



New Creation Teaching Ministry

**2000 MONTHLY MINISTRY NOTES
(Formerly Pastors Studies)**

Pastoral Dynamic Series

February:	An Introduction to Pastoral Dynamics—I
March:	An Introduction to Pastoral Dynamics—II
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*Note: Some of the notes in these series have not been proofread.
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An Introduction to Pastoral Dynamics—I

INTRODUCTION: SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE NEW STUDIES SERIES

We now commence our Monday Pastors' Series 'Pastoral Dynamics for Pastors and People'. All the material of the book entitled *Pastoral Dynamics for Pastors and People—Book 1*¹ is used—and more—to open the subject, and will help to form our first two Studies.² This should give a general view of the subject and help us to know where we are going, since much of its material will be expanded in our future Studies.

The primary idea of these Studies was based on the idea that churches are formed by the Holy Spirit; that they are constituted of members of Christ's body by baptism into him; that Pastors lead churches in what we call 'pastoral ministry'; and that Pastors and people are the community of the Triune God, the family under the Father, under Christ as Lord of history, and under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is certainly the biblical view. It was thought that a revision of the Apostolic nature of the Church would be helpful.

With this in mind, research of the Acts and the Epistles shows us that the Church was born at Pentecost of the gospel, as the Spirit-filled Peter and the apostolic band witnessed to the risen Christ, and listeners believed in him for the forgiveness of sins, were baptised and received the gift of the Spirit. The new community, then, arose from what we call 'the *kerugma*' or 'the good news'. It immediately was occupied in four things, 'the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers'. With these elements as its life it was moved to institute 'the daily distribution of food' and other help to the indigent—the widows and orphans, and others in need.

It was envisaged that with these elements in mind the proper life, faith and practice of a church could be understood. To the word *kerugma* could then be added *didache*, that is, 'teaching', and *koinonia*, that is, 'fellowship'. Continuing research reveals that a further exercise in the Church was *paraclesis*, that is, the practice of 'exhortation and encouragement'. In all this it was assumed that the *kerugma* would continue to be proclaimed to those outside the Church, for such was to be part of the activity of the Church. The conclusion could then be that pastoral dynamics could be understood and practiced in the light of *kerugma*, *didache*, *koinonia* and *paraclesis*, as all of these elements are one together and the source and expression of pastoral life.

It could be envisaged that a *praxis* or mode of practice deriving from these four elements could be formed, and that would ensure what we have called 'pastoral dynamics', and this could possibly be the case. However, as we face both the history of the Church and the present forms and practices of churches, we see that churches have been, and often are, a long way from the apostolic form and practice. A large number of factors work to bring about these differences. Probably culture may be one of the strongest conditioning factors. Denominations have not only varying cultures but also beliefs and practices. These are realities we face.

Even more to the point are the differences in ministry of both the clergy and the laity. These two terms—'ministry and laity'—as we use them today seem not to be found in apostolic days. Whilst some denominations of churches hold out for a layered or hierarchical system of ministry,³ yet others seek to live as democratic structures. Where ministry is hierarchical then

¹ G. C. Bingham, NCPI, 1999.

² Note that an Addendum to the book was given with the book. In the present first two Studies it has been incorporated in the text.

³ The Roman Catholic Church is wholly hierarchical to the last degree, while other episcopal churches, for example the Anglican Church, have bishops, priests and deacons. These differ from Presbyterian systems with ministers and elders, the minister also being an elder. Some denominations have a pastor and elders, or a pastor, elders and deacons. The Salvation Army did not originally claim itself to be a church, but is so, though without celebrating the sacraments. The original form of Brethren Assemblies did not allow for pastors, though having a form of eldership.

those not in it or are the bottom layer are generally understood as ‘the people’ or ‘the laity’. The laity may be thought of as those to whom the hierarchy ministers, and who, in their turn, are supportive of the work of the ministry, both materially and spiritually. It is better not think of layers, as the term *laos* or *people* refers to the entire Church. We will later deal with the mistaken idea of two layers—that is, pastors and people.

In the light of all these elements it seems clear that the setting out of pastoral dynamics is going to be a vast task and quite demanding. It will warrant sharing further particular series of subjects from time to time. We now proceed to tackle the matter of the formation of churches, the life of the churches, and the doctrine and practice of faith, as also the pastoral care which is exercised in the local Community of Christ, as under the Fatherhood of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴

THE BIRTH & HISTORY OF THE CHURCH: THE KINGDOM OF GOD & THE CHURCH

We need to have a theology of the Church, its ministry and its sacraments. We are able to deduce this from reading the Acts and the Epistles. All we seek to do at this point is to see how the Church came into being and then how local churches were formed or formed themselves, and the pastoral elements that were operative within them.

The preaching of Jesus was primarily to do with the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was not so much to be a Society as the very action and rule of God in and over Creation, bringing it to its ultimate completion. It included the submission and cooperation of all peoples in general, but, in particular, only those who had entered the Kingdom could be called the special Society of God, that is, the true people of God. In the Old Testament these were known as the *qahal*, once called by Stephen ‘the *ecclesia*’, that is, ‘the congregation’ or ‘church’ (Acts 7:38). The faithful remnant of Israel at the time of John the Baptist waited for the Kingdom of God to come. They expected this to be the triumphant rule of God over all nations, but especially over Israel; hence Jesus was welcomed on Palm Sunday as the triumphant Davidic King.

We conclude that Jesus did not preach the Church as a coming entity which would arrive and exercise its powers. However, he did speak to his disciples regarding the Church, as we see in Matthew 16:17–19 where the disciples are told that Jesus will build his Church and that the keys of the Kingdom will be given to the disciples, ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom’. It seems the keys were to be given to Peter, but the passage of John 20:22–23 seems to speak of a corporate use of the keys. The Church and the Kingdom are not identical, but then neither can they be considered apart as the Church is to do with the Kingdom, to proclaim it and to live in accordance with it. The Church is the Society for the Kingdom, and the Society within the Kingdom.

The people who came together on the Day of Pentecost were those faithful to Christ, those to whom Christ had appeared following his Resurrection (cf. I Cor. 15:3–8; Acts 10:40–41),

⁴ We suggest that those who attend or read these Studies on Pastoral Dynamics undertake a wider reading. There is no lack of relevant material, but the books named here should prove sufficient for a beginning. *Christ's People in Today's World* by G. Bingham (NCPI, 1985); *Christ's Living Church Today* (Bingham, NCPI, 1993); *Dynamics in Pastoring*, Jacob Firet (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1986); *Jesus and His Church* by R. Newtown Flew (Epworth, London, 1943); and *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, Eduard Thurneysen (John Knox Press, Virginia, 1962). No one should think that the present series of Studies on Pastoral Dynamics will be sufficient without, at least, the wider reading of the recommended books. A second set of books are those of Roland Allen which examine the way in which the gospel ignited spiritual fires and churches came into being and were the cause of other fires spontaneously igniting. Titles are (i) *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Christian Church*; (ii) *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*; and (iii) *The Ministry of the Spirit* (ed. D. M. Paton), all published by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids. Very close to these writings is Vincent J. Donovan's *Christianity Rediscovered* (SCM Pr., London, 1982).

and they were to be witnesses to his resurrection. Witnessing to the Resurrection was the main function of Christ's people, aided as it was to be by the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth. The coming of the Holy Spirit caused the number of believers in Christ to be enlarged but they were not called 'the Church' until Acts 5:11. Not until the Sanhedrin had opposed the new believers as a group and thus officially rejected Christ was it thought appropriate to call them 'the *qahal*' or 'the *ecclesia*'. Then they were seen as the Society or Community of Jesus, and although they continued to worship at the temple, were opposed by the leaders of the Jewish *qahal*, even to the point of persecution.

THE CHURCH BORN BY THE WORD OF GOD AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

We speak about the continuity and the discontinuity of the Church in relation to the *qahal* of Israel. The witness of the small community of Jesus on whom the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost was a witness to Jesus' resurrection and his lordship. This was publicly voiced by Peter in the form of a proclamation which has come to be called the *kerugma*. Peter was speaking to a great crowd of people who wondered at the Pentecostal event which itself was attended with certain startling phenomena. Later we will see that the Church constituted the prophetic community. Peter was saying that Joel 2:28f. was being fulfilled by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the making of all the Jews who received the Spirit into a prophetic community. Peter's words clearly indicated that those on whom the Spirit was poured were truly Israel. This put in disrepute those who had crucified Jesus, since God testified against them through the resurrection of Jesus. Such were called by Peter 'this crooked generation'.

Three thousand people—all Jews and many of whom had helped to crucify Christ—believed Peter's message and were baptised in the name of Jesus the Christ, and became one with the followers of Jesus, receiving the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This new community was to be enlarged by yet more Jews believing and being baptised. Thus it is that we have the Church. Since all were Jews the Church had *continuity* with Israel. Indeed it must be said it was true Israel. At the same time *discontinuity* of the Church with the visible Israel took place when the Community was opposed by the Sanhedrin—the Jewish parliament—when it opposed the apostles and began destroying the disciples when Stephen was stoned. Spurred on by this event the scattered members of the Church began preaching the *kerugma* not only to Jews but also to Samaritans, Greeks and other Gentiles.

THE CHURCH AS THE TRUE ISRAEL

It is essential that we see the Church as the new People of God who had continuity with the Jewish *qahal*, and thus continuing the mandate given to Israel to be the witness to God to the nations. If we miss the fact of continuity then we will see the Church simply as a community springing off from the main body of Israel and having no continuity with Covenantal people whose identity lay in the Covenant made by God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the eternal Covenant specialised, so to speak, with Israel at Sinai. Indeed the New Covenant of which Christ was said to be the Mediator was linked with the prophecies concerning this Covenant, as also with the Covenant God had made with David.⁵ Because this latter Davidic Covenant also constituted matters of the Kingdom of God it is of utmost importance.⁶ Galatians 6:16 is greatly debated. The *RSV* text is, 'Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God'. The *NKJV* translates, 'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God', and possibly distinguishes two

⁵ For a wider treatment of this issue see my *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* (Redeemer Baptist Pr., Castle Hill, 1997), *Comprehending the Covenant* (NCPI, 1999).

⁶ The New Testament brings together the ideas of the New Covenant and the Kingdom of David. This is a subject which needs to be studied in detail.

different sets of people, one of which is the Israel of God. ‘Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God’, is the *NIV* translation, seeming to equate ‘all who follow this rule’ with the Church. The *NASB* translates, ‘And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God’, which seems to refer to two distinct groups.

Many scholars see the Church as the ‘Israel of God’ and call it ‘the new Israel’. In Romans chapters 9 to 11 Paul hammers out the message, but again his words are seen differently by various scholars. Whatever are the conclusions that they come to, one thing is clear, the Church has continuity with Israel and its nature cannot be understood without seeing it as commissioned to do what Israel should have done through its Suffering Servant, namely to be ‘A light for revelation to the Gentiles [nations], and glory to thy people Israel’ (Luke 2:32; Isa. 42:6–7; 49:6). Without this key we cannot understand the nature of the Church.

The Church, then, was given the keys of the Kingdom, the Kingdom which it is bound to proclaim and to declare open to its hearers.⁷ Whilst it does not proclaim itself—the Church—at all, it is the Community which proclaims Christ as Saviour and Lord, and into whom believers come as they are joined to Christ by baptism. As we said previously, it is the Community which proclaims the Kingdom of God and His Christ.

THE CHURCH & ITS FIRST PASTORAL DYNAMICS

We have a choice of researching either the apostolic Church and its pastoral dynamics, or of researching modern churches and their pastoral dynamics. Of course we can research both, and this must surely be of great benefit. It certainly will give us grounds for comparison and then for judgment of the materials we have researched. In any case it would seem best to first examine the apostolic Church and later evaluate our findings in the light of what we now see as the practice of pastoral dynamics.

We begin to see these pastoral dynamics on the Day of Pentecost when the Community suddenly emerged:

- The first thing we note is that they had had the *kerugma* proclaimed to them.
- Secondly, they were baptised, receiving the gifts of forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit.
- Thirdly, they were warned against the crooked generation of Jews which had crucified Christ.
- Fourthly, they attended to four things: (i) the apostles’ doctrine; (ii) the fellowship; (iii) the breaking of bread; and (iv) the prayers.
- Fifthly, ‘fear came upon every soul’, and many signs and wonders were done by the apostles.
- Sixthly, they began the daily distribution of aid to those in need in the new Community.

We note that the apostles continued with their ministry of proclamation, which was attended with signs and wonders. Also opposition from the Jewish leaders began to mount.

The pastoral life of the Church could only be said to have intensified, as the days went by, as the *kerugma* was continually proclaimed, and as signs were done—for example, the miracle at the gate Beautiful. Opposition intensified, and the Community prayed for the persecuted apostles.

⁷ It can be said that the apostles opened the Kingdom of God to Israel (to the Jews) at Pentecost, to the Samaritans when the apostles came and laid hands on them (Acts 8:14–17), and to the Gentiles at Caesarea (Acts 10:44f.). That means that the Kingdom of God is open to all peoples since the Day of Pentecost. Thus the Church does not so much open the Kingdom of God to people as it declares it is open to them who will believe the gospel (Acts 20:25; cf. 8:12; 28:23, 31).

The result of persecution and prayer was that a fresh infilling of the whole Community by the Spirit eventuated. The power of witness was extended, and an intensification of the social care for the indigent by the members of the Church was experienced.⁸

AN EVALUATION OF PASTORAL DYNAMICS IN THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM

The first seven chapters of Acts set out the birth, nature and action of the Church as it came into being at Pentecost and built into a significant community in the following days. These chapters constitute a powerful social document, one of the most amazing of history. They reflect the nature of Israel as a community, as the *qahal*, the social community whose ways of living were prescribed in Exodus and Leviticus. Leviticus chapter 19 is especially relevant, as its prescription for helping the indigent is a powerful social document in itself. It was along these lines of love that the early Church moved. As for old *qahal*, so then for the new *ecclesia* and the social action sprang from its source which was the *kerugma*. John's three Letters along with the other apostolic Letters are a testimony to the heart of pastoral exhortation, as well as the actual living out of God's love in the Church. We note in Acts that the new churches formed in Asia and Europe cared much for the mother church at Jerusalem, ministering to the needs of its members who were in poverty.

The great documentation of the Epistles shows that churches were communities of activities in proclaiming the gospel, being continually taught the whole counsel of God, being unique in fellowship, versed in worship and intercessory prayer, and living as people to whom gifts were given which were in the service of love, both within the church, and outside it where it was seeking the conversion of non-believers. We will have cause to amplify these elements in later Studies.

One clear matter in our evaluation is the fact that when the apostles proclaimed the gospel at a centre, then as a result of their teaching churches sprang into life. Those same churches were quick to proclaim the gospel, not only in their immediate environment, but also out into the countryside and even beyond that. There was a reason for them doing that, which we will discuss below.

We have, then, to discard many contemporary ideas of 'making' and 'planting' and 'replanting' churches, and of organising social aid, as such, as the expression of our love (*agape*). However admirable some of these ideas may be, they do not express or replicate the spontaneous life and action of the primal Church. We will also have to look at the structures of ministry as we have them today (i) in their form as it has come down in history, and (ii) as we are seeking to reshape them today in the light of what we call 'need' and 'utility' and 'marketing promotion'.

In the light of all that follows let us keep in mind that we are not trying to replicate the early Church in its 'forms' as though doing that will make right the shape and action of the Church as it was apostolically, and thus bring forth success in the church community. By 'success' we mean developing the power of the local church in evangelism, and authentic church life in worship, power and action. It is doubtful that the early Church self-consciously thought in such terms.

Whilst in this short section we have not fully evaluated the pastoral dynamics of the apostolic church, this shortage will be supplied as we discuss further the way churches came into being, and the nature of their life and witness beyond their own perimeters.

⁸ We use the word 'Church' for the full Church which came into being and is now in being throughout the world. We use the word 'church' for each local church. It happened that the local 'church' at Jerusalem was then 'the Church'.

THE WAY THE CHURCHES CAME INTO BEING & THE NATURE OF THEIR COMMUNITIES

In the New Testament we can examine how churches came into being in the apostolic age. When we compare what happened and then examine Christian history we see many variations in the ways churches came into being. Often evangelism took place in political action and sometimes at the point of the sword. Churches, too, died in invasions by pagans or by Islam. It seems that churches came into being because of the *kerugma* preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit and the gospel account for churches coming into being. When we say ‘came into being’, we could be close to the truth that this is ever how they come into being, but whilst this apostolic way of their birth—coming into being—was as we will describe it, yet in lands and nations with a substantial Christian history, the circumstances will differ to those which we call ‘un evangelised world areas’. Geographically there are relatively few areas left to evangelise. When, however, we face countries into which the gospel has reached but has not succeeded numerically to effect conversions, then we face the more problematic task of facing animistic religion, and the ancient religions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Shintoism. We also face the matter of the Chinese race with its strong culture which has its roots in Confucianism and—latterly—Communism. Islam is really an offshoot of Judaism and Christianity, and probably presents a greater problem than other religions and cultures. In Australia we face the immediate problems of secularism—the virtual rejection of the Christian gospel—and the multicultural growth of our society, with the growth of the individual religions which have come to this land, to say nothing of Aboriginal spirituality.

We are saying, then, that when we examine the elements which helped bring churches into being, and established them in themselves and as part of a rapidly growing movement, these elements may or may not be the way we should go today, especially when we have the subject of Pastoral Dynamics before us. As indicated above, there are four elements which brought churches into being, substantiated them, and which developed the shape of churches in the apostolic era. These elements are (i) *kerugma*; (ii) *koinonia*; (iii) *didache*; and (iv) *paraclesis*.

What we are suggesting here is that these four elements are the proper way in which churches truly come into being and in their turn cause the birth of further communities of Christ—further churches.

THE KERUGMA: THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

The gospel was spoken into various situations and was necessarily relevant to them. Peter was the first to utter the *kerugma*—the proclamation—or the ‘good news’ (*euaggelion*). Since it was preached to Jews it had to make sense to them: it had to be relevant by nature of the case, and of course it was. Peter in himself—as also his companions—was of no great importance in Israel, which tells us that *kerugma* (proclamation) had to have power and authority to be of any affect and effect. The word *kerugma* derives from *kerux*—a trumpet blast, in effect—and *kerussein* ‘to proclaim’, for the Emperor’s officer would blow the trumpet in the market place, and then proclaim the authoritative message of the Emperor and expect it to be obeyed—under fear of death. There was, then, the content of the message, and the proclamatory power of it. The two elements effected the response required by the message.

A setting out of the *kerugma* in the Acts and the Epistles takes, roughly speaking, the following pattern. We need to distinguish between the *form* of the *kerugma*/gospel and the *effects* of its proclamation, namely the conversion of some hearers, and the rejection of the message by others:

- From times of old, the law and the prophets, that is, the whole body of Israel’s history and thinking, including its story.

- The prophetic forecast of the good news of the Kingdom of God to come (Isa. 52:7, ‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns”’), and of the Covenant, ‘You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant’ (Acts 3:25), and so of the blessing for all nations.
- The prediction of Messiah—his work and his rule—fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- The meaning and purpose of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The apostles were witnesses to Christ in all his work.
- The command to believe on him for salvation since he has been made ‘both Lord and Christ’, and primarily because of his resurrection; Acts 2:36, ‘Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified’. See also Acts 4:33, ‘And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all’. Romans 10:9 calls for faith in Christ as Lord on the score of his resurrection, ‘because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved’.
- Belief in Christ—with baptism in the name of Jesus—would bring the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Those baptised would belong to the new Community of Christ, the true Israel of God.

There are other verbs than *kerusso* ‘to proclaim’ (*kerussein*, present, active, infinitive), for example, Matthew 4:17, ‘From that time Jesus began to *preach*, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”’, which have similar meaning. The verb *kerusso* is used some 61 times in the New Testament as well as many times in the Old Testament (LXX). The verb *euaggelizomai* is ‘to preach the good news’, and is used most often in Lukan and Pauline writings. *Kerugma* is the noun ‘message’ or ‘proclamation’. C. H. Dodd was the original expounder of the *kerugma* as being distinct from ‘the teaching’—*didache*. Some scholars following him have felt the distinction was not wholly valid. His first *kerugma* and second formulations of it were:

The prophecies are fulfilled, and the New Age is inaugurated by the coming of Christ.

He was born of the seed of David.

He died according to the Scriptures, to deliver us out of the present evil age.

He was buried.

He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.

He is exalted at the right hand of God, as Son of God and Lord of quick and dead.

He will come again as Judge and Savior of men.

The age of fulfilment has dawned.

This has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God, as Messianic head of the new Israel.

The Holy Spirit in the Church is the sign of Christ’s present power and glory.

The Messianic Age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ.

An appeal for repentance.⁹

⁹ Both formulations are in C. H. Dodd’s *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1944, pp. 17 and 21–24 respectively) and are quoted from *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* by R. H. Mounce (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1960, pp. 5 and 60f.).

Dodd's thesis has been questioned and greatly reshaped. However, the fact is that the proclamation was a body of truth proclaimed by the apostles, embodying the gospel but approximating to what Paul called 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27). This *kerugma* is dynamic as to both utterance and content, and should be read as such in the first chapters of Acts, and then Acts 13. Elements of it are uttered throughout the Epistles. We must beware of thinking that to have the *form* and the *content* of the proclamation is to have the *kerugma* itself—that most dynamic body of truth which, under the Holy Spirit, creates the Church and constantly vivifies it.

An Evaluation of the Apostolic *Kerugma* & the Present *Kerugma*

If we compare this *kerugma* with what is often today called 'the gospel' we may detect vast differences. Rarely now is reference made to the Story of God from creation to Christ's incarnation. Audiences are not treated to even a brief history of the people of God in the Old Testament, let alone the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. Again, less still of its eschatological nature and importance is emphasised, and so the object of hope is hidden. Much gospel preaching is not proclamation so much as a form or forms of persuasion to believe on Christ, and showing this as beneficial for the fulfilment of one's needs. By 'needs' evangelists often mean emotional and social needs and not the primary need for salvation. The question is whether this kind of preaching really effects the transformation of the hearer and brings him/her to understanding Christ and his Church. There can be no true founding of a church without the pure *kerugma*. The strength and life of the churches which come into being—or in these days are 're-formed' or 're-constituted'—must come from the initial proclamation and the continuing proclamation.

The point we want to make here regarding Pastoral Dynamics is that *true kerugma is essential to the birth of a true church*. If we form a fellowship or community on any other grounds then it will be deficient as a church—whatever else it may purport to be. Whether the church is badly formed or well-formed—even originally by the *kerugma*—it will need constantly to have the *kerugma* proclaimed. Each generation, indeed each decade, will need to have the gospel proclaimed *in the power* of the Word and of the Spirit. Certainly we may form a group of people which we may call 'the church', but the group will not really be a church.

Further, since the kind of resultant *koinonia*, *didache* and *paraclesis* depended wholly on the *kerugma*, it can be observed that the nature of present pastoral dynamics will depend wholly on the kind of *kerugma* we preach initially and then continuously.

THE KOINONIA: THE FELLOWSHIP

We have observed that Israel was God's *qahal*, His congregation. Israel was not a system of *qahals* (the plural of *qahal*). It was the whole people in one body such as we find in Acts 7:38, 'This is he who was in the congregation [*qahal*; *ecclesia*] in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us'. Many of the Jewish *qahal* followed Jesus in his early ministry. Later in that ministry he told his disciples that he would found his church on the confession uttered by Peter for the apostolic group—the reality that he is 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16:17–19; cf. 18:20). On the day of Pentecost some 120 of the Jewish *qahal* who were followers of Christ received the outpouring of the Spirit and manifested their fellowship to those who heard them. Three thousand believed their gospel and joined them.

We are told, ‘And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers’ (Acts 2:42). We are then informed of the further action that took place:

And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (vv. 43–47).

One of the great miracles of the day of Pentecost was this fellowship—the *koinonia*. This new company of believers devoted itself to the apostles’ teaching, to its new life as a fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. This *koinonia* immediately expressed itself in love-concern for one another, ‘And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need’. Acts 4:32–35 records:

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need.

This is surely the quality of fellowship, a true pastoral dynamic, in the midst of which the apostolic proclamation was stimulating and powerful.

A reading of Acts concerning the new life of each church and the ways in which they lived in love, unity and fellowship shows us the necessity of members being affected by the *kerugma* which had been the source of the new community life, and, as we shall see, of its discipline. It is not as though *kerugma* was the initial proclamatory teaching of the new community, and was then followed by another kind of teaching called *didache*. All the time *kerugma* had to be known and understood, for it continued to affect the Church, and kept it seeing it was part of the Story of God, the Church thus seeing it was in the last age—the Eschaton—and as such was continuing the Story. In this way it knew its identity as God’s working force in Christ and the Spirit.

An Evaluation of the Apostolic *Koinonia* & Present *Koinonia*

We have indicated that the apostolic *koinonia* issued from the apostolic *kerugma*, *didache* and *paraclesis*, since all of these came simultaneously into operation. We need to discern any differences which may presently be the case, so that we do not mistake learned socialisation for spontaneous *koinonia*. The unity, love and fellowship are the work of the Spirit and the Word, and are not mere sociality. Nor can we correct division of persons and groups within the churches but by a special work of the Holy Spirit of true fellowship and not by education alone. The life of love of the churches is the heart of their witness. Where *koinonia* is lacking, there the motivation to proclaim *kerugma* is also lacking.

It is worth noting that whilst *koinonia* is the context in which proclamation, teaching and exhortation have their power, *koinonia* cannot be organised into living operation, any more than the *kerugma* can be organised as a set of points in doctrine and simply delivered as such and expected to be dynamic in its effects. The power of the proclaimed and taught word through the Holy Spirit is what gives the community the sense of its identity as God’s community in the Kingdom of God and as the people of God who are part of His Salvation History as it proceeds to the appointed goal of the *telos*. This knowledge is quite dynamic and is the only setting for true exhortation. It is also the only setting for the total life of the community.

An Introduction to Pastoral Dynamics—II

THE DIDACHE: THE TEACHING

In Acts 2:42 we read, 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching [*didache*]' . We remember that Jesus was called 'the teacher'.¹ In John 11:28 Jesus is referred to as teacher, 'When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you"'. Matthew 7:28–29 describes the impression given by his preaching, 'And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes'. He had many critics, who scrutinised what he was saying, checking it out with what they considered was the authentic teaching in Israel. Teaching was certainly part of Jesus' vocation: nothing was intelligible apart from it. What we have to note is not that he was simply imparting useful information, but that his teaching was astonishing. It was with power and authority, startling listeners, and it was with signs and wonders so that it was dynamic, arising from some source they knew to be a witness to him. What he said seemed to be new teaching, yet it was in keeping with 'the law and the prophets', that body of Old Testament teaching which was canonical and constituted the truth. On the night of his betrayal Jesus had told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and teach them all things, lead them into all the truth, and cause them to witness to the truth. In Matthew 28:19–20 he commissioned them to teach, 'Go therefore and make disciples² of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'. In Acts 1:1 Luke talks of what Jesus had 'begun both to do and to teach' in his lifetime, inferring that he would go on doing these two things, presumably through the apostolic ministry.

Whatever was the case, the apostles began at Pentecost to 'do and to teach'. The *didache* became prominent and important. It was certainly the 'all things' which the Spirit was teaching them as he was 'leading them into all the truth'. It was certainly teaching which was gripping the newly inaugurated Church.

Katechesis, as the word is found in Romans 2:18, I Corinthians 14:19 and Galatians 6:6, is 'the form of instruction', and implies there is one who is taught (Gal. 6:6, *katechoumenos*). Rarely used, it is not as powerful as *didache* and the verb 'to teach'—*didaskain*. In Deuteronomy 6:4–7 is the famous passage about teaching one's children what was good, and was most dynamic, for it was not just rote-teaching, but teaching that is at the heart of the community and which promotes the spirit of *qahal* or *koinonia*. In that sense we can call it 'relational teaching':

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

It was teaching on 'the way' and of 'the wisdom', and its action in the Old Testament requires our attention in order to understand fully its significance in the New Testament. It is pedagogy which is just as fresh today as a way of teaching as it was then. Unfortunately it is a method

¹ See Matthew 13:54; 26:55; Mark 1:21; 6:2; 12:35; Luke 4:15, 31; 6:6; 13:10; 19:47 for his being seen as a teacher. He was often addressed as 'Rabbi' or 'Good Master', the equivalent of the modern 'Doctor'.

² 'Make disciples' (*matheteusate*) really means 'make pupils', and 'teaching' (*didaskontes*) was the teaching of those who declared their adherence to the new teacher by being baptised into him and his system—Christ and the Church.

too rarely used. In the New Testament, as we have partly seen, Jesus' teaching amazed the crowds who heard him: Mark 1:27, 'And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."' He took authority in all his teaching as we see at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:28, 29), 'And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes'. In John 7:45–52 is the incident of the temple officers being sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to apprehend Jesus. When they hear him they are unable to arrest him. They report to the temple hierarchy, 'No man ever spoke like this man!' In Matthew 28:18–20—as we have already noted—Jesus gave authority to teach to his disciples, where to teach means to make disciples, that is, those who know his teaching and live in it. Jesus required them to be teachers and make teachers. In similar manner Paul says in II Timothy 2:1–2, 'You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also'. This is the way *didache* is taught by apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher, by the older women to the younger woman (Titus 2:3–5, 'Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited')—and so on. It was assumed that teaching would be in the power of the Holy Spirit so that (I Cor. 2:13) '... we [can] impart this in words not *taught* by human wisdom but *taught* by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit'. Scrutiny of the passage I Corinthians 2:6–14 tells us that teaching is not—as we have repeatedly said—the mere impartation of information. What was taught was the truth, and only the Holy Spirit knows the truth. Thus the teaching of 'the whole counsel of God' cannot be taken on by any person who designs to do so.

Paul is the paradigm of a true teacher, 'For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher' (II Tim. 1:11), and—as we have seen, above—he taught others in order that they, in turn, teach others. A succession of teachers was to be the fruit of teaching: 'You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also' (II Tim. 2:1–2). Where biblical teaching is absent, then so is the true power of the Church. Some churches attempt today to teach from contemporary human knowledge, from the idea that present teaching has moved beyond that of OT and NT times.

The Contents of the *Didache* (Teaching)

The writers of the New Testament Epistles often refer to what they have previously taught their readers. Indeed it is the basis on which they teach further. Much of this will be seen in the element *paraclesis* which has to be related to *kerugma*, *koinonia* and *didache* since it arises from them. In Acts 2:42 'the apostles' teaching' was obviously the truth which the Holy Spirit had taught, and was teaching them, in his first and subsequent outpourings on the Church.

In hindsight we can see the Story of God was a developing Story from creation to the coming new creation, from the protological to the eschatological, and that the Incarnation and the work of Christ was central to it all, and was—and is—dynamic in the whole action. This the apostles had seen and received, and now they would be passing it on. All in the Church would need to know 'salvation history' and 'creation history' and that these things led to the *telos*, the final completion of all things. Without such teaching they would lack historical perspective and so be limited in the experience of hope. It is not enough to see the *kerugma* as 'saving'. It is bringing converts to be participators in the plan of God.

It is also necessary to note that the apostolic ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher were all teaching ministries, each teaching according to the gift given. As Christ's teaching was dynamic and with an authority not just of Man and his academies, so the teaching gifts, combined with the gifts called 'charismatic'—that is, gifts of the Spirit—produced disciples

who were alive and vital in their ministries. The idea of a group of people being led in worship and taught, and nothing much more than that—that is, the whole congregation *not* being involved in teaching and action—is not found in New Testament churches.

An Evaluation of the Apostolic *Didache* & the Present *Didache*

In the apostolic age *didache* (teaching) extended what the Jewish converts already knew in the sense that it showed (i) Christ as the fulfilment of the Scriptures; (ii) the Church as the new *qahal*; (iii) the outworking of God's plan through the Church; and (iv) the Church as the source of salvation to all the nations. The Gentile converts were instructed along the lines of 'the law and the prophets' and then in the four points just outlined. That is why we say that they did not just sit back and listen, absorbing it but being the receivers only, that is, receiving without acting on the word heard. As we have pointed out, the teaching of Jesus was dynamic, astounding the hearers. So was the *kerugma* and the *didache* as they came to the new converts. They, also, had to be about communicating this amazing truth in the support and motivation of the *koinonia*.

Without *didache* there would be no comprehension of the Church's nature and its place in God's history. There would thus be no understanding of the identity of the Church. The great doctrine of the *Eschaton-Telos* in the light of Christ's return in the triumph of the defeat of all evil powers and the judgment of them, to say nothing of the resurrection of the faithful to eternal life and the establishment of the New Heaven and the New Earth, would be lost without *didache*. So essential, then, is that word.

When we come to look at *didache* in our present situations of churches throughout the world, especially in regard to pastoral dynamics, then we have to say that we have to a great degree lost the sense of the importance of the foundation of the Old Testament for our understanding of the Story of God. Without being versed in 'the law and the prophets', Christ's accomplishment in his work cannot be adequately known. In addition we have the vast problems of culture and hampering traditions which have too often impinged themselves upon the principle of Galatians 3:28 (cf. I Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:9–10): 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.

Our gratitude is to the goodly company of Old and New Testament scholars who have enabled us, afresh, to see what was the substance of the apostolic *didache*, but it needs a goodly company of teachers to renew us in that *didache* in the setting in which the gospel is preached today. This is a vast subject. We have scarcely touched its edge, but where *didache* is being taught it is bringing forth the same sort of apostolic fruit.

THE PARACLESIS

We have indicated that the fourth element present was the *paraclesis*, which can be translated as the synonym nouns of the verbs 'to entreat', 'to beseech', 'to invite', 'to ask', 'to urge', 'to conciliate', 'to exhort', 'to encourage', 'to console', 'to comfort'. The pattern of the *kerugma* is teaching, but it is proclamatory teaching; *didache* is teaching to fill out the knowledge of 'the whole counsel of God'; and *paraclesis* is the kind of teaching which is intended to stimulate to true spiritual, moral and ethical action.

Today we have a fair idea of what is 'Christian teaching' along these lines. Hundreds of years have conditioned us to recognise what is moral and ethical action which springs from a spiritual basis. This can be tested by looking at *paraclesis* in non-Christian religions. It is particularly so when paganism is studied. Because this is so, and because every religion produces the culture of the devotee people, then the Apostolic Church had to teach

the differences in moral and ethical practice in Christianity to those in the society which it addressed.

In the Old Testament we see that there was a widespread sense of morality when the Pharaoh and Abimelech of Abraham's day were going to take Sarah into their respective harems. Much in Jewish law which was moral was practiced before the law was given at Sinai, but the nature of Yahweh as against the pagan gods determined a morality different from that of the gods of pagan culture. Israel's high order of morality was known to those outside Judaism even if it was not followed. Deuteronomy 4:5–8 shows this to be the case as Moses exhorts Israel:

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

The Wisdom books in the Old Testament—especially Proverbs—project a high morality and a lot of wise commonsense. Cultures can permit practices which would be offensive to Judaism and Christianity. Whilst we may think of each religion having its own ethics, yet where there are large cities we often have a society which operates with certain mores of the culture of the day. In Paul's time homosexuality was not looked upon with disfavour in a Hellenic culture. The bases of families differed from culture to culture and this is quite often the case today.

So we have Paul teaching against paganism, and exhorting his converts and readers to different standards of life, especially to sexual chastity in regard to both fornication and adultery. Passages to be studied are Ephesians 4:17–32, Colossians 3:1–23, I Thessalonians 4:1–7 and II Thessalonians 3:6–13. Whilst these passages are obvious enough to us today, they were not so then. Romans chapter 6 and other passages emphasising practical holy living can also be included in *paraclesis*.

There are many other uses for *paraclesis*, such as the encouragement to the Church which is opposed on a number of fronts; often by cultures, sometimes by governments, generally by Israel, and certainly by the unseen—but not unfelt—powers of darkness. These conflicts are sensed in the Acts and the Epistles, to say nothing of the Book of the Revelation. Even so, we should see *paraclesis* as dynamical a word as the three others. Nor should we see it as embattled. Rather it embattles. It comes not only from apostolic authority and pastoral leadership, but also from the hearts of the people. We have to remember that it was a community of love, worship, prayer and unity, and that all shared in its works for all contributed. Thus *paraclesis* was tendered in mutuality. Ephesians 5:18–20 is typical of mutual exhortation, the mutual action of *paraclesis*:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Likewise Colossians 3:16 says in a similar exhortation, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God'. The exhortation, 'addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs', has affinity with 'teach and admonish one another in all wisdom'.

There are other elements of mutual encouragement in the face of steady opposition. It is not just 'whistling in the dark'. Philippians 2:1–4 spells it out:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full

accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

We have barely touched upon the uses and actions of *paraclesis*. There are, besides, many encouragements and comforts, as also related words such as *nouthesis* and *sterizein*, which are intended to admonish, direct, correct and support the church members. Coverage of these is beyond this small document, but the care exercised by members of the Body of Christ as well as by leaders are an assurance to us that wherever a church is the Church then all these elements will be coming into play.

An Evaluation of *Paraclesis* Both Apostolic & of Today with Associated Actions

We can see the four main elements are as the one in that they are the word which comes to the Church from the Triune God, from God as Father, Christ as Lord and the Spirit as the Revealer. In one way looking at it is incredible, for every element of the word is indispensable to the Church. Exhortation which was an old prophetic ministry within Old Israel is the *paraclesis* of the New Israel, without which it cannot continue on its way in its significant life of witness and movement towards its final hope in Christ. Along the way it must not keep to moral and ethical actions solely for its own integrity but because of its Lord and his moral glory, and because this is the way in which the *telos* is billed to come. True or pure hope is therefore dependent upon the life the Church lives in keeping with its prophetic being in Christ.

Exhortation is becoming increasingly unpopular in an age when human autonomy seeks to be the order of the day, when the democratisation of the Church is increasingly sought and where exhortation is looked upon as a moralism. It is interesting, nevertheless, to see the forms of 'correctness' which are being legislated secularly. 'Human rights' are in the fore and human responsibility is little emphasised except in its duty to preserve human rights and to correct the wider order of international behaviour. In spite of the varying fortunes of ethics as a discipline for studying, the New Testament *paraclesis* seems to have retained its substantial nature.

It is helpful to know that it is by motivation that exhortation is applied. Thus in Romans 12:1, 'I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God'; Romans 15:30, 'by our Lord Jesus Christ'; I Corinthians 1:10, 'by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'; II Corinthians 10:1, 'by the meekness and gentleness of Christ'. In Philippians 2:1-4 there is really a long and powerful exhortation. We note the basis of it, 'So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind'. In Philippians 4:2-3 Paul directly exhorts Euodia and Syntyche to agree, and on the basis of their former ministry with him. Also he exhorts help for these women from his brethren, 'I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.' In Philemon 8-10 Paul could command Philemon but he prefers to appeal to him on Onesimus' behalf, 'I appeal to you for my child'.

All exhortation is based on what the readers already know, the *kerugma* and the *didache* which have been taught livingly in the context of vital *koinonia*. Apart from this context and background, readers are not in the Story of God. In Romans 13:11 is an exhortation which has its motivation built into it, 'Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.' Here the *eschaton* is the context, and the coming *telos* (climax) is in view. Thus moral exhortation and moral response is truly powerful.

When we ask what it is today that motivates teachers to motivate their hearers to accept and act upon exhortation, we have to see whether teachers exhort in the manner and substance of

the apostolic teachers. Only on the basis of declaring the whole counsel of God and the personal responsibility which attaches to it can true motivation operate. Nothing new is better than the old by reason of the fact that it is new, anymore than the old is authentic because it comes from the past. Exhortation must be based on the nature of things—God, Man and Creation as they come to us in the whole counsel of God.

THE CHURCH & THE WORD

It is here we must pause and look at the true pastoral dynamics which are operative in the Church, and which must be understood if we are to comprehend the pastoral life of the Community of Christ. We have suggested that the four ways in which the Church came into being and in which it must always continue to operate are *kerugma*, *koinonia*, *didache* and *paraclesis*. We could have said, ‘By the word of God’, which could have meant, ‘the word of the Father’, ‘the word of Christ’, and ‘the word of the Spirit’, or ‘the word of the Triune God’.

It is quite clear that the three ‘words’—the *kerugma*, the *didache* and the *paraclesis*—are the one word of God in three different actions or modes, and in the context of the *koinonia* that was present even before Peter first uttered the *kerugma*, and which went on being present for the communication of *didache* and *paraclesis*. Peter’s *kerugma* needed to be the proclamation of the witnessing Community. Peter for his part was simply explaining the *event* of Pentecost and his explanation began with the quoting of Joel 2:28–32, and led on to proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth and what he had been and done in terms of *kerugma*. What is to be seen and understood is the effect of Peter’s proclamation. Listeners heard Peter’s word which brought them to understand what they had not hitherto understood. Probably this happened to many more who were present, but it was the 3 000 in which Peter’s word did its full work. That is, the word brought not only understanding, but it also brought ‘the moment of truth’, that is, *the moment when the truth effected action in the mind*—in the minds of the 3 000. It is ‘the moment of truth’ which concerns us.

We may well ask, ‘If the word is proclaimed, and listeners hear it, then does the word, by reason of its own utterance, so affect the hearers that the moment of truth comes to them and thus effects its purpose?’ The answer must be that in the word it is God Who is speaking—no matter who the appointed utterer may be—and that the response or reaction of the listener will be according to his or her attitude towards God. The mystery of acceptance or rejection of the word is known only to Him. Whatever the case, the word responded to will bring the fruits of its promise and/or command, and the word rejected will bring judgment. The word is never uttered without one of these actions. The fact that the word cannot be rejected until heard is brought out by Paul in Romans chapters 9 – 11. Starting in 9:6, ‘It is not as though the word of God had failed’, he then proceeds to show God’s word had not—and does not—fail. In 10:18 he asks—of Israel—‘Have they not heard?’ He then proceeds to say they have and quotes Psalm 19:4 as proof, ‘But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”’

We say, then, that the truth does not come without effecting the action that God Who speaks the word intends should happen. We may speak of this as ‘revelation given and received’. This means that we presuppose the revelation was needed, that what the word does is to communicate understanding and confront the will for consequent action. All of this is borne out by Romans 10:17, ‘So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ’ (RSV). The NRSV has, ‘So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ’. The conclusion is that it is the word of Christ which, being at the same time the word of God, is that which confronts Man to be believed. Only in this word can Man know the mind of God, the nature of God, the will of God.³

³ It is true that God uses many *media* to communicate His mind, but ultimately those *media* have to spell it out in *words*. These words are the word of God. Words are intelligible to Man, and he must hear them. This is his privilege and his responsibility.

THE PRACTICAL OUTWORKING OF THE CHURCH AND WORD OF GOD

It is not intended here that we take up this vast subject of the word of God. It demands closer scrutiny and wider explanation and this will happen ahead in our Studies. We have two things here for examination: (i) the word of God as the Church proclaims it to the world, and (ii) the word of God as it is spoken in the Church community.

It is axiomatic that God reveals what He will by what He says. A word has meaning, and words are uttered to constitute what God intends to communicate. Since God is incomparable then He reveals as He will, in the way He wills. Even so, as we mentioned above, the word is not only to give understanding, but also to lead to action in the moment of the truth being received.

The matter of truth we will need to examine later, as also the matter of ‘witness to the truth’. ‘Thy word is truth’ is enough for the moment. God’s truth and God’s faithfulness are virtually the one. The truth which will make the enslaved free is the word uttered by Christ and which is Christ. The Church proclaims this word, the *kerugma*. It, itself—as its members—has been through the truth of the gospel, or it could not proclaim it. It does not just proclaim a deposit of truth given to it, a form of words as such, but it proclaims the saving word of God in living words which save human beings.

The second matter, that of the word of God within the community, brings us to conclude that *didache* and *paraclesis* are the word of God coming in the various words of God to various situations. We have seen that we cannot presuppose *kerugma* not to be needed within the community, likewise the ministries of ‘apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher’—all of which are ‘word’ ministries—are required within the community as well as outside of it.⁴

When we consider the work of pastoral oversight—in particular, the work of the pastors and elders—then we discover from the New Testament text that this also is the work of the word of God. When we turn to the word of the *paraclesis* we find it is not limited to pastors and elders or other ‘teaching’ ministries. In fact the whole community is involved in what is a mutuality of teaching.

What we need to recognise in all this is that every word spoken by the people of God, by the members of Christ’s body, is to be done with aforethought. Paul warns against the affects and effects of false teaching, of deceptive or manipulative teaching, of corrupt and seductive use of words. Any conversation is to be ‘gracious, seasoned with salt’. The injunctions are ‘But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices’ (Col. 3:8–9) and, ‘Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another . . . let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear’ (Eph. 4:25, 29). ‘Speaking the truth in love’ (Eph. 4:15) is not just gracious talking, but communicating the clear truth to all listeners, and this is accorded to the generality of the Church.

‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God’ (Col. 3:16), is a key injunction to all members of the Church.

⁴ Our point here, and one to be dealt with later in a special Study, is that ministerial gifts of the early Church have not been disbanded or withdrawn. They are as necessary today as then, although it is obvious that Christ’s apostles were not replaced, as such, when the apostolic truth was disclosed by them, and set for always. Even so, a second line of apostles can be discerned in the New Testament, namely those sent to open new ground with the *kerugma/euaggelion*. There is no necessity to form apostolic truth again since it has been given, once for all, by the apostles.

We come, then, to this powerful conclusion that the Church lives wholly under the word of God. Its mind, its thinking, and its action are in accordance with this word. For there is no other word. ‘Thy word is truth’ must mean that to live in the truth and witness to the truth, the Church must have no other word than God’s.

When we think about this we see what happened in the Garden of Eden. When Man moved from the word of the Father–Creator, he moved from the mind of that One, and so moved from what is the proper mind of Man. Man the image of God cannot be truly image apart from the mind of God, that is, the word of God. Thus all in the Church—those in the Image of God which is Christ—must have that mind. The Church, then, is always the Community of the mind of God, as against the idolatrous, the pagan, and the secular mind of the humanity which rejected—and rejects—the sovereign God of glory, that moral glory which God has always revealed to those who are His people.

This brings us to see that in proclaiming, teaching and living the word of God the Church is moving in the will and purpose of God as it moves in this present time of the *eschaton* towards the fulfilment of God’s action in the *telos*. We have yet to work out the relationship between the word of God, the truth, the witness to the truth, and the life of the Church, especially in what we have called its pastoral dynamics. These are what give the Church its identity, and it is in that identity that the members of the Church have their strength, and so their anticipation of faith which we call hope.

With so many elements set out for our consideration in Pastoral Dynamics, we have to pause at this point for a conclusion which will help us to see the vast sweep of the Triune God with His people, His flock, and His Family. Throughout the universe these dynamics of His birthing His people, His giving of life to them, and His nurture of them to the maturity of eternal sanctification, glorification and perfection are always in action. What knowledge of them that we can gain will aid us in the wisdom we need in our own, personal participation in them. It is these thoughts we try to gather together in our following conclusion.

CONCLUSION TO INTRODUCTIONS (I) AND (II)

The *schema* of our Study in Pastoral Dynamics can be seen in the ‘Contents’ of my *Pastoral Dynamics for Pastors & the People—Book One*⁵; the format of what we have considered in these two present introductory Studies. We now have a rough geography of the ground we have tried to cover. It is, in fact, an attempt at a vast coverage, since it mentions certain elements in an introductory way which, themselves, are quite major, and which will be dealt with at a greater extent in succeeding Studies as we hammer out more of our pastoral elements.

The fountainhead of the life of the Church—indeed of the Church itself—has always been Pentecost. The flow which began then and had its substreams—so to speak—in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Samaritans in Samaria, and the Gentiles in Caesarea, has never ceased. The statement of Paul in Galatians 3:5, ‘Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?’ informs us that God ‘goes on supplying the Spirit’. This is supplemented by Paul’s injunction in Ephesians 5:18 for his readers to ‘go on being filled with the Spirit’. It is unthinkable that God does not go on supplying the Church with the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The presence of the Spirit and the continual utterance by that Spirit of the word of God means that *kerugma*, *didache* and *paraclesis* were—and are—always *the word* to the Church in its life of *koinonia*. Thus the Church lives by the Spirit and the word. In what we have already compassed, then, many elements which are of the gospel—that is, of faith and practice—have scarcely been mentioned. Such are sin; human depravity; the personal powers of evil; the matters of Man’s bondage to sin, the flesh, Satan and death; the great truths

⁵ NCPI, 1999.

of repentance and faith, God's forgiveness and His cleansing of the conscience from pollution; and then the doctrines of justification, sanctification, and ultimate glorification and perfection.

It just happens these are all the subject of *the word* as *kerugma*, as *didache* and as *paraclesis*, and they are alive and active—as we keep saying—in the context and environment of *koinonia*. In the life of the Church these things are not dealt with simply in line upon line, one element after another, all being experienced sequentially and—so to speak—tied up neatly. The volatility of our temperaments, the matters of environment and circumstance, the battle in which we live and move continually, and the constant matters of interrelationships all work to mean that we do the round many times of many things. Now our weaknesses and failures confront us, and our innate moral impotency troubles us. We are occupied afresh with repentance, with the reality of God's forgiveness of sins, and ours to others. We have times when justification looms large both for pain and for pleasure. Other days we are occupied with the matter of personal, practical holiness, or the great matters of worship and service.

So the changes are rung for us and even sometimes by us, on all the eternities. We can know dreadful wounding and then incredible healing. We can know painful discipline and joyful freedom. Just a formal practice—if, indeed, such can exist—of *kerugma*, *didache* and *paraclesis* cannot guarantee a proper Church format and life. We keep needing to see that the Holy Spirit is present for all elements of the Church's life and practice. Christ, the Church's Head, walks amongst the candlesticks, as the Lord and as the 'great Shepherd of the sheep'. The Church is his Bride, his Wife, and the Branches of the Vine, and works with him in the plan and counsel of God. As Prophet, Priest and King in his community he effects its nature, and all of this in the light of the 'God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all'. So much, then, every day and hour touches upon the whole life of the Church.

If, then, in these two small studies we have ventured to speak of Pastoral Dynamics, let us see that it calls for our continued attention and participation in all elements of the whole counsel of God. Virtually nothing that is there in both Old and New Testaments, to say nothing of the great actions of the Church down through its history, will not be met, and will not be part of the living subject of Pastoral Dynamics.

The Pastor and His People—I

1. INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF PERSONAL PASTORAL DYNAMICS

In our pursuit of the nature of pastoral dynamics the word 'pastoral' is important. Stemming from *ra'ah* which is the Hebrew verb 'to feed', it is used eight times in Jeremiah as 'pastor' and everywhere else is translated as 'shepherd'. In the RSV it is only translated as 'shepherd'. The only use of 'pastor' in the New Testament is Ephesians 4:11, but again the word 'pastor' (*poimen*) is the same Greek word as used for 'shepherd'. The term 'shepherd' is used innumerable times, both in the Old and New Testaments. The primitive meaning was 'to feed', for the shepherd had to seek out places of water and grass—not always easy in Middle East lands—and elements such as leading into the best areas, guarding against predators (animal as well as human), as also disciplining aggressive sheep in the flock, and attending to wounded animals.

J. Jeremias tells us that historically in the Ancient Orient kings such as those of Babylonia and Assyria were named 'shepherds' because they had sovereignty over their people, and the verb *re'u*—'to pasture'—was used as the verb 'to rule'.¹ This royal emphasis is used only in Genesis 48:15, Psalm 23:1, and 80:1, although the term 'shepherd' is so often used for God, particularly regarding His pastoral care of His flock, Israel. The Shepherd goes before His flock (Ps. 68:7), guides it (Ps. 23:3), leads it to pastures (Jer. 50:19, etc.), to watered places where it can rest (Ps. 23:2; 80:1; Isa. 40:11; 49:10). Other actions of the Shepherd of Israel (Yahweh) is that He whistles to His sheep, gathers them, picks up the lambs to his bosom and leads the mother sheep.

Also in the Old Testament political and military leaders are often referred to as 'shepherds'. It is worth keeping in mind that the shepherds are given such responsibility as to render them quickly culpable for failure to be true shepherds and God will quickly judge such false and lazy shepherds (Jer. 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 12:10; 17:16; 22:22; 23:1, 2; Ezek. 34:1–10), and in fact will not trust such shepherds anymore; but Yahweh who is the true Shepherd will raise up His Davidic Shepherd. In Ezekiel 34:21–27 we see the future time of blessing to the flock:

Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will save my flock, they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them.

Two of the judgmental references are Zechariah 10:2–3, and 11:4–17, which all modern pastors ought to read so that they do not become lazy, smug and careless of the ministry committed to them. Another mysterious reference is Zechariah 13:7–9 which relates to 12:10. Of these two references, J. Jeremias says: 'Thus at the end of the OT shepherd sayings there stands an intimation of the shepherd who suffers death according to God's will and who

¹ J. Jeremias, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, eds. G. Kittel & G. Friedrich, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1968, pp. 485–502.

thereby brings about the decisive turn'.² Certainly Yahweh as Shepherd and the appointment by Him of the Davidic Shepherd opens the way for Christ the Good Shepherd, and his suffering for the sheep, the true flock of God.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD 'PASTOR', THAT IS, 'SHEPHERD' IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

On Pastoral Dynamics Day we saw that in the Book of Acts there are elders in the Church at Jerusalem, James the brother of the Lord being the leading elder, since he made pronouncements (15:4, 6, 13, 22). We are not told how this eldership came into being. In I Peter 5:1–5 Peter addresses elders and calls himself an elder. In II John 1, and III John 1, John calls himself an elder. In the Pastoral Epistles (I Tim. 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5) Paul speaks of elders. A difficulty arises when we read Acts 20:17 where it is said that Paul called the elders of the church of Ephesus to Miletus. He gives them a charge to fulfil (vv. 17–34). They are elders but in verse 28 Paul calls them 'guardians' or 'overseers' (*episkopoi*), and his use of the verb 'to shepherd' (*poimainen*) the church (*ecclesia*) makes them pastors though that word is not used. We now have 'elders' and 'overseers' which seem to be synonymous. In Philippians 1:1 Paul writes to 'bishops' (*episcopoi*) and deacons (*diakonois*). Note that there is a number of bishops—the word used in Acts 20:28. In I Timothy 3:1–7 Paul speaks about a person desiring to be a bishop. The RSV text is 'The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task'. The NRSV text is 'The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task'. The NIV text is, 'Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task'. The NASB text is, 'It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do'. The words 'to the office of' are not in the text. Perhaps this does not matter, but to our modern ears the term 'office' has certain connotations not here in the text. *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* says in regard to 'the office of a bishop':

But 'pastor' originally meant only 'bishop' in its English ecclesiastical sense. It is clear that the originals of our *episcopate*, *diaconate* and *apostolate* were at first interchangeable as general terms; Acts 1.17, 'this diaconate,' 20 'his episcopate,' 25 'this diaconate and apostolate,' are all used of the office from which Judas fell: *diaconate* expresses the service done for Christ, and *apostolate* the mission from Him; *episcopate* the oversight and care of those among whom the service is done and to whom the mission is.³

Again, Donald Guthrie in his Tyndale Commentary on The Pastoral Epistles has the following statement:

It is important to notice that the modern word *bishop* does not represent the Greek word *episkopos*, which properly means 'overseer'. In its original usage, at least until the time of Ignatius, it was restricted to those who exercised oversight in the local church. In the proverbial saying in this verse, the office referred to is quite general and might encompass any position, secular or ecclesiastical, where 'oversight' was necessary. Nor is there any hint here or elsewhere in the Pastorals of the monarchical episcopacy so much lauded by Ignatius.⁴

Henry Alford in his *Alford's Greek Testament* says: 'The identity of the [*episcopos*] and [*presbuteros*] in apostolic times is evident from Tit. i.5—7'.⁵ That passage is as follows:

This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and *appoint elders* in every town as I directed you, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not

² J. Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

³ *The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, ed. A. E. Humphreys, Cambridge University Press, London, 1907, p. 101.

⁴ *The Pastoral Epistles: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, Tyndale Press, Leicester, 1964, p. 79.

⁵ *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, vol. 3, Guardian Press, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 321.

open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate. *For a bishop*, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain [emphasis mine].

When to this we add Paul's calling of the elders in Acts 20:17, and telling them in 20:28 that the Holy Spirit has appointed them as overseers (*episkopous*), surely we see the leaders (*hegeomai*) of Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24 (that is, 'those having hegemony—the rule—over you') are identical with the elders of I Peter 5:1–5, who are the same as pastors because they are to 'tend the flock of God'. Again, in I Thessalonians 5:12 Paul says, 'But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you', must surely be of the one order which is leader-elder-bishop-overseer-pastor. It seems impossible to come to any other conclusion, although some attempt to deny this. Surely the key to the New Testament order of elders in the *ecclesia* is that it is 'the flock of God', so eldership is corporate pastoral ministry. If ministry (*diakonia*) is used specifically for deacons (*diakonoi*), it is also used generally for all members of the congregation (Eph. 4:12; cf. I Cor. 12:5). It seems to me to be best to call eldership a specific pastoral *ministry*, rather than use the word *office* which can be so misunderstood and so magnified that the idea of 'serving' can be replaced by 'ruling'. The term 'leader' is more appropriate, provided that the function of discipline and bringing into line of the flock—such as shepherds exercise—is not diminished. The genuine shepherd who leads or puts out his sheep before him is a leader who loves the flock and does not dominate it in a sinful, authoritarian way. Of course shepherds differ from person to person, but those who are Christian elders must exercise the good qualities of oversight. Also, we see that each flock has a corporate eldership. In order to understand this we need to go back into the history of elders.

ELDERSHIP IN HUMAN HISTORY

We might ask whether or not eldership is ontological—a point to which we will come later—but whether it is or not, we do know that it is functional, so functional as to be indispensable. The term 'elder' refers to older people of the family, or clan, or nation who have wisdom and can help to lead and rule for the benefit of the unit. The eldership may be of a council, or a ruling body such as a parliament, but every such body is highly functional. It seems almost universal that the elders will be men, and has been called a patriarchal form of governing,⁶ but the women are certainly elders to their gender in ways which men cannot be. Elders go by many names, such as aldermen, rulers, leaders, councillors, and the like, and sometimes young men are selected who show ability in the realm of ruling. A monarch generally has his council of elders which advises on request and to whose members is often distributed areas of government. Eldership, then, has always been in use.

So far as nations mentioned in the Scripture are concerned, we see that Egypt, Moab and Midian speak of eldership, and in more minor form the peoples of Gibeon, Succoth and Shechem. So far as Israel is concerned it had eldership in Egypt, and the elders were to go to Pharaoh and bargain for Israel's release. During the flight from Egypt and wandering in the wilderness there was eldership (Exod. 3:16), and the account of the formation of the 70 elders to help Moses, and their being anointed with the Holy Spirit, speak of them who were also called 'shepherds of the sheep'. The passages speaking against the shepherds show how culpable elders can be when they are not true to their calling. With the division of the land in Canaan, eldership seems to have been within tribes. When a monarch was introduced and Israel flourished then national eldership seems to have grown again. This eldership continued through to the New Testament where the nation's elders are called 'the Sanhedrin'. There are

⁶ It is not our task to explain or defend patriarchy but it is assumed by many that such a system has been unfair to women and is by the nature of the case to be totally rejected. This may not necessarily be so, and fuller research is required. Likewise the idea of hierarchy is rejected as being dominating to the 'lower' members of the hierarchy. For discussion on these points see my book *All Things Are Yours* (NCPI, 1996).

also elders of synagogues and like groups. When the Church came into being at Pentecost it seems that eldership was a natural order within each church. So the ideas always associated with eldership and its pastoral role would also be present.

PARADIGMATIC ELDERSHIP: THE TWENTY-FOUR HEAVENLY ELDERS

If we take the heavenly Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of His Son to be archetypes from which the earthly fatherhood and sonship take their ectypes, then we can probably speak of other celestial archetypes from which earthly ectypes are produced. There is a celestial eldership as we will see, and we can at least reckon on the fact that this is essential eldership by which the churchly eldership can be understood and even fashioned: that is, if the Holy Spirit reproduces the elements of celestial eldership in earthly persons.⁷

Celestial eldership can be studied in the Book of the Revelation, but is there a celestial eldership found in the Old Testament? In Isaiah 24:23 it is said, 'Then the moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory'. The Jewish Targum said that 'his elders' being at Jerusalem are the elders of Israel, and this fits with a parallel passage in substance, namely Isaiah 4:2–6. Jeremiah 23:18 and 22 speak of 'the council of the Lord', an idea found in Job 15:8. All this may be figurative or it may simply mean that God informs His mind to the prophets, as in Amos 3:7; 'Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets', which would make sense of the Jeremiah verses, that is, all prophets should listen to God. Even so in Daniel 7:9ff. there is a vision of heaven and of many thrones, the main being occupied by 'The Ancient of Days'.

The elders in Revelation could be men chosen by God, or those creatures who are celestial by creation. It would appear they are celestial creatures of great majesty, since all are crowned, are seated on thrones, and their white garments and golden crowns may fit with the idea of priestly kings. What, then, is the nature of celestial eldership and could it be and is it the archetype of the earthly ectype of eldership? We see the following things in celestial eldership:

- (a) They have authority; they wear crowns of gold.
- (b) They are pure; they wear white robes.
- (c) They are closest to the throne of God of all creatures except the four living creatures. They are even nearer than are the angels (7:11).
- (d) They have great knowledge of God, hence they sing the song of God the Creator, and the *new* song of the Lamb the Redeemer.
- (e) They are adept at worship. In their worship they humble their own authority before that of God Himself, i.e. they cast down their crowns before Him. Hence they are submissive.
- (f) They are able in some sense to bring the prayers of the saints before God (5:8).
- (g) From time to time they come forward to say something (5:5, 7:13). This indicates they know the intimate things of heaven, as also of the counsels of God.

Generally, then, we can conclude that in heaven the place of eldership is one of great authority, great knowledge, great service, worship and obedience. The elders have intimacy with God, although not without deep reverence and awe. So high is their authority, that the 144,000 and the harpers sing before the elders, who themselves are situated next to the living creatures and God. That is, the elders are included in this high celestial office. An examination of their praise songs is one which in itself demands close study. These can be seen in 4:11, 5:9–10, 11:17–18. Doubtless the elders are also involved in the songs of 19:1–4 and 19:6–8. These songs deal with God and creation, Christ and redemption, God and the vindication of His righteousness, and the ultimate defeat of all evil. In Revelation 7:13–17, the statement of the elder concerning the redeemed and their place in heaven is uttered in rich poetical terms and may even be a song in itself. As we have said, the truth and theology contained in these utterances is not only beautiful and transcendent praise, but is also deep theology.

⁷ This matter is discussed on pp. 5–9 of *The Shepherds of the Flock: Eldership in the Scriptures* (NCPI, 1985), which should be read with these brief notes.

What, then, of eldership on earth? Is it like this? Is it intended to be of the same order, i.e. to have authority, purity, wisdom and understanding? Surely this is of the nature of eldership within the church.⁸

Our question was not whether or not there is an eldership in the Church, for it is evident that there is, but whether this is an order appointed by God for the Church, an order derived from the celestial archetypal order, and we believe this is the case. In the Anglican service ‘For the Ordering of Priests’ (Presbyters) the following words are used, and these are asked by the ordaining bishop:

You have heard, my brothers, in your private examination, in the sermon, and in the readings from holy scripture, how great is the dignity and importance of this office to which you are called. And now again I exhort you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you remember the dignity of the high office and charge to which you are called: that is to say, to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and forewarn, to feed and provide for the Lord’s family; to seek for Christ’s sheep who are scattered abroad, and for his children who are surrounded by temptation in this world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever.

Have always therefore printed in your mind how great a treasure is committed to your care. For they are the sheep of Christ, whom he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood. The church and congregation whom you must serve is his bride and his body. And if it should come about that the church, or any of its members, is hurt or hindered as a result of your negligence, you know the greatness of the fault and the judgment that will follow. Accordingly, consider within yourselves the purpose of your ministry to the children of God; and see that you never cease your labour, your care, and diligence, until you have done all that lies in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or will be committed to your care, to that understanding in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that maturity in Christ, which leaves no place among you for error in religion or viciousness in life.

Since your office is of such excellence and such difficulty, you can see how much care and study you need, to show yourselves dutiful and thankful to the Lord, who has placed you in so great a dignity with so great a responsibility. Take care therefore that neither you yourselves offend, nor be the cause of others’ offending. You cannot have such a mind and will by yourselves; for that will and ability is given by God alone. Therefore you ought to pray earnestly for his Holy Spirit. And because you cannot perform the difficult task of leading men to salvation without the doctrine and guidance of the holy scriptures, you should read and study them well, and shape your life and the lives of those for whom you are responsible, according to their teaching. And for the same reason you should put away, as much as possible, all worldly preoccupations and pursuits.

We have good reason to believe that you have carefully considered these things already; and that you have decided, by God’s grace, to give yourselves wholly to this office to which God has been pleased to call you: so that to the best of your ability you will devote yourselves completely to this.

You will continually pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our Saviour Jesus Christ, for the assistance of the Holy Spirit; so that, by daily reading and meditating on the scriptures, you may grow in your ministry; and that you may so strive to sanctify the lives of you and yours and to shape them according to the teaching of Christ, that you may be godly patterns for the people to follow.

And now, in order that this present congregation of Christ’s people may also be assured of your intentions in these things, and in order that your public profession may strengthen your resolve to do your duties, you shall plainly answer these questions which I, in the name of God, and of his Church, now put to you:

[Here follow certain questions asked by the Bishop]⁹

When we read these words we are surely struck by the solemn bidding they contain. In my own case, I have found myself going time and again to them, reminding myself of what it is to be an elder. The quality of the charge is superb, for the creators of it have been deeply ingrained in the meaning of eldership. Whilst I would, perhaps, like to avoid the term ‘office’, yet it is only because it could seem to set apart members of the Church and divide them into that obnoxious division conveyed by the words ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’. As we have seen, the

⁸ See *The Shepherds of the Flock*, pp. 8–9.

⁹ The version of the Ordering of Priests quoted here is from *An Australian Prayer Book 1978* published by The Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Church of England in Australia, Sydney, pp. 609ff. I would have liked to have used the 1662 Prayer Book Service, for its language is very stately and most beautiful. This present version is stately enough, even though modernised.

word *laos* in Greek means the whole of the people, as Acts 10:42 has it, ‘He commanded us to preach to the people [*laos*]’. The word ‘priest’ (*hiereus*) is never used of elders, bishops, pastors, or indeed of any member of the Church. Likewise the word ‘temple’ (*hieron*) is never used of any building linked with Christian worship. The whole of the Church is called ‘a royal priesthood’ (I Pet. 2:9; *basileion hierateuma*), and the Church is itself ‘a shrine of God’ (I Cor. 3:16; *naos theou*), that is, ‘a holy temple in the Lord’ (Eph. 2:21; *naon hagion*). In this sense eldership has no direct priestly ministry, but shares the priestly ministry of the whole Church, which is a corporate priesthood. Thus Paul says, ‘there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus’. We are simply pointing out that the elder or eldership is not sacerdotal.^{10 11}

THE MINISTRY OF THE PASTOR–ELDER OR ELDERSHIP AS SHEPHERDING

I work on the assumption that the elder is the pastor,¹² and that in the apostolic church any church would have more than one elder.¹³ In the Anglican Ordination Charge, given above, we have statements that define eldership in terms of ‘messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord’, who are to ‘teach and forewarn, to provide for the Lord’s family; to seek for Christ’s sheep who are scattered abroad, and for his children who are surrounded by temptation in this world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever’. Another pastoral bidding is, ‘Have always therefore printed in your mind how great a treasure is committed to your care. For they are the sheep of Christ, whom he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood. The church and congregation whom you must serve is his bride and his body.’

Thus the terms ‘Christ’s sheep’, ‘the Lord’s family’, and ‘his bride and his body’ bring us to the heart of what is pastoral care. We are talking much about ‘pastoral dynamics’ and have seen that these take place in the context of *kerugma*, *koinonia*, *didache* and *paraclesis*. For our own approach we will first work on the basis of the elder being a pastor or shepherd. Already we have been told that pastoral ministry cannot be carried out apart from a continuous and living study of God’s holy Scriptures. It is these very Scriptures which open up, as do no other writings, the character and meaning of a true shepherd.

To truly understand the nature of a shepherd it is essential we see a shepherd and his flock in the Middle East and in other continents, and not just as on sheep farms and stations where they

¹⁰ It may seem that we are carping on what an elder is not, especially not a priest, and not as a Levitical priest working in a sanctuary which is a sacred sanctuary as was the Tabernacle and Temple in Israel. The emphasis given is to combat the sacerdotal developments of ministry. Thus the saying concerning the reformation that ‘new presbyter is old priest writ large’ (I think it comes from Hooker). These are by no means confined to our present elders who are pastors. There is the growth of counselling ministry which in many cases develops into a mediatorial operation.

¹¹ The idea of a sole pastor who is often a monarchical pastor seems absent from the New Testament. Today we have pastoral teams, and still the idea is of an elevated group of persons who constitute a hierarchy who, as it were, are over the people (*laos*). This is not the New Testament idea. Whilst doing this Study I have picked up *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* by Gordon D. Fee (Hendrikson, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1994), and chapter 8 ‘*Laos* and Leadership under the New Covenant’ is excellent. One illustration places a small circle over a large circle, the small circle being the clergy and the large the people. Fee then places the small circle within the larger circle so that the leadership is with the people, being of them and not over them. The whole book is really on this subject.

¹² I am aware of some of the arguments concerning eldership. Because bishop and elder are equated in Titus 2:5ff. (cf. Acts 20:17, 28) it has been said that a bishop is the leading elder. If so then he is *primus inter pares*, i.e. ‘the first among equals’. I am also aware that some see the bishop as a level above elders. As we noted before, monarchical bishops were not known until Ignatius. Sadly enough, we read back into apostolic times the *de facto* situations of today, with gradations of clergy from a pope and other hierarchical clergy down to altar acolytes. I have seen so much bondage, and so much prelacy with the damage it brings, and the confusion of ‘there is neither’ (Gal. 3:28), that the fellowship of the saints is virtually lost.

¹³ It is said that when Archbishop Wand made a translation of the New Testament and he came to Philippians 1:1, he changed ‘bishops and deacons’ into ‘bishop and deacons’. I only have this on hearsay from T. C. Hammond and he is now deceased.

are dealt with as multitudes of animals. This will illuminate the biblical view of a shepherd and shepherding. We will proceed by firstly seeing God as the True Shepherd.

God the Father is Shepherd

In Genesis 49:24 Jacob prophesies of Joseph, ‘yet his bow remained unmoved, his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel)’. Psalm 23 is by no means a sentimental view of a tender Shepherd, but that of an indispensable, practical and caring Shepherd. It is also a psalm which does not use the human shepherd as an analogy for one that is divine, but tells us that this is the very nature of God, as ontological as is His being the Bridegroom of Israel. Thus, we will see, the Son is one with Him in this ontology of shepherding. Jeremias says that, whereas the term ‘shepherds’ was a common term for political and military leaders, it is surprising that there is no single instance in the Old Testament of ‘shepherd’ being used in Israel as a title for the ruling king.¹⁴ We saw in Jeremiah 2 and Ezekiel 34 that God is scandalised by the evil of His shepherds in Israel, and will punish them for their reprehensible conduct, and will Himself resume the order once delegated to them. The indictments on the shepherd includes the fact that the flock of Israel has been divided by them. In Ezekiel 34:23–24 God says:

And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

This idea is filled out in Ezekiel 37:15–23 where Israel shall again become one people, and in verse 24, ‘My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes.’ To these wonderful prophecies we must add the beautiful descriptions of God as Shepherd, such as Jeremiah 23:3–4 and Isaiah 40:9–11:

Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the LORD.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

We must surely think of God as seeing His created people as one flock, for His Messiah will bring His people, some of whom are not of the fold of Israel but are of the elect flock of God. Psalm 23 is perhaps the most universally loved and quoted Scripture, so beautiful is its presentation of God as the loving Shepherd. As we shall see, the psalm is also applicable to the Son and, that being the case, we have the real meaning of earthly pastors, no less than of heavenly Elders.

Jesus Is the Messianic Shepherd

We have seen the Scriptures which refer to the Davidic shepherd,¹⁵ and how he will have concern and love for the flock and make them to be one, secure flock. It is true that sometimes

¹⁴ J. Jeremias, pp. 487–8

¹⁵ See Jeremiah 2:8; 23:3; 31:10; Ezekiel 34:1–22; Micah 5:4.

it is difficult to be quite sure of whom the prophecies speak, whether of Yahweh or the Messianic Son of David, but Jesus certainly refers to the Father as the Shepherd. This is so in the case of the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15, where the Shepherd seeks the sheep so that ‘there will be more joy in heaven over one lost sinner that repents than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance’. ‘Joy in heaven’ is certainly the joy of the Father–Shepherd. When Jesus sees the people ‘harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd’ (Matt. 9:36), it is because they are so far from their Father–Shepherd, and so they can be called ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matt 10:6; 15:24). Even so, he makes it clear that he is the true Shepherd, spoken of by God in the Old Testament. This is brought out when he has dealings with Zacchaeus, and says, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost’ (Luke 19:9–10).

Seeing the people ‘as sheep without a shepherd’ means his heart is the same as the Father–Shepherd’s. It is clear that he has come to seek and save those who are the lost of the tribes of Israel. Moreover he has come to gather them together, back into the security of the one flock. In fact we see that flock comprised not only of the saved of Israel but also of those who were once not of that flock, namely the Samaritans and Gentiles. In Matthew 25:31–33 he is seen with that flock, ‘When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.’ This flock will be the evidence of the true shepherding of the true Shepherd.

It is in John 10 that we see all the elements of the Good Shepherd. ‘Good’ here means the archetypal Shepherd. Verses 1–18 tell us that this Shepherd is legitimately present to the flock, that they recognise him, and his relationship with them is such that they follow him. For these he will give his life when the wolf comes to destroy them, and it seems in this case that the wolf is Satan. Yes, the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The Father out of His own Shepherd heart loves the Son for being Shepherd to the sheep of the flock of Israel, and so He has given authority to the Son both to lay down his life and take it again—in the interests of the flock. Yet the saving work of the Shepherd is not limited to those in Israel’s fold, for other sheep not of this fold will be gathered in, for they have eternal life and will never perish.

There are somewhat curious passages of Zechariah, the first being that of 11:4–17—against the worthless shepherds—and the second being 13:1–9, and especially verse 7 of the Shepherd who is being wounded grievously, his flock being scattered. It is this passage which Jesus quotes as he enters into Gethsemane (Matt. 26:31). The mystery of this Shepherd being smitten, as also voluntarily laying down his whole life, is the mystery of judgment and love.

After his resurrection, his passion for shepherding is seen in John 21. Here he wishes Peter to have his heart and mind on the flock—both lambs and grown sheep. He wishes his own Shepherd-being to flow through Peter, who had been quick to flee when the Shepherd was smitten.

The Elder–Pastors—the True Shepherds of the Sheep

From before time the Father and the Son have been the Shepherds, so that those chosen to be shepherds must live at the heart of them both by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why Peter exhorts them by the Chief Shepherd (*archipoimenos*) whom the writer of Hebrews describes as ‘our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep [*ton poimena ton probaton ton megan*]’. Only the pastors who see themselves as being under the Chief and Great Shepherd will see their flock as the Anglican Ordinal charge bids pastors to love and care for, feed and tend their flocks. The biblical shepherds lived with their flocks, and in all weathers, but rarely—if ever—would any pastor give his life for his sheep, loving them deeply though he may have done.

Only then, seeing the Shepherd at the Cross, can we realise the Pastor-love at the heart of the Father and the Son. That flock will be present on the Day of Judgment, redeemed and purified, and at the same time there will be the goats—the nations who have rejected the Saviour and for whom there is no entrance into the Holy City, the Paradise of God. Thus it is that we have surely to be crucified with Christ, the closest the Holy Spirit can bring us to understanding the Shepherd whom we love. We realise that he was first a member of God's flock—the *qahal* of God—for he was first a Lamb, and then he was the Pastor, the Shepherd of the flock, and 'Great' and 'Chief' Shepherd, because only in him can a man be a true pastor. Every man, being pastor, is also a sheep of His pasture, and every man a member of His beloved flock.

Therefore are they before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night within his temple;
and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence.
They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;
the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.
For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water;
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes
(Rev. 7:15–17).

The Pastoral Dynamics of Sacrifice

It doesn't take long in reading the Bible to encounter the action of sacrifice—the offerings of Abel and Cain—and then in continuing to see that the matter of sacrifice is common throughout the whole of the Scriptures. It is not simply an Old Testament phenomenon, dispensed with in the coming of Christ. Rather, the number of references commanding offering or sacrifice¹ in the New Testament (e.g. Rom. 12:1; 6:13; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 13:15) shows that this matter is essential to the life of the people of God. In fact, the church could be typified as the 'sacrificial community', another way of speaking of it as the 'community of love'.

THE ORIGINS OF SACRIFICE

The first actions of sacrifice we note in the Scriptures are those of Cain and Abel, who both brought offerings of their produce (Gen. 4:3–4). Continuing on from there, we next encounter sacrifice in Genesis 8:20, burnt offerings as a thanksgiving sacrifice following Noah's deliverance from the Flood. Then, in Genesis 12:7–8, when the Lord appeared to Abraham and established His covenant promise to him, Abraham responded in sacrificial worship. When this promise was reiterated in 13:14–17, we again see Abraham responding in sacrifice in 13:18. And so we could go on through the unfolding of salvation history in this way, noting the occasions of sacrifice—Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Manoah, Samuel, David, and so forth. Alongside this, of course, is the contrasting offering of false sacrifices in idolatry—again a line traceable from Cain onwards.

What is clear is that whenever people encountered God in His grace and kindness, they offered sacrifice to Him. This response of sacrifice was not commanded, but flowed out of the encounter. There must have been something about the encounter with the Lord which drew out sacrifice from those who received His grace. If when people met him and came to know Him they sacrificed, then the truth of sacrifice must be very deep in the heart of God Himself. Sacrifice appears to be a gift given in the establishing of relationship between God and Man.

Sacrifice seems to be 'compatible' with God; that this response came whenever men and women met God indicates that sacrifice must be very deep in the heart of God Himself. Further, the fact of false sacrifice from Cain onwards tells us that sacrifice is very deep in the psyche of Man also. Certainly, at a human level, the response of people to (seeming) acts of sacrifice by others is very deep.

Hosea 6:6 says, 'For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings'. This was not an absolute criticism of the sacrificial system by Hosea, but rather a pointing to the heart of the matter of the sacrifices given to Israel. Right at this heart were the issues of steadfast love (*chesed*) and the knowledge of the God (*da'ath elohim*). To sacrifice aright was not simply the performance of a set ritual, but a coming to the knowledge of God. The origins of sacrifice then are within God Himself, the expression of His own character and being. Trying to define sacrifice is quite difficult, but it certainly

¹ The word 'offering' comes from a Latin term, *offerre*, referring to the presentation of a gift; 'sacrifice' has the meaning of making holy, *sacer*, 'holy' + *facere*, 'to make'. The Hebrew expression 'present an offering' is a hiphil form, *hiqrib*, and has the idea of causing to be brought near—the offering was the *qorban*. It was a broad word and included most kinds of sacrifice. The verb *zabach* (to slaughter for sacrifice) is used in Leviticus and virtually the rest of the Old Testament only in reference to the peace offerings. Strictly speaking then, the word 'sacrifice' in the Old Testament refers only to animal offerings slaughtered and eaten as part of a communal meal, and 'offering' refers more comprehensively to animal or vegetable offerings. The Greek terms corresponding to these phrases—*thuo* and *prosphero*—do not have quite the same precision.

involves so loving another that we give up to them and for them what was precious to us, but which cost is of no consideration to us now in view of that love. To be sacrificial is to be concerned not for yourself but for others. For this reason sacrifice is right at the heart of the being of the Triune God.

Moltmann says of the divine relationships:

. . . each divine Person exists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they ex-ist totally in the other: the Father ex-ists by virtue of his love, as himself entirely in the Son; the Son, by virtue of his self-surrender, ex-ists as himself totally in the Father; and so on.²

The divine relationships are relationships of utter self-giving. Jesus spoke of the Father giving all things to him, and of withholding nothing from him (see John 3:34–35; 5:19–30; 6:37; 10:29; 13:3, and especially the great high-priestly prayer of 17:1–26). Note too in John 5:30 the reciprocal relationship of utter devotion to the Father—‘I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me’. The character of the Son’s self-giving to the Father is that of submission and obedience—glad, free and total. Love looks not to one’s own things, but to the things of others (Phil. 2:4)—and so in this it is always sacrificial. So, to be in communion with God, to know God, means that a person and community will by nature of the case be sacrificial.

COMMUNION, THE GOAL AND THE GIFT OF SACRIFICE

The Old Testament sacrifices were part of the gift of God to Israel that were included in the gifts that Paul lists in Romans 9:4–5—‘theirs is . . . the worship’. It is important to understand that the sacrifices were not devised by Israel, but given to them. Leviticus 17:11 makes clear the giftedness of the sacrifices—‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life’. This gift was temporary and also prophetic—as the writer to the Hebrews makes clear (10:1–18). Yet they were enormously powerful and dynamic proclamations to the people of God, of the grace of God and the purposes of God.

Leviticus 17:11 points to the goal of sacrifice, especially the blood-shedding sacrifices—that they were given ‘to make atonement for your souls’. Atonement is more than forgiveness, although forgiveness is an enormous and essential part of atonement. Atonement is being brought into rich, personal, communal fellowship with the Lord.

There was a logic in the Old Testament sacrifices. Basically there were three kinds of sacrifice: (i) propitiatory offerings, to deal with sin and guilt; (ii) dedicatory offerings, an expression of thanksgiving to the Lord (these are called ‘pleasant to the Lord’); and (iii) peace or fellowship sacrifices, expressing intimacy with the Lord and with His people. The basic offerings were the propitiatory offerings, even though the sacrifices we encounter first in the Scriptures were either dedicatory or communal offerings. In those cases, the encounter with the Lord had shown to those worshippers that the Lord was the Lord of mercy and grace who had dealt with their sins. It was with the giving of the Law that the propitiatory sacrifices were established. In Israel’s worship, the propitiatory sacrifices were given to be the means of proclamation of this fact of God’s grace. The other sacrifices—dedicatory and fellowship—were offered following this offering. The propitiatory sacrifices were efficacious because the Lord had given the blood to be the means by which atonement was to be made. The life of the animal sacrificed stood for the forfeited life of the sinner–worshipper. The animal’s blood was shed in the stead of the worshipper’s.

² Quoted by D. Meatheringham in ‘The Dynamics of Divine and Human Perichoresis’ (NCTM Pastors’ School 1991, *Trinitarian Theology: Human Unity and Relationships*, p. 4).

Equally essential to atonement were the dedicatory offerings—the whole burnt offerings, the cereal offerings, and the drink offering. The offering of the gift symbolised the complete dedication of the worshipper to the Lord. Again, the gift stood in the stead of the worshipper, not this time to bear the sins but to proclaim the responding love. In the offering of the dedicatory gifts, Israel symbolised the heart of the Law: ‘you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might’ (Deut. 6:5). This self-dedication to the Lord was grounded in the knowledge that God had made them His people through His action of grace, through His dealing with their sins. That is, their dedicatory sacrifices were *by the mercies of God*.

Note well that both sacrifices—dedicatory and propitiatory—were the gift of God to His people. It is not entirely accurate to describe the propitiatory sacrifices as God’s gift and the dedicatory sacrifices as human response. The grace of God includes the way of response within itself. The outflow of these two offerings were then the fellowship or peace offerings, which symbolised the gratitude of the people to God and their desire to participate in His gift of fellowship.

CHRIST’S ONCE FOR ALL SACRIFICE

Athanasius spoke of Jesus Christ exercising a two-fold ministry: ‘He ministered the things of God to man, and the things of man to God’. We could add, ‘and so he became the place of communion, God with man and man with God’. These three aspects of Christ’s ministry correspond to the three-fold action of the sacrifice. In Christ’s ministry the whole of the sacrificial system is fulfilled.

Hebrews 9:11–14 says:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

The ‘good things that have come’ could be summed up in ‘communion with God’. This goal was obtained by the taking of his own blood into the Holy Place for atonement. He, in his death on the cross, so completely identified with us that he took our sins upon himself, and bore the judgment of that sin within himself. Whilst he bore the judgment of the world, he was not simply punished instead of us. This is the heart of the suffering servant’s intercession, that he comes in under the burden and bears that burden to its utter extremity. So thorough was his action there that it has secured an eternal redemption—he has borne the sins and evil of the whole world and of all eternity in that enormous, depthless action of sacrificial love. In this Christ fulfilled the propitiatory sacrifices of the old worship.

Hebrews 7:23–25 says:

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Christ holds his priesthood forever, and continues in this ministry permanently. That is, there is a ‘sacrificial’ act—the ministry of the priest—which Christ continues forever to perform. This is quite clearly not the propitiatory action of his death, which was once and for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26; I Pet. 3:18). This sacrificial action of Christ is the worshipful, obedient, dedicatory offering of himself to the Father (‘Lo, I have come to do thy will’). In this action Christ has established the human response to God—he responds to the Father *for* us, but in such a way that as the Spirit of Christ is given to us this response of Christ’s becomes ours,

coming freely and spontaneously from ourselves. In Hebrews 2:11–13 Christ is shown to be unashamed in calling us his brethren, for we all have one origin—Christ himself—and so in his self-dedication to the Father (‘Here I am’!) we are caught up with him (‘and the children God has given me’!).

In this then—the receiving of the Father’s rich and free grace for us in His Son through faith in his blood, and the offering of ourselves fully and richly to God through His Son in the empowering of the Holy Spirit—true communion is known.

THE SACRIFICIAL COMMUNITY

The gift to God then is that we participate in His own sacrificiality through Christ’s priestly ministry. In Acts the community born of the Gospel and the Spirit is typified by a sacrificiality. In Acts 2:41–47 and 4:32–35 we see that, without being commanded, there was a desire to sell property and give to those who were in need: ‘There was not a needy person among them’. The source of this is clear in Acts 4:33b—‘and great grace was upon them all’. There is no indication that there was any sense of imposition upon them (in fact, when Ananias and Sapphira sought to deceive the community through an ingenuine act of sacrifice, Peter was clear to them that the land was theirs to keep or to dispose of as they willed—Acts 5:3–4). What is clear through this is that, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the great depths of the love of God for the world, who spared not His Son but gave him up freely for us all, was shed abroad in the hearts of the people of God. The church, then, was not looking to its own things, but to the things of others.

There is no sense of this, in either the Acts or the Epistles, of the church being put on to be sacrificial. In fact we see almost the opposite in II Corinthians 8:1–5:

We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

The church in Macedonia could not have conceived of their giving in terms of ‘cost’ or ‘commitment’—their giving was beyond their means to give, but they did not ‘give ‘til they hurt’. Rather, it hurt them to be unable to give.

This is the dynamic reality of true sacrifice—it is the overflow of the heart filled with the love and the grace of God, caught up into the action of God Himself.

All this is essential to know in pastoral ministry, where often we are reacting against a lack of ‘sacrificiality’ within a congregation or person. To hit this ‘law-way’ goes right against the true dynamic of sacrifice, and so, whilst it may produce some kind of result, in fact what is produced is not sacrifice, the sacrifice of love, but a counterfeit, the sacrifice of obligation, and is probably closer to the sacrifice of Cain than of Abel.

The heart of the life of God’s people together is that each looks not on his own things but on the things of others. So, mature Christians are called upon in the New Testament to give up their ‘rights’ for the benefit and upbuilding of others. So, for example, in Romans 15:1–3a, in response to a disagreement about the rightness of eating meat,³ Probably because it has been sacrificed to idols, although Paul identifies the key issue here only as cleanness/uncleanness (14:14ff.). the fact that Christ did not please himself is crucial in understanding how we are to behave. So too those who are mature are not to seek to please themselves, but ‘let each please his neighbour, for his good to edify him’. This way of living in Gospel harmony is then linked to the praise and worship of God by the church in the following verses; e.g. 15:7, ‘Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, *for the glory of God*’. The principal of sacrifice is at work here.

THE PLEASING, ACCEPTABLE, DESIRABLE SACRIFICE

In Leviticus there was one category of sacrifice which had this phrase attached to it—‘an offering by fire, a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord’. These were the dedicatory offerings including the ‘*olah*, the whole burnt offering. As that sacrifice indicated the giving of the whole person (through identification in the laying on of hands), it is clear that when a person, in the grace of God, gives himself or herself to the Lord, that this is a sacrifice which pleases Him.

Throughout the Scriptures we read of sacrifices which either pleased or displeased the Lord. In fact the first offerers of sacrifice—Cain and Abel—represented both. What was displeasing about Cain’s sacrifice, that the Lord had no regard for it? Note in Genesis 4:5, it is *Cain and his offering* that the Lord has no regard for. The dedicatory offering always is about the *person* who offers it. There is argument about the reasons for the displeasure of the Lord, some linking it to the fact that it was not animal sacrifice, but this seems unlikely in that cereal offerings were an important part of the dedicatory offerings in the Temple. The key to it all is in Hebrews 11:4, where we read that the distinguishing feature of Abel’s sacrifice not found in Cain’s was the element of faith. Wenham in his commentary on Genesis 4 understands verse 7 to read, ‘If you do well, will you not be forgiven?’ Cain had missed the grace that underlay true sacrifice, and so his action was not the outflow of grace in the human heart, but an attempt to buy God off.

A person pleases God only through faith (Heb. 11:6). Whoever would draw near to God (remember *hiqrib*) must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. This can only be the person who has come to know the forgiveness of sins; until then we flee Him and seek to hide from Him, and can not even think of pleasing Him to whom we are hostile. The person who has come to the forgiveness of sins and new birth has the desire to please God—Romans 8:5–8. When grace has come and the Spirit has filled a person (or a community of believers) then the desire is to please God, and to be wholly dedicated to the Lord—Colossians 1:9–10; I Thessalonians 4:1.

³ Probably because it has been sacrificed to idols, although Paul identifies the key issue here only as cleanness/uncleanness (14:14ff.).

The heart of this dedicatory life is love; the person who being gripped by the grace of Christ and who wants to respond sacrificially will love—Ephesians 5:2. In fact, acts of so-called sacrifice that lack love are gutted of their true meaning and dynamic—I Corinthians 13:3. The New Testament names a number of elements of that sacrificial love that is pleasing and acceptable to God, desired by Him, and they are listed simply here without comment:

And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ But when he heard it, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Matt. 9:10–13).

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Heb. 13:15–16).

Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity . . . (I Thess. 4:1–3).

Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them (Eph. 5:7–11).

If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God (I Tim. 5:4).

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord (Col. 3:20).

The Christ of the Scriptures

INTRODUCTION: THE COMING OF CHRIST

In Revelation 12:1–6 the Apostle John is given a vision of the '*red dragon*', who '*stood before the woman . . . that he might devour her child*'. This passage is telling us that from the beginning of time, Satan has been constantly seeking the destruction of 'the seed of woman' (Gen. 3:15) and the enthronement of himself as ruler over the nations. From the beginning of time this has been The Story (cf. Heb. 2:14–15; 1 Pet. 1:10–12).¹

The clear message of Revelation is the Victory of Christ and His Church over the dragon and his helpers.

In his Gospel Luke records how Jesus, after the Resurrection, had spoken to the two disciples on their way home to the village of Emmaus:

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

Luke further clarifies what Jesus was '*interpreting from all the scriptures*' (see Luke 24:44–47). Jesus says that He, as the Christ (Messiah), should suffer and die, and that He would rise victorious over death (and Satan—the dragon) and thus win salvation for all mankind—and be the One to whom the Father would give the nations (cf. Matt. 4:8–10; Ps. 2:8).

Luke also tells how Paul likewise spoke, '*. . . persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening . . . [for] two whole years . . . preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ*' (Acts 28:23, 30).

This same thought can be found in many other passages: John 5:39, 46; Acts 3:18, 24; 7:52; 10:43; 13:29; 26:22, 23; 1 Peter 1:10.

*Christ was in all the Old Testament Story. It would be easy for us to see the Old Testament 'law and prophets' as being prophetic regarding Christ, but that Christ was not, himself, active in all the story, movements and acts of that same Old Testament.*²

The one central theme of all the Scriptures is The Coming of Christ and the victory He would achieve for sinful mankind. Unless we see this, the Scriptures (particularly the Old Testament) remains a meaningless book.³

¹ 'Rev. 12 is very clearly based on Gen. 3:15: the same characters appear in both; the same truth is proclaimed in both . . . Thus viewed, the entire Old Testament becomes one story, the story of the conflict between the seed of the woman and the dragon, between Christ and Satan. In this conflict Christ, of course, is victorious' (William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1939, pp. 165ff.).

² Geoffrey Bingham, NCTM Monday Pastors' Study Group 1/3/99, p. 7.

³ This theme is followed by Hendriksen in much more detail in his book *Survey of the Bible* (beginning at p. 83). He says, 'This is the only proper way of telling the Old Testament story' (William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1947, p. 84).

THE PROMISED ‘SEED OF WOMAN’

We begin in Genesis 3:15:⁴

The Lord God said to the serpent . . . I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.

The ‘*serpent*’ of Genesis 3 is the ‘*red dragon*’ of Revelation 12. The ‘*woman*’ is Israel/Church. The woman’s ‘*seed*’ is Christ, the Redeemer (‘the Crusher’).

The story of Scripture is the unfolding of this promise and the relentless pursuit by the dragon/Satan, as he seeks to destroy the promise, by destroying the ‘woman’ (Israel) before ‘the child’ can be born.

This promise of Genesis 3:15 can be said to be ‘the mother of all promises’.⁵ It is the promise upon which the rest of the Biblical narrative rests and sees fulfilled in Christ. We can trace that conflict through the periods of Scriptural history.

The testimony of the Scriptures is the surety of God’s promises and His Covenant protection of the woman!

What we need to see is that not only is Christ to be the fulfilment of the promise but He is also the guardian of the promise through all of history. The Scriptures are the story of Christ protecting the woman until in God’s time she will give birth to the child—the Redeemer—Christ the Lord.

(In this study we will look only at some of the highlights, but once this theme is discerned it becomes a key to understanding all the Scriptures.)

THE STORY BEGINS AT CREATION

The story of Creation, of Adam and Eve, of Eden and The Fall, are recorded for the benefit of Israel. They clearly indicate to Israel her special status and role, which God gave man at the beginning and through which God would one day achieve all He purposed for mankind and creation.

The restoration of the disruption of the Divine Order and the good creation is the theme of all later Scripture (and history).

While in the Old Testament the restoration is seen in symbolic form in Israel’s gift of the Promised Land, its fulfilment is seen in the great expectation for a new creation that would one day come (Isa. 66:22; Rev. 21:1).

In that sense Genesis chapters 1 – 3 are the ‘head-waters’ of salvation history. In these opening chapters we find the essence of all Biblical promises—with Genesis 3:15 the key to seeing them all fulfilled in Christ.

THE DRAMA UNFOLDS

In that sense the drama begins to unfold in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel. Abel is a righteous man (already foreshadowing ‘the Crusher’)—Cain was evil; he would not live in love and

⁴ To gain the complete picture we need to begin at Genesis 1:1.

⁵ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, p. 165.

rose up against his brother and murdered him (1 John 3:11–12). But then Seth is born, and from him men of faith continue (Gen. 4:26).

Once again ‘the dragon’ does his evil work and seeks to destroy ‘*the sons of God*’ (Gen. 6:1–4). We read:

The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose . . . The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually . . . so the LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground’ (Gen. 6:2, 5, 7).

Judgment must come to the whole earth, but ‘the promise’ is secure and will continue in Noah and his family.

FROM NOAH TO ABRAHAM

The drama continues after the Flood. With Noah, God renews His original covenant promise (Gen. 9:8–17). Even though sin remains in the family of Noah, God’s purposes for man and creation have not altered. In spite of the need to judge sin, men of faith will find grace and God’s covenant protection of His promises. Satan’s schemes will come to naught.

This is dramatically demonstrated when proud and powerful Nimrod gathers men into cities and builds a ‘memorial tower’, saying; ‘*Let us make a name for ourselves*’ (Gen. 11:4), in defiance of God. But judgment comes, and Satan’s schemes are crushed . . . and the promise of world-wide redemption continues . . . in Abraham, a descendant of Shem.

Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves’ (Gen. 12:1–3).

FROM ABRAHAM TO ISRAEL

Abraham is a righteous man—he believes God. God has promised that He will make of Him ‘*a great nation*’—but Sarah his wife is childless and beyond child bearing age! Humanly speaking the promise cannot be fulfilled—a situation only too clear to Abraham (Gen. 15:2).

But again God works contrary to all human expectation—at ninety years of age Sarah gives birth to Isaac. The promise of a world Redeemer will come through Abraham’s descendants: Isaac–Jacob (Israel).

Abraham knew God. In spite of his own misgivings, he believed God. As Genesis 15:6 states; ‘And he [Abraham] believed the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness’ (cf. James 2:23).

Abraham believed that God would fulfil His promises and that all His deeds were righteous. Even in the face of God’s imminent judgment on the inhabitants of Sodom, Abraham acknowledges God’s righteousness. He says, ‘*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*’ (Gen. 18:25).

The greatest test of Abraham’s trust in God’s righteousness came on Mt Moriah when the Lord commands Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:1–2). (Was not Isaac the one through whom the promises of world redemption would come?) But Abraham knew God—

He could raise Isaac from the dead (cf. Heb. 11:17–19). In total obedience Abraham went. In faith he lifted the knife to slay his son.

We read:

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here am I’. He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me’ . . . So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day. ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided’ (Gen. 22:11–12, 14).⁶

The Lord stands guardian over His promises, as He reveals to Abraham (and his descendants), the way of Redemption. God will provide the perfect sacrifice—the Father will not withhold His only Son, but will offer Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32; 1 John 4:9; Rom. 3:24–25).

From Isaac the promise is given to Jacob—but not before Rebekah (Isaac’s wife), who is ‘barren’ (Gen. 25:21), miraculously conceives and bears twins—Esau and Jacob.

Jacob deceives his father into giving him his blessing and incurs the wrath of his elder brother Esau, who threatens to kill him (Gen. 27:19, 41–42). Jacob has to flee for his life. Yet Esau does not carry out his threat and Jacob is reconciled to Esau and the Promised Land . . . with great blessing (Gen. 33:4). The promises of the Lord are again preserved.

Under threat from famine, Jacob and his family must leave the Promised Land. Through Joseph the Lord provides a sanctuary in Egypt:

And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob’. And he said, ‘Here am I’. Then he said, ‘I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again’ (Gen. 46:2–3).

(This was the last word spoken by God to the patriarchs in Genesis, and in that sense will sustain Israel through over 200 years in Egypt.)

ISRAEL AND THE EXODUS

While memories of Joseph continued, Egypt offered a safe sanctuary for Israel. But ‘*a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph*’ (Exod. 1:8) and sets about to destroy Israel (Exod. chs. 1 – 2). Miraculously the Lord raises up Moses and rescues Israel from the Egyptians:

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And Israel saw the great work which the LORD did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD; and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses (Exod. 14:30–31).

Once again we see the Lord’s intervention to save His Covenant people. The Lord’s promises are sure—they will be fulfilled. Even the might of Egypt cannot stand against the Lord.

But Israel’s troubles are not over. The enemy is within their hearts. Left to themselves they quickly abandon the Lord and worship a golden calf (Exod. 32:4):

⁶ The term ‘the angel of the Lord’ (Gen. 22:11) appears regularly throughout the Old Testament and is said by some to be the Lord (Christ) Himself. Certainly ‘the angel of the Lord’ must have spoken fully as the Lord, ensuring the Lord’s will is communicated and His promises protected.

And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them (Exod. 32:9–10).

Israel is just as wicked as any nation. They cannot live in God’s presence, they cannot come near to Him. But Moses can—he will intercede for Israel (Exod. 32:11–14).⁷

Israel will live only by the covenant mercy and grace of God (Exod. 34:5–9). If Israel is to know the blessing of God’s Covenant promises, then she must be careful to obey all that the Lord commands her. Disobedience will bring curse (Exod. 34:27–28).

ISRAEL IN THE PROMISED LAND

Upon the death of Moses, the mantle of leadership passes to Joshua. Joshua is a man after Moses’ own heart, and while he remains alive Israel follows the Lord. But the need to continually exhort Israel to faith and obedience, reflects a people whose heart is not true to the Lord.

Moses’ final words echo down the centuries of Israel’s history:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, and I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying His voice, and cleaving to Him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:19–20).

Likewise, Joshua’s final words exhort Israel to forsake their idols and follow the Lord, or suffer the curses foretold through Moses—even to be removed from the Promised Land (Josh. 23:12–13; 24:14–15, 19–20; cf. Deut. 28:63–64, 68).

Joshua’s fears were well-founded. Upon his death Israel reverts to idolatry and slides into moral and social anarchy (Judg. 19:30; 21:25).

Throughout this period, time and time again God brings judgment upon Israel through the surrounding nations. But Israel refuses to repent of her idolatries. Only the Lord’s faithfulness in raising up a Spirit-inspired ‘judge’ has prevented the nation’s destruction.

These were ‘dark days’ in Israel’s history. The prospect of a glorious future humanly looked impossible (Judg. 21:25; 1 Sam. 3:1).⁸

SAMUEL AND KING DAVID

When Jacob pronounced his blessing upon his twelve sons, it was to Judah that the role of ‘Ruler’ was given:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples (Gen. 49:10).

Of the tribe of Judah, the family of David is to be heir of the promise (1 Sam. 16:12–13; Ps. 89:19–37; cf. Jer. 23:5; Acts 2:29–31).

⁷ To Moses God had appeared (Exod. 3:4–5), and called him to this great task of being God’s representative to Israel. ‘Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend’ (Exod. 33:11).

⁸ It is in that context that the Message of the Book of Ruth stands as a beacon of hope—the future would be secured through Israel’s ‘Kinsman–Redeemer’! (Note: Ruth 4:15 ‘a restorer of life’.)

Anointed by the prophet Samuel, David's life is threatened by King Saul. We're told how an '*evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul*' (1 Sam. 19:9) to drive him to pursue David and seek to kill him (1 Sam. 16:14; 18:29; 19:1)—but David has the Lord's protection, even though he must constantly flee for his life.

Even after he has become king, David must flee from Absalom for his life (2 Sam. 15:14) in the midst of which the servants of Saul's grandson Mephibosheth make claims of reclaiming the kingdom of Saul (2 Sam. 16:3) and rekindle hatred for David among the Benjaminites (2 Sam. 16:11).

But the Lord preserves the house of David and safeguards the promise of a Davidic Messiah:

Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Sam. 7:11–13).

FROM DAVID TO QUEEN ATHALIAH

Upon the death of Solomon the northern kingdom (Israel) revolts against the house of David (1 Kings 12:16). Israel now rivals Judah—'*the house of David*'.

Athaliah (daughter of the infamous Jezebel and King Ahab of Israel, who had been given in a marriage alliance to Jehoram king of Judah), in seeking to gain absolute power over the kingdom of Judah, destroys the house of David (2 Kings 11:1). That is, she has all her own grandchildren killed!

Thus, once again the promised 'seed of woman' through the line of David is threatened. And it seems, with Athaliah, the dragon has succeeded, as we read '*. . . she arose and destroyed all the royal family*' (2 Kings 11:1). If it is '*all the royal family*', then God's promise cannot be fulfilled.

But Athaliah only *thought* she had killed all the royal family, for the very next verse reads:

But Jehosheba took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were about to be slain . . . Thus she hid him from Athaliah, so that he was not slain (2 Kings 11:2).

Once again the Lord was wonderfully guarding and protecting His promise. Not even the wicked Athaliah could thwart His purposes.

At seven years of age, Joash is brought out and proclaimed and anointed king, and all the people '*clapped their hands, and said, "Long live the king!"*' (2 Kings 11:12).

The promise is secure—the house of David will continue.

FROM ATHALIAH TO AHAZ

Some 100 years later, Ahaz becomes King of Judah, and inherits trouble from the days of his father Jotham. King Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria are plotting to overthrow the kingdom of Judah. The house of David is again being threatened with extinction. The Lord speaks to Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah, who advises calm and trust in the Lord (Isa. 7:4–6). But Ahaz rejects Isaiah's advice.

And once again we read:

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz . . . ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold a young woman [virgin] shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel’ (Isa. 7:13–14).

God’s promises will be fulfilled. The seed of woman will be born—he will be ‘*Immanuel*’—from the family of David, but not before the house of Ahaz is judged.

FROM AHAZ TO BABYLON

The years have passed, already Judah has witnessed the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. Judah’s own fate hangs in the balance until, around 605 BC, Jerusalem falls to the all-conquering Babylonians, and King Jehoiakim is killed. His son King Jehoiachin is taken into exile and will die in Babylon. Zedekiah, brother of Jehoiakim is appointed as Judah’s last king.

In 588 BC the Babylonians again march on Jerusalem and lay siege to the city. After a year and a half the city is brought to the verge of starvation and finally falls to the Babylonians, who this time utterly destroy everything, including the temple, and those who are left are taken into exile. It seems that this is surely the end. What would become of God’s promises?

But the word of the Lord is again heard, through the prophet Jeremiah:

For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise . . . For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jer. 29:10–11).

God’s promise is still secure.

FROM ZEDEKIAH TO ESTHER

Even in exile (in Babylon) Judah was not abandoned by God. In the fifth century BC, King Ahasuerus (or Xerxes I), ruled over the Persian empire—which now stretched from India to Ethiopia. Ahasuerus was a man given to extreme passions of both great enterprise and great atrocity. It is of no surprise therefore, at the request of Haman who hated the Jews,⁹ the king issues a decree that all Jews throughout his vast empire should be put to death on one day (Esther 3:13).

Once again the dragon stands poised to devour the seed of woman. He has a plan ‘*sealed with the king’s own ring*’. It seems now he will fulfil his ambition.

But the Lord had promised that the Redeemer would be born of the house of David. The crisis was overruled through the providential placing of Jewish Esther as Queen, so that she was able to influence the king and turn the tables on those who would destroy the people of Judah (Esther 9:1–2).

The message of the Book of Esther is that God’s care of His Covenant people (‘the woman’) will overrule the affairs of even the most powerful and wicked of men and nations.

⁹ This is the first mention of the term ‘Jews’ as an abbreviation for ‘the people of Judah’ or ‘Judeans’.

FROM ESTHER TO BETHLEHEM

And now the final act in this amazing drama.¹⁰ The scene is Bethlehem—‘*the city of David*’. There, in a humble peasant home, lies baby Jesus in a manger. *He* is the child born of the woman! *He* is Immanuel! Yet from the moment *He* is born His life is in danger—the dragon is determined to destroy Him. This is the moment Revelation 12 saw as the climax and fulfilment of Genesis 3:15:

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child . . . (Rev. 12:4).

Satan plots his course. He will get the jealous and evil Herod to do his work. As the wise men from the east arrive in Jerusalem, seeking ‘*he who has been born king of the Jews*’ (Matt. 2:1–2), Herod is worried, a rival king must be destroyed. This is the dragon’s last chance. The child has come—all his earlier attempts to kill the woman and destroy the promise have failed. He must now destroy the child or face his own destruction.

However, the wise men having found Jesus and worshipping Him do not return to Herod. But Satan refuses to admit defeat. Through Herod all the babies two years old and under in and around Bethlehem, are killed. But the Christ-child is safe . . . in Egypt. Herod (and the dragon) has failed. God’s promise will not fail.

Christ’s birth is God’s victory—the bringing to fulfilment the promise of Genesis 3:15. Christ is born to once and for all crush the head of Satan. As the Lord’s Anointed He will take His stand against the forces of evil until finally they are gathered to the Cross (Ps. 2).

At the Cross, and powerless before Him, Satan tries his last blasphemous, mocking attack, as he cries out, ‘*He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, His Chosen One! . . . Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!*’

THE PROMISE FULFILLED

The Son of God (the True Adam) dies for the sins of the world (John 3:16; Rom. 5:18–19).

Here at Calvary was Yahweh’s Servant—the seed of the woman—the Redeemer–Saviour of the world, Immanuel, bearing the curse of all man’s sin.

The Word of the Lord is fulfilled!:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed . . . He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth . . . Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin (Isa. 53:4, 5, 7, 10).

Luke records that moment:

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last (Luke 23:44–46).

¹⁰ Yet Revelation 12 reminds us that this conflict will not end until the Lord returns and Satan and his hosts are thrown into the eternal lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

The promise is fulfilled—the victory has been won, Satan’s power broken, his head crushed.

THE MESSAGE OF THE REVELATION

It was as the Lord revealed to John, *‘she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to His throne’* (Rev. 12:5). Christ Jesus is Lord. He is The One enthroned over the nations as the Lord’s Anointed (Ps. 2).

Satan’s quest to rule the nations has been destroyed—he is cast out of heaven (Rev. 12:4; cf. Luke 10:18). Satan now knows he has little time left to effect anything—so in his anger he seeks to destroy all he can that is of Christ, particularly those who *‘keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus’* (Rev. 12:17).¹¹

CONCLUSION

The child, the long promised ‘seed of the woman’, has come. He is Christ the Lord. All the scriptures spoke of Him. From the beginning, ‘the woman’ (Church/Israel) was preserved and protected by the Lord, so that she could give birth to the promised Saviour of the world.

The testimony of the Scriptures is that those who opposed Him have come to naught.

The story of the Scriptures is the story of the surety of the Lord’s promises, and the Lord’s protecting those promises against every attack by Satan to destroy them, be it by destroying the woman. Throughout Scripture men and nations are spoken of in terms of their response to God’s promises. Either men humbly believe and trust in God or they oppose God and His people and find themselves instruments of the dragon’s evil schemes, and under God’s judgment.

If we fail to see that the story of God commences at creation and comes to its climax at the end of time as we know it, then we will not feel the whole story of the Old Testament—as also the New—vibrating, resonating and throbbing with Christ! Nothing in the Old Testament has Christ absent from it, nor makes sense without him.

To see this is to know how thrilling are the Scriptures, how alive and dynamic is the Old Testament, and how all its action is part of the story of faith and hope and love as it moves forward in God’s time for God’s plan. Once we see that, then the Old Testament’s life becomes ours. The New Testament is not simply the fulfilment of the Old, but its continuation and its conclusion.

It is in this that we are all involved.¹²

The Lord’s final words in Revelation complete the story:

Behold I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end . . . I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star (Rev. 22:12, 13, 16).

¹¹ For a thorough understanding of the plan of God in history as revealed in Revelation, I recommend Geoffrey Bingham’s essay, ‘The People and the Plan of God’ found in his commentary *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (NCPI, 1993, pp. 250ff.).

¹² Geoffrey Bingham, NCTM Monday Pastors’ Study Group, 29/3/99, p.9.

THE CHRIST OF THE SCRIPTURES:

The Pastoral Imperative

From an early age, Jesus knew in His heart His Father's calling—He knew what He had to do. It was something His 'parents' (Joseph and Mary) came to understand, as Jesus clearly pointed out to them, '*Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?*' And what was He doing at the time? He was '*... in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions*' (Luke 2:46–50).

Those '*teachers*' were teachers of the Scriptures—the promises of God. The '*Father's business*' was that His Son would fulfil those promises. Jesus grew to know what that meant! (cf. Heb. 5:8).¹³

This was Paul's exhortation to Timothy, '*... continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*' (2 Tim. 3:14–15).

As Pastors and people of God, we are in the battle to 'be about the Father's business'—to be knowing and teaching the Scriptures. There is the constant temptation (and pressure) to be about other things. The 'Parable of the Sower' (Soils and Seed) is what we're about.

The whole of Scripture (not just the New Testament) is the story of God's giving and fulfilment of His promises in and through Christ Jesus. '*For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him*' (2 Cor. 1:20) '*I am the Alpha and the Omega*' (Rev. 22:13). The promises of God alone determine the outcome of history. This is the liberating truth of the Gospel. All things are fulfilled in Christ. Our calling as Pastors is to make that fully known so that men and women might live in the freedom and power of Christ's victory.

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Church at Colossae, spoke of the magnificence of Christ as the fulfilment of all creation in heaven and on earth (Col. 1:15–20). Paul speaks with the overwhelming passion (and suffering), the proclaiming of this Gospel brings to a pastor's heart (vv. 21–23), as he says:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me (Col. 1:24–29; see also 2 Tim. 1:10–12).

¹³ 'When we read the four Gospels it is clear to us that Christ had great reverence for the Scriptures. He believed them and attested to them as authentic. The grasp he had on them came undoubtedly from his reading of them, his being a Jew of his time, his dependence upon them as being the Word and words of God, and his discovery of himself in them . . . We must also take into account the fact that he was 'that prophet' of whom Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 18:15—"*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed*". Jesus was a prophet and the prophet, and so would have the prophetic sense, essential for fully understanding the Scriptures (Geoffrey Bingham, NCTM Monday Pastors' Study Group, 29/3/99, p. 2).

The Pastor and Church Culture

ABSTRACT

This paper builds on a previous discussion and seeks to enter the interface between theology and culture, in particular church culture. Historically, Christianity has succumbed to the prevailing culture. Examples taken from Christ's ministry will show the difficulty people have in accepting the new framework that He has come to reveal. This is because they could not fit that into their existing frame of mind and so they reject it. The events at Nicea and the Enlightenment will be used to show how others had sought to project onto the divine relationship formulations from their culture. The Chinese churches are no different and they have substituted harmony for union. The Triune communion and covenant relationship will be discussed briefly. The search for the relevance of the gospel is not found in subordinating the dogma of the Trinity to culture but in changing the framework of thought to that of the Triune communion.

OUTLINE

1. Introduction—recap from 'Christianity and Culture'¹. Christianity has repeatedly succumbed to the cultural norms of the day.
2. An example from Christ's ministry—John 6:60–66 and the rich young ruler. They left because they were unable to accept the new framework.
3. Christ taught in parables—to make clear or to confound? An explanation will be given in Mark 4:11 in the context of engaging frameworks.
4. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman—a new framework. New wineskins for new wine. One cannot understand the things of Christ unless there is a change from one's framework to engage the new framework.
5. The church of the West—Nicea, Enlightenment (dualism). The prevailing culture caused serious faults in theology.
6. The Chinese church—naturalistic and pragmatic. Substituted harmony for union.
7. The Triune communion and covenant relationship. The search for the relevance of the gospel is not found in subordinating the dogma of the Trinity to culture. The more the gospel is subordinated to culture, the less relevant it will be. The answer is found in changing the framework of thought to that of the Triune communion. The church must fall back on the four elements, *kerugma*, *koinonia*, *didache* and *paraclesis*, in the expression of her Triune communion.

¹ S. K. Tham, 'Christianity & Culture', NCTM 1994 Pastors' School.

INTRODUCTION

This is an evolving topic as culture is continually changing. It is unfortunate that so often Christianity has followed the culture of the day rather than impacting upon it. The Trinitarian life of the early church transformed the Greco–Roman culture. Athanasius fought the prevailing thought of the day in the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Reformers went against the trend of theological thought and reclaimed for us the Triunity of God. Again unfortunately, their followers, both of Luther and Calvin, succumbed to the prevailing thought and subordinated theology to scholasticism. This was brought to an extreme in the thought of Schleiermacher whose intention was to take only the sections of the Christian faith that were acceptable to the cultural norm of his day. Barth was scathing in his criticism of Schleiermacher and many after him have enabled us to appreciate more fully the Triune Godhead as the foundation of theological thought.

EXAMPLES FROM CHRIST'S MINISTRY: THE REFUSAL OF THE FOLLOWERS TO ENGAGE A NEW FRAMEWORK

It is often said that we must work from the known to the unknown. What this often means is that we approach the unknown with the framework of what is known. This may be so in many instances. However, how would Christopher Columbus explain what he had conceived to the people of his day in terms of what was known? It is simply not possible without a shift to a new framework or paradigm. It is this refusal to make a shift to the new framework that stifles thinking and the understanding of experiences.

This refusal is not a new phenomenon. It was present in the days of Jesus' ministry. We know the encounter with the rich young man who approached Jesus asking, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' (Matt. 19:16, *NRSV*). Notice that his framework was that of personal achievement. He approached Jesus and expected an answer in terms of his material framework. When this was not forthcoming, he could not accept what Jesus told him and he went away.

It would appear from Jesus' answer that there were many acts to fulfil (Matt. 19:18–19). This is so if one approaches this on a legal basis. However, the reply Jesus gave, 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself', were not stand-alone imperatives but were derived from the covenant relationship. The rich young man with his legal framework simply could not understand this. Even the disciples had some difficulty with Jesus' answer. They responded with the question, 'Who then can be saved?' (Matt. 19:25). Jesus answered this way, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt. 19:28). The implication of this is that the disciples—that is, those who followed Him—will participate in what Jesus has achieved. It is not what they had achieved, though His answer was partly veiled in this context. This was an individual encounter.

John records for us another incident of this refusal with a group of followers. After Jesus had fed the five thousand (John 6:10ff.), He expounded to them something of the oneness in the relationship between the Father and Himself (John 6:37–40, 44–46) and what it meant to participate in that relationship through Him.

He used the bread as a symbol of His body. He pointed to the mutual indwelling which we know is the basis of this relationship. Many in the crowd could not accept what Jesus was expounding because again they were not able to embrace a new dynamic in relationships. So they forsook Jesus and returned to their former static form of relationships (John 6:60, 66).

The analogy that Jesus gave did not clarify their understanding. In fact it confused them further. They wanted to understand what Jesus taught only in terms of what they knew. In other words, they wanted to subordinate Jesus' teaching to their culture. Being aware of their refusal, Jesus did not, as we say nowadays, come to 'meet them at their point of need', and make things simpler so that they could understand. In fact, if we may say, Jesus came down even heavier on them and brought in the full Trinitarian orchestration, 'It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life' (John 6:63, *NRSV*). This was way beyond them in their egocentric and legalistic framework. No wonder, 'many turned back and no longer went about with him'. There was no way that Jesus would subordinate the Triune communion to their way of thinking. Unless they were prepared to undergo a *metanoia* to His Triune communion, then they would not enter the Kingdom of God.

THE PARABLES—CONCEALMENT OR CLARITY

It is difficult for the naturalistic mind to comprehend a God who is personal and known only from His self-disclosure. For many people, the way the self-disclosure of Yahweh is understood is in terms of the natural, that is, the understanding of what God is like is reasoned from what is observed in nature.

This is not to say that one cannot work from nature. There are resemblances, and Jesus used many examples from nature in His parables on the Kingdom of God. Many have thought that these parables make clear the Kingdom of God, and thus they are able to argue from the natural to the spiritual. In the context of the naturalistic mind, this is precisely the misunderstanding. The parables are not wholly revelatory. There is a particular difficulty with what Jesus said regarding the parables in Mark 4:9–12.

There is a concealment in the parables and at the same time they are meant to be revelatory. Many explanations have been given to clarify this apparent contradiction. Any explanation will have to hold in tension the concealment and revelation of the parables.

Our thinking starts from the natural phenomena. We observe the phenomenon and draw conclusions about what we have observed. Now this is not an end in itself as the observation points to something beyond. For example, the natural phenomenon points to something beyond humankind, as the psalmist exclaimed (Ps. 8:3–4).

In other words, the natural framework leads to another framework of thinking. This other framework is that of the Triune Creator–God. That is not to embrace the Platonic system. The natural is not just a shadow. The natural is an observed reality, but it points to something beyond itself.

When the parables are understood in their naturalistic framework, then the truth will be concealed. If, through the parables, one is able to move into another framework, then the 'secret' is revealed. This is where the naturalistic mind has difficulty. It wants to remain on the naturalistic framework and from this base moves towards the understanding of God, that is, to understand God in terms of the naturalistic framework. In so doing it will inevitably subordinate the Triune God to the natural framework and this will be exemplified in the discussion below on the missionary outreach.

A NEW FRAMEWORK

There needs to be a shift to a new framework in order to engage the Kingdom that is centred in Jesus. The Kingdom of God must be conceived of in terms of the Kingdom. We cannot try to fit the Kingdom of God into some earthly concepts even though there may be some resemblance.

There are two further encounters of Jesus that highlight this. One is the encounter with Nicodemus and the other with the Samaritan woman. The narration in the third and fourth chapter of John's Gospel is indeed hilarious. We know the stories well. While Jesus was talking about spiritual things, both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were trying to engage the subject on the earthly plane. They were on different frameworks. So while Jesus referred to the new birth from above, Nicodemus was talking about going back to his mother's womb. He was unable to embrace a new framework that involved an initiation from the God he worshipped. Perhaps his was an egocentric framework and he was unable to accept that there could be a participation of the human in the divine.

In the other instance with the Samaritan woman, while Jesus was talking about the rivers of living water and by this He was referring to the Holy Spirit (John 7:39), the Samaritan woman was only concerned about her thirst and the embarrassment of having to come out each day to draw water. She only heard Jesus in terms of what she could see, and failed to understand that it is the Holy Spirit that Jesus was alluding to. In other words, she failed to engage the reality of what the water pointed to. She had not yet engaged the new framework that Jesus was trying to lead her to. Nicodemus had precisely the same difficulty.

CHURCH AND CULTURE IN HISTORY

There has always been a conflict in the church regarding the concept of God. While we celebrate orthodoxy and vilify the heretics, much of the problem is due to the lack of an adequate framework to express the Triune Godhead. The problem of Christology in the early church was that most sought to express their understanding in terms of the 'known' and they were unable to break free to a new framework of thinking that held together the fact that 'the Word became flesh'. The early church was beset with legalism, as we saw in the conflict between Paul and the Galatian church. Furthermore, Christians have always looked for an answer to the 'How?' question rather than to start with the 'Who?' question.

The gallant stand by Athanasius against Arius at Nicea was the turning point in Christology. Athanasius refused to allow the philosophy of the Greek culture to dominate his thinking. To him, the Incarnation was not a speculative philosophy, as was the way Arius approached the issue. Rather, Athanasius saw the link between incarnation and redemption, and approached the issue in a unitary fashion. The Son is *homoousios* with the Father, and from this he did not waver. The Nicene Creed states simply what we have been given to know by revelation, and does not in any way attempt to spell out the Triune Godhead in an explicit fashion for the satisfaction of the human curiosity. So, while Arius subordinated theology to culture, Athanasius forged ahead with a category of thought that transcended his culture. He remained true to the revelation of the Triune Godhead and stood against the cultural norm of the day and did not go beyond what he could possibly know from revelation.

The church continued to seesaw between orthodoxy and heresy. Augustine's

analogous conception of the Trinity gave some understanding of a very difficult subject. His attempt was not to derive the Trinity from reason, but rather to explain how it could be held together. However, the use of created analogy to explain the Creator suffers from the same distortion as Arius did at Nicea, that is, the conception of the Creator is then subordinated to His creation. As the Augustinian conception of personhood in the Trinity dominated Western theology, it gave rise to the excessive individualism we see today.

The Medieval church was locked within the legalistic framework and imposed that onto the theological thinking. We see this in Anselm's theory of atonement which was stated as an extrinsic legal transaction. It was the thought forms of the day imposed onto theology.

The Reformation brought about a change in the theological framework and we see this especially with Luther and Calvin. The *Institutes* of Calvin is based upon the Triune relationship. Unfortunately his followers, gripped by the superiority of reason, fossilised his work into an intellectual framework quite opposite to what Calvin had formulated.

Two philosophers of the Enlightenment, namely Thomas Hobbs and John Locke, in order to resolve the social upheaval in their day, proposed the social contract theory. This gained popular acceptance and its establishment in society led to the concept of bilaterality in the covenant of the Bible, thereby distorting the understanding of the covenant in a contractual framework. Again, theology was subordinated to culture.

Schleiermacher, in order to find social acceptance of Christianity among the aristocrats of his day, removed the miraculous and other aspects of biblical revelation so that Christianity would have a place in popular culture. He appealed to reason and placed it above revelation. It is the subordination of the gospel to culture again and again.

THE CHINESE CHURCHES—SUBORDINATED THEOLOGY TO CULTURE

In the continuing debate on contextualisation in Asian Theologies, Bruce Nicholls emphasised that 'we need to recover the central themes of dogmatic theology that are either neglected or misunderstood in Asia'.² He called for a recovery of the Trinitarian faith:

God's self-disclosure as Father, Son and Holy Spirit needs to be constantly contextualised. Chalcedon faithfully expressed this knowledge in the midst of controversy in Greek and Roman cultures. In Asia, where the distinction and relationship of God's universal and His special revelation is not fully understood, where the Holy Spirit is often confused with Christ, the personal God lost in the impersonal principle and law separated from the Lawgiver, a recovery of the Trinitarian faith is urgently needed.³

There needs to be a starting point in our theological thinking. This point is none other than the Trinitarian God as made known to us by revelation. So often, as in Nicea, the starting point is the god that we conceive of through our culture or philosophy, and onto this god we try to graft the Trinitarian God. This was precisely the process

² B. J. Nicholls, 'A Living Theology for Asian Churches' in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, ed. B. R. Ro and R. Eshenaur, Asia Theological Association, Taiwan, 1984, p. 134.

³ *ibid.*

taken by the missionaries to China. Covell commented: ‘The process, then, for many missionaries to state the gospel in Chinese was first to establish the reality of the spiritual world within the Chinese intellectual framework and then teach the truths of the Bible’.⁴

In proceeding this way, the truth of the Trinity of God will inevitably become subordinated to the Chinese naturalistic, intellectual framework and this framework will be the starting point of all theological thinking from then on. The Triune God will be contorted into this framework which is deeply rooted in Confucianism.

W. A. P. Martin’s *Tiandao Suyuan*⁵ approached the apologetics from firstly natural theology, then evidences of Christianity, and finally revealed theology. Even in his section on revealed theology, he dealt with the attributes of God from a philosophical standpoint.⁶ He should have started with the revelation in Jesus Christ and the Trinity of God, rather than trying to graft this onto natural or philosophical theology.

It may be unkind to criticise the methodology taken by the missionaries. Their intention was sincere, as they had been brought up in their days with, and taught precisely, this approach. The Bible colleges in their days, and many colleges even today, taught firstly the concept of God and the attributes, which is essentially a philosophical approach, in a module termed ‘Philosophy of Religion’. The god conceived in that way is the philosophical unmoved mover. At a later stage the doctrine of the Trinity is brought in and is inevitably subordinated to the god of philosophy, as in Nicea. That is why for a long time in the 19th and 20th centuries, the church did not have much to say about the Trinity.

The Chinese churches are guilty of this as well. They started with the god of natural theology, the heavens (*tien*), and onto this god they tried to graft the Trinitarian God of the Bible. The Chinese churches need to consider seriously that the Trinitarian understanding is used to evaluate culture, and not the reverse.

As many missionaries in those days were brought up in the pietist movement of the West, they naturally brought this emphasis to the Chinese, and this fitted perfectly with the piety of the Chinese. Again, Christianity was subordinated to the culture of the day. In his assessment of the missionary outreach in China, Covell made mention of the pietism inherent in much of the thinking among Chinese Christians, and in particular in the writings of Watchman Nee.⁷ This pietistic brand of Christianity continues to be practised among the Chinese churches today.

In the translator’s preface to Ricci’s *Tianzhu Shi*,⁸ it was pointed out that ‘in the later Ming and early Qing dynasties most Chinese scholars were materialists and either would not be able to comprehend anything Ricci might say about the Trinity or would reject it and him as foolish’.⁹ It has been difficult for the Chinese churches today, with the way the Chinese mind has been influenced by Confucianism and its history of being evangelised by a grafting of the Triune God onto the Chinese culture, to truly come to terms with the revelation of the Incarnation as the starting point of theology.

While the above comments relate to the Chinese churches, they are relevant to all cultures. The gospel in many cross-cultural approaches has been presented from a

⁴ R. R. Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha and Christ*, Orbis, New York, 1986, p. 98.

⁵ The title means ‘Evidences of Christianity’. It was written by him in 1854. It was used extensively by missionaries and in theological colleges (ibid., p. 99).

⁶ ibid., p. 100.

⁷ Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha and Christ*, pp. 195–201.

⁸ The title means, ‘The True Idea of God’. It was prepared in 1601 and used to present the gospel message to non-Christians. Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha and Christ*, p. 45.

⁹ ibid., p. 49.

cultural or anthropological perspective. This accentuates the dualism already existing in our society. What is needed is a unitary approach that starts from the Triune God, and each culture then works through the core assumption of the culture in the light of this understanding. It calls for a participatory approach as this Triune God has addressed His created humanity in the one eternal covenant of creation which has been consummated through the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. The acknowledgment of the Trinity of God requires us to relate to God in the way He has expressed His grace and mercy to us in His gracious covenant.

Another interesting phenomenon in the Chinese mind is the great desire for harmony. It is well known that many Asian cultures extol the family relationship. However, it should be noted that in these relationships each remains within one's class distinction, as Confucius taught:

Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about government. Confucius replied: 'Let the lord be a lord, the subject be a subject; the father a father; the son a son.' The Duke said, 'Excellent! If indeed the lord is not a lord, the subject not a subject, the father not a father, the son not a son, I could be sure of nothing anymore—not even of my daily food' (Analect 12:11).

By inference the Chinese mind could very well conclude, 'Let God be God, and man be man'. There is a lack of the sense of union in Confucianist thinking, as it is rooted in naturalism. It tends to maintain the distinction between different classes. The Chinese understanding of relationship lies more in terms of harmony rather than union. Therefore the communion that Christ came to achieve would be difficult for the Chinese mind to conceive. Because the Chinese mind is steeped in naturalism, it conceives of unity in terms of harmony. That is why the Chinese mind is able to hold the concept of harmony (balance) much better than the concept of union. In fact, 'the most deep-rooted desire of the Chinese people is for harmony'.¹⁰

Moltmann pointed out the excellence of the Chinese in achieving harmony when describing the 'Forbidden City' in Beijing. He wrote:

The layout reflects perfect harmony; everything matches: left and right, height and width, walls and roofs, foreground and background . . . Here there is no history of style nor any break in style, but only the one, timeless, uniform harmony . . . The basic notion of 'harmony' also dominates the old Chinese religion of the *I Ching*. The Chinese people accepted alien religions on the basis of this fundamental pattern. To make a very rough classification, it might be said that ancient Chinese Taoism is the religion of natural harmony; Confucianism is the religion of social harmony; and Buddhism, whether Amitabha or Zen, is the religion of inner spiritual harmony.¹¹

This is another example of the subordination of theology to culture. While Jesus came to reveal to us the union within the Triune Godhead and the participation of the human creation in this divine union, we have turned this around and substituted the concept with harmony. There was a church where several well-known scholars of the Bible took the pulpit. However, one of them was quite Arminian in his outlook, and really the congregation did not know the difference as they did not have a good foundation. Anyway, the church thought that that was a great system where we could have one of this one week, and some of the other next week. They harmonised the different teachings according to their underlying framework of thinking. There was no concept of union.

¹⁰ J. Wu, 'Chinese Legal and Political Philosophy', in *The Chinese Mind*, ed. C. Moore, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1967, p. 227.

¹¹ J. Moltmann, *Creating a Just Future*, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1989, pp. 88–89.

THE TRIUNE COMMUNION AND COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

When Christians refer to God, the term ‘God’ is a shorthand term for Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the Triune God. In our Christian dogma of monotheism, we have suppressed this understanding of the Triune God because we cannot hold in tension a tri-unity. We hold to a concept of an absolute monotheistic god. We see this to be a problem not only at Nicea but also in much of Christian thinking today. If the essential nature of God is Trinitarian, then our lives and worship must of necessity be Trinitarian and the nature of our church and ministry must also be Trinitarian.

The understanding of the Triune God is not a figment of the imagination of the early church or a philosophical deduction from the Greek culture of the day. It was an experience that the Christians of the early church went through and they understood that experience in trinitarian terms.

There is little in the New Testament by way of direct reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. However, in many passages of the New Testament, the three-in-one Godhead is mentioned with reference to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹² This is so because:

1. Jesus Christ had come in person to reveal God the Father (John 1:18). His humanity is not foreign to His divinity.¹³ The early Christians related to the human Jesus in a very real way, as John the Apostle made it so clear in his Gospel (John 1:1–18) and Letters (1 John 1:1–4).
2. Following the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost and indwells the people of God as the Advocate. The early Christians experienced the reality of the indwelling Spirit.

Out of these real experiences the early Christians sought to express their understanding of God in trinitarian terms—a unity of the Three Persons in the Godhead. The apostolic church was gripped by the revelation of the divine Trinitarian God and sought to express its understanding of God and salvation in terms of this foundational revelation. As L. Hodgson rightly commented, ‘Christianity was a trinitarian religion before it had a trinitarian theology’. What he means is as follows.

As a result of the revelation of the Father through the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the early disciples were indwelt by the Holy Spirit who made the redemptive work of Christ a reality in their lives. This awakening by the Holy Spirit caused them to respond in ways that transformed the culture of the day. They realised that they had a new common humanity in Jesus Christ and they lived in that reality. This was manifested in their devotion ‘to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers’ (Acts 2:42, *NRSV*). This was the *koinonia* (fellowship) of the early church and ‘all who believed were together and had all things in common’ (Acts 2:44, *NRSV*). This became the essence of the new trinitarian religion of the early church. The dogma of the Trinity was not developed till the 4th century at Nicea. That is not to say that the early church did not have a Trinitarian framework for its expressions. The way of life in the Triune God was a reality in the early church long before the written dogma of the philosophers three hundred years later. That is why Paul could write to the Ephesians in this way, ‘There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one

¹² See 1 Corinthians 12:4–6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:17; 2:18; 4:4–7.

¹³ See K. Barth, *The Humanity of God*, John Knox Press, USA, 1960.

Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all' (Eph. 4:4–6, *NRSV*). This is one example of the Trinitarian thought of the apostles as they lived out their Trinitarian faith.

The theme of the covenant is central to the Bible. This theme runs throughout the Old and New Testaments. The study is important to us today as we have discarded the covenant in favour of the contract or rather we have come to understand the covenant in terms of a contractual framework. The covenant is initiated and maintained by the sovereign grace of God. This has been debated and understood as a bilateral agreement between God and man. This understanding of the covenant has contributed to the contractual framework. Or rather, it is the contractual framework put in place by the philosophers of the Enlightenment that has contributed to this understanding of the covenant.

The understanding of the covenant follows from the understanding of the Trinity of God. It is because the Trinity has been neglected in the past that the covenant has come to be understood in the context of the contract. Herman Hanko expounded this well in his book, *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace*. In the opening two paragraphs of the first chapter of his book he made this link between the Trinity of God and the covenant:

God is a covenant God. The deepest ground for the covenant of grace must be found in the truth that God lives in a covenant life in Himself even apart from the creatures He has created.

God is triune. That is, God is one in essence and three in person. This central and all-important doctrine of the church has stood as the immovable rock upon which all of the truth is based. And this trinity is the deepest reason why God is a covenant God and lives a covenant life within Himself. Without the reality of the trinity, the covenant would be impossible.¹⁴

And so it is in the covenant life of the Triune God that we derive our understanding of the covenant. Further, as mankind is created in the image of God, so we are created to live in covenant relationship with the Triune God, and in covenant relationship with one another.

The word 'covenant' in the Bible is used to describe the relationship between God and man. It is an everlasting covenant. We should note that the concept of an everlasting covenant lies within the relationship of the Triune Godhead. The Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in eternity, giving to and receiving from one another in communion. They are distinct from one another but they coinhere in a *perichoretic* relationship. Man was created in God's image in that covenantal relationship.¹⁵

I shall not take up the study of the covenant here as this has been dealt with on many occasions. I refer to the book by G. Bingham, *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*.

CONCLUSION

The search for the relevance of the gospel is not found in subordinating the dogma of the Trinity to culture. In the examples from Jesus' ministry we have noted that He did

¹⁴ H. Hanko, *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace*, Reformed Free Publishing, Grandville, 1988, p. 7.

¹⁵ I recognise that the treatment of the biblical material in this section on 'The Theology of the Covenant' is brief as our concern here is more with its relationship to culture. For more detailed treatment on the subject of the Covenant, see W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Paternoster, Great Britain, 1984) and G. Bingham, *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1977).

not try to fit the Triune relationship into anything that His disciples might have known. He could not because there is nothing on earth that will explain the Creator, that is, one cannot work from the creation to the Creator and there is nothing in creation that we can use that will give us a model of the Creator. Any such attempts at modeling would be false. Jesus' followers needed to make that shift in their framework to embrace the Triune communion in faith. Paul says in Romans 12:2, 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect'. Our fellow church members and we need that transformation without which we will only be worshipping a god of our creation.

The more the gospel is subordinated to culture, the less relevant it will be. The answer is found in changing the framework of thought to embrace the Triune communion. The church must fall back on the four elements, *kerugma*, *koinonia*, *didache* and *paraclesis*, in the expression of her Triune communion. This last theme has been covered in Geoffrey Bingham's study on Pastoral Dynamics.¹⁶

¹⁶ G. Bingham, *Pastoral Dynamics for Pastors and the People*, NCPI, 1999.

Christ and His Church

INTRODUCTION: CHRIST AND THE LIFE AND ACTION OF THE CHURCH

Because we have the reality of the church facing us daily both in the life of the fellow churches throughout the world, and the church to which we belong and in which we have ministry, we are apt to think that responsibility for the life and being of the local church is on our shoulders. This sense of accountability is especially present when we are those ordained to the ministry of pastor, deacon or what are called 'Christian workers'. We think we are accountable for it in just about every element. A glance at a concordance of the New Testament will teach us differently. We see that the church¹ is called 'the church of God' ten times, and never directly 'the church of Christ', although indirectly in such phrases as 'the churches of Christ salute you' (Rom. 16:16), and 'as the church is subject unto Christ' (Eph. 5:24). We also know there are references to Christ loving the church. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul speaks of 'the church of the Thessalonians [which is] in God the Father', and 'God our Father'. 'Church of God' is properly understood to mean 'the church of the Father' in New Testament parlance. Of course so far as Christ is concerned the church is his body, and this is often stated. It is also his flock and his bride, just to mention a few figures or images.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHURCH BEING OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE SPIRIT

What concerns us in looking at what we have called 'pastoral dynamics' is to recognise that it is not the church of the pastors and deacons, or of pastors, deacons and laity as having differing functional offices or identities. That means that those who see themselves as legitimate 'leaders' in the church do not have the responsibility of the church as though they must plan it, organise it, take up the burden of it, and increase its growth and strength. No: it is simply 'the body of Christ', 'the fullness of him who fills all in all', 'the Bride of Christ', 'the flock of God'—and so on. It is the church of God, and is therefore in His hands, in His keeping, and called out for His purposes. It is not even a nation such as was Israel under God, although 1 Peter 2:9 speaks of 'a holy nation' (*ethnos hagion*) in repetition of Exodus 19:6, 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. New Testament statements such as those found in Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11, and 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 show it is not a nation among all the nations, and so it is not a contender with them for power and place in the world. Never does it have to be political though it lives in the maze of international political brinkmanship and intrigue.

We must understand this fully. It is the church of God—that is, of the Father—and as such, His Family. It is the people of God and as such, His working community in the world. To know and to do 'the whole counsel of God' means it is His Family, the people doing His will through this time up to time's *telos*.² The Father is at work in the members of the church

¹ One way of dealing with 'the church'—i.e. 'the church of God' which we sometimes call 'universal'—and the number of churches in locality would be to spell the universal (catholic) church with a capital 'C', and the churches in localities with a small 'c'. Having tried this I find it is often extremely awkward to use upper and lower cases. It is best for us to see the local churches as being universal, albeit it is localised. The church universal is not the aggregate of localised churches for they all share in the universality of being the flock of God, or the Bride of Christ, or the Family of the Father.

² The *qahal* of Israel and the *ecclesia* of Christ really form a continuity of the 'people of God'. Indeed we can go back to Abel as the first of the people of faith, so that continuity of the church is from Abel to the *telos*.

as Philippians 2:13 reminds us: ‘It is God who energises within you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure’. He and the Son together give the Holy Spirit to the church to enable it to work in power, for ‘the supply of the Spirit’ is the energising power by which God’s church works in the world. Christ is its ‘Head’, its ‘Chief Shepherd’, its ‘Bridegroom–Husband’ and its ‘Elder Brother’, for in regard to the latter he says to the Father, ‘Here am I, and the children [you have] given me’. A figure such as the Vine and the Branches means the church is in him and he in the church in respect to its being fruitful, which it is called to be.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of revelation of the Father and the Son, the Spirit by which men, women and children are regenerated and admitted into the church. He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son and so keeps all members appropriately together in the Divine Triune *koinonia*, proclaiming the powerful *kerugma*, exercising the necessary *didache* and *paraclesis* by which the life and character of the church is maintained. Being the Spirit of communion, love, fellowship and unity he keeps the character of the family, the flock, the Body, by the fullness of Christ which he continuously imparts. He is the power for true worship, adoration and thanksgiving. He is the eschatological Spirit who enables the church to live in these times and know ‘things to come’. Christ is the Head of God’s church in which the Trinitarian action is always present.

Alternatives to the Prime Working of God in the Church

I am sure that every sentence here is understandable to a pastor, deacon or other worker in the Body of Christ. Surely all readers would strongly agree with the activation of the church by the Triune God. The more we see the church as being ‘the church of God, the Father’, and the churches as being ‘the churches of Christ’ and in all as being the communities of the Holy Spirit, the more we will rest and depend on Divine leadership. Yet the question is whether, in daily life in the church, we accord all the action of the community to God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—or whether we are using ‘commonsense’ and intellectual and entrepreneurial skills to attract, hold, enlarge and maintain congregations of people. This will depend on whether we believe the Word of God to be the primary factor in redeeming the hearers of that Word, and embracing them through the ministerial gifts as living members of the Community of Christ. In this case our dependence will be upon the never-ceasing activity of the Triune God, whose church it is.

This is not to discount all the resources available to us today for the proclamation of the gospel, the teaching of the whole counsel of God, the way of life of the church, and the future to which it moves and by which it is powerfully motivated. Such resources greatly enrich the church in its ministry to all the world. At the same time there is the temptation to see the church as an organisation which depends upon the organising skills of its leaders. This attractive alternative is ever with us and where it is acceded to, then there will be an organisation mainly activated by human endeavours.

Let us see whether, in fact, what we have said above about Divine leadership and power is the way we should go in these days when many churches are crumbling, when others seem stultified, when traditions are rapidly changing, where some churches are knowing the power of God in their proclaiming of the gospel and their teaching, and where mega-churches seem to go from strength to strength.

CONSIDERING THE REASON FOR WHICH THE CHURCH HAS BEEN CREATED

A simple ecclesiology would teach us that the Christian church is really that body which arose from the Jewish congregation (*qahal*) amongst those Jews—and later, Gentiles—who recognised that the Man Jesus was—and is—really the Messiah and so the Saviour of the world, and that they should be his people as the true people of God. As such they should

be proclaiming the gospel of redemption and setting forth the Kingdom of God in the light of events which must bring mankind to the ‘fullness of time’ and to the victory over all evil, and the consummation of history—something no other people, community or nation could do. When investigated, the purpose for which the church exists is to know, proclaim and live ‘the whole counsel of God’, a matter we will shortly discuss.

So, then, those of the church in those apostolic times³ knew that the church was not brought into being for its own sake, that is, they knew that the church itself is not the primary goal of God, but that it existed to work with God in the fulfilling of the counsel of His will which has ever been. The church is not *all* the creation but a servant for it in God’s will. Some would disagree and say that as the Bride of Christ the church does exist to become something in herself—the Bride eternal for the new heavens and the new earth. That is true enough, yet it was as the Bride of Christ that the church was—and is—Christ’s helpmeet in history to bring the goal of God to pass *for the whole creation*. She still does not exist for herself but as Christ’s *aide* in bringing the will of God to pass. She exists ‘with a view to’, that is, to the fulfilling of God’s will as it is in Christ. It is the will of God which is the prime matter, or, as we shall see, the purpose or intention (*boule*) of God’s will (Eph. 1:11: *ten boulen tou thelematos auton*). If we were to apply that test to the churches as their authentic reason for being—that is, the test of working with Christ to fulfil the goal of God—then this criterion might surprise many in the churches. ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’, is the true test.

THE WILL OF GOD, THE FULL COUNSEL, THE PLAN OF GOD: THE PLAN OF THE MYSTERY

When Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:26–27, ‘Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God’, he meant by ‘the whole counsel of God’ what we will now speak about in Ephesians and Colossians, for here ‘whole counsel’ means God’s whole purpose or intention or decree for the whole of creation. Whilst this may not seem to be apt for ‘pastoral dynamics’, it is in fact at the root of them, for the church is only occupied in doing the will or counsel of God. When it is occupied in that then pastoral dynamics—so to speak—look after themselves. We now look at this plan of God for all creation, which *He intends to fulfil through Christ and his church*.

All Things Are to Be—as They Are Being—Headed up in Christ

That which is ‘the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him [Christ]’ in Ephesians 1:9, is ‘the plan for the fullness of the times [*ton kairon*]’, that is, ‘to unite *all things* in him’ (1:10). ‘Unite’ here can mean ‘to add up’ or ‘total’ *all things*, as also to ‘head them up’. ‘Unite’ is a good word, for in Colossians 1:17 ‘*all things* hold together in him’, and indeed in Colossians 1:16 ‘all things were created through him and *for* him’, where ‘for him’ means ‘unto him’, that means Christ is their goal and their end.

This uniting of all things presupposes that ‘all things’ had become disunited, and that it would take something of a powerful action to unite them. In Ephesians 1:11 Paul states a principle that God accomplishes all things according to the counsel (*boule*) of His will. We know that it is through Christ that He fulfils His will, for the ‘in Christ’ is the means whereby the uniting takes place.

³ We are not suggesting that in the past 2000 years the church has not known its identity and the work for which it was founded and is aided by God. At the same time some churches have missed the reason for their existence. They have ‘lost the plot’ and have tended to become self-protective and self-extending, rather than working in the whole counsel of God .

All Things Are to Be—as They Are Being—Filled up in Christ

In Ephesians 1:22–23 we read, ‘and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’. If we take ‘who fills all in all’ as referring to Christ then we learn that he is *filling* ‘all things’. ‘All in all’ must mean everything in the universe is being filled by him. In Ephesians 4:9–10 the matter of his filling all things is brought to us again, ‘(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)’. If we ask, ‘Why should he fill all things?’ then the answer is that from his fullness (*pleroma*) all that which needs filling—which is unfilled—is filled.

If we ask regarding the manner of this ‘filling’ we have Colossians 1:19 in which we are told, ‘For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell’, and Colossians 2:9, ‘For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily’, so that what is required to fill all things is in him, Christ. The next verse (Col. 2:10), tells us, ‘and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority’. This fullness of life tells us what it is that Christ uses to fill all things, that is, ‘the fullness of God’ in him. John 10:10 makes a contrast of what is ‘empty’ and what is ‘full’. ‘The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’. The thief—the serpent to be sure—empties a person, whilst Christ fills him. John 7:37–39 also speaks of a similar fullness:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, ‘If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, “Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.”’ Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

All Things Are to Be—as They Are Being—Reconciled in Christ

In Colossians 1:19–22 we see the matter of the reconciliation of ‘all things’:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.

Here we see that out of the fullness (*pleroma*) dwelling in Christ, that is, the fullness of God, that through Christ the reconciliation of all things, and in this case ‘whether on earth or in heaven’, has been achieved. This has happened in the Cross, that is, ‘by the blood of the cross’. As with the uniting of all things and the filling of all things, so the reconciling of all things is a titanic work, far beyond human comprehension and a mystery which has to be opened to us by the Holy Spirit.⁴ It is for this wonderful work that the church has been created, for she is the wife of the Husband and shares with him in what he is doing to bring creation to its renovation or renewal.

ALL THINGS COME TO THEIR APPROPRIATE CLIMAX

Is there a relationship between ‘disunited’ and ‘emptied’, between ‘united’ and ‘filled’, between ‘at enmity’ and ‘reconciled’? We would think so. Whilst the three elements outlined above are certainly part of the ‘whole counsel of God’, there are also other elements which relate to these, as they to them. Were we to fill these out they would go far beyond the boundary of this Study. These things are:

⁴ At this point we can refer to Colossians 3:14, ‘And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony’. Love is that which unites, reconciles and fills all things. It is the works of love and is the same as uniting, filling and reconciling. So much then is the power of love.

The Redemption of the Creation

When we realise that nothing in the creation as it was formed by God needed redemption, yet we have to recognise that through the fall of Adam and the effects it had on the whole creation that the creation—including Man—needed to be redeemed. This redemption has been effected by Christ, and whereas we may understand ‘redemption’ to mean ‘Man’s redemption’, yet the creation too requires this redemption. Thus Romans 8:18–30 is a key passage which describes the coming *telos* of redemption when creation itself shall be redeemed from its bondage to corruption, to share in the glory of the liberty of the children of God. This redemption for both Man and creation was so often the subject of the Old Testament prophets as well as the strong teaching of the New Testament. *It requires the work of Christ and the church to complete it*, and this work is done under the Father and by the aid of the Holy Spirit.

The Sanctification of the Creation

When God created, nothing was unclean or evil. Yet nothing—that is to say apart from the seventh day of rest—was sanctified. In one way of speaking, the whole creation was dedicated to do the will of God, and sanctification is the setting apart of things to be used in God’s service. When Man sinned then unholiness entered into creation, and it needed, (i) to be cleansed and purified; and (ii) to be consecrated to God and His service. We rightly call this part of redemption, and are assured that ultimately there will be nothing in the entire creation which will be impure and unconsecrated to God. The entire creation will be sanctified.

The Glorification of the Creation

As redemption was planned before creation, so was sanctification, and likewise glorification. Whilst the whole earth has always been filled with the glory of God, and whilst Man was created in the image and glory of God, yet God’s counsel was always to bring all things to their ultimate glorification. All things will have been glorified when ‘the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea’. This is ‘the glory of the liberty of the children of God’ which we have mentioned.

The Perfection of the Creation

Perfection has a number of meanings. In the New Testament its primary meaning relates to maturity. To ‘go on unto perfection’ as Hebrews 6:1 demands is often translated ‘go on to maturity’. Whilst there is also the meaning of flawlessness in the word ‘perfection’, and whilst that will doubtless be the case at the *telos*, yet the idea of coming to full maturity of being is spoken of often in the New Testament. All who are sanctified and glorified will necessarily be fully matured or their sanctity and glory would not be total. One Corinthians 13:8–13 is a good description of ultimate perfection (maturity) and it includes the present process of perfection:

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

God’s Way for Fulfilling the Counsel of His Will

If we put together God’s purpose of uniting, filling up and reconciling all things, and add to these the redeeming, sanctifying, glorifying and perfecting work and intention of God, then

we are conducted by means of these into the full plan and mystery of God. This plan comes to its fruition in God's people being His inheritance, and God's people receiving their inheritance from God in the climax of His gracious Covenant. Seeing all this we now understand what is the entire 'counsel of God' in its accomplishment. We realise, too, that these works are not the works which God accomplishes by use of sheer power, that is, by deciding they will be accomplished by the issuing of a decree or a fiat, such as 'May all these things be done!' Such an idea does not comprehend *how* God works. The only way God's counsel can be accomplished is the way He has first purposed and has then brought into being the whole creation, and is continually working in it. This is the way the Scriptures describe the outworking of His will. Nothing has happened in history which can thwart 'the counsel of his will'—nothing! Just as history—rightly understood as God's history—is as it is, and is the plan of God, so we must see that His way is that of love, of compassion and of redemption, though to outward appearance history may not appear to be this way. Who of us has the power to discern its movements and God's part in them? We all need the understanding which comes by God's revelation.

The question we ask ourselves is, 'How did God do this, and by what means will He complete the counsel of His will?' The answer is, 'By the work of Himself as the Triune God, and by the service of His servants'. When we say, 'and by the service of His servants', we know that there have always been His servants, the celestial servants, heavenly creatures who work His will, and the people of God who work His will as His terrestrial servants. Since the advent of Pentecost it is the church as Christ's flock, body, bride, and brethren, who in Christ their Head, seek to do His will. When the church is active in what she is doing then we say that pastoral dynamics, as such, work themselves out in terms of love and fellowship. They happen, of themselves.

THE SECOND AND LAST EVE

To the first Adam and his wife Eve was given the commission by God to 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over [it]'. By this mandate Adam, the image of God, was the vice-regent of the great King, and Eve was the queen and the mother of all living. Later intelligence, drawn from the Second Adam, informs us that the first Adam was of the order of prophet, priest and king. Whatever the case, the full roll of humanity was in Adam's loins, and he named his spouse 'the mother of all living'. Together they were to be God's covenant partners, and as such, to aid the Creator in fulfilling the counsel of His will. Both were to be fully occupied in this commission. They failed.

In the faithful people of God the work went on. Israel was God's spouse. Both her beginnings and her continuings were very much of grace, as Ezekiel 16 and Hosea chapters 1 and 2 indicate. Geoffrey Bromiley, in pursuing the nature of true marriage, as also the continuity of the Spouse of God and of Christ, shows us that God preserved the people of God so that they could constitute the Spouse of Christ:

In creating man—male and female—in his own image, and joining them together so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies both of himself in his trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of himself in relation to the people of his gracious election. Analogically, what is between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what ought to be and is and shall be between God and Israel and Christ and the church, is also what is meant to be in the relation of man and woman and more specifically of husband and wife. Neither the intratrinitarian relationship nor the union between the heavenly bridegroom and his bride is a good copy of a bad original. Earthly marriage as it is now lived out is a bad copy of a good original . . . It is simpler, however, because God himself took the initiative at the level of both original and copy. *At the level of the original the deserted husband lovingly went to look for the erring bride and brought her back. He did this by offering himself, in the person of the divine Son, as the price of redemption.*⁵

⁵ *God and Marriage* by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1981, pp. 77–78.

THE HELPMEET MINISTRY OF THE BRIDE

Before leaving the historic action of Israel as God's Spouse we need to see that Israel—God's Spouse—was to be the servant of God as the unique priest-people, a kingdom of priests among the nations of the earth, and itself a holy nation (Exod. 19:6). Later in history this was also to be the nature of Christ's Spouse as 1 Peter 2:9–10 shows us.

When we ask ourselves, 'What is the place and purpose of Christ's Bride?' then we have to see the commission under which Eve was, as the bride of the first Adam. The church is the Spouse of the Second Adam. As such she is his helpmeet. They are one flesh. He does nothing apart from her. She is under his headship and does what pleases him. Ephesians 5:21–32 gives us great insights into the relationship of the two. In this passage we see that he has ever loved her and has given himself up to death for her. He has purified and sanctified her, and made her beautiful. He nourishes and cherishes her. His adoration of her brings her willing obedience to him and her 'helpmeet' ministry.

What then is the 'helpmeet' ministry? It is to do 'whatsoever I have commanded you'. It is to go into all the world and preach the gospel. It is to make disciples of the nations, that is, to so work that the nations become disciples of Christ. It is to teach whatever he has commanded her as his helpmeet. It is to enter the battle with Satan and his deadly 'world'. It is to rescue men and women and children out of that 'world' and bring them into the holy community of Christ's church. And so on. In other words it is to be the glory of Christ to the world. It is here that Paul helps us. In 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 he shows by analogy that Christ is the image and glory of God and that his wife is the glory of her husband:

For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.)

Then why are we using this 'two spouses' and 'one flesh' language? Because we wish to show that Christ is ever present with his Spouse, that he is ever working with her, guiding her in what she is to do and encouraging her in doing it. He has only one plan by which they both work and that is God's counsel of His will, the whole counsel of God. When we forget that, then we deem ourselves to be an organisation on earth which ostensibly desires to do the will of God in heaven, and so we 'give it our best'; but that 'best' is often worldly and even of the natural man, and does not show itself as the work of the Spouse of Christ in the power of the Spirit.

One criticism that can be made of this use of the 'two spouses' and 'one flesh' language—and indeed can be a criticism of this whole Study—is that it is too 'other-worldly', too spiritual, too theological. It is not down-to-earth enough. It is but gracious imagery after all, and we are here in a world of realities which we must take into consideration. We must adapt to and live in these 'realities'. Quite apart from the nature of so-called 'realities', we are in a world which can only be conquered with spiritual weapons. As Paul put it:

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:3–5).

For this reason we must take marriage and spouse language quite seriously. Let me explain.

The Matter of Pastors and Husbands

In our last Study in this Series we studied the ecclesiastical matter of the pastor in the church. We saw that 'pastor' is a functional office or order in the church. We saw it began with God who is the true Shepherd. The Son is likewise 'the Good Shepherd', and 'Chief Shepherd'. Pastors are shepherds of the flock, the church. In truth they are the means by

which the full shepherding of the true Shepherd is carried out. If the true Shepherd does not come to the church distributively through the pastors, then their ‘shepherding’ is not of Christ. It may be that the church—the people of God—has placed the local shepherd—or shepherds—above Christ or cannot see Christ by reason of the pastors. Likewise if the congregation ignores the shepherding of Christ through the pastor, then they have become independent of the Head of the church, indicating they do not feel the need of the Shepherd.

Further, then, if the church loves her Husband then she will look for his love. The church will be kept fresh and alive in this ‘conjugal’ state (cf. Rom. 7:4). The question naturally arises, ‘Is there some way in which the conjugal love of Christ for his church comes through the pastoral ministry and is therefore at the heart of pastoral dynamics, that is, living as the Bride?’ Jonathan Edwards on September 19th, 1746 delivered a sermon at East Hampton on Long Island where a pastor was being inducted. His sermon was titled ‘The Church’s Marriage to Her Sons and to Her God’. Edwards took Isaiah 62:4–5 as his text:

You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Edwards took the text from ‘your land shall be married’ and proceeded to show that, after a manner of speaking, a pastor should be a husband to his church as his bride. He is quite convincing but it is doubtful whether he has proved his thesis, as such. What he has shown is that every pastor should love his church as Christ loves his Bride because the church is his Bride. What we mean is that as Christ distributes—so to speak—his shepherding through the pastors, so too, *he may distribute his conjugal love through his pastors*. Pastors are bound to communicate this. That the church needs such love is shown by 2 Corinthians 11:1–4:

‘I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.

Paul as an Apostle had a passionate love for his churches, as we well know, When he says, “I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband”, he is coming close to Edwards’s thesis. He sees the church needs Christ’s love. He remembers the original Eve and says, ‘But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ’, thus showing the new Eve has to be husbanded closely as the first Eve was not, for Adam was not on loving watch against the serpent. The church thus loves Christ, and in her love she willingly shares with him the fulfilling of the ‘counsel of God’s will’.

A PROBLEM FACING CHRIST’S SPOUSE AS HIS BODY

Indeed we are led now into wider areas in our seeking to understand pastoral ministry and pastoral response. I will take it that Christ’s sacrificial and conjugal love must be shown through pastors, but then I believe we should advance beyond this functional reality. I believe that so many churches down through the ages have been hoodwinked into the concept of ‘clergy and laity’. From the New Testament point of view we cannot argue for a clergy and a laity, two levels of church membership, with the ‘laity’ dependent upon ‘the clergy’ and the clergy the mediatorial ministers for the laity.

I have noticed for some time that when we speak about ‘bishops, presbyters and deacons’ or just ‘presbyters and deacons’, and also speak of ‘the laity’, that we convey the idea of two

levels or two offices, that is, ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’. I believe it is because we have left out the matters of gifts, gifts which are called *domata* and gifts which are called *charismata*. As we well know there was not an order of priests, since the word ‘priest’—in the sense of ‘sacerdos’—is never applied to a single person in the New Testament. The whole body of Christ is ‘the priesthood of *all* believers’ and not even of *each* believer (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9–10; Rev. 1:6). There should be, at the least, pastors and deacons, but should there not be more? The answer must be, ‘Yes’.

‘The more’ that is rarely discussed today in ecclesiology and in ecumenics, is the matter of the *domata*, those gifts which we call ministerial. The fact and the purpose of these is set out in Ephesians 4:7–13:

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it is said, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Here the *domata* are ‘some . . . apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers’. In our discussion of what we called ‘ordained ministry’ we speak mainly of ‘pastor’ and/or ‘pastors and teachers’. ‘Pastors’ is only one of the five gifts⁶ given by Christ for the purpose—‘until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’—which is outlined in our passage, and further, that the church may upbuild itself in love. I am convinced that all five ministries are always essential to the life of the church. Of course ‘apostles’ as in ‘the apostles of Christ’ was a category which died out with the death of the twelve (or thirteen) apostles. Yet even in the text of the New Testament there are others called apostles. Today apostles would, it seems, be those who open up virgin gospel territory and help to establish churches and guard and pass on the apostolic truth. Prophets are often mentioned in the Book of the Acts, and none of them was named from among the Apostles. Evangelists are rarely mentioned in the Acts, but were there. Timothy was encouraged to do the work of an evangelist. Pastors we have discussed at length in our previous Study, and teachers we will likewise expound. If also we add to this list of *domata* the list of spiritual gifts called ‘charismata’ or ‘the spirituals’ (*ta pneumatika*: 1 Cor. 14:1), then we really have a church which is in a constant ferment of activity and so, operative in loving pastoral dynamics.

CONCLUSION: THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST IS HIS CHURCH IN HIS ACTION

What is our aim in opening up this line of discussion? The answer is that a church which has only a ‘clergy–laity’ structure may be at peril because the whole congregation may not be evoked to using its access to Christ and to the Father. If the whole church has been gifted by Christ, through the Spirit, then the whole church is in action, or can be in action. If the Holy Spirit is distributing the gifts given to every person for the good of the whole (1 Cor. 12:7), then the whole is alive and active. Granted that the *domata* are gifts given for five ministerial operations, and that the *charismata* or *spirituals* are basically ‘manifestations of the Spirit’, yet all of these are from Christ. *They are of his fullness*. They are the church in its living motions. Concertedly, unimpeded by ecclesiastical overburden, in joy they work out the ‘counsel of His will’.

⁶ Many understand ‘pastors and teachers’ to be the one ministry in which case there are four ministries operating, and not five. I think this claim can be debated. All ministries are involved in teaching.

In Ephesians 1:22–23 we saw that Christ has given his fullness to the church:⁷ how else could the body be one with the Head but in and by this fullness? We saw that the gifts given in Ephesians 4:8–11 are gifts of ministry for ‘filling up the church. *Domata* and *charismata* (‘the spirituals’: *ta pneumatika*) are part of that ‘fullness of God’. In Colossians 1:19, *passim*, the fullness of God is pleased to dwell in Christ. His fullness comes from God’s fullness. This fullness dwells bodily in Christ. It is from this fullness that the church is filled full. This giving of the Husband to his Bride is the giving of his fullness so that the church can be one with him as he ‘fills all in all’. ‘Filling all in all’ is to bring all things of creation to their unity, to their reconciliation, and to their fullness in Christ, unto the Father. It is in this way that ‘the counsel of the Father’s will comes to its completion, to its *telos*. This means that the church which is the living, acting, aiding Bride–Wife of Christ has its true ‘pastoral dynamics’ in using Christ’s fullness to bring all to God’s goal.

⁷ For the back of this matter of fullness and filling re-read p. 4, ‘All Things Are to Be—as They are Being—Filled up in Christ’.

The Life and Order of the New Testament Church—Part 1

THE PHENOMENON OF THE CHURCH

There is a sense in which we can speak of 'the churches of many faiths'. In other words, the word 'church' can be, roughly, a term for the aggregate adherents of a religion or, secondly, for their gathering or grouping which is local, say in a temple or some other building of worship as it is known to this group. If that is the way we understand 'church' then the Christian church is one amongst many parallel groupings. The view of Christians is that 'church' is a term unique to them, to Christianity, and means the Community of Christ, that is, all whom Christ has called to himself through faith in him and in his Father who sent him to bring salvation to mankind. They believe the church is the community in which the Holy Spirit works to make them a unique society, its creator being God the Father—Creator, its head being Christ and itself being his Body. Those growing up traditionally within this community scarcely think about the being of the church, and its remarkable being as an entity created by God to be His own special people, and to be in partnership in His mission to the whole world. When Christians begin to enquire into the nature of the church they begin to realise what a marvellous and astonishing entity it is, as also they begin to hear the judgments, criticisms and appreciations of those outside their community.

We are setting about trying to understand the congregation called 'the church' (*ecclesia*) as, we say, a phenomenon, a community different from all other communities. We see it as having continuity with 'old Israel', yet also having discontinuity since 'old Israel' rejected Christ as its Head, and thus rejected the church, sometimes called 'new Israel'. We described it above as 'an entity created by God to be His own, special people, and to be in partnership in His mission to the whole world'. This is saying a lot, for amplified it means God's plan for the end of the age for as Paul told Titus:

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:11–14).

Later we will expand this special point—that God is on mission to have a people for Himself who will be called sons or children of God and who will constitute the Bride to Christ the Bridegroom, and the Family to the Father, and 'a kingdom [kings and], priests to his [Christ's] God and Father'.

INTRODUCTION: THE CONGREGATION IN THE BEGINNING

We have already observed that the term 'church' (*ecclesia*) is not mentioned in Acts until 5:11, 'And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things'. Prior to that the accession of new converts is described in Acts 2:42 as 'all who believed', and 'their number' in 2:47. In 4:23 it is in relation to the apostles they are called 'their friends' and in 4:32 are called 'the company of those who believed'. In 6:2 we read that 'the twelve summoned the body [*plethos*, "multitude"] of the disciples'. Believers are now known as

‘the disciples’. After the stoning of Stephen the term ‘church’ is used, that is, ‘a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem’, ‘Saul laid waste the church’. Ananias speaks to the Lord of the church of ‘thy saints’, and this is a term used often.¹ In Acts 9:31 Luke records that ‘the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up [etc.]’. In spite of heavy persecution they remained an indestructible community, even though they were so scattered that later Peter could call them ‘the exiles of the Dispersion’ (1 Pet. 1:1). This could be linked with the idea of the Flock scattered on every hill (Ezek. 34:6ff.; cf. Matt. 26:31; John 21:16ff.), yet still one flock, ‘the flock of God’ (1 Pet. 5:2).

The Relational Unity of the *Ecclesia* at the Pentecostal Beginning

The term ‘disciple’ is used less as the term ‘brethren’ comes into use. The apostles use the term ‘disciple’ when addressing their fellow Jews, and ‘brethren’ when addressing their fellow believers. The term ‘disciple’ seems more to be used outside the company of believers, whereas ‘brethren’ is used within the company of believers. It is an intimate term and in the Epistles the term ‘disciple’ is not used to address one another. The word ‘brethren’ is used quite largely, and especially for addressing one another. It is of course linked with God as Father and the believers as being ‘family’—the Family of God. In what may be called the Johannine churches, ‘brethren’ is greatly used, so that John speaks much of ‘brotherly love’. Even so, it is Paul who uses the term more than them all. In Hebrews 2:10–18 Jesus is the elder brother to whom God gives ‘the children’, for it is he who acts as their High Priest.

We saw that in Acts 4:23 all members of the church are called ‘friends’, a term Jesus used for his followers on the night of his betrayal. ‘Multitude of disciples’, ‘friends’ and ‘brethren’ tell us something of the nature of the new community. We have seen also that they were called ‘saints’ and this comported with their origins in and continuity with Israel, described in Exodus 19:5–6 as ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9–10).

In some previous Studies we have noted that with the forming of the company of believers there was immediate concern for those amongst the community who had needs. Thus the daily distribution arose. Churches outside Palestine showed their care for the poor and needy in the Jerusalem church. Even this matter of care was not new and radical, because in Israel care of widows, orphans, the poor and the aliens was prescribed. On the whole this relational caring had fallen into disuse, which was why it appeared so astonishing when it suddenly appeared in Jerusalem and beyond. It spoke powerfully of a community truly unique in relational concern. The witness to the gospel by this unique behaviour of the community is a vindication of the gospel, the message of the community.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH AS ‘THE BODY OF CHRIST’

When we face this Pauline understanding of the church we are confronted with mutuality of relationships even more powerful than that found in old Israel. The 12th chapter of Corinthians is a remarkable exposition of intimate relationships. Verses 12 and 13 give us the principle of unity and interrelationships, as also the way in which it came about:

All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

The first mention in 1 Corinthians 10:17 of ‘body’ has, ‘we who are many are one body’, and in 11:29 we are told to ‘discern the body’ in the Holy Communion. It is all akin to us being

¹ The sanctification of all believers entitled them to this description. It seems certain that it has been used from Daniel chapter 7, where the saints are given the Kingdom.

‘one loaf’. The diversity in no way endangers the unity, but rather is necessary to make and maintain it, for a body has diverse members, but all members together are functional of the whole body. This unity comes about by those who, having believed, have been baptised in the Spirit and have been given the Spirit to drink. The Spirit is ‘the one-ness Spirit’ and so achieves the ‘one-ness’ of the Body, all of this bringing a unitive experience to all, for all.² We must beware of equating diversity in the church today with the diversity of the apostolic church.

In this same chapter 12, and especially in verses 14–26, Paul expounds the practical unity of the Body, showing that the value of each member is as that of all other members. What we are saying—keeping in mind verses 4 to 11—is that in the varieties of gifts (*charismata*), of services/ministries (*diakonia*) and workings (*energema*), all members are valuable and to be honoured, each no more nor less than any other. This is because all are involved in these works of the Body because of gifts given to each.

This, then, leads us to realise that the church is the most remarkable community which has ever existed. We might say we now have a sociological marvel, keeping in mind that such a community would have been in the beginning, in Eden. It had just begun so to be, when it was shattered by the Fall, relationships becoming fractured between God and Man, and Man and his society. Now in Christ this *koinonia* (fellowship) is freshly constituted.

We agree that we do not see this unity in perfect action, yet in essence the community of Christ is irrefragable and its reality transcends the social being of humanity composed of those outside the Body of Christ. We use the term ‘those outside the Body of Christ’ to distinguish them from the Community of Christ, but not all who are members of the visible church are necessarily members of Christ’s Body. Apostolic writers posit new birth with baptism as essential for participation in the Body of Christ—his church.

The Gospel Quality of the Life of the *Koinonia*

When we say ‘gospel quality’ we mean the quality evoked by the gospel. The gospel of forgiveness and grace, along with the gift of the Holy Spirit, brings peace to the conscience, the freedom which comes from forgiveness and justification, and the knowledge that God has sanctified His people so that they are members of the church, and as such serve and worship Him. Also they are now those who witness to God in the proclamation of the gospel. Having been redeemed, they bring the message of redemption, because the community of holy people at the end of the age is God’s purpose for creation and creation’s *telos*.

The relational life of the fellowship comes from God’s life flowing into the humanity of the community. Jesus tells us in John’s Gospel that he as the Son of God dwells within his Father, and that his Father dwells in him, and that the Father and the Son will come to dwell in us, and that the Holy Spirit will also be in us (John 10:30, 38; 17:21–23; 14:17, 21). The glory of the Triune God lies in the unity-of-love which has always been in action and this from before time, and so in all history,³ and this is the unity brought to all in the church by the Spirit, for by him the love of God is poured into all hearts.

In Trinitarian theology we see that the Three Persons are each ‘other Persons regarding’, and that this quality flows through from the Trinity to the members of Christ’s Body who are instructed to ‘count others better than yourselves’ as they ‘look not only to [their] own interests, but to the interests of others’ (Phil. 2:3, 4), for this is truly kenotic living. Such ‘other persons regarding’ becomes the way of life of the church—a fact most remarkable, for Man as true Man was created after the image of God and as redeemed Man lives in a manner rarely—if ever—to be found outside the church.

² The event of baptism does not of itself bring about the unity of all elements—diverse as they may be—but it is the work of Christ which comes to the believers by the act of the Spirit which effects that unity, for reconciliation is effected by the blood of Christ and the agent of Christ is the Holy Spirit.

³ John 17:24 speaks of the Father’s love for the Son before the foundation of the world, the love by which God gave the Son His own glory, and the glory which, incidentally, the Son has given to the church.

Because people came into the church from other cultures, they were entreated to leave wrong and unhelpful mores behind them (cf. Eph. 4:17f.; Col 3:4f.). We find direct and positive teaching on the way of new relationships (1 John 2:9ff.; 3:11f.; 4:7ff.; Rom. 12:3ff.). All things must be done in love (1 Cor. 13; 16:14). The strong should keep the weak in mind and the weak should consider the strong (Rom. 14 – 15; 1 Cor. 8). Giving full honour to one another is a constant theme, sometimes stated explicitly, sometimes not (cf. Rom. 12:10; Eph. 5:21ff.; 1 Pet. 2:17; 3:7; 5:5), and none must demean another human being, since Man is made in the image of God and so is worthy of high esteem no matter how much a person here and there may have demeaned himself/herself. Love is the most powerful virtue of all. As we have seen, many injunctions are linked with love. Gifts have been given to all members so that they may have the wherewithal to aid and profit the whole Body. All gifts must be used in love, for love; or not at all.

Regarding all relationships as they derive from their Trinitarian source and paradigm, we have teaching of a manner that has been described by the enemies of the gospel as ‘idealistic’ and ‘non-attainable’, but the early church shows it was not an ideal but *the* way of life, and was not unattainable but practicable because it was constantly inspired by the Holy Spirit as he fed love and power into the hearts of the community of Christ and the Father. We note how rich are the Scriptures which have taught us of the high and lovely life of the church. There is the great Sermon on the Mount, the parables of the Kingdom, the death of the Cross and the power of the Resurrection which give moral and ethical power to the new community. There are the many Epistles with their teaching unique in the annals of holy exhortation. Thus we have John’s epistles on brotherly love; Paul’s letters on the Father’s Fatherhood and the family of God, his great love song of 1 Corinthians 13, his exhortations to holiness; the mystery of our great, interceding High Priest in Hebrews; and the all-revealing apocalyptic of the Revelation. Then there is the life of mission which is at the heart of the church’s ministry. The church is always the saving church and this is to be continually understood so that the adjective ‘saving’ does not have to describe the church: it is basically understood as such. Great, indeed, are all these driving forces within the church.

We emphasise the fact, then, that the church is the Church of the Father, that it is the Body and Flock of Christ and, as such, is led by the Holy Spirit as also administered by him. Being thus of the Triune God, the quality of the Divine relationships is poured into the life of all members of the church. The continuity of the Divine perichoretic flow into the community of Christ ensures the right relationships which human members have in the Body of Christ. The relationships within the Trinity between the Persons manifest themselves in the human *koinonia*. It is certain that this is what God—even before creation—determined should be the case.

We must continually be alert to the fact that relationships are not intended to be an end in themselves. The whole action of the church is that of the Bride of Christ, the *aide* to her Husband, Christ. All relationships have their purpose in leading to the *telos*, that is, the goal of God. The church lives in and by its eschatological action, and so everything assists in completing the *telos*. All created human beings are intended to live in this expectant action, and so those outside the Body of Christ have the ontological pressure to accomplish, but cannot, so that some kind of guilt must be present within them. Likewise the joy of expectant action within the Body makes for joy and satisfaction.

As we have seen above, the church is the partner of God in covenant, and the partner of Christ in his ministry as Redeemer and as Lord of the creation. It is the body of Christ’s people, who proclaim his gospel and who tell of the Kingdom of God. Their transformation from enemies of God to His worshippers is *the* witness to the power of the gospel. Their compassion on their fellow-creatures, and their yearning to bring them into the company of Christ’s people, tells of their genuine love, also inspired by the gospel.

We can conclude then that the church is the company of all people who hold to the faith of Christ and who are thus motivated to live in rich relationships with one another so that their community is unique in human society. We need to see that the church is by no means perfect

since it is composed of redeemed sinners. These sinners having been redeemed are enlivened, morally, ethically and spiritually by the presence of the Holy Spirit who administers the church. Even so, the community of Christ is not ideological in its life and teaching. It does not propose itself as the true way of human living, as though it intends to transform the whole world. Given the grace which sustains it in its human weakness, it is a witness to the gospel which brought it forth. Its message of the Cross is one of redemption, and will always be seen as a scandal by the religious and foolishness by the intellectual, and so will not be universally accepted. Of course it does transform what is converted, but not all will be converted.

Whatever be the case—conversion or no conversion—the church witnesses to the power of the gospel which brought it forth in an alien world. By ‘alien’ we mean the world of gods and lords which are not God and not the true and only Lord, Jesus Christ, nor yet the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

THE APOSTOLIC ORDER OF THE CHURCH

It is here we need to look at the order and composition of the *ecclesia*. Because we are ourselves constituent parts of the ongoing church we need to know the principles evinced in the apostolic church. As we have said a number of times, it is not in order to reproduce the pattern of the apostolic church that we do this, for even if that were possible it would not be advisable. At the same time, if certain continuing principles were the life and power of the early church, then we would be advised to seek to live by those today. By this we do not mean that as members of the church we have the responsibility and power of ourselves to change the church and to transform it so that it becomes more apostolical. No: we must firstly recognise afresh the reality that the church is the Church of the Father, that its Head is Christ, and that its Administrator in this age is the Holy Spirit. In short, we must see that the church has ever been under the leading and empowerment of the Three Persons as they are the one, true God.

Eduard Schweizer in his monograph *Church Order in the New Testament*⁴ commences his work under the heading ‘The Diversity of the New Testament Church’ by saying, ‘There is no such thing as *the* New Testament Church order’.⁵ He then goes on to say that diversity in church order existed then, and he gives as examples the church at Jerusalem and the church at Corinth. At the same time he denies that that kind of apostolical diversity justifies the extraordinary kind of diversity we find in churches throughout the world today, since the order of the church is a theological matter, and because the church is on mission so that its order must be a witnessing one—the church as it is really formed by the gospel and witnesses to it. This is what we were getting at under our heading above, ‘The Gospel Quality of the Life of the *Koinonia*’.

Part of Schweizer’s monograph is the church order as he describes elements of it which can be detected in the four Gospels, in the Acts, in the Letters of the New Testament and in the Revelation. He then examines the early, post New Testament Christian writings in the same manner, detecting elements which conform with or indicate a departure from the New Testament church order. Finally he discusses the community as charismatic.

⁴ *Church Order in the New Testament* by Eduard Schweizer (SCM Press, London, 1961), p. 13.

⁵ Two other valuable books which examine the New Testament church order are *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* by Catherine Mowry LaCugna (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), and *The Language of Faith: Essays on Jesus, Theology, and the Church* by E. Schillebeeckx (SCM, London, 1995). These two books are by Roman Catholic theologians and call in question much of the historical church order which has developed since the New Testament and which is accepted by many adherents as authentic. Another valuable work is that of Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SCM, London, 1964). In particular the Essay ‘Ministry and Community in the New Testament’ is valuable. I would also draw attention to a raft of books by Roland Allen, an Anglican Missionary in China in 1895. His ideas appeared to be radical, but they are impressive and certainly relate to church order in a helpful way. Many missionary writers presented Allen’s ideas in practice. It can be said that Vincent J. Donovan, a Roman Catholic missionary priest in Tanzania, was affected by Allen and his ilk, and his first book *Christianity Rediscovered* is quite an astonishing volume, and his experiences and insights on church order are remarkable. It is my intention to draw on all these writers as I am enabled to do.

We will seek to see how the church subsists as the community of Christ, especially with reference to its order, and because the subject is so large we will try to draw out the things common in the midst of a great diversity of church life and order.

Elements of New Testament Church Order

We remind ourselves of the tendency of us all to read back into the New Testament the orders of our many churches as we have them today. The passages of Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 12:12–13, and Colossians 3:9–10 show us that the idea of an ethnic or national church (e.g. Anglican, Italian, Greek, Russian churches) was foreign to the New Testament. There are just ‘the church which is at . . .’ and so forth. When we think of the diverse cultures, liturgies, ministries and practices which obtain in our contemporary churches then we despair of finding the New Testament church order. Great comfort comes from the areas of the world where the gospel has caused churches to spring up which know nothing of formalised diversity and cultural and liturgical accretions. It is true that elements of culture help to determine the way in which worship, the ministry and the sacraments are used, but the spontaneity of what we have called *kerugma*, *koinonia*, *didache* and *paraclesis* gives authenticity to the new churches. Matters such as the ministry of elders and deacons, and the use of gifts and celebration of the sacraments is less complicated than in older churches. Now we will try to trace these principles of the New Testament church order.

The Context of Church Order: The Priesthood of All Believers

It is worth noting that the early church knew of no priest in its church order. What, then, is the priesthood of *all* believers? First it is not the priesthood of *each* believer and not that of certain special believers. The only priest that the church knows is Christ who alone is Mediator and Mediatorial High Priest (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 5:5–10; 7:11–26; 10:1–14; cf. Rom. 8:34). Christ’s Body is his people, and as Christ is priestly, so then are his people. In the New Testament the word for priest is never used of a church member. Christ’s piacular (atoning, propitiatory) sacrifice is unique and no church member offers such. Christ has offered such a sacrifice and it is a ‘full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world’.⁶ It is a sacrifice which does not have to be repeated or even represented, because it is sufficient.

There are references to the church being a priestly people (1 Pet. 2:5, 9–10; Rev. 1:6; cf. Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15–16), which must mean that Christ’s priesthood is expressed in their worship as in 1 Peter 2:5 and Hebrews 13:15–16, where ‘spiritual sacrifices’ are offered up, but not piacular offerings. We need to note that to introduce the idea of a mediatorial priest other than Christ is to change the whole complexion of the apostolic order. Edmund Schillebeeckx states:

The First ‘Sacerdotalization’ of the Church’s Office

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

In this way, there was a gradual sacerdotalization of the vocabulary of the Church’s office, although this was initially used in the allegorical sense. Cyprian was also the first to say that the *sacerdos*, that is, the bishop as the leader of the community and therefore also in the Eucharist, acted in this capacity *vice Christi*, that is, in the place of Jesus. Augustine, on the other hand, refused to call bishops and presbyters ‘priests’ in the sense of mediators between Christ and the community.

With his ‘Apostolic Tradition,’ Hippolytus is obviously at a transitory stage. In his *epiclesis*, he speaks simply of the ‘Spirit of the high priesthood’ that is attributed to the episcopal leader. On the other hand, however, he says again and again that the bishop is *as* a high priest (*Traditio Apostolica* 3 and 34), which points to continuing influence of the Old Testament and the patristic use of allegory. These

⁶ These words are from the prayer of consecration in the 1662 Prayer Book of the Church of England.

comparisons are, however, not made in connection with the presbyters, who are therefore clearly seen as non-priestly, although they were (to varying degrees according to the different local communities) increasingly permitted, as time passed, to replace the bishop in leading in the Eucharist (without needing a new ‘ordination’ to do this).⁷

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Here the word *dorea* is used. James D. G. Dunn maintains that this word is used primarily for the gift of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament:

The word [*dorea*] occurs eleven times in the New Testament—in six different books by four (or five, depending on one’s view of Ephesians) different authors. It means of course ‘gift’ and in the New Testament is always the gift of God to humanity. But when it comes to defining the gift more precisely in the various passages, a wide range of alternatives have been proposed, particularly in recent years. I wish simply to argue that [*dorea*] usually means the Holy Spirit, and that in the early Church [*he dorea tou theou*] was a technical term for the coming of the Holy Spirit in forgiveness and renewal to those who took the step of repentance and commitment to the risen Jesus.⁸

We have already spoken of the Holy Spirit being the Administrator of the church for it was born of him, as indeed each member is born anew of him, and it is led by him, empowered by him, and given fellowship, love, unity and communion by him. He is the one who distributes the gifts for the internal life of the ministry and the external proclamation of the gospel. In Romans 8:9 it is clear that only those who have the Spirit—the *dorea*—are in the church. All who have *dorea* have the gifts or bestowals which we discuss partly below. All members then have a gift or a bestowal: none is ‘ahead’ and none ‘behind’: none is below or above, because of the administration of the Holy Spirit.

The Gifts Known as the Domata

These are the ministerial gifts of Ephesians 4:11 given by Christ, ‘And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers’. The reason for their being given was ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ’, etc. These *domata* are five in number, were obviously all used in tandem, and were essential to the true (full) order of the church.

Notice in 1 Corinthians 12:28 where some of the *domata* are mentioned along with the *charismata*, or ‘spirituals’—‘And God has appointed [placed] in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues’—that the *domata* and *charismata* are appointed by God, not by others.

(a) Apostles (*apostellous*)

Eduard Schweizer has the following to say about apostles:

As such they lay the foundation of the Church’s preaching generally and are its first leaders; but after the Council at Jerusalem they disappear completely. Both Mark and Matthew use the term ‘apostle’, independently of each other, only once (in editorial statements) for the twelve who are sent out as messengers to preach and heal. The word still clearly denotes function, and is not simply a title. John and Hebrews do not know the word at all. Paul can use it in a wide sense as denoting function (Rom. 16.7; II Cor. 8.23; Phil. 2.25); but he generally uses it for a definite group of Christ’s witnesses who have seen the risen Lord (I Cor. 9.1) and been definitely commissioned. Both uses apply to himself as to the first apostles. No one is an apostle for the whole body of Christians, but for the particular church for which the commission is given (I Cor. 9.2; Gal. 2.8; cf. 1.16). This group is larger than the twelve plus Paul (I Cor. 15.7).⁹

⁷ Schillebeeckx, *The Language of Faith*, pp. 137–8.

⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, *Pneumatology*, ‘The Christ and the Spirit’, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998), pp. 207–9.

⁹ Schweizer, *op. cit.* pp. 194–5.

Note that the church has true apostolicity only when it is ‘built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the cornerstone’ (Eph. 2:20), for the mystery ‘which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit’, so that both the original apostles and their contemporary—in tandem—prophets set the foundation by the Holy Spirit. It is evident that there is a second group of apostles, that is, those who are sent, are not the foundation-setters so much as builders upon it for they teach only what the apostles taught. The presence of false apostles at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:1ff.) shows how powerful the ministry of an apostle can be even when false. There are certain ‘signs of an apostle’ which in those times were recognisable.

(b) Prophets (*prophetas*)

We have just seen that apostles and prophets work together. See, then, 1 Corinthians 12:28f.; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Revelation 18:20. It is clear that as in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament, prophets are not chosen by the community. Nor does it seem that the order of prophets ceased when the primary apostles died. In Acts we see an order of prophets (Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10). Post New Testament Christian writings speak much about the prophets and it seems no cessation of this gift was anticipated. Revelation 10:7 indicates that all the prophets were involved in the will or counsel of God—‘but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled’.

(c) Evangelists (*euangelistas*)

There is surprisingly little spoken about evangelists. Philip seems to be the only one (Acts 21:8), whilst Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5) is told to do the work of an evangelist. It seems that the placing of evangelist after prophet and apostle does give it importance. It may have been that evangelists did some work after the manner of the apostle who broke new ground with the evangel.

(d) Pastors (*poimenas*)/Elder/Bishop

This (Eph. 4:11) is the only place where the word ‘pastor’ is used in the New Testament. It is the same word for ‘shepherd’ and this is used in John’s Gospel, in Hebrews 13:20 and 1 Peter 2:25. It may be supposed that pastors, shepherds and elders are the one thing. It is linked with the terms ‘elder’ (*presbuteros*) and ‘overseer’ (*episcopos*) in Acts 20:17 and 20:28. It is here we link ‘elder’ and ‘pastor’ (‘overseer’) and they are virtually interchangeable in Titus 2:5–9 and—in the light of Titus—1 Timothy 3:1–7; when speaking of a bishop, is at the same time speaking of an elder. It has been supposed by some that a bishop is *primus inter pares*—first among equals—and so is a leading elder.

It is possible that a pastor is not an elder, nor a bishop in spite of all that has been said above. If so then we must conjecture as to what it is. It would seem that a church did not have a single elder but elders. Philippians 1:1 says, ‘To all the saints who are at Philippi with the bishops [overseers] and deacons’. This seems to discount the idea that a bishop was a leading elder.

(e) Teachers

It is clear that all five ministries here in Ephesians 4:11 are those which teach. In Hebrews 5:12 all members of the church ought to be teachers, and not remain as learners who do not mature. Jesus in Matthew 23:8 says, ‘But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren’. This is an important statement for it means the teacher and the taught are one together. There may be a link between elder (pastor) and teacher since in 1 Timothy 3:3 the bishop (elder) must be ‘apt to teach’. In Titus 1:9 the matter of teaching is raised for elder/bishops. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Timothy is to teach others so that they can teach others. In 1 Timothy 3:9 deacons must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Older women (deaconesses?) are also to ‘teach what is good’.

Doubtless teaching was of ‘the apostles’ doctrine’ (Acts 2:42), yet related to things practical in the church and its component relationships as the church faced the world. We remember that the whole life and ministry came under the rubric of ‘charismatic’ because the Holy Spirit caused all that was Christ to be present and active in the Community. We have yet to give the full picture of the church under the Holy Spirit, and the way in which it witnesses to God and proclaims the gospel by which it was formed.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH ORDER OF MINISTRY

Up to this point we have avoided making comment on whether church order in the apostolic church was regular, organised and in line with **Karl Holl’s** brilliant essay where he says:

We meet in the Christian community from the beginning onwards, a legalized hierarchy, a divinely ordained order, a divinely sanctioned ecclesiastical law, a Church as an organized institution, into which individuals were received. A strictly circumscribed group of Apostles (i.e. James and the Twelve), possesses a permanent divine prerogative to be obtained by no one else, and is therefore authorized for leadership.¹⁰

Newtown Flew, who quotes Holl, does not wholly agree with him and says:

In the second place, the thesis is justified [by Holl] that the Church is regarded as an organized institution, into which individuals are admitted. This again implies order, and a certain rule, which may well have been administered by the Twelve. But the organization of a community whose basis is a new divine revelation in an historic Person, and whose life is the charismatic life of the Spirit, is essentially different from the life of a community based on a code. The organization of the Ecclesia must conform to the essential nature of the Ecclesia, and not to that of preceding or contemporary institutions.

Thirdly, the thesis that the Ecclesia possesses a legalized hierarchy is misleading. The word ‘hierarchy’ is inextricably bound up with later ecclesiastical development. The pre-eminence of the Apostles was due to the amazing privilege of intimate personal companionship with the Messiah, to the special commission, once given them in His earthly life, to preach and cast out demons, and to the renewed commission from the Risen Lord to be His witnesses. This is a ‘hierarchy’ the like of which the world has never seen. But for that very reason a fresh word is wanted. The term conveys associations of earthly rule which were expressly repudiated by Jesus Himself. We do not see the Apostles exercising the kind of rule against which He warned them. In the crucial instance of the letter written from the Council of Jerusalem to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, the Apostles and the elders associated with them do not lay stress upon their own position. We cannot improve on the statement of Hort. They send ‘a strong expression of opinion, more than advice and less than a command. . . . A certain authority is thus implicitly claimed. There is no evidence that it was more than a moral authority, but that did not make it less real. . . . It was a claim to deference rather than a right to be obeyed.’¹¹

These statements help us to see how uninstitutionalised was the New Testament church. Likewise **Ernst Käsemann** rejects the reasoning which would make the offices of the church to be as they are in operation in many churches today:

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

¹⁰ Quoted by R. Newton Flew in his *Jesus and His Church: A Study of the Idea of the Ecclesia in the New Testament* (Epworth Press, London, 1956), p. 133, from Karl Holl’s *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (1927), ii.54.

¹¹ Flew, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–5

it is possible to reach a proper appreciation of a fact which has almost always remained opaque to the exegetes, although it has to be counted among the most significant phenomena of the New Testament proclamation.¹²

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE: EDEN ON THE WAY

We have yet to deal with the *charismata* or *pneumatika*—‘the spirituals’—the place and function of them in the Community, and the nature of the church as Christ’s body in action. Also we do not here and now have time or space in this Essay to deal with the changes which have developed since New Testament days, and they are many. It may well be that the changes and adaptations which have come have nigh on changed the heart of the gospel and that consequently churches today are not witnessing to it, and are unable to utter it because its message has been compromised. Likewise the life and operations of the Community have been radically changed. At this point we may do well to quote a statement on the church written by Catherine Mowry LaCugna:

The one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is to be a credible witness and sign in the world of new life in Christ. Its vocation is to embody in its teachings and words and actions, in its ecclesial structures and ritual gestures, in its internal patterns of relationship (*koinonia*) and its service to the world (*diakonia*) the new nature that its members put on in baptism and that is gradually being conformed to the image of the Creator . . . The Christian community is the image or icon of the invisible God when its communitarian life mirrors the inclusivity of divine love.

The nature of the church should manifest the nature of God. Just as the doctrine of the Trinity is not an abstract teaching about God apart from us but a teaching about God’s life with us and our life with each other, ecclesiology is not the study of an abstract church but a study of the actual gathering of persons in a common faith and a common mission. We are all members of a church on the way toward the full realization of God’s life; communion is an eschatological hope. This is not an invitation to complacency but the opposite: God’s reign cannot be finally established until the work of the Holy Spirit is complete. The mission of the church is to assist us on the way to this destiny. This is our ‘sending forth’ as the church, just as Christ and the Spirit were sent forth to lead all men and women back to God so that into all eternity, we will be “marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of God’s glory” (Eph. 1:14).¹³

It would appear that we have much research to do to fully understand the order of the early church, but surely it is in our bones, and our spiritual instinct is to be the church and to do its works. In the meantime we take comfort from the fact that ‘You [we] are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And *God has appointed* in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then . . .’ We also take comfort in the fact that Jesus said, ‘I will build my church’, and the Epistles tell us many times, ‘the church of God’. Most of all we take comfort that the Bride of Christ is the Bride in Paradise. Wedded to the Bridegroom in her we are destined to be the Holy City, the ultimate Eden. Israel saw itself as Eden on the way of history, no matter what dreadful judgments it deserved and met. It held fast to the fact that Canaan was its Eden. When we look at the dreadful mistakes Israel made our heart shakes within, but when we look at the errors and painful vicissitudes of the church through history the foundations of our faith seem to quiver and shake. Yet it is true that never in its history has the world witnessed so wonderful a miracle as the church. For us it is ‘Eden on the way’. It is Eden to faith, if not to human sight. Why, then, should we not revel in it?

¹² Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, p. 63.

¹³ *God For Us* by Catherine Mowry LaCugna, p. 403.

The Life and Order of the New Testament Church—Part 2

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH ORDER OF MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (CONTINUED)

We are continuing our examination of the order of the Ministry in the New Testament church. So far we have noted that the church is created by God at Pentecost, and that its membership has been given the *dorea*, that is, that gift of God which is primarily the gift of the Holy Spirit, but also includes the gifts of life, of Christ, and of God's righteousness. We then saw that Christ gives special gifts to the church which are *domata*, namely the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These can be called the gifts of ministry, provided we understand the meaning of the word 'ministry'. If, in addition to *dorea* and *domata* we can talk about a third set of gifts¹ which are called the *charismata* or 'the spirituals' (*ta pneumatika*) then we can see that these bestowals of gifts enable the church to operate as it ought in order to fulfil the plan of God which we have seen is called 'the counsel of his will' or 'the whole counsel of God'. Since Christ is the head of the church, and the church is his body, and since Christ and the church work as one to fulfil the counsel of God, then we must have in mind what is God's purpose in creating the church.

GOD'S GOAL FOR HIS CHURCH THE REASON FOR THE BEING OF THE CHURCH AND FOR ITS ORDER

When we ask what is the reason for the church, then the answer must lie in the *telos*, that goal to which the church will come. Knowing this will enlighten us as to the present function of the church. If 2 Peter 1:3–10 is a true indication then it means that the members of the church will: (i) become partakers (*koinonoi*; in communion with, participators, sharers) in the divine nature; and (ii) have 'an [abundant] entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ'. Such is true *theosis*. A way of describing *theosis* is that it is the successful conclusion of God redeeming, sanctifying, glorifying and perfecting His elect humanity and bringing them into the fellowship of the Godhead. God's plan for creation is to liberate it from its bondage to corruption, bringing it into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. The church is inherently the theotic community.

Within this movement towards *theosis* the church is commissioned to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth with the purpose of bringing humanity to redemption, the outcome of which will be *theosis*. It has been created as the Bride of Christ to be his helpmeet in the work of moving to *theosis*. As a holy temple in the Lord, all members being built into it for a dwelling place of God, the outcome will be the Eden sanctuary in the age to come. The church is the flock of God under the Father and the Shepherd Son—a flock which is intended to graze on the pastures of Paradise and to drink its Edenic waters. Again, it is the militant force of God against Satan and the powers of darkness, for which task it has been equipped with weapons. This elect Bride of Christ is destined to inherit the new heaven and the new earth and inhabit the Holy City and to be that City.

¹ It is to be noted that in 1 Corinthians 12:28 *domata* are mentioned first, and are then followed by *charismata*. Both *domata* and *charismata* are said to be 'appointed by God'.

When we realise how high is the goal, and how lofty the demands which are made upon the church, then we realise its need to be fully gifted, and for its ministry to be enabled from the flow of God's largesse which equips it. We shall then continue to look at the third stream of gifts which are called the *charismata* or the *spirituals*. This will help us to understand the ministries of all members of the Body of Christ. Thus when we seek to see whether the church is truly fulfilling the goal then some analyses of the situation of the church in history and in the world today would be helpful. Later it will help us in making an assessment of whether the church is 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'.

SOME MODERN APPRECIATIONS AND ANALYSES OF THE ORDER OF THE CHURCH

There is quite an amount of recent literature available which analyses the changes which have taken place in church systems over 2000 years. All of us are aware of the church's history, of its great accomplishments and also its abysmal failures. One treatment is that of Loren Mead in his analysis in *The Once and Future Church*.² In the belief that the church is to a great degree 'out of order' he sees the need to reinvent it.³ He speaks of three paradigms—the Apostolic Paradigm, the Christendom Paradigm and now the Time Between Paradigms, suggesting we are in a stage in history where a new paradigm is being formed, and for this he has his suggestion of 'reinventing the church'. He speaks of the church as being involved in the polarity of parish and congregation. The idea of 'parish' is both location and part of the established system of Christendom whereas congregation is the dynamic, active community with mission in its sights. To reinvent the church would be to make the tension of the polarity of parish and congregation a useful one, so that it neither settles nor disconnects with its environment.

His book reminds us somewhat of David J. Bosch's *Transforming Mission*, subtitled, 'Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission'.⁴ In this he has set forth five paradigms of mission in the past and speaks of a present post-modern paradigm which is emerging, a paradigm such as could not previously have been envisaged. His treatment is phenomenal, and his description of paradigms and paradigm shifts is comprehensive. It is possible to receive the impression that the church is somehow caught in the paradigms and their shifts, as those are part of the processes of history and that somehow they do not at all add up to 'the counsel of his will'. I am not sure of Bosch's understanding of Salvation History, especially in regard to the conflict of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Satan receives virtually no mention, and history seems more a matter of causes and affects than a plan being carried out with *theosis* in sight.

From another standpoint is the work of Paul Stevens which I believe should be studied by all. Whilst he acknowledges the fact of paradigm shifts, especially in the missionary principles and action of the church, his prime aim is to tackle the matter of what he sees as an unbiblical structure in the church of two layers, namely clergy and laity. His latest work is *The Abolition of the Laity*, subtitled 'Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective'.⁵ In addition to its primary work of emphasis that there was no clergy-laity structure in the apostolic church, one of the great values of this book is its Select Bibliography. Stevens has amassed a most comprehensive and specialised list of books and authors so that the theme draws on many resources. Two comments on the book's back cover are first that 'He argues that the clergy-laity division finds no basis in the New Testament. Just as God is a trinity, yet one, so

² *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (Alban Institute, Trinity Church, New York, 1991, reprintings 1992, 1993, 1994). This book has an excellent Bibliography.

³ The idea of reinventing the church is ludicrous at first sight, but doubtless Mead is using the statement, 'reinventing the whole', to mean we should go back and start afresh and with more wisdom and foresight. Otherwise the term is ludicrous, since Christ is the Head and Lord of the church.

⁴ Publisher is Orbis, Mary Knoll, 1991.

⁵ Paternoster Press, England, 1999.

the people of God, though diverse, and with various functions, are one.’ The second comment is, ‘All believers are called to participate in God’s mission as witnesses of his saving grace. This mission is directed to the whole of society, to the structure of common life at work and in the home. Churches should recognise, support and equip people for ministry in workplaces, neighbourhoods and other spheres of influence.’

If we go back to Loren Mead then we see that the clergy–laity problem is again singled out. In his *The Once and Future Church*, under the heading ‘The Reformation of the Clergy’, he has this to say:

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

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

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

Thus, no one faces a greater change in the future church than clergy. In the past four decades they have already experienced more change than they expected. From being a high-status/low-stress profession the clergy has become a low-status/high-stress profession. The number of congregations who can afford to pay their pastor a living wage has declined.⁶

Here we should not wholly read ‘pastors’ for ‘clergy’, being mindful that there is a hierarchy within clergy. Also we should understand the paradigm of the ‘Church of Christendom’ in Mead’s writings is in contrast to ‘The Apostolic paradigm’. Mead, like Stevens, is interested in the fact of the clergy–laity order which they see as the order which has obtained for centuries but was not part of the apostolic order. Stevens, perhaps more than Mead, has a sense of this early order and seems to press a return to it, at least whilst he has the present problematic in mind.

The Theological Bridge

In perhaps a more theological approach to the whole *principial* matter of the church and not primarily of *church order* is the work of Catharine Mowry LaCugna. She is well aware of the situation of the church in the world today, but sees an understanding of the nature of God as a key to true reform of the church, and in this she does include its order. To begin with it may be helpful here to repeat part of a quote used in our September Study, which was from her book *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*:

The Christian community is the image or icon of the invisible God when its communitarian life mirrors the inclusivity of divine love.

The nature of the church should manifest the nature of God. Just as the doctrine of the Trinity is not an abstract teaching about God apart from us but a teaching about God’s life with us and our life with each other, ecclesiology is not the study of an abstract church but a study of the actual gathering of persons in a common faith and a common mission. We are all members of a church on the way toward the full realization of God’s life; communion is an eschatological hope. This is not an invitation to complacency but the opposite: God’s reign cannot be finally established until the work of the Holy Spirit is complete. The mission of the church is to assist us on the way to this destiny. This is our ‘sending forth’ as the church, just as Christ and the Spirit were sent forth to lead all men and women back to God so that into all eternity, we will be “marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of God’s glory” (Eph. 1:14).⁷

LaCugna in the Introduction to her book speaks helpfully of *theologia* as dealing with the mystery of God in His Immanent Being as Trinity, but of *oikonomia* as being the true way of knowing God, that is, by the action of Economic Trinity. In other Studies we have observed that there is one Trinity, and that ‘Immanent’ and ‘Economic’ are ways of speaking about the inner

⁶ *The Once and Future Church*, p. 53.

⁷ *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* by Catharine Mowry LaCugna (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), p. 403.

subsistence (*ad intra*) and outward action (*ad extra*) of the one Triune God.

The guiding principle in this book is that for Christian theology, the mystery of God can be thought of only in terms of the mystery of grace and redemption. We can make true statements about God—particularly when the assertions are about the triune nature of God—only on the basis of the economy, corroborated by God’s self-revelation in Christ and the Spirit. *Theological* statements are possible not because we have some independent insight into God, or can speak from the standpoint of God, but because God has freely revealed and communicated God’s *self*, God’s personal existence, God’s infinite mystery. Christians believe that God bestows the fullness of divine life in the person of Jesus Christ, and that through the person of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit we are made intimate partakers of the living God (*theosis*, divinisation).⁸

LaCugna is saying we cannot tackle problems of the church unless we see the church as the image of the Triune God. This is certainly a most helpful observation. Having indicated that there have been changes in the order of the church from the time of its apostolical beginnings we now need to see where we are today in the matter of that true order. Was it a temporary order which arose from God’s gifts to the church, in which are the *dorea*, *domata* and *charismata*, and has the order of the church been necessarily dictated and necessarily changed by the processes of history which some of our commentators—LaCugna excepted—seem to think? We must also ask whether the apostolic order of the church is essential to the true operations of the church, that is, whether such an ecclesial order in the early church was seminal only and that out of it was intended to grow new orders and even forms. John Newman’s theory of the ‘acorn and the tree’, for example, might be quite feasible. By this principle Newman understood that the early church was as the [acorn] seed which was to develop and grow into its later fullness of form of the oak tree. Even in this principle nothing was left to evolutionary development or adaptation to the exigencies of history. Preset development is innate to the acorn.

THE NATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST, ITS PRESENCE IN THE CHURCH AND RELATION TO CHURCH ORDER

Our Study from this point onwards is based on the nature of the church as we see it set out in the New Testament. We see it not as a paradigm but as a living organism. We are aware of its power and its living form. We have no sense that it will have to be adaptive in order to survive⁹ and be a power to be reckoned with in the world. Such thoughts are absent from the New Testament. The church is one with Christ who is not subject to historical movements and changes, but rather is the Lord over all things ‘for the church which is his body’. So we need to remind ourselves that the church has a fullness (*pleroma*) by which it participates as Christ’s helpmeet in fulfilling God’s counsel or plan. Ephesians 1:22–23 speaks of ‘the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’. There is no such thing as Christ’s fullness which is not Christ himself. His fullness is not just a reservoir of power on which we are to draw, but rather his life which is moving the church. **Christ’s work** is:

- (i) to head up, or unify, all things (Eph. 1:10);
- (ii) to ‘fill all things’ (Eph. 4:10; cf. 1:22–23); and
- (iii) ‘to reconcile to himself all things’ (Col. 1:19–21).

This mighty, cosmic task requires all Christ’s fullness and so the church which participates with him in the dealing in ‘all things’ needs to share in that fullness. As to the nature of that fullness, Ephesians 3:8 speaks of

⁸ *op. cit.* pp. 2–3.

⁹ There is no question of the church surviving or not surviving. It has been created by God and has its being in the light of the concluding eschaton. Hence its ‘survival’ should not be measured in pragmatic terms.

Christ's 'inexhaustible riches', and Colossians 2:3 says that in him 'are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. These are undoubtedly his fullness, the resources needed for fulfilling the counsel of God's will. When we talk of 'the resources' we need to see that Christ's 'inexhaustible riches' and his 'treasures of wisdom and knowledge' are for the *oikonomia*,¹⁰ that is, the supplying of the powers to accomplish God's purpose and plan for creation, and we can understand them as constituting 'God's varied grace' (1 Pet. 4:10). This many faceted grace is supplied through the gifts given to the church. We need to keep in mind that this era of the Spirit is likewise the era of grace.

What is called Christ's fullness in Ephesians 1:23 is described in Colossians 1:19 as 'all the fullness of God', which is said to dwell in Christ. In Colossians 2:9 it is stated that 'in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily'. There is then the fullness of God (Col. 1:19; cf. Eph. 3:19) from which comes the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1:23; cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9; cf. Rom. 15:29) and the fullness of the blessing which comes from God (Eph. 1:3), from Christ (Eph. 1:23; Rom. 15:29) and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 9:17; 10:44; etc.).

This fullness is of the Triune God, and is given to the church for the fulfilment of God's will and purpose. Notice in Colossians 2:8–10 that the church is 'filled full in him'. When we ask what it is, then it must mean at first an endowment such as is spoken of in Ephesians 3:16, 'that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man'. At the same time the fullness must be the gifts of God—*dorea*, *domata* and *charismata*. God is said to give the gifts (1 Cor. 2:12); Christ is said to give the gifts of *domata* (Eph. 4:8) and the Spirit is said to distribute the *charismata* (1 Cor. 12:7–11). God is said to appoint the gifts in the body (1 Cor. 12:28).

In this fullness are three elements which Paul brings together in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, 'Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one'. We will have cause to look at these three varieties given by God. In addition we will have cause to look at what Paul calls 'the weapons of our warfare' (2 Cor. 10:4), for such weapons are the equipment given by God from His fullness.

The Fullness is for Love and is Love

The statement that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) is not speaking merely about some behavioural quality,¹¹ for whilst love shows itself in true moral behaviour yet this love is primarily God's power for edifying, that is, for constructing His edifice. When in 1 Corinthians 8:1 Paul says, 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up', he is stating a general principle in regard to love. In Romans 14:13–19 he is saying that love for the weaker brother will help to build him up. In 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 he speaks of building, and says that which is not acceptable to God will be destroyed in the day of judgment. This links with 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 which shows that to use gifts without love means they accomplish nothing. We can surely say, then, that true building is through the works of love, that is, through *agape*.

This principle is brought out clearly in Ephesians 4:7–16. In this passage Paul says that the gifts given by Christ—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher—are for the equipping of all the saints for the work of ministry, for the *building up* of the body of Christ, the climax of which is the church's coming 'to the stature of the *fullness* of Christ'. He concludes, 'Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to *grow up* in every way into him who is the head,

¹⁰ The term *oikonomia* is derived from *oikos nomos* which is normally used for the management of a household and is thus used for stewardship. We have in Ephesians 1:10 'a stewardship of the fullness of the times'. It really means God's 'salvation history', the outworking of the Economic Trinity. The term used for discussing the Immanent or ontological Trinity is *theologia*.

¹¹ Love is often looked at as being the high ethical way, the true *behaviour* of the believer, whereas the New Testament views it as the fullness of God who loves the world (1 John 3:16) and purposes to bring it to the *telos* of love, the glorious freedom of the children of God. All things of the end-time resonate with love. This love became very apparent at Pentecost when the love of God was poured into human hearts by the Holy Spirit who, himself, was the great *dorea* of God. Salvation history is but love building on love.

into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, *makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love*. Love and Christ's fullness are here viewed together and *the basis of their working is the giving of the gifts, the services and the workings* (1 Cor. 12:4). We can surely conclude that the gifts are given for the business of love, and that it is love which builds up. If love does not motivate the gifts in their action, then the gifts do not supply the edifying action of love,¹² the end of which is the *telos* of God's plan. More generally we can say that it is the love of God from beginning to end which brings His plan to its fulfilment. This makes sense of Paul's injunction, 'Let all that you do be done in love'. Included in this is the principle of Galatians 5:6, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but *faith working through love*'.

Gifts, Services and Workings Which Build in Love

The passage of 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 has had much attention in regard to the teaching about gifts (*charismata*), but it has not had all the attention it ought to have had in regard to 'services' or 'servings' (*diakoniai*) and 'workings' or 'operations' (*energemata*). In fact Paul is talking not so much about the *fact* of these three elements but about the *varieties* of these three. If 'varieties' is key thought then it would mean all *charismata*, *diakoniai* and *energemata* are operative in the principle of oneness, that is, of unity. This is brought out clearly in verses 12 and 13—there the Spirit is the *oneness* Spirit as the body is the *oneness* body. It is by no means a coincidence that in the action of these unifying elements each should proceed from a member of the Trinity and all should reflect and expresses the unity of the Triune God.

What, then, constitutes (i) *charismata*, (ii) *diakoniai* and (iii) *energemata*? The answer is:

(i) The *charismata* are the gifts distributed in the church by the Holy Spirit whom we should see as the Administrator of the church. Each member is gifted and all gifts combine to make the unity of the church, in love. The *charismata* are for love, but not love only as right behaviour¹³ but love that builds up, that builds towards the *telos*.¹⁴ Lists of the *charismata* can be seen 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4:10.

(ii) The *diakoniai* are the 'services' or 'servings' or 'ministries'. The term 'ministry' or 'service' (*diakonia*) covers many forms of ministry, and, indeed, all ministries. We have observed elsewhere that all five *domata* of Ephesians 4:11 are ministerial and all *serve* by the teaching which issues from their allotted *ministries*. It is appropriate here to state that the *domata* issue from Christ himself who is *the* Apostle, *the* Prophet, *the* Evangelist, *the* Pastor (Shepherd) and *the* Teacher. Thus it is Christ's ministry given distributively to the church through those who he engifts. In Ephesians 4:12 it seems there are three aims of Christ's five gifts (*domata*): (i) for the equipping of the saints, for (ii) the work (*ergon*) of the ministry (*diakonia*), for (iii) the building up of the Body of Christ. Christ himself is the true Servant (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 15:8) so that the Body is simply ministering as Christ. E. K. Simpson in his commentary on Ephesians has these words:

The New Testament affords no hint of a priestly caste, 'commanding all the approaches of the soul to Him', usurpers of the title they clutch at; but the universal priesthood of believers, each occupying

¹² In 1 Corinthians 14:1–4 Paul tells his readers to 'Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy'. Why seek prophecy? The answer is that it builds the church (v. 4). In 1 Corinthians 13:2 he has said that if he exercises prophecy but does not have love then he is nothing. All gifts must be used in love for love. Without love the gifts cannot 'build up' the church.

¹³ We have long been accustomed to see love as a right kind of behaviour, but it is really that work which goes out to build up other persons and, in this and other ways, builds to the accomplishment of the *telos*.

¹⁴ We will see, later, that love (*agape*) when it has completed the *telos* does not require the *charismata*. This may be because of the eternal equipping of the saints. As to the cessation or otherwise of the *diakonia* or *energemata*, it appears that we will continue to worship for *diakonia* is worship. All will be energised to carry out the acts of ruling as a Kingdom of priests unto their God.

his proper place in the body of Christ, has its clear authorization. *In the theocracy of grace there is in fact no laity* (emphasis mine).¹⁵

A quote here from Siew Kiong Tham's article 'Supplement to *Dorea, Domata and Charismata*' is helpful:

While we consider the services [*diakonia*] and refer to ourselves as servants of God, it should be noted that the first servant of God is Christ Himself (Rom. 15:8). The gospels tell us that He came to serve and not to be served (Matt. 20:28). Our services 'continues Christ's service for the outer and inner man' and is carried out 'on Christ's behalf'. As we have seen earlier, Christ gave gifts (*domata*) for the building up the body of whom He is the Head. The *domata* of Eph. 4:8 were given 'to equip the saints for the work [*ergon*] of ministry [*diakonia*]' (Eph. 4:12). So we see the *energema* of the Father flowing through the *diakonia* of Christ and to us as we participate in Christ's service. In the context of our union with Christ and when we see that what Christ gives (*domata*) is identical with His being, then we see that in our service it is Christ continuing His *diakonia* through us. This must be the basis of our giving to God in His service. Otherwise, it will merely be mere pietism and much weariness in the flesh (Ecc. 12:12).¹⁶

(iii) The *energemata* are the works or workings—operations—which come from God, just as the *charismata* come through the Spirit and the *diakonai* (ministries) through the Lord Christ. Linked with *energeia*—energy, efficiency, power—it can be seen in Philippians 3:21 to be effecting a goal.¹⁷ In Ephesians 2:2 the spirit of the power of the air *energises* within the children of disobedience, whilst in Philippians 2:12–13 God *energises* within the believer to bring him to his *telos*. It is the working to gain the effect that is in mind, and whilst Paul does not enlarge on the term, we find in 1 Corinthians 12:10 'the working of miracles [*energemata dynameon*]'. The related word 'work' (*ergon*) can be seen in Ephesians 4:8, 'to equip the saints for the work [*ergon*] of the ministry [*diakonia*]'. The power to effect works, we saw, comes from God, and the fact that there are varieties of these workings or operations means the rarity of mention does not mean the workings were minimal. In all we can probably conclude that Christ's works (*erga*) resemble the action of the *energemata*.

Paul's question, 'What do you have that you have not received?' is now pertinent to our enquiries. What does the church have by which it lives and works, if these not all be gifts? Within the range of *dorea, domata, charismata, diakonai, energemata* and the spiritual weaponry (*hoplates strateias*) the church operates fully. We can state all this as 'the power of God' if we wish to be simple, but in *domata* persons are specified, and in the other elements all members are energised and work with responsibility.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE APPOINTING OF MINISTERIAL AND OTHER GIFTS

What should we understand by the multiplicity of appointed ministries and gifts? The answer should be that the church can thus work by the given fullness of Christ and be competent as the helpmeet of Christ to go forward under his Lordship to accomplish the Father's purpose. We have seen that Christ's fullness is the source of all things needed for that action. To take one example: in our previous Study (September 2000) we stated that often it *seems* that a local church is composed of a pastor and the congregation. Only one of the five *domata* appears to

¹⁵ E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians* in the New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1968, p. 95.

¹⁶ This article is a supplement to his Study '*Dorea, Domata and Charismata*' in the NCTM Pastors' School 2000 notes.

¹⁷ See also Colossians 2:12, 'faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead'; Galatians 3:5, 'works miracles among you'; Galatians 2:8, 'he who worked through Peter . . . worked through me . . .'; etc.

be in action. This system has been in operation in many churches for hundreds of years. One's response to the statement that this is not in accordance with early church practice can seem to threaten persons who are single pastors in their congregations today, especially if they are in any way monarchical pastors.

The answer to this impression is that God appoints both *domata* and *charismata*, to say nothing of other gifts and actions. The single pastor today is not personally responsible for an historical decision of form made by denominations and churches. Neither is it to say that 'domatic' and charismatic gifts (i.e. appointments by God) have not been made in any congregation, nor that ministries and workings are not present and operating today. It may well be that the *domata* may be present but not recognised; may be present in irregular and undetected operation. The single pastor (elder, bishop) is not invalid even if the pattern of the church is irregular. Only where a church for some reason or reasons knowingly rejects the wide and varied ministry such as was in the early church do problems arise. We have historical matters before us which so often determine differentiations from the early church but these are too numerous for us to include in our paper. This may well apply to the *charismata* also. It is difficult to see how God's *dorea*—covering the gift of the Spirit, of Christ, of eternal life and righteousness—can be present and the *domata* and *charismata* rejected as being ever present in their apostolic form and for the apostolic purpose.¹⁸ It has been argued that all gifts were given for the church to be launched, after which it had a normative order.¹⁹ I have seen, personally, in missionary situations, that where new churches arise they take naturally to the form and order we see in the early church as it arises in their community. Leadership, acceptance of that leadership, and the gifts called *domata* and *charismata* come into operation.

As we have seen, one common answer to this problematic is to say that things have changed, and that the church of today is not that of the apostolic era. We are in another era, it is said, and what we do today is as valid as what was done in past eras although it may seem to differ in practice from the apostolic times. History, it is pointed out, has brought us to the paradigm in which we now work. Certainly the paradigm in this era is greatly different from that of the apostolic era, but it has to be said that there was never an apostolic church, nor for that matter was the church a paradigm. There has just been the church which began in the apostolic era and which is only the church truly when it is apostolical in its nature, that is, fulfilling the task for which it was created and moving to its destined *theosis*. All the great New Testament figures of the church, such as Bride, Body, Flock, Vine—and so on—remain as ever they were, and it is by these and in these that the church has its authentic being, and should seek to determine its practices. God as Father Shepherd, Christ as the great Shepherd of the sheep, and the church as the flock must be true today as ever.

THE *KENOTIC* COMMUNITY THE IMAGE OF GOD

LaCugna's claim which we saw—that the church is the living image of the Trinity—must be the key to our whole understanding of the church, both in its *being* and its *action*. If we take the immanent Trinity as subsisting in Itself, yet subsisting by its relationships as it interrelates, interpersonally coinheres, and mutually honours and serves, as also gives to, and receives from one another in this eternal communion (*koinonia*), then this immanent Being is reflected in the inner relationships of the church. In some sense we may speak of the church as

¹⁸ A useful book for study is *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today?* edited by Wayne A. Grudem (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996). Grudem also has helpful material in his *Systematic Theology* (IVP, Leicester and Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1994) pp. 1016–48.

¹⁹ In the previous (September) Study we quoted a statement of Karl Holl by Newton Flew, 'We meet in the Christian community from the beginning onwards, a legalized hierarchy, a divinely ordained order, a divinely sanctioned ecclesiastical law, a Church as an organised institution into which individuals were received. A strictly circumscribed group of Apostles (i.e. James and the Twelve), possesses a permanent divine prerogative to be obtained by no one else, and is therefore authorized for leadership.' We also saw that Newton Flew denied that was the case with the early church, but it is, unfortunately, a view still held by many.

immanent or ontological, but in order for it to be truly known its economic action (*oikonomia*) must also be seen. Only by *God's oikonomia* can we know the church, as only by *oikonomia* is the church really known.

At the heart of *oikonomia* is kenosis, that is, the action of the Persons of the Trinity lies in each setting aside self-saving in favour of self-emptying on behalf of another or the other members of the Trinity. As One, the Persons set aside God-saving in favour of Man-saving and Creation-saving. All is done in the interests of *theosis*. *Kenosis* is not one simple—though remarkable—act of self-emptying as we appear to find it in Philippians 2:1–11, and in particular in verse 7, ‘but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men’. The key to the meaning of *kenosis* is found in the text of verses one to five, namely continually using every resource on behalf of others rather than on behalf of one’s self. The text should be scrutinised closely and in detail as *the way of life of the community in communion (koinonia)*. In the Trinity all members are ‘other person regarding’ and only ever outward looking. For God to preserve His immanence by not exercising Himself in *oikonomia* would be the same as the church preserving itself by having only inner being (*ad intra*) and having no outward working (*ad extra*). Sadly enough she has had such withdrawals from true action.

Once we discover this *kenotic* principle in Philippians chapter two, then we discover it is everywhere; for the Incarnation leading, to the works of Ministry, the Cross, the Resurrection, Ascension and Reigning, is then seen to be done on behalf of others, and not on behalf of oneself, although, indeed, it is the true expression and work of oneself. Not until *kenosis* is the principle by which we live, that is, by divine love (*agape*), will we begin to understand the giving and gifts of God, and the actions of serving and working which are one with those gifts. We will always tend to glory in our servings, workings and uses of gifts. With this in mind we should beware of being soft and sweet in the world—just about ‘doing good’. We must remember that one of the main causes of the Incarnation was to destroy the works of the devil, ‘The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:8). There can be no *theosis* until all evil is destroyed.

In our next Study we will pursue the matter of what seems to be the irregular nature of the church in this age, that is, not having and not working from the gifts. It is because it seems to be irregular that there are so many reformists at work. They may have ontology in their sights. We suffer from those who are always pressing ontology as a standard rather than working from it, as we also suffer from the liberally minded who see ontology as a standard which is to be recognised but not to be considered as possible of accomplishment in a world of sinners. Hence the methodologies which seek to accomplish that which appears to be desirable.

ADDENDUM: THE RENEWAL OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

Every so often an accusation is levelled at a theologian that his theology is disintegrating. Such an accusation was levelled at Archbishop Cranmer as he was shaping the Prayer Book of 1662. History shows us he was integrating in a new way, having lost nothing that was worth retaining. All of us come to a point where we think our own theology is disintegrating. I have more than once thought my theology was disintegrating, yet I have pressed ahead to find, gladly, that it is being enriched by new understandings and so it has been enhanced. In the Studies I have been sharing on Pastoral Dynamics I may appear to some to be disintegrating theologically. When others are linked with you in your theological insights it is painful to see them look apprehensive. We are ever fearful of becoming heretical. We feel comfortable in what we have always believed and practised.

I believe that when we are faced with what seems new, that we should investigate it for all we are worth. We should not, however, take others with us on the excursion. This article is to say that I have not surrendered any of my theology held up to this point. Even so, I believe we would be dishonest if, faced with what is new, we did not investigate it when certain pressures come upon us to be honest and face what confronts us. If further justification be needed then it is that knowing others have entered into this realm and are persons of integrity, we should take heart and proceed even in the face of the charge that one's theology is disintegrating. Also, to have the works of many who have already proceeded is a great help. One can test the works and benefit by their stated insights.

One of the main matters is the nature of the New Testament church and particularly its view of ministry and orders. Were all members of the church in its early days ministers, that is, servants? I think Ephesians 4:11–16 says 'Yes' to this question. Did the church have grades of leaders and was there the equivalent of what we call 'clergy' and 'laity', that is, clergy who were over the rest of the members of church who were laity? The answer here is that this was not wholly the case. The people of God was the whole church, and in that people there were those who, being members of the same body, had a form of leadership. I think that the five ministries which were in tandem—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers—were the leaders within the number of the churches. I think that only the pastors were not itinerating from time to time. They would be primarily the shepherds of the flocks. These are variously called elders (*presbuteroi*), overseers, or bishops (*episcopoi*) and in any church would be plural in number (*presbuteroi*).

The original apostles were not replaced with fresh apostles who took over their previous form of ministry and authority, but it seems probable that there is an apostleship, since the term was used for messengers. Certainly there are prophets up to this day and likewise evangelists, pastors and teachers. Each category derives from Christ who was—and is—apostle, prophet, evangelists, pastor and teacher. We may investigate this matter further.

Why are we anxious to hold the idea that *all* the people of the church constitute 'the laity'? Because this idea is present. Elders have always been, but where people are elders—as in Israel, as in all communities—they are part of the people who have wisdom for the edification of their fellow-beings. We learn much about elders in the Book of Revelation and they are always about the business of ministering to creation, but then only under God. Elders are pastors but are also of the flock, Christ pastoring them and through them, since he is 'the Chief Shepherd of the flock'. Christ had warned against calling anyone 'teacher', 'father', and 'master'—that is, as they who rule. These names belonged only to God and Christ. There are many other terms applied to the church which show its members are all as one—unity. No elder is accorded the ministry of mediation or of a priest. Christ is the true mediator and the continuing High Priest of the community which was called 'a priestly Kingdom' because Christ the High Priest ministers himself through them all to them all.

I think one of the most powerful matters which confronts us is that every member of the body of Christ has been engifted by God. All members work within the triad of manifestations of the Spirit. This triad is composed of the gifts (*charismata*) distributed through the

Holy Spirit, the services (ministries) engifted by Christ the Servant, and the workings (energised operations) by God. Thus the work of the Trinity is manifested throughout the people of the Trinity. All three elements have the goal and purpose of God in view, namely the *telos*, and all are out of love, and for love and with a view to the love *telos*. Otherwise the action of the triad are empty and without effect.

One of the reasons why I believe the people of God (the *laos*) is constitutionally the church is because it is essential for each member, and all members to know they are honourable and held in honour. Democracy, whatever may be its merits, has no place in the church. The question of one or more persons having government ‘for the people’ slides away from the issue that in Christ every person has ministry for every other member. ‘Equality’ is not the word, but ‘wholly a person’ is what applies to each and all. All members need this according of honour to them. By creation each is in the image of God—an extraordinary matter. By redemption each has been won back to that standing with God. By being engifted each is in honourable ministry to all others. Whatever hierarchy there is in the Trinity will be manifested in the church, but the human word ‘hierarchy’ is so befouled we will need to invent another word for it. Of course this cannot be done.

There is much more I could say but I believe that no one should feel threatened by anything I have written. Each has a gift or gifts and each is indispensable to the all. The church is that of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and created for the matter of the *telos*, that is, to be in that ministry and to be the recipients of its *telos*, which will be *theosis*, that is, we will all be partakers (participants in) the Divine Nature. My final word, then, is that I see the church is the *eikon* of the Triune God. It witnesses to the world the immanent Trinity subsisting within itself as Love, each Person coinhering the others, having that communion which is the utmost of all relationships. At the same time it witnesses to the economic Trinity having gone out to create the world, then, in the face of Man’s rebellion redeeming it, and so sanctifying it, glorifying it and perfecting it and all its humanity, that all things live in the liberty of the glory of the children of God, the church—the Bride of Christ—being inducted into the mystery of the Triune God.

Note this: the church has never been perfect. It has never been a closed system but one which is dynamic and constantly active in all its parts. It is not an organisation, but an organism. Ontologically it is ever the community of love. In history both human and other diverse elements have come into it to change its form so that it may be humanly reshaped, but I believe God has ever gone on appointing the ministries and gifts, and these have ever been operating though much of the time unrecognised as such. Her nature can never be changed. Inwardly she is the unique People of God, the Flock, the Vine, the Bride—the helpmeet of her Warrior Bridegroom. We, then, can estimate our true place in this body of heavenly gifts and with others minister as we are called and gifted to do.

The Church Militant—I

INTRODUCTION

This Study is intended to fill out more of the background of God's purpose for the church as well as His purpose in the church. For a time we leave the question of offices and gifts and the order of the church via them, and see the function of the militancy of the church as it is called to use it in its fight against 'the world, the flesh, and the Devil'. This will help to highlight the necessity of the church order in ministries and gifts.

In the 1662 Prayer Book there is a prayer in the Service of Holy Communion which has the preceding bidding, 'Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here in earth'. In the passage of John 15:18–27 Jesus informs his disciples that the hatred borne against him—by which he was yet to be crucified—will be against them as his followers. Those who hate will be *the world*. Jesus has already spoken much about the world, for example, John 7:1–9, in which Jesus said, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil.' In 8:39–59 Jesus had conversation with the leading Jews who in John 7:7 and 15:18ff. he called 'the world'. In 8:39–59 Jesus called the Jews the children of the devil and linked them with his treacherous works. A strong indictment indeed!

Again, in John 16:1–11 Jesus extended his warning of the 15th chapter. The world is going to cast them out of synagogues and persecute them and believe that in so doing they are working out the will of God. Even so, the Holy Spirit will come and convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment and this latter, 'because the prince of this world is judged'.

If anyone should be reluctant to believe a large part of the work of the church was to be in battle with Satan and the world—to say nothing of the flesh—then let him read the account of the judgment of Jesus and the work of the Cross, and having done that go on into the Acts where Satan is active in many ways. Let him read the Epistles and then the magnificent Book of the Revelation in which is the whole battle between Christ and his people against the powers of darkness. History has proved that from the very beginning the people of God have been in conflict with the Serpent of Eden, 'that ancient serpent called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'. This people of God, called the Wife of God in Israel, and the Bride of Christ in the New Testament, have always lived in the midst of the world and been subject to endless attacks by the world.

WHY WE SHOULD UNDERTAKE THIS THEME OF 'THE CHURCH MILITANT'

We should undertake it because the church is still in this battle, and it is no less in its strength than ever it has been. The New Testament shows us that the people of the church were alert to Satan and his stratagems (2 Cor. 2:11), and that Satan was rightly called 'the deceiver of the world' as well as 'the accuser of the brethren'.

We should undertake it because there have ever been days when the world of Satan has sought to penetrate the church and make it worldly-wise, and deceive it into imitating it—the world—and into using its principles in an endeavour to draw others out of the world to it, ostensibly to save them but unable to do so where it has lost its distinctive apostolic nature, its unity, and holiness.

We should undertake this Study to inform us wholly of the battle which is on and the goal of God as against the goal of Satan who is seeking to dethrone God. Without such knowledge

and action we will not be the eschatological people of God in truth. We will be putting down the many happenings to natural causes, the vicissitudes to the quirks of history, and so will have lost the power and authority of the church whose Head is Christ—Lord over all things. We will be hard put to explain biblical accounts of the battle, and we will be among the deceived of the nations.

I find it a curious thing indeed that many of our leading theological works of these days bear no mention of Satan and the world. Even though it is recognised that ‘out there’ there is what we still call ‘the world’, yet we seek to be user-friendly to it because we excuse it in its sin and ignorance and even think of it as more sinned against than sinning! We confess the difficulty the church has in presenting the God who seems to be mindless of the problems of our age and, in fact, of all ages.

THE WOMAN AND THE BATTLE THE SERPENT’S ATTACK IN EDEN

It all began in Eden, so far as we know. The time of the rebellion of the red dragon in heaven as described in Revelation 12 is not given a time frame. That there was a rebellion is evident. Certainly we know the serpent of Genesis chapter 3 was sharply against God. We work, then, within this time frame, that of the creation and the fall of Man, the latter being engendered by the serpent. Certainly all this was within the plan of God, which leads us to believe that the notion of the Lamb slain before the foundation of the earth (Rev. 13:8; cf. 1 Pet. 1:20) was also under consideration by God. The serpent insinuated himself into the matter of Man being favoured by God with Eden. The serpent desired to capture the supremacy in Eden, by breaking the communion between Man and God. We now need to see God’s action towards Man and the serpent.

The Battle and the Bride throughout All History

Man, constituted of the man and the woman, was the image of God. Man was to be God’s covenant-partner by creation and share in fulfilling the plan He had for creation. The marriage of the two was ‘a profound mystery’ according to Paul in that it was protological of the marriage of Christ and his Bride. This meant that in Eden God had His plan for the principle of ‘Woman’ in Eve ‘the mother of all living’, in Israel as the Spouse of God, and the church as the new Eve for the New Adam, Christ. God’s action against Eve seemed to demote her and to the serpent this must have been a triumph: he had interfered with God’s plan for Man! At the same time he suffered a heavy loss: out of Woman would come a male Seed (‘he’) which would destroy him. From then onwards the serpent would work to destroy the child of the Woman, if not the Woman herself. This is exactly the picture in Revelation chapter 12:

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days (vv. 4–6).

Here the serpent seeks to devour the male child but is not successful. From Israel’s being until the Nativity the Woman is significant as God’s wife. She goes on being the church and the serpent pursues her. Being unsuccessful the dragon (serpent) was angry with the Woman, ‘and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring’, who with her constituted the church. We could spend much time talking about the Woman; how in Galatians 4:21–31 she is ‘the free woman’ and, as ‘the Jerusalem above’, ‘she is our mother’. That is, in the Old Testament she is the Spouse of God; in the New Testament she is the church, Christ’s Bride,

and at the same time is Mother of the church; and yet further is the new Holy City, the Jerusalem above, and in that sense is Eden.

We conclude, then, that the Woman who is most powerful is in constant battle with the serpent. This conclusion must include the Woman as the church. In her way she fought along with her Husband in Israel to defeat the idols and what in New Testament language is called ‘the world’—the gods, idols, lords and nations—in order to bring the plan of God to perfection. The present church has been raised up for battling with the world, the flesh and the Devil. The serpent still makes war with her as the Spouse of Christ. She is his warrior Bride. She overcomes the Evil One (cf. 1 John 2:12–14).

The Church Raised up To Do Battle with Satan and His ‘World’

One John 3:4–10 tells a full story. It speaks of sin being lawlessness and makes the clear statement, ‘He who commits sin is of the devil’. This is broad in its implication, ‘No one sins but that sinning has a link, one way or another with the Devil!’ Man prides himself as being autonomous; that is, he can sin by himself! He believes he is autonomous in sinning, but he is in fact the slave of sin and Satan. In fact Paul speaks of Man’s bondage to Satan in Ephesians 2:1–3:

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

This bondage began in Eden and has wearied the world ever since. The vast works of Satan are uncountable but 1 John 3:8 goes on to say, ‘The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil’.

This statement must be put alongside other statements telling the reason for the Incarnation. Let us look at it in its plainness, ‘The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil’.¹ There are many other such reasons (see footnote 1) but here we note this, that *the church is called to be the conjugal partner of Christ in all those purposes being fulfilled!* We have stated the general plan of God—‘the whole counsel of God’—as bringing Man to *theosis*, and the whole creation to the same sanctification, glorification and perfection. In the pursuit of the counsel of His will is included Christ’s destroying all the works of the Devil, and so the church is wholly involved in this.

Note: With every book I read to do with the church, its theology and its practice, I scan the Index to see what is its theology of Satan and the world. It is extraordinary how many omit reference to Satan and the world. It is clear from the New Testament that Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil as, indeed, Satan has ever been out to destroy the works of God, and to make null and void the works of Christ. If pastors and teachers were asked how much time they give in a year to making folk aware of Satan’s devices (2 Cor. 2:11; 4:4; 11:1ff.) then they could assess the degree of responsibility fulfilled in alerting their people to the deceit of Satan. They could also see how much they are personally aware of the battle between Christ and Satan and between Satan and them. The Good Shepherd battles continually with the wolf and saves the sheep from this predator. Do we?

CHRIST AND THE BATTLE WITH SATAN

There has always been a battle since the ancient serpent vied with God in Eden. He has weapons which are equally old. Christ came to destroy these weapons. The church, too,

¹ For other reasons for the Incarnation, see Romans 14:9, ‘For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living’; 2 Corinthians 5:15, ‘And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised’; John 10:10, ‘The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’. There are more such reasons.

has been given weapons for warfare. So there are questions we can ask, namely: (i) what is the weaponry the Devil uses? (ii) what is it that Christ does which defeats Satan? and (iii) what is the weaponry the church uses? These are questions which call for answers.

The answer to the first question is that in Eden the serpent used the weapon of deceit. Jesus once said he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and we read above that he deceives the whole world. Having deceived and brought Man into guilt he then uses the weapon of accusation; false accusation and also accusation with some truth in it. This is a powerful weapon since every human being is guilty of having sinned. How then can his weapons be rendered ineffective? At this point we can say, in principle, ‘The truth renders deceit powerless: justification by grace counters guilt accusation’.

The immediate answer to question 2 is found in Hebrews 2:14–15:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

Man is under Satan’s bondage by his accusation of sin whereby he alarms the subject to fear of judgment, which is, at the same time, fear of death. Christ, in bearing the sin of all sinners, withdrew the sting of death which is guilt before the law. The weapon of accusation is thus struck out of the hand of the Devil.

The third question, ‘What is the weaponry the church uses?’ is answered in a number of passages where spiritual weapons are said to be given to the church. Here we simply quote Revelation 12:11: ‘And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death’. A little later we will see what all this means.

CHRIST AND SATAN: THE STORY OF THE SEED

We have seen the statement, ‘The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil’. The battle was to be joined within Christ’s Incarnation. Christ knew this. We saw in John 10:10 that he was aware of what he came for in this regard, ‘The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly’. In the context of this utterance is the wolf who comes to ravage the sheep, but the Good Shepherd protects them, giving his life for them. The thief is the serpent in the Garden, stealing their communion with God, handing them over to death in their sin, and virtually destroying them forever. Christ, we repeat, knew what he was doing—destroying the works of the Devil.

We saw from Revelation 12 that ‘that ancient serpent who is called Satan and the devil’ was awaiting the birth of the male child (lit. ‘male son’) but that he was foiled by God, in terms of Psalm 2, when the child was caught up to the throne of God.² This event has been linked with the murder of the innocents under Herod. At the time of his appearing at ‘about thirty years’ he, being baptized, was led by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1) into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Why should the Holy Spirit lead him into this situation? Just as in Psalm 2, God testified to His Son being Messiah–King—so at his baptism had the Father testified the same. Satan was the one power—if any—which could make this last Adam to fall. Far from falling he triumphed and ‘returned from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit’, for after this encounter ‘Satan rested for a season’.

On his return Jesus went to Nazareth where he proclaimed:

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

² cf. Psalm 2:8–8 and Revelation 12:5.

Later, at Caesarea, Peter described Christ's ministry which began in Galilee:

You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him (Acts 10:36–38).

Peter and others understood that ministry as 'he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him'. Jesus was out 'to destroy the works of the Devil'. And he did. Although Palestine was free of idols it was not free of demons who are always associated with idols. There were many demons as the Synoptic Gospels show. One man had a legion of them. Another woman was bowed with a 'spirit of infirmity' and Mary Magdalene was freed from seven demons. The demons often cried out at Christ's approach. In the case of the demonic person of Gadara, they pleaded not to be sent into the abyss before their appointed time. Jesus exorcised such spirits, and on two occasions sent disciples out to do the same, but they went out to proclaim the gospel. It has been conjectured that the disciples had a 'pilot run' for the apostolic ministry which would later be theirs.

At Caesarea Philippi, Peter confessed Jesus as 'the Christ, the Son of the living God', only to fail to see all the implications of this. Seeking to divert Jesus from the Cross he was rebuked by his Master, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men' (Matt. 16:23). There can be no doubt that Peter was attacked by Satan. The battle was ever in action. In Luke 11:14–23 Jesus spoke about the strong man and the stronger-than-the-strong-man—Satan and himself—predicting the strong man would be cast down by himself. What is interesting is: (i) the fact that he would divide the spoil taken from the strong man; and (ii) the saying that 'He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters'. This is a solemn statement. Human beings are either for him or against him, for Satan or against him.

It was in John's Gospel that Jesus spoke much about Satan, the impending clash ahead of him and the disciples. In John 7:1–9 there is an important description of the opposition of the world to him:

After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of Tabernacles was at hand. So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.' For even his brothers did not believe in him. Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.' So saying, he remained in Galilee.

Whilst there is no direct mention in this passage of 'the prince [ruler] of this world', there is in later pronouncements. Here we see the deep opposition of the world to him, and it is of this he speaks in John 15:18 – 16:11. He speaks of the cause of its opposition to him, namely, 'it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil'. This shows his determined opposition to it, and his intention to unmask it. It is clear that the world is the Jewish opposition to him, which would include many Pharisees, Sadducees and the temple hierarchy. In John 8:42–47 Jesus told Jews who spoke against him:

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.

He was firstly saying they were of the Devil and then describing the Devil in very strong terms, ‘He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.’ This was a total unmasking of the serpent of Eden, the very competent spin-doctor. Jesus had come with the truth, and spoke the truth. The Devil spoke lies. Jesus came to give life. The Devil was a murderer. It is pertinent to say here that Israel’s state of being was terribly wrong. This was a people who did not act in accordance with their forefather Abraham. They could not be a true witness to God when they persecuted His Son—the Messiah.

In John 12:31–32 Jesus made a clear proclamation of what lay ahead. It is here we notice that Jesus called Satan ‘the prince of this world’. He cried out to the crowd:

‘Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ He said this to show by what death he was to die.

This was a most significant statement as it made public his opposition to Satan and Satan’s ‘world’. There is a decisive, climactic event ahead which will defeat the opposition of the world and its Ruler. It reminds us of Jesus’ statement in Luke 11:21 regarding the overcoming of the strong man by the stronger-than-the-strong man.

On the night when Jesus and the disciples were in the upper room Satan was working to destroy his hated enemy. He worked through Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew of this opposition, and referred to the action of betrayal which Judas was about to undertake, saying, ‘I am not speaking of you all; I know whom I have chosen; it is that the scripture may be fulfilled, “He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.”’ On this basis Jesus gave a morsel of dipped bread to Judas Iscariot, at which point ‘Satan entered into him’. Jesus told him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly’. Judas went fleetingly to so do, and Jesus talked on about many things. Then, in John 14:30–31 he spoke of the coming of Satan to oppose him and to destroy him. He said, ‘I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go hence.’ Doubtless he was explaining that Satan had no *right* to do anything to him, for he was sinless and doing only the Father’s will, but because Jesus would take the sin of the world upon him, Satan would thus have great power to accuse him as sinful.

In Luke’s Gospel it was shortly after this that the chief priests, captains of the temple, soldiers and elders came to apprehend him. This was the world of which Jesus had spoken and all of them were Jews. He said to them, ‘When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness’ (Luke 22:53). This again was a strong statement. Jesus was saying that at this point in his history that an hour had come in which this ‘world’ had ‘an authority [*exousia*] of darkness’. We see, then, that the seeming triumph of Satan and his world was about to be enacted. Enacted it was with lies in a trial which was not truly legal. Even so, Jesus witnessed a good witness before Pilate. The text of John 18:33–37 brings out the falsity of the Jews opposing Christ, and his own true kingship. He has come into the world to bear witness to the truth:

Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.’ Pilate said to him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.’

Pilate, it seems, was convinced of Jesus' innocence, if not of his sovereignty of the kingdom which 'was not of this world'. So powerful was the world that he could not gainsay its political pressure. This man, Jesus of Nazareth, would have to go to the Cross, and Pilate would see to it that the customary superscription which named the so-called malefactor would tell the world who hung there, namely JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS. The dislike of the Jews made them ask Pilate to change the wording, but he said, 'What I have written, I have written'.

The Act of the Crucifixion: The Battle for Christ's Destruction

In Acts 2:23, 4:10, and 5:30 Peter accused Israel, and particularly those leaders whom Jesus had called 'the world', that they—the Jews—had crucified Christ. In Acts 4:23–33 the church—called 'their friends'—prayed to God, and interpreted the event of the Cross in the light of Psalm 2, a powerful understanding to be sure. They spoke of the crucifixion being at the hands of 'both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel'. The 'world' is a wider grouping here. Satan we know to have been the power behind them all, and not only behind Judas' act of betrayal. Later, in 1 Corinthians 2:6ff., Paul talks about God's pre-creation intention to glorify His elect and says, 'None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (v. 8). Who then were the rulers of this age? They were variously seen as Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Jewish leaders or even the great principalities and powers so often spoken of in the New Testament—especially those which were evil.³ When we come to the actual event of the crucifixion we see the hatred of the world. This includes the people caught in a mad blood lust, screaming and chanting 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' There was jeering, mocking, cursing and spitting:

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, "I am the Son of God."' And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way (Matt. 27:39–44).

This passage reminds us of Psalm 69 which is a Messianic Psalm and shows the people have him in derision, 'More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies'. Even more powerful in showing the hatred of all the dynamic evil forces are both fallen celestial creatures and demonic ones as well as human enemies of Christ are the verses of Psalm 22:11–18:

Be not far from me,
 for trouble is near
 and there is none to help.
 Many bulls encompass me,
 strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
 they open wide their mouths at me,
 like a ravening and roaring lion.
 I am poured out like water,
 and all my bones are out of joint;
 my heart is like wax,
 it is melted within my breast;
 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
 and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
 thou dost lay me in the dust of death.
 Yea, dogs are round about me;
 a company of evildoers encircle me;

³ For the evil principalities and powers see Romans 8:38; Ephesians 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 2:14–15.

they have pierced my hands and feet—
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
they divide my garments among them,
and for my raiment they cast lots.

In all this Satan and the world did not prevail. In fact Paul tells us in Galatians 6:14 that the world was crucified. Most telling are Hebrews 2:14–15 and Colossians 2:14–15:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

. . . having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

The key to it all was that in his death Christ took the guilt of sin, suffered and destroyed it and so destroyed the fear of death and judgment. Satan's weapon was destroyed, and the world from now on would accuse the people of God in vain. As we saw in Revelation 12:11: 'And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death'. Christ had overcome Satan, his principalities and powers, his demonic forces and his human adherents, by the work of the Cross, which, in the eyes of the world, was to destroy him! Hallelujah! Not only had Christ as the new Moses led his people on their new Exodus, but by the Cross and Resurrection had led them through death into resurrection life.

CHRIST AND SATAN, THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

This is where we see that Christ had truly destroyed the works of the Devil. The Cross and Resurrection forever undercut the miserable power the Devil had had to accuse and bring his victims into great suffering. The indignity of death that had had sin's sharp sting in it had now changed:

Death cannot keep his prey,
Jesus, my Saviour;
He tore the bars away,
Jesus, my Lord!⁴

At the point of Pentecost it was shown that the little group of people who had faith in Christ had triumphed. The Holy Spirit had come with all his powers of proclaiming the word of Christ's victory over the world, the flesh and the Devil. Through Peter and the Apostles the world was confronted with its heinous sin of crucifying the Son of God, the true Messiah of Israel. Convicted of their dreadful act of rejecting and murdering their Messiah, three thousand repented and were granted forgiveness of sins by baptism in the name of Christ, and they, too, received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The leaders of Israel—most of whom were of 'the world'—were alarmed. In the events following Pentecost the leaders and many of the people hardened in their stance towards the new company of the faithful.

It is here we see that Christ, having essentially destroyed the works of the Devil through the Cross and Resurrection, has now called his church throughout the ages to be with him to share in his work of destroying the works of the Devil on the basis of the victory obtained at Calvary and through his rising from the dead.

⁴ Robert Lowry, *New Creation Hymn Book* vol. 1, no. 85.

Note: This takes us back to our proposition set out early in this Study, that the church as the Body of Christ, under his Headship and as his new Eve—his helpmeet—must see that its task and ministry is to do battle with Satan and his world. This battle is not to be seen as a merely defensive action, but as an offensive one. This is why all ecclesial theology should be shot through with the reality of the battle with the powers of darkness, and always pointing to the ultimate victory over all evil. If this dimension and this action is missing from theology, then it is greatly deficient. If it is missing from the pastoral life and ministry, then it is an inadequate and powerless theology.

The Battle Joined

From the very beginning at Pentecost, Satanic and worldly attacks began on the church and have not let up even to this day. The apostles were indicted as trouble makers by the Sanhedrin and warned and threatened against further action. The incident of the lying of Ananias and Sapphira brought forth the question from Peter: ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land . . . How is it that you contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God’. The chastisement of God was to bring the couple to their death and yet, far from warning folk off, more pressed into the church.

The killing of Stephen was of ‘the world’ for it was the Jews who sent him to his death. A wholesale persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem took place. Not that this furthered the power of the Devil since ‘those who were scattered abroad went about preaching the word’. Philip went down to Samaria, and the disciples followed, giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who believed. One, Simon Magus, desired to have the gift of giving the Holy Spirit to people. He was rebuked for his request: having been a magician his motive was not good, and Peter said, ‘For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity’ (Acts 8:23).

In chapter 13 we meet one Elymas, also a magician, and he sought to turn Sergius Paulus from the Christian faith to which the preaching of Paul and Barnabas had been drawing him. Paul used his apostolic power to cause the magician to go blind, temporarily. This Elymas was a servant of Satan. Then, as the apostles proclaimed the gospel in many centres and countries, we find that opposition arose and in some places it was highly organised. Certainly the church was under the pressure of opposing powers. We must understand that the principalities and powers set out to defeat the church and Christ’s work of putting down all the enemies of God and Man, as shown to us in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28:

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

This, of course, is Christ continually pursuing the mandate the Father has given him to destroy the works of the Devil. The remainder of the Book of Acts includes the story of the violent persecution of the church by the world. The text of the Epistles includes the constant sense of the opposition of Satan and his world. The material is too profuse to be able to include it in this Study, but its teaching is in the nature of ‘we are more than conquerors’. So much is made of the defeat of the world, the flesh and the Devil by way of reporting the victory of Christ, his ruling over all creation both celestial and terrestrial, as also the insistence upon the manner in which believers can, and must, overcome the Evil One. Romans 16:20, ‘then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet’; James 4:7, ‘Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you’; 1 Peter 5:8–9, ‘Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is

required of your brotherhood throughout the world'; 1 John 2:13–14, 'I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father . . . I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.' These all fit with the nature of Revelation 12:11: 'And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death'.

It is when we come to the Book of the Revelation that we are faced with the fact that the battle against the people of God—the fight between Christ and Satan—virtually takes up the text of the Scripture. Undoubtedly Christ's victory of the Cross places all history in his hands in the form of the seven-sealed book, and opening that book means the action that flows first from the seven seals, then the seven trumpets and then the seven bowls of wrath. Linked with these openings of seals, trumpets and bowls is the story of the red dragon, the beast and the second beast or false prophet. The three constitute an evil, imitation trinity. Very much linked with them is Babylon, the unholy woman, the evil counterpart of the True Woman, the church.

The Book of the Revelation opens in the first chapter with the magnificent vision of Christ. The two chapters of Christ's letters are written in the urgent situation of enemies within and without the church. Chapters 4 and 5 show the sovereign rule of God over creation, including the victory of His triumphant Son, the Lamb once slain. The sixth chapter speaks of those slain for the gospel's sake. Chapter 7 shows us the elite people of God, the new Israel, whilst also it shows the victory of salvation come to innumerable people. One cannot read chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14 of this book without seeing how vicious and brutal is the attack upon the people of God, that is, the church. One cannot but see at the same time how strong is the church in the face of the deep conspiracy of Satan and his celestial powers. The seventeenth chapter shows us Babylon, the unholy city, the mother not of pure humanity but as 'the mother of harlots'. In the eighteenth chapter we see the judgment of this vicious queen of corruption, much to the dismay of all who are worldly and have had traffic with her. Chapter 19 resounds firstly with 'the mighty voice of a great multitude in heaven' as praise to God for destroying the corrupt city, for in 18:20 they were thus bidden, 'Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her'. There is joy as the Bride is shown to be pure and virginal, for her marriage will be the triumph feast of all history. 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'

The second half of chapter 19 is shown to be the final battle between Satan and his forces and Christ and his army. The evil forces are outfaced by the heavenly army so that the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. The Devil and his adherents come into the same fate in the twentieth chapter. In chapters 21 and 22 the church has triumphed over the serpent, and the Holy City, full established, has come down to earth out of heaven. The full victory is now apparent. All that is evil has been destroyed. Glory reigns.

CONCLUSION: THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST AND CHRIST'S BRIDE

History is 'A Tale of Two Cities', the original city of Eden which is there all through history until it emerges beautiful and triumphant at the end of time to be the habitation of God's creatures for all eternity. The serpent in Eden knew where history was going and set out to thwart God in His plan. The conflict has always been there and it was essential that the unholy city be overthrown, which it was. In the end chastity and the beauty of glory triumph over the sordid and the evil.

History is also 'A Tale of Two Armies'. The evil sets out to demean God, His creation and all His creatures. The savagery of this foul force is beyond description, but is doomed. Ultimately it must face him who is 'King of kings and Lord of lords' and be decimated. It cannot

be permitted to rule over God's fair creation, and certainly not 'the new heaven and the new earth'.

History is 'A Tale of Two Gods', for although God is God by right of true being, the usurping monarch—'the prince of this world'—is no true king. He does not know how to reign. Terror and mayhem are his tools and none of his ways is peace. In his jealousy of the true God he devises a false trinity, but it lacks the communion and the love of the True Trinity, and so it cannot build in love. It can only destroy and ultimately is set for destruction.

History is 'A Tale of Two Queens'. One is the Bride of God, Bride of Christ, the other the woman of the red dragon and the beast. One is pure, virginal, fit to be wedded to deity, the other a vicious harlot who shows her gaudy beauty and beguiles by her wiles, but cannot produce true children.

All of these titles certainly fit, but we must see that all of this happens on the moral level, or on the immoral level. It is a matter of righteousness, truth, holiness, goodness and love on the one hand, and unrighteousness, deceit, unholiness, badness and hatred on the other. If we look at the list, then we may be drawn into thinking it is physical battles which happen in this conflict between God and Satan. Physical battles waged in the history of Man may be involved in some way in the spiritual battles, but they are not the warfare of which we speak. Satan energises the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2), and God energises the people of salvation (Phil. 2:13). Human battles are analogies of the spiritual wars, but the latter are in the unseen realm, though manifested on the level of the seen.

What are we saying? We are saying that before creation God planned the history of His creation. In time a celestial creature He had made had the wild ambition to be as God, to know good and evil, to become *a* ruler of all creation if not *the* ruler of it. Since this would be the horror not only of anarchy in the affairs of heaven and earth, but—even more—of failed Godhead, we were alarmed then. Such madness could not even be contemplated! Such works must be destroyed! So God chose to make a people for Himself whom He would bring to *theosis*, into conformity with His own Triune Being. That people has ever been His own, at least since the time of faithful and loving Abel.

In the last days that faithful people has been called the ecclesia, the Body of Christ, the Bride of the Bridegroom, the Flock of the Good Shepherd, the Branches in the Vine, the Helpmeet—and so on. Her vocation is to be one with her Head and his working out the Father's plan for *theosis*. Now this vocation she has followed is fulfilling, and will go on working in a most creditable way. What concerns us at this moment—that is, in our day—is whether she is alert to Christ's 'destroy[ing] the works of the devil'. Is it possible that Satan has blinded not only the eyes of those who believe not (2 Cor. 4:4), but also the eyes of many who have believed. Has the constant, repetitive opposition and suffering hedged us away from full witnessing? Have we opted for more comfort? In short: are we in the business of destroying the works of the Devil or are we out of that business? Is our theology constantly cognisant of the church as it confronts Satan and the powers of evil?

At the last I would say that never has there been in history such a strong, living organism as the church which, itself, has been equipped by God with innumerable gifts, ministries and weapons—many of them supernatural in quality—so that the church, thus equipped, can accomplish what no other organisation, system or ideology can possibly accomplish. That is one further matter to be discussed. This whole Study has been worked out *within* Scripture, and in a principal way, but what of its interpretation and application in this age? How ought we to interpret the matter of Satan and the adverse powers which oppose the church, and what of the gifts of creation which are used against her? Most congregations today are deeply interested in this whole theme. They need to see something of the outworking of the defeat of Satan and the world in history. We will try to deal with these matters in a coming Study, but meanwhile let us not be ignorant of Satan's stratagems.

The Church Militant—II

INTRODUCTION: THE CHURCH GOD'S PRIMARY CONCERN

In our previous Study of 'The Church Militant' we traced the battle between Satan and God, the promise of Genesis 3:15 that God would put enmity between the Seed of Woman and the seed of the serpent, and that the Seed would destroy the serpent. We saw the threat the Woman posed to the serpent, how Christ has defeated Satan and his world system and world powers at the Cross, and how the church as the Bride of Christ is his Helpmeet in the holy battle until it climaxes in God's *telos*, the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. In this second Study on 'The Church Militant' we are to some degree repetitive, but at the same time are seeking to open up more of the modes of battle and to see where the church is in this battle in our own age, the age of the eschaton.

The title above may appear to be astonishing at first sight. We have said, all along, that *theosis*—the bringing of Man into eternal fellowship with God—is His primary aim. At the same time it would seem that the Kingdom of God is His primary aim. In fact *theosis* and the Kingdom of God are bound together. We know that His love is for all His created world, and that the creation is His Kingdom, but then the highest regard He has in His Kingdom is for Man as He created him—in His own image! Man will be one with Him in the victory of His Kingdom at the end of the age! From one angle this seems a high place of Man in creation, and the Kingdom in its ultimacy is staggering beyond belief, yet we need to be prompted from time to time genuinely to recognise that Man *is* the highest of all creatures, even higher than angelic creatures whom one day he will judge. To no other is it given to be seated with Christ in the heavenly places. It is because of Man that God in His Triune Being first redeems, then sanctifies, glorifies and perfects all creation and Man in particular. No other set of creatures is formed into the Bride of God's Son, and no other creature is wedded into the Holy Family of God.

The matter of the Kingdom is not placed second to the Divine Marriage, but is part of God's intention for all His creation. By creating He has shown Himself Author of all creation, and so the one with authority over it. His intention is to bring it to that climax when it will be a Kingdom wholly subject to Him, and He has in mind that this very Kingdom will be constituted 'a kingdom of priests' unto God. This will mean that Man has been made to be essential to it, and the highest order of it.

Whichever way we look at the church and the eternal Kingdom, we see its people are the elect of God and that He prizes them above all things. As we read Scripture we see on the one hand that He cares for His elect, has an everlasting covenant with them, and so loves them that He gives up His beloved Son for them. On the other hand, where His people are truly aware of His love and His mercy and know they are ordained to life, we see an unremitting love for Him, and a determination to let nothing destroy their destiny, their living with Him for ever. It may be said that the world's greatest suffering and martyrdom is found in the people of God from Abel to the projected end of time.

So in these words we claim the certainty of the church being the prime object of God, and its glorification His unchanging intention, as also His aide in fulfilling His goal.

The Implications of God's Electing Love for His People

As humanity lives in this creation it seems naturally to give significance to certain categories of life. It tends to line itself up with what seems primary, what seems to be most successful, what seems to be the fashion, and with the modes that are adopted for living generally.

According to the context of living for persons and peoples, culture appears to be the strongest factor of all for determining most human thinking and perception. On what we might call the ordinary human level, life and society are evaluated so that people tend to follow what is the pattern of their culture.

With this kind of evaluation the church is assessed by society along with many other things. In the Apostolic period the church was not even partly accepted by society, but was something almost foreign to it, and at the most an adjunct. In the era of Christendom the church was a strong and settled force in Western society. It had its conflicts with paganism and generally overcame pagan society in Europe and parts of Asia. Late in Christendom's history its extraordinary missionary probes into what we now call 'the Third World' extended its influence enormously as European nations were also colonising that same Third World. The history of this action is most complex and difficult to interpret.

So far as the people of God is concerned its history began with Abel and then with that progeny of Seth who 'began to call on the name of the LORD'. These were named 'the sons of God' but they were eventually attracted by 'the daughters of men' and married them, which led to a society which became so evil that 'The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Gen. 6:5). This wickedness called for the judgment of the Flood. Only Noah and his family could be classed as 'the people of God'. It was not long before much of the resultant society of the children of Noah became idolaters. It was to one of these idolaters, a man by the name of Abram ('exalted father'), that God appeared, showing His glory and making him to be Abraham—'the father of a multitude of nations'.

Behind the story stretching from Abel to Abraham and then further towards modern times was the remarkable 'everlasting covenant' of God. God had created His people and was developing His intention for them. In our last Study we saw that in the very Garden in which God placed Man there was the serpent—later defined as 'that ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'. The Apostle John also later states that all who sin are of the Devil. We take it, then, from John's description (1 John 3:12), that Cain 'was of the evil one and murdered his brother . . . Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous'. It is clear, then, that from the beginning the serpent attacked the people of God, and that up until the choosing of Abraham the people of God lived in the hostile action of the serpent and its active wiles. The most powerful opposition of the serpent was in the devising of idolatry and its cultural spread through the nations. The battle was for the human race, and Abraham's designation as the father of the faithful meant that the destiny of the human nations was bound up in him. In him would all the nations of the earth be either blessed or cursed—no little matter!

Israel as the declared people of God¹ faced the unremitting opposition of the serpent and its force of idols and active demonic powers. This evil force sought continuously to marginalise this people of God and to destroy it. The true people of God—'the holy remnant'—continuously fought the serpent and its force, looking to the coming of Messiah who would liberate his people from the onslaughts of evil. We are not here detailing a minor matter in history, but showing the splitting apart of all celestial creatures and of the human race. Israel always knew painfully its call given by God. Had it not been given such responsibility through covenant and law, then it would not have suffered so much.

As we saw in our last Study, Christ came as the Deliverer from 'the world, the flesh and the Devil' and in his ministry constantly defeated Satan, and at the Cross and through the Resurrection, definitively broke his power. At the same time he was announcing the Kingdom of God, showing its power over the kingdom of Satan, and training his people to be those who proclaimed the victory of the Kingdom of God, setting their sights upon this ministry.

¹ This is a constant theme of the writers of the Old Testament and is the subject of prophets. God has chosen Israel to be His people both as His elect (Deut. 7:6–11) as the priest nation among all the nations (Exod. 19:5–6) and as God's witness in history (Isa. 43:8–21).

In the midst of this he said to Peter and the disciples, ‘I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it’ (cf. Matt. 16:17–19).²

THE CHURCH THE PREVAILING POWER IN HISTORY

We saw in our previous Study that Christ proclaimed his victory over the ‘strong man’ and showed he would judge the system called ‘the world’ of which Satan was ‘ruler’ or ‘leader’, and that he would cast out Satan. The disciples were Christ’s people, and as such they would earn the undying hatred and the unremitting persecution of Satan’s people, the world. He told them to be prepared for this. His statement of Matthew 16:18 that he would build his church and that ‘the gates of Hades would not prevail against it’ meant that the church would be more powerful than death itself.

The statement ‘gates of Hades’ has been interpreted as (i) the powers of death, that is, ‘all the hosts of darkness’ who fortify themselves against attack; or (ii) the power of death to hold humanity in death. In Revelation 1:17–18 Jesus tells John, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades’. It seems that both ideas are contained here, so that everything of evil connected with death and Hades—the place of the dead—is under attack by the church. This is true, for Christ has defeated Satan who ‘has the power [*kratos*] of death’ in Man’s fear of death, that is, his fear of judgment. Sin, the law and death are connected in 1 Corinthians 15:54–56, for sin is the sting of death and the power of sin is by the law, that is, by the guilt of the law. Hebrews 2:14–15 and Colossians 2:14–15 bear this out.

It is certain that Christ’s words tell us the powers of death and darkness shall not prevail against the church for it is Christ, anyway, who has the keys of death and hell. These he has won in his battle at Calvary against the forces which heaped up there to destroy him. Had the rulers of this world known the outcome of Christ’s Cross-suffering, ‘they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’.

The main point for us is that the church was to be a fighting force under Christ its Head and Warrior. This force not only would not be defeated but it, too, could not be withstood. The barrier of the citadel of evil withstanding, it would be overcome. At first sight this claim seems ridiculous for the church is not given to power politics and its weapons are not the armaments used by all material forces of this world. Of course when we think of Satan using the power of death to intimidate a person and see the important factor of Christ’s resurrection we begin to gain an understanding of the church’s powers.

THE EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONRY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

When we come to the matter of the people of God and its powers, our enquiry begins in the Garden of Eden. What special equipment does Man have that he may fight hostile powers? The answer must be, ‘Man is constituted as the image of God’. As such he reflects all the powers of God. This includes the wisdom of God. Of course he is only truly God’s image when he is in full union with God. Apart from that union he is not dynamically the image. In communion with God he has godly powers. Whilst Man has a general brilliance in being human, he does not have true wisdom outside that union and communion with God.

² In this passage—Matthew 16:17–19—Jesus addresses his remarks to Peter using the singular ‘thou’, so that it could appear as though Peter alone was addressed as being given the power of binding and loosing. In Matthew 18:15–20, in speaking to the same disciples of the church and the power of loosing and binding, Jesus uses the second person plural—‘you’. In John 20:22–23 Jesus gives to all the disciples present in the Upper Room the power of loosing and binding. In the Matthew passages what is bound or loosed by the disciples will already have been bound and loosed in heaven. It would seem that the apostolic college has, corporately, the ministry of binding and loosing, whether in the proclamation of forgiveness for redemption, or in the inner discipline of the church.

His powers in God are remarkable. Created by God's word—'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' (cf. Heb. 11:3)—Man lives fully only by the word of God, but then his use of the word of God places him above all other powers. For this reason the serpent in Eden invented another word—his own serpentine word. When the primal couple received this word—against God's word to them—then they lost power. By contrast Abel knew faith in God's word and triumphed—'he being dead, yet speaketh'. Hebrews chapter 11 speaks of the battle of faith down through history, including martyrdom, so that in the ultimate the people of faith were always triumphant.

We have noted that the covenant people always have the protection and power of covenant. God is their God and He will not leave them nor forsake them. He lives in their midst. They will always do valiantly. Psalm 68 is a good psalm showing that God was always at warfare with the enemies of Israel. There are more than just echoes here of past victories. Back there in Exodus Israel had sung of His triumph, 'I will sing unto the LORD for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and rider he has thrown into the sea', and then that thrilling ascription to Yahweh 'Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?' (Exod. 15:11). Psalm 68 needs to be read, time and again, all verses.

The Psalms constantly repeat the theme and motif of victory. They are strong in that they have His law which is the most wonderful gift of all, and with His law comes the very wisdom of God. As for the people who seek to undo God in the manner of the rebellious nations of Psalm 2, their high aim is ridiculed by God. His Messiah will undo them all: 'Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'

What authentic wisdom *do* the nations have? What sapiency *can* they have? God's people work by faith and the word. They have relational knowledge of God. They work within the wisdom of the Creator, in the orbit of the everlasting covenant, within the whole counsel of God which is His willed wisdom. This knowledge and wisdom is enormous alongside which the so-called wisdom of the gods and lords is seen to be ridiculous. The description of the weaponry in Ephesians 6:10–18 really derives from Isaiah 59:15–19:

Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intervene; then his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle. According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render requital. So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives.

When we look at the weapons they are righteousness, salvation, and 'garments of vengeance'. Even the sword is not mentioned although it is certainly understood. Again, in Ephesians 6:10–18 the weapons are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God, the latter being the sword of the Spirit. From the first fiat uttered at the time of creation, 'Let there be light!', to the last fiat, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness', the word of God was creative. In time, the same word is sustaining the creation; in blessing and in cursing; in moving all history in the covenantal word, the word of law and the word of prophecy. This word of God had been the sword which had carved out history and at the same time it was the weapon which the people of God wielded against the serpent and its ilk. So, then, all these weapons constitute the whole armour of God such as is seen in action in Isaiah 59. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 the weapons are named as faith, hope and love. In these two New Testament contexts there is talk of great warfare and it is war with Satan and the powers of darkness, with 'principalities [and] powers against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places'. It is no light battle,

and it says much that the church participates in this struggle with her Lord. In 2 Corinthians 10:3–6 Paul describes the battle and the enemies:

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

Whilst Paul does not tell us the nature of the weapons, we see they are quite powerful to ‘destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience’, both within the church and outside of it. We must see the weapons as used on a worldwide scale and, as indicated in the Ephesians passage, on a cosmic scale. If that seems to us of vast proportions then let us see that the church has been given all the fullness of Christ and that the fullness is all the gifts and weapons of Christ, for on the Cross he fought the cosmic battle which overcame Satan and all his support troops. The weapons are spiritual, and of great efficiency. There is no part of creation where they do not operate, where he does not destroy the power of Satan in the ‘principalities and powers . . . the world rulers of the present darkness . . . the spiritual hosts of wickedness’. Human wars and battles, though often part of this great conflict, are dwarfed into comparative insignificance against the vastness of these cosmic struggles. Yet, amazingly enough, it is the church which is battling through these issues, led by Christ the Lord and Warrior.

When we place the battle on such a cosmic scale it may seem to be an exaggeration of the warfare Christ and the church are conducting. In certain moods we may think we are merely being romantic about battle as though it were in the vein of the old Crusades. How wrong we would be! The battle is daily being waged. It was joined in Eden, and ever since has been fierce in its unremitting warfare. The outcome of victory was battled out at the Cross and by means of Christ’s Resurrection, Ascension and Reigning, but the church is in it up to the hilt—so to speak. She is not permitted to depart the field of war. If our last Study covered much of her battle this Study must show further the extent and dimensions of its action.

The Battle Mode of Gifts and Weaponry

By this we mean that the church’s armoury is not limited to the weaponry we have described above. When words such as ‘righteousness’, ‘salvation’, ‘truth’, ‘faith’, ‘hope’, ‘love’, ‘the gospel of peace’ and ‘the word of God’ are stated, then we know the warfare is made via these gifts God has given to the church, indeed by all the gifts given to the church which we have mentioned under the terms *dorea*, *domata* and *charismata*—for all these elements are part of the fullness of Christ which he has given to the church, his body, his people, his flock, his bride, his helpmeet, his warrior wife.

What are we saying in matter of practical fact? We are saying that the whole life and activity of the church constitutes the battle she is undertaking. For example, see John chapter 17 when Christ is praying that his people will be the church militant. He prays that they may be as one in Trinitarian configuration as he and the Father are one, that they—his people—may be in the Father and the Son as the Father and the Son are in each other. This will be the wonderful witness to the world that God has sent His Son into the world. At the same time the church will represent a formidable phalanx. The verses of Philippians 1:27–30 voice this:

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.

The love, unity and communion of the people of God is frightening to Satan and evil powers. ‘You stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents’ is a spiritual echo of the ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’. By the same token we cannot have such unity without love, for love is a major weapon whilst at the same time a major gift. We must think of it as being both at the one time. We must think of faith and hope in the same way. On the one hand the shield of faith destroys the fiery darts of the wicked one—that is, the accusations hurled at the saints before the throne of God night and day—and at the same time it is the faith which halts the Devil as he comes roaring against us. Halts him, yes, but also causes him to turn and flee, so much terror we put into his heart. ‘I write to you, young men, because you are strong and you have overcome the Evil One.’ Faith, hope and love are ways of fighting the Enemy.

It is now time for us to discuss the resources that are ours in the fullness of the Beloved, the fullness given to his church. The Father has given His fullness to the Son—‘The Father has loved the Son and given all things into his hand’; ‘All things have been delivered to me by my Father’; ‘The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son’; ‘For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself’. The Son gives that fullness to his church that all in it may be ‘filled with all the fullness of God’ via the Son and the Spirit, for you are ‘filled full’ in him. How can we speak of a church being in this power and fullness when it is not competent in love, as the church at Ephesus showed itself to the risen, triumphant Christ in Revelation 2:1–7? Christ would come quickly and take the church’s candlestick out of its place unless they repented and turned and did the first works—of love—again. The days were urgent, the battle joined, the people of God in peril. Without the weapon of love—that is, the gift of love—they would be overcome by the enemy. The ‘works’ of some of those churches of Asia were not good works, but the works of some churches were good works, for they had overcome the enemy. To them, eschatological promises are given regarding Eden, Paradise, the Holy City and their part in that final *telos*.

God Who Gives All Things: Church Ministry

We are now to see afresh the equipping of ‘the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’, the outcome of which will be that ‘truthing it in love’ the church ‘makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love’. We have seen that *God’s love is operative through His gifts*, those gifts being under the names of *dorea*, *domata* and *charismata*, these being gifts given to persons, and persons being given as gifts. The giving of these gifts as well as their manifestations was through the Persons of the Trinity. The moment the church came into bloom at Pentecost this love manifested itself in devotion to the Apostles’ doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. It flowed out visibly in the daily distribution to the needy of the church. That is, the gifts worked in the harmony of love and the church was upbuilding itself bodily as it ‘truthed it in love’. So the weapons of truth and love stood against the untruth and unlove of the world. It was a powerful body against the world, and penetrating into the world, taking bastions, peoples and cultures, although politically it was a nonentity.

If we are based upon the truth that nothing in creation has any substance but what it has been given, and that all that is humanity is nought but gifts, but then is all of gifts, then we realise that God is the giving God. He so loves that He gives. When we realise that the church is really the gifts of God working functionally in personal community under grace, then we realise that receiving and giving are the ways in which the church has life and action. The point we are working towards is the conclusion that the love which is so potent in the cosmic battle and which defeats all that unloving, is based on the action of God through His gifts in the Body.

If we agree with that then we must agree that to attribute the gifts to ourselves as though of ourselves would be fatal. Not to say that we have nothing but what we have received, and to think that what we have is not a gift, is to break the unity of love. If we think we are ‘getters’ and ‘doers’ of ourselves—as against being true receivers and givers—then we are living in pride and tragedy. If, because of the strange happenings of history and tradition, any person thinks himself/herself above another, and views ‘the clergy’ as greater and more significant than ‘the laity’, then it is an error beyond calculation as to the damage it causes to what should be a community of love and communion.

The Giving–Serving Community

At the same time we are not here thinking of an egalitarian church, for such cannot be the case, given the nature of the Trinity, recognising the *prius* of the Father, understanding the dependency of the Son on the Father, recognising the giving of all things into the hands of the Son by the Father, the virtual return of all things to the Father,³ and the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son in the ministry of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, as also the exaltation of the Spirit by the Father and the Son. Since the church is the image of God—the Triune God—then its life and ministry must be likewise of love and kenosis in its community.

The church certainly has its leaders and these at least in the five ministries of the *domata*, and functionally in the eldership⁴ of the local *koinonia*, but that leadership is from within the church and not over it in any kind of monarchical ruling. Eldership is the ministry distributive by the pastors of the action (fullness) of *the* Father–Shepherd, and the Son—‘the great Shepherd of the flock’, ‘the Chief Shepherd’ himself. The true Pastors serve the church as the True Shepherd serves the Flock.

When the community is one, as the Triune Persons are One-in-Community, then the world has been shown the action of God which is the only true action, that is, the ontological way. Being shown this the world is outfaced and unmasked as not being true community. The battle, in the sense of the truth being manifested, is won by the people of unity. The armoury of love, of moral integrity and moral action such as we have seen above in righteousness, salvation, the good news of peace, the powerful, acting word of God, the triad of faith, hope and love, have now all been revealed. In the face of these the world and its ruler have been outfaced, outwitted and morally defeated. When we realise this then we know the nature of the battle, and the forms of the church’s militancy. This means we must ensure in all ways possible that human elements of ambition, pride, self-assertion, emulation, and domination over others are ended.

At the same time we must ensure that a democratic insistence on flat equality has no place in the community. By ‘flat equality’ I mean the rejection of wise leadership which reflects Trinitarian oversight for the flock, in favour of an homogenised society in which wisdom and mystery are rejected for the comparative peace of equality. In the Trinity the Father is—so to speak in human terms—the Divine Hierophant. He is *fons divinitatis*—the fountain of Godhead from which flows all He gives to the Son and the Spirit. He is fathomless wisdom and love, and all the varieties of these elements bring the continual flow of wisdom and love to the Son and the Spirit. Without this being the case we cannot talk of ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’, the fullness of God dwelling in Christ, of Christ’s ‘treasures of wisdom and knowledge’. These varieties of wisdom and love flow through the Son and the Holy Spirit to us, but they flow from the ineffable communion of the Three Persons. To posit that all Three have ever equally possessed this wisdom and love *from themselves* is to destroy the Trinity.

³ In this note I take it that the reader knows all the Scriptures which could be quoted to verify my Trinitarian statements. However, the reader may query my statement ‘the virtual return of all things to the Father’. My basis is 1 Corinthians 15:28.

⁴ For ‘eldership’ also read ‘pastors’. Include in leadership ‘deacons’. Understand all ministry as *diakonia*, i.e. ‘servantship’.

It is also to undercut all true ontological authority and all true obedience. This is, by nature of the Trinitarian case, impossible.

I hope we have established that in the Triune God the weaponry God has given to the church includes His total engifting of her, that is, the communion of holiness which she is. This understood, we can now look at the nature and power of her militancy. We can now look at the Holy War.

THE MILITANT CHURCH AT WAR: THE BATTLE FOR THE *TELOS*

We saw that in Eden the serpent sought to undo God's will and plan to bring His creation to its *telos* of *theosis*—the entire redemption, sanctification, glorification and perfection of all creation. Against this destruction the Woman was placed with her Seed, Messiah. Afraid of the birth of the Seed the serpent has ever opposed the Woman, and has devised his own woman, Babylon, with a view to his own scheme for the climax of time, an unholy city. What the ancient serpent as the Red Dragon fails to understand is that the resources of the True Woman far outweigh and outpace the self-destructing resources of the world and its ruler. The resources of true wisdom and love cannot be found in the Satanic world, but in the church, the covenant Companion and Bride of Christ. In Christ her resources are illimitable and indestructible for he has given his fullness to her.

The Battle Is in the Mission

If we may talk of all God's action being in and for His creation, then God has ever been on mission. Before time this was His intention: in time it is His action, that is, the creation of all things and then bringing that creation to its true goal. Having created Man He gave him the mandate for his work in creation, which was stewardship of the creation and the Edenising of the earth as the goal set for it. The Fall was also within the wisdom of God which was to bring Man to voluntary submission to Him in worship and service. Without redemption this could not be accomplished. Man the sinner knew 'the riches of His grace' in Eden and from Eden onwards. Sanctification, glorification and perfection were elements God was ever working and will complete.

Man was not thrust away from God but brought into the same mission where he lived in the grace of covenant. Thus the people of God gave witness to the grace of God. The time for proclaiming the gospel through the world had not arrived, even in the era of Israel. She was God's witness, and God's priest nation for the other nations. She was of Abraham and would receive his inheritance. This same inheritance had also been promised to those nations who would bless themselves by Abraham. This principle penetrates deeply into the nature of mission, to that which is in the very heart of God, that is, the reconciling of all things to God, even of Israel and all the nations. Even so, Israel was God's witness, His prophetic, priestly and royal people. The story of Jonah is a rare one of mission, of an unwilling preaching of the gospel by the prophet Jonah who knows God will spare Nineveh if it repents of not hearing the word of God. The prophet wishes it to be destroyed by God:

And the LORD said, 'You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?' (Jonah 4:10–11).

The Forming of the Gospel

The fulfilling and establishing of the law and the prophets awaited the coming of Israel's Messiah, their true Emmanuel. Both John and Jesus spoke of the gospel of the Kingdom, but

the proclamation of the gospel of salvation awaited the forming of it by Jesus of Nazareth whom God, at Jesus' baptism, attested to be His Son. This Son had been sent forth from the bosom of the Father to give the intelligence to the world of the saving Father. He taught that he did nothing but what the Father told him: 'a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God . . . for I proceeded and came forth from God'. He also told them that the Father had put all things into his hand. He had been given to have life in himself, and was appointed to be the judge of all men.

As he preached so he acted, and should have been seen to be the King of the Kingdom of heaven. He came primarily to the lost of the tribes of the house of Israel, but in the latter days of his flesh he spoke of other peoples being given the Kingdom if Israel did not fulfil obedience to God. Such things were abominable to Israel's leaders, and finally they felt so threatened by this one who appeared to communicate that he was the Son of God, that they crucified him.

We do not have time and space here for describing all his work, and especially that of the Cross—Resurrection. What we must do is say that by his life, death, resurrection and ascension he formed the gospel. Without his incarnation and these works there would have been no gospel. We may say, even if a little quaintly, 'The gospel of the Kingdom—God's saving sovereignty—became the gospel of redemption'. There would have been no substantial action which could redeem Man had Jesus not died, risen and ascended. Now there was truly the substantial gospel.

The Proclaiming of the Gospel

Our Study is on 'The Church Militant'. Proclaiming the gospel is the church's militancy. Christ commissioned the apostles to go into all the world, to proclaim the gospel to every creature, to tell it to nations with a view to their becoming his disciples. It was a tall order but it was given to a simple people who possessed resources beyond computation. They had to proclaim the love of God to the nations, thus liberating them from the powers of Satan and the world. The Saviour they proclaimed was now Lord over all things, even of all the principalities and powers—both good and bad, both human and celestial—who ruled the nations. Christ's gospel was cosmic in its nature and intention. Salvation and reconciliation covered the whole cosmos.

History has shown how successful the church has been in this battle. Nation after nation has acceded to Christ. The mighty Roman Empire became Christian. The face of the nations has altered considerably. At the same time millions have been martyred for their faith. Ideologies have formed and become dominant but the church has survived ideologies and national cultures and powerful philosophies, and the end is not yet. The battle ever waxes fiercely. Who can tell the configurations and tell the outcome of the battles of this mighty conflict? The decision is not made by the outward appearance of things, but by the simple matters of morality, the effectivity of the life and action of the church in every generation and in every place it has told the gospel. None is such a strategist and statesman of the mysteries that he/she can tell the outcome. The best we can say is that God knows them that are His because they are His elect, those who before time were given into the hand of the Son, and at the end will be announced to the cosmos before the Father.

THE WAR THAT BRINGS THE ENDLESS PEACE

Human wars have often been described as 'a war to end all wars', but this is impossible, because they who live by the sword will die by the sword. Each war has the seeds of future wars and destruction in it. This war must be one fought with wholly moral weapons, and humanity cannot instigate such a war. The church's militancy is moral or, if you will, spiritual. In our previous Study we traced something of this warfare, especially in the Book of

the Revelation. At the very beginning our interest was in what we call ‘pastoral dynamics’ for it is the daily life and actions of the church which are relevant to us and have meaning for us. We have seen the church in its life is a partner to Christ as he destroys the works of the Devil. This was a major reason for his incarnation and operations. We share with him in this work or we will wilt on this Vine. We should see and ponder on the final two battles, described in Revelation, in which forever the works of the Devil will be destroyed so that the glorious *telos* may come.

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

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev. 20:7–10).

For those unaccustomed to reading and understanding apocalyptic or symbolic language these two passages may seem strange, but they contain great truth. It is Christ on the white horse and he makes righteous war. He is the Word of God for it is that word he proclaims. His people are ‘the armies of heaven’ and these will be the militant church for in Revelation 17:14 they are described as ‘called and chosen and faithful’. In Revelation 15:2 they are ‘those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name’. There may also be other celestial creatures. These ‘armies of heaven [are] arrayed in white linen’, which tells us of the moral purity and beauty of the church militant. The armies of evil are overcome and the beast, the false prophet and the anti-God army are defeated and punished.

In the second quotation above, the last effort of the Devil to destroy the church—‘the camp of the saints’—is futile. Fire comes down from heaven, and this fire is the word of truth which forever destroys all deceit and falsity of the Deceiver. Such battles are the symbols used to describe the successful warfare of the church militant and show powerfully that ‘the gates of Hades’ cannot stand before its onslaught. Christ and his Bride have finally destroyed the works of the Devil and brought him and his hosts to judgment and execution.

In contrast we see the Wedding Feast of the Warrior Bridegroom and his Bride celebrates the ultimate victory, for Babylon the evil woman has been destroyed and the Holy City has overcome the unholy city. What the serpent in Eden sought to do has failed miserably. ‘The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, and he shall reign forever.’ His people shall be a Kingdom of priests to their God, and they shall reign upon the earth. By their sharing the battle with Christ, and by their conquering with him in holy militancy, they have showed themselves wholly fit to be his Bride and competent to work with him in the new and thrilling stages of all eternity.

CONCLUSION: LIVING IN THE PRESENT WARFARE

In our Studies on ‘The Church Militant’ we have taken an overview of the People of God in their constant warfare with the serpent of Eden. For us this means living in the present in the same warfare. It is from the witnesses who warred in the past that we take our cue and our encouragement. The dimensions of their suffering we read in Hebrews 11:32–38 and history records millions of martyrs. Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:7–18 speaks of the situation we now face, and it is not an easy one. Even so, it is more dreadful for Satan and his hosts. They know their time is coming and even self-deceit can give them no hope of victory. If anything, this makes them more savage. As for us, we have the word of God.

This word has always been a matter of power for the People of God. From the prophetic cutting of the sword of God in Genesis 3:15, through to the end when the sword of Christ and the fire from heaven defeat and destroy all evil powers, this sword has been effective. Rather than extend this Study I suggest reading our Pastors’ Monday Studies on the word of God—May, June and July 1988. Here are two revealing passages of the Old Testament:

Listen to me, O coastlands, and hearken, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away (Isa. 49:1–2).

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light (Hosea 6:5).

If we add to this the whole of Psalm 2 then we realise how fierce the battle has ever been, and that God’s Servant and Messiah is at the heart of the battle, leading his people and enabling them to win. The prayer of John 17 also becomes so much more intelligible and significant. Knowing we are men and women of the word, we will not lose heart, but war a good war of faith. Lacking carnal courage we shall nevertheless be overcomers and so inherit the new heaven and the new earth, and reign as kings and priests to our God.

The Church Militant—Addendum

INTRODUCTION

Paul once said, ‘We are not unaware of Satan’s devices’. He meant we understand this one who is variously called Deceiver, Destroyer, Slanderer, Liar, Murderer and Accuser—among other names. Today some of the most scholarly theology gets along without a mention of Satan. We search book indexes in vain to find him mentioned. Developments of history are considered scientifically, the results of causes and effects. The Devil is looked upon as a myth, needed in previous generations which lacked clarity in reasoning and were long on superstition. Sadly enough some critics of this fallen angel pictured him and his cohorts as crude, ignorant and inept. They did not seem him as brilliant, and as aided by a great company of competent, celestial creatures.

We must, therefore, bring the reality of Satan to light again. We must unmask the ineptitude of some theologians and Christians in regard to the reality and power of Satan. The following are notes I have been getting together for a further book on Satan, his powers and his intentions. Two of my books published—*The Dominion of Darkness and the Victory of God*, and *The Clash of the Kingdoms*—spell out much concerning Satan, the world, the evil powers and their deceits, but the book that is coming will, I believe, be of further value. These notes are brief but the article can be useful to those who follow the Bible references given.

THE BATTLE FROM THE BEGINNING TO END

- (a) Satan’s plan to destroy God’s plan and set himself up on the Divine throne. The ‘two words’ of Genesis chapters 2 and 3. Satan’s word accepted, God’s rejected by Man.
- (b) The fall and the grace (Gen. 3:1–15); the proto-evangel of 3:15.
- (c) The battle of Cain and Abel. Abel’s weapons—Gods’ grace and love. Cain’s weapons—self-reliance and hatred. Typical of the stream of God’s people, Satan’s people.
- (d) The OT battle. Constant pre-Flood, post-Flood. Corruption, violence. Idolatry.
- (e) All the time Satan is seeking to subvert God’s plan and people. God’s covenant with Man—eternal; Noahic; Abrahamic; Davidic; New. The people lived as God’s children and thus defeated evil. Their weapons the same as in the NT, viz. faith, hope and love; righteousness; gospel of peace; truth; the word of God—the sword of the Spirit. Also the gifts—prophets, priests and kings, rightly understood, in both Testaments.
- (f) Messiah comes and defeats Satan in his Sonship of God. Acts 10:38, etc. and the Cross–Resurrection–Ascension.
- (g) The church is to go against the gates of hell and death. The church will prevail.
- (h) The eschatological victory of Christ is shown in the NT and especially in the Book of the Revelation.

THE CHURCH AND THE BATTLE

- (a) Christ established victory over Satan by his life, death, resurrection, ascension and reigning. This was deliberate. This was why he was manifested—to destroy the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8; cf. John 12:31f.; 14:30–31; 16:11; Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15).

(b)The church to go out against the whole world that is under Satan (Eph. 2:1–3) by the commission of Christ (Matt. 28:18–20; etc.).

(c)The church will suffer (John 15:18 – 16:11).

(d)The church battles as (part of?) ‘the armies of heaven’ (Rev. 19:14; 15:2; 17:14).

(e)The church triumphs (1 John 2:12–14; 4:4; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8f.). See the battle in Revelation chapters 12 – 14, and 18 – 20.

THE COSMIC, UNIVERSAL BATTLE

Whilst the church is part of ‘the armies of heaven’ (Rev. 19:14), there have always been the celestial powers who have fought the other traitorous angels of heaven. In the Old Testament we see Satan as a ‘son of God’ that is, an angel. In Daniel chapters 10 and 11 Daniel is visited by a glorious celestial personage—an angel of a high order—who in coming to the prophet as an answer to his prayer has fought ‘the prince of . . . Persia’ and was helped by Michael the archangel. Daniel is told that Michael is his—Daniel’s—prince, that is, the prince of Israel (Dan. 10:13, ‘one of the chief princes’; cf. Jude 9). The angel is to return and will have to fight both the princes (angels) of Persia and Greece.

Also in the Old Testament the battle against evil powers is the battle against idolatry, for demonic powers infested all idols (cf. 1 Cor. 10:17–22) and operations of the occult (cf. Deut. 18:9–22).

In Revelation chapter 12 Michael and his angels fight the dragon and his angels, and cast them out of heaven. Michael takes the initiative. Satan’s aim is ‘above the stars of God I will set my throne on high’, that is, over all the angels (Isa. 14:13; *passim*) and so be powerful against God. It is against these evil ‘principalities and powers’ that the church fights (Eph. 6:12; cf. 3:10). Christ announced his victory of the Cross (Heb. 2:14–15) to these ‘spirits in prison’ (1 Pet. 3:19; cf. Col. 2:14–15). In Revelation 19:14ff. it is difficult to define ‘the armies of heaven’, but they must be the church and the celestial powers together. Ephesians 2:6 and 6:12 make it clear that we—the church—live and operate in ‘heavenly places’. Thus as Satan seeks to win the cosmos—God’s creation—yet the creation is of God and not Satan. As ‘the stars in their courses fought against Sisera’ (Judg. 5:20–21), the earth cursed the murderer Cain (Gen. 4:11) and the earth swallowed the horrible flood of the red dragon’s mouth (Rev. 12:13–17), so we see that creation, temporarily being subjected to vanity, though in hope, is always Godward in its activity. All the creatures of God—no matter what their categories—are part of the entire forces which reject Satanic domination and help in working all things for good’ (Rom. 8:28).

THE WEAPONS FOR FIGHTING.

Note first of all ‘Christ in us’. We do not fight on our own. So 1 John 4:4, ‘greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world’. We are in Christ’s battle with the world. Note also that 2 Corinthians 10:2, 4–6, ‘for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.’

(a)There are the weapons of God (2 Cor. 10:1ff.). ‘They are spiritual, mighty to the pulling down of many strong holds’, etc.

(b)The armour of God in Isaiah 59; Ephesians 6:10–18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

(c)The elements of the armour, as we collect them together.

Faith, hope and love as a triad: These constitute the way of life of the church, the people of God as seen from Acts 2:42ff. They also evinced ‘the fruit of the Spirit’. This made them a formidable army against Satanic forces, who fear them (see Phil. 1:27–28).

Faith: Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 4:4; 5:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

Hope: 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Romans 5:5; cf. 8:18–25.

Love: 1 Thessalonians 5:8; 1 Corinthians 13:8ff. (cf. Eph. 4:26, 27). Love casts out fear of death, that is, of judgment (see 1 John 4:18; Revelation 12:11).

Truth: Ephesians 6:14; John 18:37; 1 John 5:7. Note that witness is the great weapon and it is the truth. It is the prophetic, priestly and royal word.

Righteousness: Ephesians 6:14. See Revelation 19:11: (i) justification; and (ii) God’s active righteousness in and through us.

The gospel of peace: Power of the gospel. It is this which goes against the world and its rulers and wins men and women from it.

The sword of the Spirit: The Spirit-uttered word since creation: ‘One little word shall fell him’. Christ’s use of the sword against Satan in the temptations. So Isaiah 59; Revelation 19:15ff.

Patience: See Revelation 13:10; 14:12. Note Romans 12:14–21. This is love’s patience in action, not rendering evil for evil, and living in peace with all men.

SATAN’S WEAPONS FOR FIGHTING

These are all anti-weapons, that is, anti-love, anti-faith, anti-hope, but he makes them out to be the ontological reality when, in fact, they are the negation of all that is real and true. So see his false system—the world, his false trinity (Rev. 13), his false fatherhood (John 8:44ff.). Against faith he has unbelief; against hope he has a false hope of a successful kingdom; against love he has hate, the tearing down of all that is beautiful. Love builds up; hate destroys.

He is stunned, disconcerted, frustrated and in explosive rage because the simple weapons of God’s people thwart him. They die cheerfully enough if it is martyrdom. They take persecution with patience (Rev. 13:10; 14:12). His weapons then are seduction (2 Cor. 11:1f.); deceit—Satan is ‘the deceiver of the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9; cf. Gen. 3:1ff.); ‘deceitfulness of sin’ (Heb. 3:13); ‘deceitful lusts’ of the flesh (Eph. 4:22); ‘deceitful wiles’ (Eph. 4:14); threatening—‘roaring lion’ (1 Pet. 5:8; cf. Rev. 13:5–6); accusing—Revelation 12:10.

All that is done by these ‘weapons’ of Satan constitutes ‘the works of the devil’ which Jesus came to destroy (1 John 3:8). Christ took away all the power of Satan to destroy. Instead Satan is destroyed (Heb. 2:14–15).

THE CHURCH IS THE COMMUNITY OF THE OVERCOMERS

Note the following passages: Revelation chapters 2 and 3 on what the Spirit says to the churches and the ‘He who overcomes’. Fit this with Revelation 21:7 which speaks of the subduing, which concurs with Genesis 1:28. Sons are overcomers. So 1 John 4:4 says, ‘greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world’, and this fits with 1 John 5:4, ‘this is the victory which overcomes the world, our faith’.

As we have said before (cf. Rev. 15:2; 17:14; 19:14) the church is victorious because of its gifts and weapons, and Christ’s indwelling. Its life is immensely overpowering for Satan, who, far from matching it, can only produce hatred, bitterness, evil, the world of the flesh—and so on.