



New Creation Teaching Ministry

2003 Monthly Ministry STUDY GROUP NOTES

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An Introduction to the Matter of Mission

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

In thinking about our series of Ministry Studies for the year 2003, I wondered what should follow the two to three years of biblical ecclesiology which we have been doing. It seemed to me that we should consider the whole matter of mission. Is there indeed a mission from God which is commissioned by Him and in which the church is clearly involved, and if so how should we regard it after 2,000 years of proclaiming the gospel throughout the world? These days Christianity is not the only one in the field of mission. Religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism are the banners under which current nationalism is being expressed. Islam can be said to have been on mission since its inception in the seventh century. Is Christianity a Western religion or faith which of necessity has clashed with other world-faiths? Should we read history afresh and with a critical mind in order to understand inter-faith conflicts and discern the value or otherwise of the mission as carried out over two thousand years? Christianity arose in the Middle East and is a faith of peace, yet it has a history of being entangled with wars with other religious nations and cultures. The conflict that has existed between Christian peoples and Islamic peoples has been proverbial over the centuries since Islam came to birth. How does it come about that two great religions are both on mission and, as such, are in strong conflict? At least we can say it is imperative for us to understand the principle of Christian mission and, for that matter, Islamic mission. We certainly need to read the history of the Jewish people, the Christian people and the Islamic people.

As convinced Christians we should be penetrating into the meaning of mission, and of the part we are called to play in it. Is it possible that the mission on which we have been is simply for the enlarging of the number of Christians in the world, or does it go more deeply than this? Is it genuinely seeking to redeem human beings out of every society so that they may gain eternal life, and that the plan and purpose of God for all history may be fulfilled according to His sovereign will? Are we partners with God in these actions? Are our churches oriented to this wisdom of God, or are we little more than social clubs, held together by the desire to maintain ourselves, our culture and our numbers? Are we ashamed of our beginnings and even more of the mistakes we have made along the way? Whatever the case we should be gaining answers to all these questions for they will certainly stab us awake to the manner in which the church should be acting in the world today. It is essential that we know God's will in the matter of mission and be strengthened by fulfilling it. Paul's words here are apt, 'do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is'.

The matter is clear: every Christian ought to understand the matter of mission, know to what degree the ecclesia of God is involved in mission, whether or not the manner of going about mission is in conformity with biblical principles, and whether he or she is appropriately on mission.

WHAT, THEN, IS MISSION?

The word 'mission' is well known in Christian theology and missionary activity. The word derives from the Latin verb *mitto* which means 'to send' and is the equivalent of the Greek verbs 'to send' such as *apostello* and *pempo*. These two verbs are found over forty times in the Gospel of John, so that we must conclude that Jesus was God's missionary or was 'on mission' or 'in mission' as the terms have come to be used. Statements such as 'When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son' (Gal. 4:4), 'God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him' (1 John 4:9), and 'Jesus, the apostle' of Hebrews 3:1, confirm the fact that the Son was sent. It is not that mission all lies in the sending or even in the being sent, but that the sent one has a mission, a message or ministry to discharge, as in Acts 13:2–3: 'While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.' It was a *work* to which the Holy Spirit called the two men, and it was the church which *sent* them. Mission, then, is the work done on being sent. In John's Gospel, and also in other Gospels, Jesus shows himself as sent and so on a mission. Paul would have seen himself as sent by God (Gal. 1:15–16) to proclaim the gospel, and then to have ministry to the new churches brought into being by his ministry. From beginning to end there was this mission to be fulfilled. In any mission there is the sender, the sent, the message and the attention to the being received, the result and the establishing of the changes brought about by the gospel.

It does not follow that any Christian or church is necessarily 'on mission' or 'in mission' as God would have it, although a person or church may sincerely formulate its work as mission or a mission. It could also be that a person or church might be reluctant to carry out mission as simple obedience. The story of Jonah teaches much about refusal to be sent, and then in reluctance proclaiming the message given. We will later attend to this example.

If our simple description of mission is correct, then we will have to search the Scripture and read history to see whether God has always been on mission from before time to the end of it, or whether He has missions only from time to time. In no way can we say that God has only been working intermittently for Jesus said, in effect, 'My Father has always been working' and claims partnership in that work (John 5:17), but is such 'working' not necessarily mission? We will seek the answer to this question.

It is clear that in the time of his incarnation, i.e. 'In the days of his flesh' (Heb. 5:7), Jesus was on mission. John's Gospel leaves no place for doubting he was sent and was actively on the Father's mission. Both John the Baptist and he were sent in the matter of the Kingdom of God (John 1:6; Mark 1:2–4). This was their mission. Jesus often claimed he was sent, and on two occasions he sent His disciples on mission (Luke 9:1–6; 10:1–16). Before his ascension he sent them into all the world and to every person with the gospel, as the four Gospels attest.

Our interest in mission makes us ask whether God's mission has always been, so that there is the Sender—God—the sent Adam and all humanity in general, and prophets, priests and teachers along with celestial beings, and those sent being messengers, whilst all sought to effect in full the mission they were given. This would mean that mission consists of a Sender, the persons sent, the message of the missionaries, and the reception of the receivers—those who were objects of mission, perhaps with the purpose of them also being caught up in the outworking of mission and then in mission itself.

FURTHER NOTES ABOUT MISSION

We have yet to see from Scripture that God has always been on mission, and that there has never been a time when He has not been on it. Good scholars have certainly proved this point but have others understood them? That certain religions or faiths are on mission is not to be doubted, but whether or not their mission is valid may be questioned. Loyalty to one's faith, custom, creed and culture seems natural enough and one's mission to extend these elements into the wider society may seem commendable, but the elements we mention are common to all societies—even if somewhat different in themselves—and may be presented as ideologies. Ideologies are meant to transform society and are dynamical, but at the same time quite dangerous. Once a religion or culture becomes an ideology it then becomes a mission and becomes perilous to human society. It may make converts but it mainly makes proselytes, and develops sectarianism and fundamentalism. So no mission per se is valid. It may represent danger to the world society.

MISSION AND CULTUS–CULTURE

That mission represents a threat is clear from the history of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. Devotees of these three religions see the danger in each other's mission, judging other missions as unacceptable ideologies. When we realise that a culture derives from the cultus or worship system of a society, then we see the reason for incompatibility in cultures and their missions. The history of every culture somehow links with the gods and lords of the particular community. This can be seen in Israel and surrounding peoples and their worship. It was always a battle for Israel not to share in the exotic worship of surrounding nations. In some sense all the idols have their missions in the total societies of humanity. Throughout this present study we rarely speak of the widest issue—God and Satan. That we will leave for later studies, recognising here that idolatry does not spring from itself but from creatures both celestial and terrestrial.

MISSION AND CREATION: CREATION AND MISSION

Within the whole creation we can perceive there are many missions, since Man is a creature and has ontological need of something to worship, i.e. some deity or deities to assist him in the business of life. He has need of a culture which supports his world-view, his deity-view and his self-view, for culture is really the bringing together of these three elements. This is how Man sees the creation. We are not speaking so much of this fact of culture as an accommodating principle as we are that God as Creator had—and has—a plan and purpose for creation. This is seen in the careful description of God creating in the six days and pronouncing it as 'very good'. 'Very good' takes away any idea of missioning creation as—or into—an ideology. As created it already was 'very good', i.e. functionally perfect in itself. Beginning with Genesis 1:1, 'God created the heavens and the earth', and concluding with Genesis 1:31, 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good', we find no fault or defect in the creation. It is clear that the creation was seen to be functionally good, had built into it the principle of hierarchy (1:14–19, 26–30) and proceeded remarkably as a

system governed, as it seemed to be, by unfluctuating laws. It also proceeded on the principle of the perpetual sabbath rest which was God's gift that sealed His creative work.

Only Adamic sin has interfered with that perfection. It would seem, then, that the re-perfecting of creation would be an immense task. The Old Testament Scriptures teach of a day of the eschaton when all things will be renewed, all evil judged and punishment executed, yet the day, also, of the future consummation of the Kingdom, of rewards and transformation of the creation coming to ultimate perfection. This was called 'the day' or 'the day of the Lord'. Creation was to be brought to its true self, a re-creation of the original creation.

History the Action between the Proton of Creation and Its Eschaton

In what we have just stated is a mixture of Old Testament and New Testament anticipations. Man came to know the judgments of God following the Fall. In regard to this, Man had been warned but not until he sinned did the dread of God come to him. The following days of the sons of God and the daughters of men inter-marrying brought forth the frightening view of God who destroyed a whole creation by flood, excepting only one family. Was that the way it would always be—unrelenting judgment when a generation would become corrupt and violent? Here the matter of covenantal grace comes into view, and of this we speak more, below. It is reasonable to say that as Man has an image of what it is to be protological, so he has an image of what it is to be eschatological.¹ In the Old Testament there was a dread of judgment and what would happen in punishments, so that the day was called 'the day of visitation' (Isa. 10:3, AV), a 'great day of the LORD' (Zeph. 1:14), a day 'of the wrath of the LORD' (Ezek. 7:19). Yet it was also the time of great peace, as when the creation would resume its pacific nature as in Isaiah 11:1–9 and 25:6–9, when Jerusalem will be rehabilitated, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth as in Isaiah 65:17ff. and 66:22–23. The New Testament is much more alive with the *telos* (goal) so clearly in sight to faith, so that hope invigorates the people of God in their assurance that all history is the plan of God outworking to its predestined consummation.

The time between the creation, as described in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 and the end-time—when there will be a new creation, i.e. a new heaven and a new earth—would seem to be a puzzle because of the sinfulness of Man and the evil of fallen, celestial powers disturbing creation on every side and in every way. In order to comprehend something of this we need to examine and comprehend the biblical idea of the everlasting covenant of God, and thus come to understand God's mission *via* the creation as also *for* the creation. Only then can we see the evil of Man's fall and the mission of God to spread His salvation to the ends of the earth, a salvation which would demand the entire defeat of Satan and his evil forces, as also the defeat of Man as a sinner and the fleshliness of him as he is at enmity with God, destroying the death of Man the sinner and the giving to him the gift of eternal life. Only then can we see that God gives moral substance to His creation, a gift which demands covenant to fulfil His purpose.

¹ Man's desire to know 'what God has done from the beginning to the end' is the theme of Ecclesiastes 3:11 and is treated in Isaiah 41:4; 46:8–11 and 48:3–5, 12–16. Ecclesiastes 3:11 indicates that Man has a sense of the eternal and is driven to know all things, though this endeavour cannot succeed in him. God must reveal such things to him.

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT OF GOD

It is interesting to know that the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David, and the New Covenant are all called 'everlasting'. Our discussion of covenant here is not, as it might appear to be, an intrusion on our looking at creation as it relates to God's mission for all creation. Incidentally, we must remember that the world is not creation *and* Man, but that Man, himself, is *part* of the creation, and is very much a creature. We are pursuing this theme on the basis that there is a universal covenant made with Man by God and that it is unilateral and not a compact or contract made bilaterally with Man, i.e. on the principle of *quid pro quo*. Since Genesis chapters 1 – 5 do not mention a covenant as such, we need to read chapters 6 – 9 to discover something of the nature of covenant. First, however, let us comment that because the universal, unilateral covenant that we claim took place before creation for Man and the rest of creation is not mentioned explicitly, this does not mean it was not present and in action in the early chapters of Genesis. When God created Man He immediately gave him the commission or mandate of Genesis 1:26–30. Because Man was in God's image he had a unique relationship with God and is featured as a partner with God in His work in the creation. Later information in the Scriptures suggests that he was God's covenant partner. I suggest that you read the Addendum to this paper which is an extract from Herman Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* on 'The Pactum Salutis', pp. 321–22.

It is unthinkable that God would create without making a covenant with Man. Some Reformed theology speaks of a pact of works God made with Adam. Hoeksema rejects this idea.² God created the world in love, and not even in grace. Grace is needed where Man has sinned. The everlasting covenant was one of love and when Man sinned he required grace. We can learn much about covenant from the ones made with Noah and Abraham. We will first look at the covenant God made with Noah, for Noah was a man 'blameless in his generation' and he 'found favour [grace] in the eyes of the LORD'.

God's first promise to Noah was in Genesis 6:18 where he said, 'I will *establish* my covenant with you'. The word *establish* is again used in 9:9 and 9:17. In his book *Covenant and Creation*³ William J. Dumbrell argues the point that to *establish* a covenant and *cut* a covenant, have different uses. To *establish* is simply to confirm what was promised when a covenant was cut. To *establish* is *heqim berith* and to *cut* is *karat berith*. Dumbrell says the covenant with Noah was the establishing of what we may call 'the creational covenant'. In pursuit of this Genesis 9:1–3 virtually repeats the language of Genesis 1:26–30. The covenant of chapter 9 is not only with Man but 'between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth'.

Other helpful references are Isaiah 24:4–6 and Jeremiah 33:19–26. The first reference reads:

The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.

Unless this can be shown to refer only to Israel, then 'the everlasting covenant' is universal, one to which all the inhabitants on the earth belong. The Jeremiah reference (Jer. 33:19–26) appears to refer back to creation: 'If I have not established my covenant

² See his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1966, pp. 283ff.

³ Published by Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1984, pp. 15–26.

with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth' certainly relates to creation in the same idiom as in Genesis 9:13, 16, let alone Genesis 1:14–19. If a covenant was made with the sun and moon at the time of creating them, then why not with Man? In this passage of Jeremiah God is, as it were, swearing by His original, creational covenant. It is eternal and it is irreversible.

ALL COVENANTS IN THE ETERNAL COVENANT

Accepting the fact that the Noahic covenant is the reiteration–establishment of God regarding His covenant with the whole creation, then the Abrahamic covenant is also to be seen as universal. It has to do with all the peoples (nations) of the earth. Genesis chapter 10 is apposite for it designates the families of the earth. In chapter 11 we have first those who would do without God in getting themselves a name. Far from doing that, they were scattered across the earth against their will and their power ploy was defeated. The fresh genealogy of the Shemites comes into view and leads to Abram in chapter 12 and the universal covenant, for nations blessing Abram would be blessed by God and those cursing him would be cursed. It is interesting to note that the covenant promise was that Abram and his descendants would inherit the earth as against the tower builders, and that God gave him a name which the Babel folk had desired for themselves, i.e. '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'. 'No longer shall your name be Abram [exalted father] but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations' (Gen. 12:2; cf. 17:5–6).

Later, as we gather together our materials now being laid out for the conclusion that God has ever been—and ever will be—on mission, we will see how important was and is the Abrahamic covenant as it is included in the everlasting covenant innate to creation and to Man. It can also be seen that the covenant at Sinai was especially for the immediate descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Indeed God named Himself by these three patriarchs. We can say that the Sinai covenant was the everlasting covenant set out in its many elements for the people of God wandering through the wilderness and then for them living in the Promised Land. Even so, God's mission was not to be limited to a special people and time—no matter how special they were.

This was one reason why the Davidic covenant was promised to Israel. Two Samuel 7:10–29 is an important passage for the promise that God made with David. The heart of it is verses 8–16:

Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 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 for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.'

David's response to this shows that he was deeply stirred. In fact he was greatly humbled. He may have had the punishment of Saul in mind, a fear which God himself dispersed. That there was to be a Kingdom of David is shown in other Scriptures such as Isaiah 55:3, Psalm 132:11–12; 89, and the parallel passage to 2 Samuel 7:10–29 of 1 Chronicles 17:9–27. We will select only 2 Samuel 7:18–21 and 1 Chronicles 17:16–17, the text of both being identical:

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, 'Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in thy eyes, O Lord GOD; thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast shown me future generations, O Lord GOD! And what more can David say to thee? For thou knowest thy servant, O Lord GOD! Because of thy promise, and according to thy own heart, thou hast wrought all this greatness, to make thy servant know it.'

It is the part underlined which shows us not only that God in His plan determines to extend David's royal dynasty but the statement, 'thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast shown me future generations', is significant. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. in his book *The Law and the Prophets*⁴ says:

... David's response is one of pleasant astonishment as he grasps the fact that the promise just given to him is to be 'The Charter for Humanity.' We call this *torah* [law; instruction; way] a "charter" because it is the plan and prescription for God's kingdom whereby the whole world shall be blessed with the total content of the promise doctrine.⁵

The Davidic covenant (cf. Isa. 55:3; Ps. 89; 132:11–12) is to do with the Kingdom of God and the proclamation of the Kingdom by John, and Jesus may well have alerted Israel to David's Kingdom.

The last covenant to be made with Israel is that prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Ezekiel 37:24–28. It was to be 'the new covenant' which is spoken of often in the New Testament, for it is the covenant Christ came to 'cut' or 'seal' with his blood (Matt. 26:26–29; cf. Heb. 8:8–12; 10:14–22). This, in substance, is the 'everlasting covenant', the unilateral covenant made with Man at creation, and which is not only with Man but all creation. For our purposes of this present paper it is showing God's reason for creation, His intention that He purposed was to have a covenant people at the end of time for the life of eternity. It undergirds His plan. Creation without covenant, and covenant without creation, does not make sense. Properly understood it means God has never not been active in time and creation. When God made Israel a priestly nation among and for the nations, it was because they were to obey His voice and keep His covenant (Exod. 19:5–6; cf. Deut. 4:5–8).

COVENANT AND LAW

Covenants of a kind were by no means lacking where there were other covenants than God had made. Such covenants were bilateral and in the forms of contracts with the deity or deities. It is noticeable that every covenant had a law. Laws, then, are common to covenants. There was a vast difference between the law of an idol and the law of God's covenant. We have said little about the law of God which has been a major factor in human living. Whilst it is called 'the law of God' it is the *torah* of God, and can be understood by both a subjective and objective genitive. It is God's own law: the law

⁴ Published by Presbyterian and Reformed Press, Philadelphia, 1974, pp. 298–318.

⁵ See my *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*, Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1997, pp. 85–91.

which is His own way of being and subsisting. It is the law which He gives to Man for his being and subsisting. Some theologians of the New Testament are in error when they say that Israel groaned under God's law. Only those who oppose the law groan under it. Psalms 1, 19, and 119 give proof that the true Israelite loved the law. Every member of Israel was already justified by being in the Covenant of God, and continuing functionally in that which involved repentance and faith continually. As for the forgiveness of sins there was the provision of the whole sacrificial cultus. Keeping the law is the exercise of the whole of Man and is satisfying to his spirit. We have included this point simply to show that the law of God is God Himself working in His covenant people. He is always in this action and never absent from His covenant people. Covenant Presence is the heart of the matter. It is the heart of all true moral and ethical living.

CREATION AND THE MISSION OF GOD

Above we commenced the subject of creation under the title 'Mission and Creation: Creation and Mission' and needed to deal with the subject of 'Covenant'. The reason for returning to it is that we have to examine whether God can be said to be on mission with creation from the time of creation. Many who see almost nothing of mission in the Old Testament would deny that any mission is detectable from creation, much less that it has anything to do with creation. Is this, indeed, the case?

Above we have defined mission—'mission consists of a Sender, the persons sent, the message of the missionaries, and the reception of the receivers—those who were objects of mission, perhaps with the purpose of them also being caught up in the outworking of mission and then in mission itself'. If this is the case, then does the fact that the Father has always been working (John 5:17), even from before creation, to fulfil His plan and is fulfilling it, mean that He always has been 'on mission'? One would think so. The alternative is to see God as letting things develop or not develop as they will in arbitrary fashion—so to speak—and then, having allowed this activity, sending His Son to work on the matter and so bring all creatures and all things to heel? This is not likely. In fact, leaving aside the statement of Acts 17:27-28, 'Yet he is not far from each of us, for "In him we live, and move, and have our being"', we know that God was often sending the angel of the Lord, manifesting Himself in theophanies, and sending His prophets—those from Abel to Zechariah—and so giving his mind and attention to every age, the antediluvian, diluvian, and postdiluvian. In Hebrews 1:1 the writer covers all God's word until Christ in the words, 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to the prophets', contrasting the last age as the one in which God speaks by His Son. We note that many of the messages though spoken through the prophets were for all the nations, many of whom are named.

We ask again, was God active towards creation and by means of it? Remembering that Man was—and is—part of that creation, we have to agree He has always worked in it. The sin of Man in idolatry is that he ascribes the action of God to the idols, lords and gods. Romans 1:23 and 25, 'they exchanged the glory', 'they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator'. In Exodus 32:4 the people said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!' thus ascribing moral power to the molten calf.

That part of creation which is not Man is always seen to be on God's side, if we can use this kind of a statement. Before the first couple left Eden, Eden's basic creational dynamic was closed off to them. Adam would have to work hard at the soil to gain his livelihood. The soil was the instrument of God's curse. Even more so, Cain, after the

murder of Abel, would be unable to till the soil, the soil not yielding its strength to him. It would appear that Noah and his progeny were blessed after the curse of the Flood (cf. 'curse' in 8:21), so the curse of a general flood would not be repeated. Even so, the earth would still be a means of cursing those who sinned, i.e. specific floods, droughts, famines and plagues would come from creation in cursing as moral, judgmental recrimination by God. One example of this is the account of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16:29–30:

If these men die the common death of all men, or if they are visited by the fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the LORD.

We know that as Moses said these words the ground opened its mouth and swallowed them up.

Another powerful example of this is Isaiah 24:1–13. Verses 4–6 state the principle:

The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.

The earth is the agent of both blessings and cursings. Psalm 104 is a picture of it working as 'very good' in its actions. On the other hand, according to the obedience of Israel to the covenant, it works in blessing and with Israel's disobedience it works in cursing. These principles are seen in the warning of Moses to Israel in Deuteronomy chapters 28 – 30. The blessings will be fruitfulness of the land and no diseases, and the cursing will be by infertility and diseases.

It is clear from Genesis 1:22 that the living creatures needed the blessing of God to be fertile. Likewise in 1:26–30 Man needed the equivalent blessing to carry out the purpose of God. It is often thought that when Man fell in Eden then so did creation, but Paul describes it in another way. In Romans 8:20, 'for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope'. In the Old Testament the blessing to repentant Man is that the earth does not act in cursing, but in blessing. The earth is restored and we have such pictures as we find in Isaiah 11:6–9 and similar passages. A beautiful passage is Isaiah 25:6–9 in words that are repeated in Revelation 21:4.

Our point in quoting these passages is to show that Man and the remainder of creation are tied closely together and God attends to both. Romans 8:17ff. shows that the release of Man into glorification will also mean that release of all creation from its bondage to corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. This being the case we see that at every point of history—indeed every moment—God, whom Melchizedek and Abraham jointly believed is 'Maker of heaven and earth' (Gen. 14:18–22), attends wholly to Man and wholly to all creation. All of this is in view of the ultimate fulfilment of His plan. This constant working in creation and in regard to Man is surely showing that God is on mission, the times before Christ's coming being basic to His incarnation and the formation of the gospel. Without His attendance to the earth there could never be a new earth as described in Revelation 21:1f., Isaiah 66:23–24, and 2 Peter 3:13 (cf. Matt. 19:28). Nor, too, could there be a new heaven. All in both Testaments is that which goes before and lays the foundation of the new creation.

SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It seems to some of us that mission is an idea which is used almost exclusively in the New Testament and that salvation to the ends of the earth commences only after the ascension of Christ. It is thought that Israel was exclusive to itself and not interested in the nations since it did not evangelise them. I think we have shown that the salvation of the nations was in the mind and reckoning of God from the very beginning. In fact the term 'salvation' was well-known to Israel, although not always referring to the matter of personal salvation as we find it preached and understood in the New Testament. Salvation had more to do with a nation or people. Israel understood the salvation of God. There was the knowledge that it was the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that God had named Himself by these patriarchs—'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. The Pentateuch concerned itself in telling the story of the people of God—Israel—and began their family history in Eden, the first couple being their fore-parents. It was this people to whom God assiduously attended from the moment of His choice of Abraham, following the salvation of Noah and his family. There were intimations of salvation from the time of the utterance of the proto-gospel in Genesis 3:15. Salvation had attended Noah and his family, and Noah's descendant Abraham was given God's salvation-history in prospect. Paul said retrospectively:

Thus Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

The truth is that all human beings since the ejection of Man from Eden have been called on to believe in God—'that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him'. This is the powerful teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews. As we have pointed out, God has ever been in communication with Man by His word. That word has come to the human race by theophanies, by the witness to Man by God by means of creation, by the acts of God in history, by the creational implanting of His covenant and His law into humanity, by men and women of faith, by the Scriptures—and so on. We are not really quibbling over the use of the term 'mission' for it must be coming apparent to us that for God to have His plan for time and eternity must mean that He is active in all the works He does to fulfil that plan and this involves all of time in the eras we call 'Old' and 'New'.

One of the terms used of Him is 'the living God'. This is found plentifully in both Testaments. It really means 'the God who acts'. Immediately above we have said God is active in works. This includes His constant care of His creation, His continuous acts of creating, and His works of salvation to the end of the earth—the very works in which the Father, the Son and the Spirit have ever been active. The Scriptures tell us that the Three Persons have ever been working as One in the works of creation, redemption and the *telos* of all creation. Examples of Him thus being 'the living God' are seen in the crossing of the Jordan by Israel:

And Joshua said to the people of Israel, 'Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God.' And Joshua said, 'Hereby you shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites' (Josh. 3:1-17).

In the case of the youth David (1 Sam. 17:26) asking his elders, 'who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?', the living

God directed David's slung stone to the forehead of Goliath. Again, in the case of Daniel being thrown into the lions' den, the troubled King Darius going early to the den cried out, 'O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?' This event showed that God is the God who acts, and acts effectively when men might think—as they have thought—that He would be absent and silent.

Likewise in the New Testament, Peter cries out because of a sudden revelation to him by God the Father, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!' Here, in front of him, is the Christ! Again in John 6:57 Jesus said, 'As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me'—a profound statement, indeed. So we read of 'living bread', 'children of the living God', 'fall into the hands of the living God', 'the Spirit of the living God', and 'to serve the living God'. It is not possible that God should be the living God and not be active every moment of the long millennia of time. The Scriptures consist themselves as one story of the acts of God and the goal to which He is leading His people. Thus in the Old Testament to know God is to know His acts:

Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD' (Jer. 9:23f.).

This kind of knowledge is most powerful, no less powerful than told to Moses in Exodus 34:5–6. Moses had sung at the crossing of the Red Sea a song of the living God, '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), and at the end of his life a song of revelation, 'The Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.'

Before closing off this section dealing with the teaching of salvation in the Old Testament we ought to touch again on the story of Jonah. Commentators and missiologists have insisted that Jonah's having been sent to Ninevah is no sign that Jonah was a missionary. Some see it as an object lesson to Jonah. All seem to be adamant that Israel did not lead an evangelistic life. What they seem to forget is that God Himself was on mission! Jonah knew that and it was his chief reason in refusing to go. He knew God would save Nineveh and was furious when that happened. The act of God saving Nineveh was not an object lesson. It was intended to give a window in on the Creator as the Saviour of people who do not happen to be of Israel. Jesus had this story very much in mind. We must not look upon it as less than a revelation of the loving heart of God.

CHRIST IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES

In Isaiah 52:7–10 is 'The Song of the Beautiful Feet'. God's true Evangelist is set before us. The Song concludes with, 'The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God'. Another one of the Isaianic Servant Songs has these words, 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth' (Isa. 49:6). Zechariah the priest sang over his baby, John the Baptist, a prophetic song which closed with these words:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:76–79).

On the Sunday of the resurrection of Christ, the risen Lord taught twice on the references which were made in ‘all the Scriptures’ concerning himself (Luke 24:13–49). This brings us to two points: (i) all through the old era God had spoken to Man by the prophets and Revelation 19:10 states ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy’, so that there was in Israel a constant looking forward to a Coming One; and (ii) God’s plan and purpose could only be fulfilled by Christ’s salvific works. It means that the old era, of itself and even of the covenant of God, could not accomplish the plan of God. Paul puts it this way:

As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God (2 Cor. 1:18–20).

In the Old Testament there had been prophecies concerning a person or persons called variously ‘Son of God’, ‘Son of Man’, ‘Messiah’, ‘Suffering Servant’, ‘Shoot of Jesse’, ‘Davidic King’—and so on. This shows that God was continually communicating His will regarding the future to His people before Christ’s first coming. His *am segullah*—‘special possession’ (Deut. 7:6; Exod. 19:5–6; cf. Titus 2:14)—were always informed. As Amos said, ‘Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?’ (Amos 3:7–8).

For all of these elements and offices prophesied to be present and active in one Person must be seen to be amazing, and eternally significant. Let us suppose that none of these offices was fulfilled in Christ, then his life would have been as that of any other human. If he had not become incarnate by the Spirit of God through Mary, and if there had been no preaching and teaching, signs and wonders, and if there had been no cross, no resurrection, no ascension and no reigning at the right hand of God then there would have been no saving gospel, no transformation of Man, no community of Christ, no saving word to the nations and no hope of eternal life. These are the facts as we see them. What work of God went into preparing to send His Son into the world!

That these things surely have happened is evident to those who have faith in God and in Christ. It needs no proof to say that God was on mission, for he sent His Son into the world and His Son has sent us into the world. We claim that the Father has ever been on mission, and it is easily seen that He has been active from before creation in Eden and the times following Eden in building towards the day of Christ, the days of his flesh, and the fulfilment of salvation history. We too have been sent on this very mission.

The aim of our continuing series of Studies on mission is to set forth Christ as in the days before his incarnation, in the days of his flesh, and now in his Lordship over all creation! The early church saw Messiah freshly, understood much that some of us have yet to understand. They were in love with him and his Father and Holy Spirit. That they must be on mission with God was for them always an indispensable presupposition. They knew the God who is Maker of heaven and earth, who is Redeemer of the world and who will bring about the glorious *telos* when all will have been saved, purified, justified, sanctified, glorified and perfected!

How then can we be members of the community of Christ and not be on mission. It strikes me that we can be missiologists and yet not be on mission. We may be fascinated by the matter of mission but yet have no fire and passion for it. God forbid that we should live on in this concept of mission yet not be in the action of it. May the illusion of a romantic missionary occupation be dissipated and may we know the God of all true mission is at work in our world, today!

Addendum to Monthly Ministry Study, February 2003

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *REFORMED DOGMATICS* ON 'THE PACTUM SALUTIS', pp. 321–22

However, as soon as we present the matter of the covenant in this wise, if the life of the covenant in God is such a life of most perfect friendship, of the most intimate communion, of the deepest knowledge and the most affectionate love, it follows, in the first place, that the idea of the covenant cannot be found in an agreement or pact. In perfect harmony and communion of life, in the perfect, eternal knowing of one another, and in the most perfect love and unity, the idea of an agreement, of the conclusion of a pact, does not fit. In such a relation everything is spirit and life. The covenant idea is given with the life of the Triune God in Himself. It rises in eternal spontaneity from the divine Essence and realizes itself with perfect divine consciousness in the Three Persons. God knows and wills Himself, loves and seeks Himself eternally as the covenant God. The covenant is the bond of God with Himself. It is the eternal life of perfect light.

But if this is so in God Himself, this must also be applicable to the covenant idea as a relation between God and man. For all things are only out of God, through Him, and unto Him. Also the covenant relation can never be anything else than an ectypical reflection of the covenant life in God Himself. If the essence of the covenant in God is the communion of friendship, this must also be the essence of the covenant between God and Man. If this communion of friendship in God rests upon the perfect essential unity by personal distinction, then this must also be the case with the covenant between God and man: it also must be based upon a creaturely likeness of man to God by personal distinction. If this communion of friendship in the Trinity implies a perfect knowledge of one another, then also the covenant life of man must consist in this, that God reveals Himself to him, causes man to know Him, reveals His secrets to him, speaks to him as a Friend with His friend, walks with him, eats and drinks with him, lives with him under one roof. If the covenant life in God consists in this, that the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are united in the bond of perfect love, then also the covenant relation between God and man must originate in this, that God opens His heart for man. Then the life of the covenant is eternal life itself. For this is life eternal, that they know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent. Thou in Me, and I in them, that they may be perfect in One . . . Then the covenant is the very essence of religion, the highest good, the very best that can ever be imparted to man through grace, the highest bliss. The idea of the covenant is certainly not a pact or agreement, whether you conceive of such an agreement in the unilateral or bilateral sense. It is the relation of the most intimate communion of friendship in which God reflects His own covenant life in His relation to the creature, gives to that creature life, and causes him to taste and acknowledge the highest good and the overflowing fountain of all good.

And once more, if we may thus conceive of the very essence of the covenant, the covenant also is not a way to a certain end, is no means to the attainment of a certain purpose, is not the manner wherein we are saved. It is itself the highest purpose, the end, the eternal bliss, unto which all things tend and must tend. Then the purpose of all things is always the covenant of God. Then the covenant determines and dominates the whole of God's counsel, and the whole of history concentrates around the highest realization of the covenant of God. That is the sole purpose in creation and recreation. That is the purpose of

the Word, of the cross and resurrection, of the uniting of all things in heaven and on earth in Immanuel, God with us. In the covenant of God is found the motive of the struggle of all ages in the world. And in that covenant is found the reason for the consummation of all things. And the idea of the covenant dominates all existence and all life and all relations of the creatures to God and of the creatures mutually. So all-dominating is the idea of the covenant that it would not be impossible to write a complete dogmatics from the viewpoint of the covenant. Not a way, and not a means, but the final destination and the all-dominating purpose is the covenant of God.

The Purpose and Plan of God's Mission—1

INTRODUCTION: DOES GOD HAVE A PLAN?

If God did not have a plan from the beginning then it would be a strange creation indeed. It is one thing for Him to have a plan, and another for Him to reveal it. If He does not reveal it then we will not know what He is about, nor how we should understand creation and what will be the outcome of history, assuming there is such a purposive history. In our first study (February 2003) we almost took it for granted that God has always had a purpose for creation, in which humanity figures largely but which encompasses all heavenly and earthly creatures and, indeed, all elements of creation. Were we, then, justified in concluding that this would be the case? Certainly the revealed religions or faiths of the world—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—have the view that there was a beginning to time, to creation, and that God's plan moves from history's *proton* to its *eschaton* and that the in between time is important, affected as it is by the *proton* (initial age) which is its beginning and launching, and the *eschaton* (final era) which is its climaxing or consummating goal (*telos*). Some religions naturally do not have this scheme because they envisage neither beginning nor end to time. In revealed religions God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The whole Bible for Christians does contain a plan and this has been called 'the whole counsel of God', i.e. 'His wise purpose'. Another term is 'salvation history' (*heilsgeschichte*), i.e. a timewide and worldwide plan to bring salvation to the whole of humanity. It also has to do with the redemption of all creation.

THE WHOLE PLAN OF GOD

We have chosen to see history as that activity by which God is on mission. We have described mission as that act of God working His will in time until His plan for creation is completed. He is the Author and Completer of His own plan. He is not sent, but He goes on the mission which is His intention for creation (John 5:17), and especially for Man whom He has made to be His own image.¹ Where Man is truly the image of God then he properly reflects the nature and purpose of God, for he is one with the will and intention of God. It is permissible to say that God is the One who goes on mission and who sends others on mission. In this case all God is about is mission, both in His own 'going' and His sending, or taking with Him. Man is never truly Man in the full ontological meaning of the word unless he is living in obedience to God. Full obedience to God entails being wholly on mission with God.

The reason we need to know the plan of God is that without that knowledge we have no understanding of what God's mission is. Whilst we have been sent and while we are going, yet we do not know the goal nor fully what God is about. Sadly enough, when we ask, 'What is God's mission?' we get many answers such as, 'Into all the world',

¹ There is a debate as to whether Man *is* the image and glory of God (1 Cor. 11:7) or is made *in* the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26f.). Those who hold the latter view see that the image and glory of God is Christ (Heb. 1:3) and in Christ the image is complete (see Eph. 4:23–24; Col. 3:9–10).

which may be true but what for? The answer to the 'What for?' is reasonably, 'To preach the gospel', but when we ask what is the gospel then we get the answer, 'The good news'; and when we ask, 'What is the entirety of the good news?' then we are told, correctly enough, 'Human salvation', but then salvation is not complete unless it includes not only forgiveness of sins and justification, but also sanctification, glorification and perfection. Most of all it means becoming His special possession, His ecclesia, His kings and priests, who will reign over creation with Him for all eternity as well as through all eternity, as we now more particularly present this amazing fact, below.

We have defined mission as that activity which has God as the Sender, Man as the sent, angels as their servants (Heb. 1:14) and all creation to be renewed into the glory intended for it (Rom. 8:18–21). In mission, the word God proclaimed as the message of the sent ones, the action of response by heeding hearers, the community which forms in the action of active mission, and the final completion of the mission through the eschaton at the telos of all history are all part of 'the good news'. These sentences describe the activity of mission, but innate to it is the fulfilment of the plan which God has ever had in mind. In mission, God is not sent, precisely because He is the one going from Himself, so that He is always on mission, which for Him is ever going as the Father who loves, the Son who loves and the Spirit who brings their love to creation, and all Three working in those who are created to be God's family. Even so, we see that as Father, God sends His Son and then the Father and the Son together send the Holy Spirit (John 14:24–26; 15:26; 16:7). In a way it can be said that the Son establishes the basis of mission by creating the gospel so that then the Spirit can act as 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus', i.e. he brings the gospel to the heart of Man and by that gospel effects the fulfilling of the righteousness (*dikaïoma*) of the law of God (Rom. 8:1–4). By this means Man becomes fully one with God in the mission He is enacting.

We will have cause to come back to this description of mission and our use of the term 'the righteousness of the law' (*to dikaïoma tou nomou*) but here, briefly, we may comment that in Romans 8:1–11, 'the righteousness of the law' means walking in the Spirit and not walking in the flesh. It is the fulfilling in us of all that the law is about, thus pleasing God. The *dikaïoma* is of a certain nature which we will need, eventually, to discuss. Put briefly, the fulfilment of the *dikaïoma* of the law is the final state of the whole church in which the *dikaïoma* will obtain eternally. Saying this leads us to the widest view of the plan of God. In short, God's plan for eternity is to create, in time—the time from the *proton* to the *eschaton-telos*—that special community of humanity which in previous studies we have seen to be the *ecclesia*, the *am segullah* (God's 'own possession' or 'special possession') as stated in Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18f.; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10, 'the people of God', 'a people for his own'. This people will be the people who will rule in all eternity as 'a kingdom and priests' or 'a kingdom, priests to his God and Father'. What that Kingdom constitutes and why it should even be will be a matter for our discussion.

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE PLAN OF GOD

By 'substance of the plan' we are looking at what has been happening and is, presently, happening, and will happen in the process of history and eternity. In our last study we took up the matter of the everlasting covenant which we said is innate to history, and without which the creating love of God could not be operative. We saw that all creation is within that covenant. That covenant of love could not be the covenant of grace at the

time of the creation for grace awaited the Fall and thus became operative at the Fall though pre-imagined before creation (Gen. 3:15; Eph. 1:3–14; etc.). We are interested in the matters which concern our salvation which we delimit to being saved from judgment, generally to do with the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of eternal life. However, we should see salvation on a much broader canvas, comprehending all things, even up to and including the regeneration of the entire creation, for this is the scope of the everlasting covenant.

In our previous study we emphasised the everlasting covenant so we also took up the matter of the Kingdom, though mainly as referring to the ecclesia as constituted of those who will be 'a kingdom, priests to his God and Father' (Rev. 1:6). In this study we will need to stress the importance of both covenant and kingdom as they pertain to 'mission' and as 'mission' pertains to them. Even so, at this point we will take what we may call some of the more obvious promises of God pertaining to *heilsgeschichte*—i.e. salvation—remembering Isaiah 49:6 which encompasses the whole world, Jew and Gentile: 'he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth"'. The points made below take us to the elements which constitute salvation. These are to be known by all who are saved:

- (a) *The people of God were chosen before time*: 'he chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world'; cf. 'For those whom he knew he also predestined' (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:29). 'Us' in its context must mean 'the elect people of God'.
- (b) *The people of God would be holy*: 'he chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him' (Eph. 1:4; cf. Col. 1:22; Heb. 12:14).
- (c) *His people are to have salvation*: 'the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago [before times eternal]'; 'you were ransomed . . . with the precious blood of Christ . . . destined before the foundation of the world, but . . . made manifest at the end of the times for your sake' (2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:18–19).
- (d) *His people are to be his children, i.e. sons*: 'He destined us . . . to be his sons through Jesus Christ'; cf. 'our Father, our Redeemer from eternity is thy name'; 'my sons . . . and my daughters . . . whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made' (Eph. 1:5; Isa. 63:16; 43:6–7; cf. Eph. 1:4–14).
- (e) *His people are to have eternal life*: 'God's elect . . . in hope of eternal life which God . . . promised ages ago [before times eternal]'; 'name[s] . . . written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb' (Titus 1:1–2; Rev. 13:8 2; cf. Tim. 1:10).
- (f) *His people are to enter his Kingdom*: 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'; cf. 'He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son' (Matt. 25:34; Col. 1:13).
- (g) *His people are to be glorified and to glorify God for His grace and His glory*: 'we impart a secret and hidden wisdom . . . which God decreed before the ages for our glorification'. This glorification glorifies God: 'we who first hoped . . . have been destined and appointed . . . for the praise of his glory . . . you also [Gentiles] . . . to

the praise of his glory'; 'my sons . . . and my daughters . . . whom I created for my glory' (1 Cor. 2:6–10; Eph. 1:11–14; Isa. 43:6–7; cf. 1 John 3:1).

- (h) *His people are to have an inheritance:* as in Abraham to inherit the earth, and the Kingdom of God: (Eph. 1:14, 18; cf. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:9ff.; 2 Thess. 1:5).
- (i) *The whole creation will be brought into unity by Christ:* 'a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth'. Note also 'filling up'; 'harmonising'; etc.; 'Christ . . . who fills all in all'; 'that he might fill all things'; 'reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven'; 'love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony' (Eph. 1:9–10, 23; 4:10; Col. 1:20; 3:14).
- (j) *All evil will be judged and eliminated:* 'But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men' (2 Peter 3:7; cf. Rev. 18 – 20).

GOD'S WHOLE PLAN

In realising these elements of salvation we are encouraged to go on in the Spirit. Even so, there is much more we can discover from the Scriptures which is included in God's plan. Wide as these elements cover the matter of salvation—particularly as to the benefits of salvation—it is necessary that we discover and understand even more than these benefits. We need to see why we were created, and what God has in store for us and all His creation. This means that in mission God has more for us than even these benefits. Whilst we are *recipients* of the grace and love of God in what is set out above, we need to know more about what it means to be *participants in God Himself*, in God who is love. The nature of love is that recipients of love cannot simply receive and take but must necessarily love the One who has loved them and all who are upon the earth. Rightly understood, this process of receiving love and loving—along with its other moral concomitants—can be called *theosis* or the *divinisation* of us in the action of God. This means, simply, that we are filled unto all the fullness of God in all our parts, personally, and in all our community, corporately. It does not mean that Man moves from being human to becoming divine, but that he, being human, fills to the full what it is to be the image of God and participates in the action of all that God is doing here, in time, and there, in eternity. All of it is really the exposition of God who is love, and so of Man who, as the image of God, must needs be a participant in that love so that the ultimate community of Man will be seen to be as he lives as the community of love. The Community of God—the Trinity—and the community of Man (the ecclesia), can never be apart in eternity. They must be one—whatever that may mean in practice. Paul is talking about this eschatologically as well as presently in 1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13. Paul is saying that history will be completed by love; that love is 'the highest way of all'. It is the true *telos* of history.

THE STORY OF GOD'S LOVE IN CREATION, COVENANT AND KINGDOM

In this section we will be seeking to show that the creation came into being through God's love, that Man was created in love to love, and although Man rebelled against God

and set himself up as the one who lives properly, yet only those who know God in faith are the people of love, i.e. the community which is God's community of love.

GOD'S CREATION IS OF LOVE AND LOVE IS COVENANTAL

God can never be compared to anything in creation. Because He created all, the whole of it is less than He is, yet creation gives us knowledge of Him as Creator, for it is *in* the things that He made that He gives knowledge of Himself when the human heart wishes to read creation in a pure way (Titus 1:15). In rebellion Man lost the gift of knowing God wonderfully as wonderful (Rom. 1:19–25). Looking at creation the darkened mind can never exclaim in ecstasy, 'God is love!' Because of Man's sin the creation has been placed in bondage to futility. How then does the mind without godly wisdom come to the cry, 'God is love!?' The answer is that human love is so powerful and so full of self-power and self-regard that it can never know what is divine love. In one sense it takes a whole Bible to be able to say, 'God is love!' The sin-darkened mind will not be able to comprehend this mystery.

The saying, 'God is love', is not comprehended because neither the word 'God' is comprehended nor the word 'love'. There is not an entity which is called 'love', otherwise we might be tempted to say, 'love is *God*', and it cannot be that way for '*God* is love'. John puts it, 'love is of God', meaning that where love is in action through human beings, then it is God who aids in action through those human beings. Because we who are writing and reading these things have claimed to know the revelation of the saying, 'God is love', then we can start off our story by saying 'God is love'. We can then see that all creation was made by the One who is love, and that it is therefore a love creation. Here Matthew 5:43–48 is a guide to us:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

In this text we are shown that God loves when He 'makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous'. He is loving both the sinful and the unrighteous by His gifts given to both. To love is to do good to and for the object of love. It is, of course, many other things. If love is an attitude then it is not a passive one. It goes out to do good to the one loved, even if that one may be unlovable by certain standards some of us hold. It is interesting that the term 'love' in the Old Testament was not used explicitly for God's nature or relationship with humans before Exodus 20:6 where Israel was commanded to love God. God as the One who loves Israel finds its first mention in Deuteronomy 4:37—'because he loved your fathers and chose their descendents after them, and brought you out of Egypt with His own presence'. By these words of Moses, God is discovering His love to Israel. A great moment in the history of Israel and, indeed, of mankind.

Even so, human love is present in Abel as we discover in 1 John 3:10ff. Cain hated his brother because his brother's deeds were righteous and his own were evil. In this was—and is—a large story. Abel loved his brother although his deeds were evil. Abel's own works were righteous, and righteousness is always doing right works which are in accordance with the law, will and purpose of God. Whoever is against the law, will and

purpose of God does evil deeds. This principle is set out graphically in two passages by Paul. He indicates that when humanity does not work by the law, which is really the law of love, then anti-loving is precipitated:

Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted (1 Tim. 1:8–11).

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another (Titus 3:1–3).

GOD'S TRUE COMMUNITY WORKS BY FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE

Taking into account the Fall, and reading afresh Romans 1:18–32 we see that fallen Man hates God and fellow-humanity. We must hold in balance the statement, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God', and the fact that in history 'by faith' (Heb. 11:1ff.) has ever been the principle of living for the true people of God, i.e. 'faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6). These latter are they who by God's grace were—and are—His beloved people although born in Adam. They are the people of love. We must also recognise that sinful people are in many stages of sinning, hence the 'many stripes' and 'few stripes' of Luke 12:48 (AV). On the whole, humanity lives by 'natural law' so that the evil outlined in our quotes above shows the extremes in sinning, which are generally recognised in human society.²

Within this recognition of extreme evil—i.e. within human depravity—is the fact that human beings nevertheless understand the words 'holiness', 'righteousness', 'goodness', 'truth' and 'love'. All humanity deals with these words and many more, such as 'kindness', 'gentleness', 'mercy', 'pity', 'compassion', 'sympathy' and the like. Man's depravity does not mean that he is wholly evil—i.e. one hundred per cent—but that being originally created by God in 'holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth and love' (cf. 'created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness'; Eph. 4:24), fallen Man has not entirely lost the lineaments of true human being. Now the words, 'holiness', 'righteousness', 'goodness', 'truth' and 'love', are the attributes or properties of God. They are His in His essential being. He does not so much have these essences as they are Him, Himself. Also the words, 'kindness', 'gentleness', 'mercy', 'pity', 'compassion', pertain to Him. For all creation they are the great issues of life and being. To genuinely know God is to know these are of Him. Take, for example, Jeremiah 9:23–24:

Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and *knows* me, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD.'

² The idea of 'natural law' needs to be understood. It is discussed variously and can mean 'God's law written in all by creation but not known in all clarity', or 'the law which is natural to all creation and recognised as authentic', or 'the law of the natural man: the way he decides to hold as authentic law'. The Nuremburg trials shows that all nations can come to a view of law which is commonly held, and certainly common enough to show what is crime against humanity.

God says that He practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth for He delights in these things. They are the issues of His being. They are the issues *for* creation. Man as the image of God is to reflect these to the creation. When Moses was afraid to take up the people of Israel to the Promised Land, he asked God to reveal His glory to him. Moses needed to be convinced that God's character was such that He would cause them to arrive. God showed his glory to Moses in terms of words and qualities which Moses would be aided to understand:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation (Exod. 34:6-7).

Here is a full description of God as He is: the God who acts according to His character—in covenant. For such a God the taking of His people to Canaan is no problem. It is worth noting that many, many times Israel reminds itself and even God Himself of these words He spoke in revelation of Himself. In the same breath we should remember that Man, made in the image of God, was created to reflect God's whole Being which includes His moral properties and essences. Two other quotes are worth considering for Israel had them ever in its thinking:

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).

For I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Ascribe greatness to our God! 'The Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he' (Deut. 32:3-4).

Now all of these descriptions tell us the nature of God, especially as they are directed to His creation and His covenant people. For those who have rejected God, another side of God's Being and character seems to be seen, since God is viewed perversely, as in Psalm 18:25-27:

With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal;
with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless;
with the pure thou dost show thyself pure;
and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.
For thou dost deliver a humble people;
but the haughty eyes thou dost bring down.

THE LAW IS THE LAW OF LOVE: ISRAEL TO BE THE LOVE COMMUNITY

At this point we remind ourselves of our main heading to this section, 'The Story of God's Love in Creation, Covenant and Kingdom'. What we have been doing in this section is seeking to show that God has created in love, worked in love for His creation and sought to have humanity be a community of love. Further, His community for eternity was to be *the* love community for all time and eternity. In our previous study we have pointed to the power of God's everlasting covenant operating in a sinful world. We have noted the antediluvian, diluvian and postdiluvian ages and God's action in them. We saw God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and how that led to the Sinaitic covenant with Israel. Now we wish to comment on the fact that it was a love covenant,

and its law not just a set of burdensome commands. We also need to see that by law God was about making Israel a community of love.

Making Israel into a love community may seem to say that God left it until later in history before He began to make such a community. The fact is that Man had the opportunity to do this from the time he was placed in Eden. From Eden onwards there was the community of faith, no matter how large or small it may have been, but God taught Man much through history which led to the making of the creational covenant to be the covenant with Abraham. Whatever may be the case Israel was chosen as God's special people, and such a nation was not chosen before or after it. Exodus 19:5–6 gives us the details:

Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.

The only condition for Israel being God's *am segullah*—a special possession for Himself—is 'if you will *obey* my voice and *keep* my covenant'. When Moses told the people what God had said they replied, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do' (Exod. 19:8), and they reiterated this later when God made His covenant with them (Exod. 24:1–8). Now God's voice was heard especially at Sinai in the giving of the Ten Words, and so much so that it produced fear in the people. This is set out in Exodus 20:1–17. We quote only verses 18–20:

Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.'

In response to their plea not to have to hear God directly, they heard through Moses the word of God against making and worshipping idols. A simple altar of uncut stone was where God would meet them and bless them. Then what seems extraordinary, God gave Moses ordinances and precepts which cover three chapters of Exodus—21 to 23—after which the covenant was cut in chapter 24. To be noted about these three chapters is that *they certainly are precepts for actions of love*.

THE TEN WORDS OF LOVE

Simo Peura comments on the first commandment of the Ten Word or Decalogue:

The first commandment, 'You shall have no other gods,' is written as natural law at creation into the heart of all human beings. By writing his will into our hearts, the Writer—himself the source of all goodness—aims at making himself known as the Giver of goodness. For even prior to this commandment, he says: 'I am the Lord, Your God,' that is, the source of all the goodness you need. Thus, the intention of writing these commandments into the human heart is to bring true, unselfish love into existence in this world. Therefore, God maintains this law in our hearts in the very act of maintaining our human life. Thus, the first commandment as well as the other nine becomes an irrevocable reality in human life through God's continuous creation. Humans are aware of an object of religious worship in their very nature. Someone or something is always set forth as the god that is loved, as exemplified in their ways of paying respect and of worshipping this god.³

³ Quoted in *Union with Christ; The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, eds Carl E. Braaten and Robert Jenson (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998), p. 79.

One comment we could make on the whole Ten Words is that its preface is, 'I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'. That is, I have shown My love to you—My covenant love—so you by responding, grateful love ought to—i.e. must—love Me in your obedience. Simo Peura says, 'the intention of writing these commandments into the human heart is to bring true, unselfish love into existence in this world'. He is really saying that by virtue of creation and the giving of the law, we are urged to love God, and that God's law is the way of love. Undoubtedly Jesus confirmed this in his discussion with the scribes concerning the law:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these' (Mark 12:28–31).

The Ten Words are composed of two tablets, the first four words having to do with love to God, and the following six to do with love to one's neighbour. To obey the law with a right heart is to love. The principle John enunciates is, 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). He is not saying, 'We love God because He first loved us', for God warned against a merely reciprocal love in Matthew 5:46–47. John is saying that the urge to love comes from being loved by God. The law being that of love means that obedience to His law is love. In John 14:15, 21, Jesus teaches, 'If you love me you will keep my commandments . . . he who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me'. Whilst he does not exactly say, 'My commandments are love', it amounts to this, especially when he speaks about the new commandment being love, without any contrast of the old not being love.

JOHN: OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAW AND LOVE IN HIS FIRST LETTER

There is so much crammed into John's First Letter regarding love and obedience. Many things are evident as we scan the Letter, things such as having fellowship with God, walking in light, confessing the matter of sin and sinning, looking to Christ for the propitiation of those sins, being loved by God and loving one another, being opposed by the evil one—the devil—as also being opposed by deceitful spirits and antichrists. John is also quite concerned with law and the possibility of transgressing it. So many of his rich ideas crowd in upon us that we have to decide to meet these ideas one by one. To do this we are required to make our way patiently through the Epistle, step by step. As we use this method so we are filled with wonder for the mind of the Apostle.

For our purpose we can say that John's Letter gives us a clear view of the law as love. For example: when in chapter 3 John speaks of sin as transgressing the law we are struck with his high view of law, and have no reason to think he is speaking of other than the moral law:

Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous. He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother (1 John 3:4–10).

His first point is that sin is lawlessness, i.e. rejection of the law and transgression of it. The one who sins is a stranger to God and does not live in Him. Only the one doing the same righteousness as God does righteousness and so is righteous. Righteousness is doing right things, things of the law of God which is God's own way of doing righteousness. One belongs to the system or principle of doing righteousness, otherwise one is of the devil. To sin is to be of the devil. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God commits sin for God's seed or being is in him and he cannot sin. We can now discern that the one who is of God does not sin, but the one who is of the devil does sin.⁴ John then concludes with this sentence, 'By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother'.

This sentence tells us that the lawless one does not observe the law of love. For John the law *is* the law of love. To obey the law is to love one's brother. We have already seen that Jesus summed up the law as: (i) love to God; and (ii) love to one's neighbour. In chapter 2 John also develops this idea:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, 'I have come to know him,' but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, 'I abide in him,' ought to walk just as he walked (1 John 2:1-6, *NRSV*).

John says we only know him—Christ—if we keep his commandments. Later in our study we will pick up the statement 'knowing him' and show—as here—that that has to do with obeying the law, but here he who disobeys his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.⁵ Now comes the astonishing statement, 'truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection'. Note the difference between the *RSV*, 'love *for* God is perfected' and the *NRSV*, 'the love *of* God has reached perfection'. The latter is undoubtedly the correct translation. One John 4:12 says, 'No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us'. *RSV* and *NRSV* agree wholly in this case. To keep or obey God's word, then, means God's love comes to its perfect goal in us. This is a stunning statement. It means that there are human beings—those of God's community of love—in whom God's love is perfected, i.e. has come to its goal. John has yet another passage on love and obedience:

Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:1-5).

⁴ We are not entering into the age-old debate of how a believer does not sin. We are simply saying there are two categories, the first being of those who have been born of God and sin is abhorrent to them. Their bias is to not sin. The second category is of those who are of the devil and are unregenerate. Their bias is to sin.

⁵ In this passage it would appear that John is talking about knowing Christ and obeying Christ's commandments, but John seems to be referring to God—the Father—when it comes to commandments. John in this Epistle often does not distinguish meticulously between the Father and the Son.

Let us try a paraphrase in order to get the sense of the paragraph, remembering that the beginning of the fifth chapter lies in 4:19–21, ‘We love, because he first loved us. If any one says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.’

Paraphrase: The test of new birth is that we believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Anyone who loves the parent of a child loves the child born of the parent. (How can I say I love God if I do not love my brother who was conceived of my father/of my heavenly Father?) The way in which we test out whether we love God's children is this, God has so made us and His law that it is love to keep the law! What, anyway, is heavy about the law and keeping it? We said that to have faith is to believe Jesus is the messiah. OK, then, this belief defeats all that is the world, so we can properly have our love in keeping the law.

In 2 John 6 is the clear statement, ‘And this is love, that we follow his commandments; this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love’. We are now able to bring together knowledge of God and the law. We looked at 1 John 2:1–6:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, ‘I have come to know him,’ but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked.

We now can see that no one can know God if he does not keep His commandments, yet ‘whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection’. In John 17:1–5 Jesus summed up his ministry as ‘having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do’, and in that context he uttered the statement, ‘this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent’. To know is to do: to obey is to know.

If we look at Israel from Sinai onwards we gather that Israel knows its God—Yahweh, the God of covenant. He has revealed Himself by His word as the Covenant God, as Yahweh, the Lord. To know Him is to do His law and as it is *His* law then to do that law is to know Him. This is so of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The promise of the New Covenant is startling, especially as we see it used in the Epistle to the Hebrews in 8:8–12 and 10:16–17. It infers that all Israel did not, at the time of Jeremiah, know the Lord. This is also clear in Jeremiah 9:6, 23–24 where ‘“they refuse to know me,” says the LORD’. It was similarly clear in the time of Hosea:

Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air; and even the fish of the sea are taken away. Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest. You shall stumble by day, the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children (Hosea 4:1–6).

Israel refuses to have knowledge of God and it does this by refusing to keep His law. If it had kept His law then it would have known Him and instead of the horror of its evil there would have been the ways of love. It would have known Him as love as it had thus known him from the beginning when he had liberated them from Egypt and brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey. In 5:15 – 6:6 comes the exhortation to repentance in which is the word of God, 'For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings'. This means that had they kept the law from the heart they would have known Him as love and would have given Him steadfast love in return. Israel would have been what God designed it to be—the community of love, now and until the *telos*.

CONCLUSION TO PART 1 OF 'THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF GOD'S MISSION'

What we have been about in this study is seeking to discover what it is for which God has ever been, and is being, on Mission. We should be telling this in its fullest form and content. The whole counsel of God is what God in His wisdom has chosen to do in creating the universe. If we believe we are sent then if we take and tell only a trifling message to humanity—humanity created by God for eternal greatness—our proclaiming will be a disgrace. Even if we emphasise a worthy part of the gospel time and again but withhold the full counsel of God, then we are cheating. If human motives move us with human compassion and pity and a desire to give the world the comforts and cultures which are ours then we have turned the gospel into a trifle. If what we have seen in these two studies is the true goal of God for His creation, then we have a magnificent message to bring. It is that by creation and redemption and the revelation of God and His intention for eternity we have a glorious vista of the God of love to give to sinners under wrath, and under the misery of their guilt. It is to show that God's plan from beginning to end is being fulfilled out of His love, and that He is making us into a people of love who, having been forgiven, justified, sanctified, glorified and perfected, will now be one with Him—the love community of the Godhead—as that community so united to Him, and in Him, that it will be His peer community, the community utterly one in love, working with Him in all eternity, filling out with Him the plan He has for the future of all creation.

Meanwhile let us ponder the Addendum to this study so that we may glimpse the nature and greatness of His people as they live in the 'now' and yet wholly participate in the 'then' of the *telos*.

Addendum to Studies Two and Three¹

FUTURE PERFECTION BRINGS GLORY IN THE CHURCH BY CHRIST JESUS—NOW

God would have us be like Him and live and act like Him. In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks about the fullness of God. Primarily he appears to be talking about a fullness of Christ (1:22–23; cf. 4:10, 13), but it is He who as Father of us all ‘is above all, and through all and in all’ (4:6). That is, we live in His fullness. It is He who has put all things under Christ’s feet and has made him to be Head over all things for the Church, which is his Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. The Son then gives his fullness to the *ecclesia*, that with and through and by the Church he may fill all things. His aim is to ‘fill all things’ (Eph. 4:10) from the depths to the ultimate height of the universe. His ascension gifts are those of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher:

... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12–13).

Such fullness—as is God’s fullness—is a moral fullness. As we have said, God would have us be like Him, especially as He verbalises His glory in Exodus 34:6–7 and reveals it in the very person and works of His Son.

What matters to God is not what we would call ‘great works’, but works of simple faith, trust in God, humility, lowliness, meekness, patience, compassion, mercy, gentleness, kindness, longsuffering, goodness, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things, putting others before oneself, looking primarily to the interests of others, being other-persons centred, laying down one’s life for others, covering the multitude of sins of another, and always forgiving as one has been forgiven. It is also spurning arrogance and pride, putting off immorality, anger, wrath, malice, slander, impurity, passion, gossip, malignity, heartlessness, ruthlessness, deceit, envy, murder, foolishness and faithlessness. It is to mourn the evil of oneself and others, to know poverty of spirit as the mind of humility, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to be reviled and not revile, to be persecuted and not fight in return, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

All these elements reflect the very nature of God. This is how He would have us be and do. Not only do we reflect Him by being His image, but the very *ecclesia* itself is the image of the Divine Community—the Godhead. All we have in the previous paragraph are not criteria for us to accomplish, but the present life we live in response to His salvation and His ever-acting love. We have all these things in the fullness of God and His Christ. Christ’s fullness is assuredly in the power of the Father (Eph. 1:19–22), and the ‘unsearchable riches of Christ’ (Eph. 3:8) and ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2:3) which are His. So Paul prays that through the Spirit and Christ we may come to the point of being filled unto all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14–19). It is in and by that fullness that we become like God and live as we have described above.

¹ This Addendum is taken from G. Bingham’s *The Beloved Community of God* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 2002), pp. 226–8.

It is not 'great deeds' which we must accomplish as 'fame is the spur', but the genuinely humble things when love is the true spur. We may be sad that all is not wholly so now, in our conduct and ministry, but Paul tells us to '[go on being] filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18f.), which means, 'by means of the Holy Spirit go on being filled unto all the fullness of God'.

That is the fullness we will know in the *eschaton* and *telos*. That will be when the Church as the Holy Bride will be one forever with the Holy Bridegroom, the union that will bring fruit for eternity. We do well not to despair at the seeming flaws and failures of the present community. Christ is ever working in it, ever walking among the candlesticks. Through rebuke, correction, and encouragement he will bring his beloved community to its ultimate perfection and goal. This is the hope we have as we believe the promises of God, and are sure that the Church, along with all creation, will worship and serve God for ever.

God's Mission in the World—the Righteousness of God and Man

Most significant for the matter and action of mission is the theme of the righteousness of God and Man, since creation was made in righteousness. It was made with a view to Man being righteous (Eph. 4:24) as the image of God, and the climax of the *telos* would be a new heaven and a new earth inhabited by righteousness (2 Pet. 3:11–13). When we see the rabid unrighteousness of Man at work in the world, we know that only the gospel of God's righteousness can bring it to righteousness before God, and righteousness as the way of true being–doing in eternity.

THE MATTER OF UNIVERSAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

Second Peter 3:11–13 speaks of the age to come:

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

'According to his promise' relates to the new heaven and the new earth as prophesied in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 and which we see particularly fulfilled in Revelation 21:1–4, 27. There are also general prophesies of a beautiful and pacific time coming as in Isaiah 25:6–9—which is quoted in Revelation 21:1–4—and in Isaiah 11:1–9 which speaks of the Messiah: 'Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist and faithfulness the girdle of his loins' (11:5).

The creation cannot be impugned as a place where righteousness did not—and does not—essentially dwell, although the fact of unrighteousness is presently present. Unrighteousness is illicit since all things were created by God in wisdom (Jer. 10:12; 51:15), and unrighteousness is negation of righteousness (cf. Rom. 1:18—suppressing the truth in acts of unrighteousness, *en adikia*) which is essentially so (e.g. in Greek 'unrighteousness' is *adikia* as against *dikaioisune* which is 'righteousness'). It would seem from Paul's injunction of Ephesians 4:22–24 (cf. Col. 3:10; Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 7:29) that Man was created in righteousness, 'Put off your old [humanity] which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new [humanity], *created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*'. This created righteousness, which was the gift to Man in the image of God, has been called 'original righteousness' which, it has been said, was virtually lost in the Fall (Rom. 5:12; 3:23) but is being renewed in the regenerated person in Christ (Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:9–10). Luther saw the image of God as lost in the Fall, but Calvin saw it as continuing in spite of depravity. Some have seen the image of God as reversed through the Fall, i.e. righteousness became unrighteousness—and so on—with all the attributes of God which Man was to reflect. Whatever the case, it is needful for us to understand what is the righteousness of God and the righteousness of Man.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AS AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD

Righteousness, theologically speaking, is one of God's attributes, the others being holiness, goodness, truth and love. These can be traced throughout Scripture as we look at the working of God and perceive His nature. Jeremiah 9:24 is one example, 'but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who *practise* steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD'. No attribute of God is separated from another: all function as one and at the same time.¹ God is living and active, not simply *having* attributes but *being* Yahweh or, in NT terms, Trinity. If we talk of the Divine attributes then we must see them as 'being-doing' essences or properties of God. In Isaiah 6:3 the seraphim say, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts', thereby attributing holiness to the Lord, and His holiness acted immediately on the prophet. Likewise John says, 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5), and he is speaking of the effect of that light.² In 1 John 4:8 and 16 he says simply 'God is love', i.e. love is attributed to God for 'love is of God'. Our understanding of an attribute of God belongs to a certain theological approach which sees the attributes of God as His nature, and that Man as the image of God reflects these attributes in his own behaviour. It is imperative that he reflect the attributes. He has no such attributes *of himself* for they are derived from God as he is in union with Him, i.e. Man is not love, but he loves out of his union with God. With God these attributes are not static but are enormously dynamic and constitute God's pure action. Man and God only act as one together within the life of covenant and so righteousness is the fulfilment of covenant law. In regard to covenantal law, J. A. Motyer puts it this way:

Law in the Image of God. Turning now to a very different genre of Scripture, we find in Lev. 19 that God has provided another image of himself on earth. Every aspect of human experience is gathered into this rich review of man's life under God's law: filial duty (vs. 3), religious commitment (vs. 4), ritual exactness (vs. 5), care of the needy (vs. 9), honesty in deed and word (vss. 11–12), and many more, touching on relationships and even on dress, hygiene, and horticulture. Yet all this variety suspends from one central truth: 'I am the Lord.' Lord is the divine name, the 'I am what I am' (Exod. 3:14), so that the significance of the recurring claim is not 'You must do what I tell you' (i.e., 'lord' as an authority word) but 'You must do this or that because I am what I am'; every precept of the law is a reflection of 'what I am.' Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written, preceptual image of God. The intention of Lev. 19 is declared at the outset: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' (vs. 2). The Lord longs for his people to live in his image, and to that end he has given them his law . . . When man in the image of God and law in the image of God come together in the fully obedient life, then man is indeed 'being himself.' His nature is the image of God, and the law is given both to activate and to direct that nature into a truly human life; any other life is subhuman. Of course, it is true that in a world of sinners the law, regrettably, has to give itself to the task of curbing and rebuking antisocial and degrading practices, but OT law has, to a far greater extent, the function of

¹ It all depends what we make of the word 'attribute'. To some it seems static, unrelational, or a latent source from which God will act. God's righteousness is far from static. In our present study we are seeing that God is powerfully active in righteousness in history in both judgment and salvation. All His acts are 'right'—whatever they are!

² For example, in his discourse on refusing to come to the light, i.e. come to himself, Jesus showed the powerful nature of light: 'But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have [already] been wrought in God' (John 3:21).

liberating man to live according to his true nature. For it is only when man finds the law of liberty that he becomes free. For this reason the OT asserts that the law has been given for our good, to bring us to a hitherto unrealised fullness of life (Deut. 4:1; 5:33; 8:1).³

We see, then, that the righteousness of Man is *doing* the right things—the things of the law, but *the law as it is in covenant*, i.e. in love relationship with God, and so in true obedience (cf. John 14:15). The law given at Sinai had within its scope the means⁴ of forgiveness and justification, namely the whole of salvation, *provided obedience was exercised in faith*. This is evident from Romans 10:1–4, especially verses 3 and 4, ‘For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified.’ Israel’s imagined righteousness was what Paul once thought was his. In Philippians 3:9 he says he wants to be found in Christ, ‘not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith’. So, then, ‘God’s righteousness’ in Romans 10:1–4 must mean ‘that righteousness which justifies the person who has faith in God’ as it did Abraham (Gen. 15:6) and as it did David (Ps. 32:1–5) as Paul pointed out in Romans 4:1–8. Abraham was justified *before* the law was given to Israel⁵ and David *within* the law that was given to Israel. When Paul cites Christ as the end of the law he does not mean the law’s cessation but its goal or *telos*. He could have meant that faith in Messiah was proleptic in both Abraham (Gal. 3:6–8) and in David (Ps. 32:1–5; Rom. 4:6–8), but covenant-faith must primarily be meant.⁶

What troubles some theologians is the fear that God’s righteousness has to be seen only as ‘distributive righteousness’, i.e. that God punishes the wicked (cf. Rom. 1:18–32) and rewards the righteous (2:6), so that this is where His righteousness begins and ends. Of course this is an undeniable part of God’s righteousness but to see it as *only* this is to miss the *schema* of Paul in Romans 1:16 – 3:31.⁷ It is to limit God’s entire righteousness and even to miss the foundational point of distributed, retributive righteousness. After his powerful utterance of 1:16–17 where Paul pronounces that the gospel ‘is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live”’, he then sets about his *schema* of showing that Man’s sinfulness is universal. He talks of distributive righteousness in order to set the basis for the righteousness which justifies the ungodly. He first shows that (i) the Gentiles have sinned and are under wrath (Rom. 1:18–32); and (ii) the Jews have sinned and are under wrath (2:1–29), i.e. ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (3:23). This, we repeat, would have to be taken as distributive righteousness. Having proved this he then shows the righteousness of God which is not distributive, as such, but justifies the sinner in the face of his sin, whether he is a Jew or

³ J. A. Motyer in an article ‘Biblical Concept of Law’ in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984), p. 624.

⁴ We mean the sacrificial system in the law, which though ‘a shadow of things to come’ nevertheless promised forgiveness and cleansing in the light of Christ’s atoning sacrifice which was to be the propitiation for all sins (Rom. 3:21–26; 1 John 4:9–10).

⁵ It is to be observed that Abraham was a righteous man in regard to observing and doing God’s law (Gen. 26:5).

⁶ In our study titled ‘The Purpose and Plan of God’s Mission—2’ we have already dealt with the lethal side of law, as well as its intention of life for the believer.

⁷ Indeed Paul’s exposition of God’s justifying righteousness extends beyond Romans 3:31 and includes the rest of the Epistle. It has to do with what flows from justification by grace and faith, ultimately including the destiny of the Jews and Gentiles in the ‘obedience of faith’ and the future of the righteousness of God and Man.

a Gentile. There is one God—the God of both Jew and Gentile—and saving righteousness is not limited to Israel. We say again that he certainly is describing 'distributive righteousness' in Romans 1:18 to 3:20, for in the face of law this is how things are, but from Romans 3:21–31 he is speaking of God's righteousness which is a saving righteousness. Both elements of righteousness—distributive and salvific—are set forth. One without the other is not the *whole* righteousness of God. It is certainly not a case of 'either/or'.

Everything depends upon God as the God of covenant, and when God cut the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:1–21; etc.) then 'the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed"' (Gal. 3:8), then it is seen that *all* the nations of the earth have to do with covenant and God's righteousness in all its expressions. Even so, there is a wider view of what is called 'the everlasting covenant' and that is that from creation God's covenant was with all creation including all humanity. Abraham's covenant and the covenant with Israel at Sinai are within this universal covenant. God's intention towards Man was always covenantal. From the moment of Adam's sin God has always exercised this grace of covenant.⁸ The prophecies concerning the Davidic Kingdom and the Davidic Covenant which merge with the prophecies of the New Covenant help to enlarge the panoramic perspective of God's righteousness.

N. T. Wright has a simple and helpful definition of righteousness:

The basic meaning of 'righteousness' and its cognates in the Bible derives from the Hebrew *sedeq* which was usually translated in the LXX as *dikaioyne*. It thus denotes not so much the abstract idea of justice or virtue, as right standing and consequent right behaviour, within a community. English translates this semantic field with two different roots: 'right', 'righteous', and 'righteousness' and 'just', 'justice', 'justify' and 'justification'. In Heb. and Gk., however, these ideas all belong together linguistically and theologically.⁹

Wright then presents this 'idea' as to do with: (i) the law court and the standing of a person in relation to the court's decision; and (ii) the covenantal setting which merges with that of the law court. These we will take up later in our study. Meanwhile it is helpful to know the words for unrighteousness in the OT are *aven*, *aval*, *avlah* and *lo tsedeq* (Isa. 10:1; 55:7; Job 27:7; Ps. 71:4; Lev. 19:15, 35; Deut. 25:16; Jer. 22:13), and that they carry the ideas of the doing of perversity, violence, iniquity, and un-righteousness. In the NT unrighteousness is *adikia*, the unrighteous person being *adikos*, i.e. carrying the idea of opposition to righteousness as in Romans 1:18, 6:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 12, and so being worthy of judgment. In order for us to understand the action of God towards *adikia* it will be helpful to tease out the ideas contained in the words 'just', 'justice' and 'righteousness'.

Looking at the story of the judgment of Sodom (Gen. 18:16–33), 'righteous men'—if there were any!—describes persons who lived righteously. In this case it seemed there were none but Lot and his family. Righteousness as a concept seems always, in fact, to have been understood without needing a word study of it. It simply means 'doing that which is right'. God in all His Being, in His works of creation, redemption and His irreversible plan does that which is right. In retributive justice He

⁸ The subject widens at this point and should be helped by wider reading. W. J. Dumbrell's *Covenant and Creation* (Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1984) is invaluable, and my *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* (Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill), could also be helpful.

⁹ N. T. Wright's article 'Righteousness' in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (IVP, Leicester, 1998) pp. 590–91.

does that which is right as a judge, and in saving righteousness which we may call 'covenantal' He does that which is 'right' in justifying the ungodly. As to what is essentially right in the sense of action, fallen human beings seek to determine what is right with their ideas of 'good' and 'evil', believing they are achieving righteousness when this is not the case. Their ideas are not inevitably right, especially because Man is fallen. What human beings do before God is known by God to be 'righteous' and 'unrighteous' according to His criteria of righteousness and unrighteousness.

At the same time the righteousness of obedience can only operate within the grace of covenant. God's act of saving righteousness leads to Man's response in what we might call moral and ethical righteousness, since these arise from the will which has been captured by grace. Again, in regard to God's righteousness in the Old Testament, H. Seebass observes:

Righteousness in the OT is not a matter of actions conforming to a given set of absolute legal standards, but of behaviour which is in keeping with the two-way relationship between God and man. Thus the righteousness of God appears in his God-like dealings with his people, i.e. in redemption and salvation (Isa. 45:21; 51:5f.; 56:1; 62:1). His righteous acts are extolled from the earliest times onward (Jdg. 5:11; 1 Sam. 12:7; Isa. 45:24; Mic. 6:5; Ps. 103[102]:6; Dan. 9:16). He who longs for redemption calls upon God's righteousness, i.e. he pleads for God's intervention (Pss. 71 [70]:2; 143[142]:11). Israel's enemies, by contrast, find God's righteousness to be the root of their downfall (Isa. 41:10f.; 54:17; Ps. 129[128]:4f.). For Israel's sake, even the very land itself may be restored through the gift of God's righteousness (Hos. 10:2; Joel 2:23; Isa. 32:15ff.; 48:18f.). Dwelling in the land as he does, Israel partakes of God's righteousness (Ps. 24[23]:5) and such righteousness may actually be referred to in spatial terms (Pss. 89[88]:16; 69[68]:28).¹⁰

The following texts show God in active righteousness which in the Old Testament is the vindication and deliverance of Israel even though they deserved only distributive righteousness. In Isaiah 5:15–17, the prophet says:

Man is bowed down, and men are brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are humbled. But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice [*mishpat*], and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness. Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins.

This is a passage speaking of God's judgment on Israel. J.A. Motyer comments on the text: '*Righteousness* is holiness expressed in moral principles: *justice* is the application of the principles of righteousness (cf. Isa. 1:21).¹¹ Both *justice* and *righteousness* are the outshining of holiness'.¹² The result of God's judgment on Israel is justice which brings the nation to exile (Isa. 5:13) and this would appear at first sight to be what is called 'distributive righteousness'—the punishment upon unrighteousness where righteousness would have been rewarded—and unless the *end* of the justice is seen then distributive justice would seem to be simply legal, but this is not the case. Isaiah 5:1–30 is spoken in the context of God's covenant with Israel, as are similar passages of judgment. At the making of the Sinaitic covenant Israel had promised, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do' (Exod. 24:7). The covenant was not a binding contract, but an irreversible promise of a people related to their covenant God who lived in His love and was their Deliver and their covenant Father. They had faith in Him in terms of

¹⁰ H. Seebass in an article 'Righteousness, Justification' in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3 (Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1978), p. 355. The article is co-authored by Colin Brown.

¹¹ 'How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers' (Isa. 1:21).

¹² *The Prophecy of Isaiah* by J. A. Motyer (IVP, Leicester, 1994), p. 72.

Deuteronomy 32:4, 'The Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he', and also in terms of Exodus 34:6-7:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.

Yes, God would show His righteousness in punishing them in wrath for their transgression, but the outcome would be their salvation. As Yahweh stated it:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah! How can I treat you like Zeboiim! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy (Hosea 11:8-9).

In Isaiah 54:1-17 God speaks of the restoration of Israel whom He has been punishing. Here verses 6 to 8 will suffice to show the love that is really justifying righteousness:

For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer.

We see, further, the righteousness of God in the Old Testament in its saving power. The redeeming or vindicating or justifying covenantal righteousness of God spoken of above, can be seen in the following references of the Old Testament which come from the *NKJV*:

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For He has done marvellous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. The LORD has made known His salvation; His *righteousness* He has revealed in the sight of the nations (Ps. 98:1-2).

I bring My *righteousness* near, it shall not be far off; My *salvation* shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, For Israel My glory (Isa. 46:13).

My *righteousness* is near, My *salvation* has gone forth, And My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait upon Me, And on My arm they will trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, And look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My *salvation* will be forever, And My *righteousness* will not be abolished. 'Listen to Me, you who know *righteousness*, You people in whose heart is My law: Do not fear the reproach of men, Nor be afraid of their insults. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, And the worm will eat them like wool; But My *righteousness* will be forever, And My *salvation* from generation to generation' (Isa. 51:5-8).

For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, Until her *righteousness* goes forth as brightness, And her *salvation* as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your *righteousness*, And all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the LORD will name (Isa. 62:1-2).

These references support Paul's claim in Romans 3:21–22 that God's righteousness worked for Israel's salvation: 'But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe'.

Here we might observe that fallen Man seems to think he knows what righteousness is in act and in principle, as also he believes he knows what is unrighteousness. Most of us would think of law as a principle, or any law or what we understand as the law of God as the means by which we assess righteousness and unrighteousness. Paul said, 'by the law is the knowledge of sin', i.e. of unrighteousness, but when the law confronts us lethally it is not just information about the law's demands. It is the law by which we are involved increasingly in sin and its devastating effects, so that remorse may come to enlarge this existential 'knowledge' but the person who is the object of the law's lethal action may fail to repent. In any case fallen Man is unable to approach the law with a clear conscience and so know its essential nature (cf. 1 Tim. 1:8–11; Isa. 5:20–23; Ps. 18:25–26), for a clear conscience is indispensable to hearing the law. Man's self-justifying means he has his own agenda in the matter of what is right and wrong. God's righteousness appraises Man of his deceit, his guilt and God's wrath on his sin, but then reveals His mercy and saving justice. What has been called 'distributive justice' is in the service of God's justifying righteousness.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD AND MAN

COVENANT RIGHTEOUSNESS

The objection made to 'distributive righteousness' is that it is a cold, legal system, where unrighteousness is punished and right action is rewarded, and so is a penal-rewards system. However, if the background of covenant is observed then judgment can be seen as God's covenant righteousness. N. T. Wright, as we have said, sees God's righteousness to deal with sin (unrighteousness) as in the forensic or court situation. God's law is covenant law and righteousness or unrighteousness must be seen in the light of covenant. He says:

These two settings (lawcourt and covenant) combine to produce the developed covenantal theology which underlay Judaism at the time of Jesus. To have 'righteousness' meant to belong to the covenant, the boundary marker of which was the Torah, and the hope of which was that God, in accordance with his own righteousness, would act in history to 'vindicate', to 'justify', his people (i.e. to show that they really were his people).¹³

This means that there were those who understood there was no action of God in righteousness to save His people unless they acknowledged that they needed to be saved from unrighteousness, which was their idolatry, their hypocritical worship and their utter immorality. Hosea 4:1–19 is a clear exposition of their unrighteousness, their rebelling against the covenantal law. God's judgments and His chastising punishments—even to being sent into exile—are meant to bring them to repentance for their state and so to have His vindicating righteousness bring them back into full covenantal restoration and blessing as outlined in Hosea 6:1–6. In this passage Hosea exhorts his people to return to the knowledge of God in covenant, and so live righteously afresh.

¹³ op. cit. p. 591.

THE LAW OF THE COVENANT

It has often been observed that the gods and idols had their covenants which were always contractual. This meant the worshippers always had a law by which they served their deities righteously from the point of view of that deity. The law of the covenant which is different from all others laws (Deut. 4:5–6) must take us back to the making of the covenant. This was certainly so at Sinai and the whole law was designed for a community under God. It was never just a block of rigid rules, but the way of practical righteousness. Eberhard Jüngel observes:

When the New Testament speaks of the righteousness of God, it links in with the Old Testament understanding of the righteousness of Yahweh, which is a relational concept, and to that extent resembles *justice* in Aristotle. It is 'the relationship which Jahweh had offered to Israel'. Or, to be more precise, that covenant faithfulness which God provides and without which neither individuals nor the people as a whole can *live*. At the same time as being a covenant faithfulness, the righteousness of Yahweh is a power that creates and maintains life. Human beings can only live in the community which Yahweh provides: we can only live as people *whom God acknowledges*. However, it is a condition of such acknowledgment that we behave as a community and so fulfil the righteousness of God—a righteousness that always obligingly anticipates us. So righteousness in human beings is *the fact of our being acknowledged by God*. And 'a man lives from this acknowledgment — "he is righteousness, he will live" (Ezek. 18:9)'.¹⁴

The quote from Ezekiel 18 really has its fullness in verses 5–9 as a statement of God's law:

If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right—if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman in her time of impurity, does not oppress any one, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any increase, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances—*he is righteous, he shall surely live*, says the Lord GOD.

As we saw in our previous study, the law always tends to life when it is observed—Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12; Ezekiel 20:11; Luke 10:28, and now here in Ezekiel 18:5–9. In fallen Man hatred of the law is rampant, but the reading of the Psalms 1, 19 and 119 confirm that the primary intention of law is not invidious. Covenant without law is impossible of obedience: law without covenant is impossible for fallen humanity. In opting for God's justifying righteousness as a counter to the righteous demand—the *dikaïoma* of the law—we may rob ourselves of the joy of practical righteousness, especially when we know that the *dikaïoma* is being fulfilled in us by God Himself. Man has an innate dislike of distributive righteousness and theologians are not excepted from rationalising it away in the face of God's justifying righteousness. We need on this account to see again how Christ viewed the law—something we pondered deeply in our previous study—in order to see how it is the way of life, especially following justification by God's grace (Rom. 3:21–24, *passim*).

¹⁴ *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* by Eberhard Jüngel (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 2001), p. 62.

CHRIST AND COVENANT LAW

We have seen in Matthew 3:15 that Jesus told John the Baptist, who objected to Jesus being baptised by him, 'Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness', and that 'all righteousness' constituted the whole plan of God. What was never to be outside that plan was God's law, for such an absence would be unthinkable. In Matthew 5:17–20 Jesus stated plainly that he had not come to abolish the law and the prophets.¹⁵ 'The law and the prophets' embodied the whole of the Old Testament and spoke of Christ (cf. John 5:46; Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; Rev. 19:10). Christ came to fulfil the whole body of truth, so that far from abolishing it as non-essential he strengthened and established it. Romans 10:4 shows that he was the goal that the law and prophets always had in their sights. Law, i.e. *torah*, as we have often seen is constituted at core of the ten words of Yahweh and understood as *dabar*, the word of command. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs. 5 – 7), Jesus in 7:21–27 claims he has been uttering *dabar*, the *dabar* of the *torah*. No wonder that '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' (Matt. 7:28–29).

Matthew 23 requires our attention. It is not just that the scribes and Pharisees were legalists—the problem that faced Paul in his own life—but they were entirely outside the wonder of law, and the freedom it had always afforded Israel, i.e. 'I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free' (Ps. 119:32, *NIV*). Indeed they had turned the law into the basis for cruelty, domination and deceit. Matthew 23:23 shows they had missed the essence of the law: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others'. As we saw previously, the law called those under it to exercise 'justice and mercy and faith[fullness]' in conformity with God's own character of Exodus 34:6–7. These three virtues are what the law is all about.

The law of the New Covenant as portrayed in Ezekiel 36:24–27 and Jeremiah 31:31–34 is 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' in that the heart is cleansed and purified, the Spirit dwells within it, and the outcome is that the *dikaioma* of the law is being fulfilled in the life of the believing people. The law is written in the heart and implanted in the inner parts as the law of life which issues from the forgiveness of sins. This is the fruit of God's justifying righteousness.

How, then, did all this marvellous transformation of the heart come about? The answer is in Romans 3:21–26:

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

From Romans 1:18 to 3:20 Paul has been talking about Man suppressing the truth in acts of *adikia* (unrighteousness) and he has shown how vicious is his evil and how God has revealed His wrath upon it all from heaven, which some would see only as

¹⁵ See my book *The Law of Eternal Delight* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2001) pp. 67ff.

distributive righteousness. Those doing evil know the *dikaïoma* ('righteous demand of the law') and the judgment of the law and yet persist in it and approve of the same rebellion in others. What, then, of all who have sinned? Will the wrath of God consume them for ever? No: God has set forth His Son as a propitiation for all sins (cf. 1 John 4:9–10; 2:1–2; Heb. 2:17). This propitiation is not a bribe to stave off the wrath of God, nor an event to appease a bloodthirsty God as some so horribly accuse God of being. God provides the propitiation to fulfil the Divine wrath in the person of His own willing, loving Son, thus averting the wrath from those who have faith in this righteousness of God which fulfils the judgment of the law. Everything of justifying righteousness depends on the death of the Son and then his resurrection: 'he was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Rom. 4:25).

What all this means to the Father 'who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' and 'put [him] forward as a propitiation by his blood' we cannot even begin to conjecture, much less understand. That the Son should bear the sin of the world in order to take it away, and what he suffered in his own body on the tree cannot be computed, especially as it dealt with the wrath of God that has been revealed from heaven (Rom. 1:18 – 3:20). A priest must have something to offer (Heb. 8:3) and Christ offered not only his body but himself 'for all time a single sacrifice for sins'. We may humbly speculate at his marring which defaced him as though he were not human and would 'startle many nations' (Isa. 52:13–15), and devotionally we may ponder Isaiah 53:4–6:

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. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all,

but then what do we come to know? One thing we come to know is that God as the Righteous One and His Son known as the Righteous One (Jer. 23:5; Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; James. 5:6), are not obligated to redeem sinners. Such an act is purely of grace (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:11–13). We must not say, 'God is not righteous unless he justifies the ungodly', but we may say 'God is righteous when he justifies the ungodly'. We must recognise that nothing obligates love and grace, for God so loves that He gives. For this reason we cannot so tie the righteousness of God to having to justify sinners because He is forced to do so. We can rightly say, 'God in His righteousness justifies sinners'. The whole plan of salvation is according to His eternal wisdom and without the Triune God propitiation cannot happen in intention and fulfilment.

To deny God's wrath as unworthy of Him who is love is to demean practical righteousness and turn sin into some regrettable mistake or error or as a sickness with which Man has been affected. It is to make propitiation more an outward act than a dire act indispensable to salvation. It is also to make repentance a mild matter, and the law to be merely a guide of sorts to those who would take the path of righteousness. Human anger cannot be an analogy of God's wrath on sin and evil. It is holy wrath as it is also the wrath of love. The writer of Hebrews (1:8–9) points to Christ's coronation in Psalm 45:6–7 and says:

Thy divine throne endures for ever and ever. Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity; you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.

The day of wrath is still coming upon the impenitent. Paul told the thinkers and idolaters of Athens:

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, *because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed*, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:29–31).

That judgment is stated graphically in 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10 and Revelation 20:11–15. Righteousness of life will be the criterion of judgment, and it is this which makes God's justifying righteousness no soft option for escape from judgment. It is the most powerful action in the lives of sinners and rebels which can be known and effective.

CONCLUSION REGARDING GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

The debate has taken place over many years as to whether God's righteousness is: (i) a righteousness which is His alone—a subjective (possessive) genitive; (ii) a righteousness which makes us right with God—an objective genitive; (iii) an imputed righteousness credited to our account when we are justified—a genitive of origin; or (iv) a righteousness which comes to us because God is in the business of making sinners right with Himself—a subjective genitive. When it is put that way I see no objection to saying that 'God's righteousness' embraces all of these. God's must be the true righteousness—the Righteousness—and He has made Man in His own image 'in true righteousness and holiness'. His own righteousness is dynamic as no attribute of God can ever be called 'static'. To us the righteousness that justifies may be called 'objective' but it is the dynamic action of His own righteousness.

The practical matter that is often discussed is whether God's righteousness is imputed *and* imparted? Probably the question presupposes the mind or presupposition of the questioner. The background to answer this question is too vast to give a simple answer. The original righteousness of Man was a powerful element which existed in the union and communion of created Man with God. In other words his righteousness was derived in and from his relationship with God, and that would still be the case. He was expected to act righteously. Fallen man has lost that derivative righteousness, but God's demand for it has not lessened. The statement 'all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment' was not a proof text that Man can do no true righteous deed. It was a confession of Israel (Isa. 64:6)—the people of righteousness—that what they had thought to be righteous deeds turned out not to be just that. They recognised that God's demand for righteous deeds—the *dikaïoma* of the law—was legitimate, for God expected His people to do righteous deeds, but only by His aid. The essence of Man is not to be righteous or holy *of himself*, but to act righteously by the aid of God.

It is clear from 2 Corinthians 5:21 that 'in him [Christ] we might become the righteousness of God' and from 1 Peter 2:24 'that we might die to sin and live to righteousness'. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 it is said that 'He [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption'. Romans 5:15–21 encourages us to live in the fact that 'those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ'.

It is essential that we grasp the meaning of God's righteousness for it is of the substance of the gospel we proclaim as we are on mission with God. Titus 2:14 tells us

this, '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'. It is a righteous people which shall inhabit eternity and share with the Triune God in leading its life. Daniel 12:1–3 is apt here:

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Christ and the Nature of God's Mission in the World

CHRIST THE PROMISED KING IN THE MISSION OF THE FATHER

We have seen the plan of the Father is to culminate the history of creation with a new heaven and a new earth, and a new community comprising all creatures now known as celestial and terrestrial which will be ruled by God, who has made His elect human Community to be a Kingdom, priests unto God and creation, ruling with Him. We have also seen that Man was commissioned to be king over all the earth. The truth of the gospel is that God in His love and grace has restored fallen humanity and made him to be this royal priesthood. In all of this it is important that we see that the Son through his incarnation and work of redemption was to be the Son-King with the Father-King over the whole Kingdom of God. In the New Testament Christ is designated, 'King of kings and Lord of all lords' and as such is seated at the right hand of God (cf. Eph. 5:5; John 18:33-37; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; cf. Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

We need to see why he should be King over the creation, and the immediate answer is, 'Because God is King over all the earth and all the nations, and must reign over all things. On the one hand He must subdue all elements contrary to the Kingdom of God, and on the other cause His elect people to enter the Kingdom and eventually inherit it.' This is the mission God is on. The gospel is 'the gospel of the Kingdom'. Always in sight is the Kingdom.

In our present study we want to see that Man was commissioned to rule as king over the earth but refused to do so and in this sense failed to be the reflective image of God. We need to see that from the beginning prophecy depicts one who will come and defeat the kingdom of the 'ancient serpent' (cf. Gen. 3:15). To this one will be the gathering of the nations (Gen. 49:10), i.e. 'the obedience of the peoples'. That is, there will be a king with universal rule. We keep in mind the listing of the nations in Genesis chapters 10 and 11 and then the calling of Abraham from chapter 12 onwards which had to do with the nations of the world.

When the magi came from the east they enquired, 'Where is he *who has been born king of the Jews*? For we have seen his star in the East, and we have come to worship him.' Herod, deeply troubled, enquired of the chief priests and scribes as to where the Christ—i.e. King, Messiah—was to be born. Their answer was, 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel'. At this point it is interesting to read Revelation 12:1-6 where the red dragon (Satan) seeks to devour the child of the Woman, but he is to rule the nations and 'is caught up to heaven'. Of course the red dragon wishes to rule the earth.

On Palm Sunday the person who was prophesied in Zechariah 9:9 to be king in Jerusalem is acclaimed as that in Matthew 21:5, 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass'. In Mark 11:9-10 we read, 'And those who went before and those who followed cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!"' In Luke 19:37-38 it is still the language of acclaiming Jesus as king:

As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'

John 12:13 is couched in similar language, 'So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"'

We know that later Pilate talked with Jesus because he had been called king, and that Jesus told him of the nature of his kingship and kingdom. Yet later Pilate asked the crowd, 'Shall I crucify your King?' and the chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar'. Thus Israel rejected Jesus as the King. John 19:19–22 tells a fascinating story:

Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews," but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'

It was not that Jesus—following John the Baptist—had not spoken enough of the Kingdom. He had taught thoroughly on this score. In every way the Kingdom of God was presented to his hearers. They were in no doubt as to what it would have meant for Israel and the world had he really been King, but it was so stupendous that almost all could not receive it.

It is that matter of the King that we need to pursue. Was Jesus really King? Is he King? If so, what does that mean for the world? What does kingship of the unique kind have to do with God being on mission?

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

We go back to the fact that God created Man to rule the world. This is clearly stated in the commission to Man in Genesis 1:28. Man is the image of God who is King over all creation. Man cannot image God truly unless he is the human king over all. The command, 'Subdue the earth and have dominion—kingship—over it'. All that is of God was poured into Man to make him so. The Psalmist says, 'The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men' (Ps. 115:16; 8:6; cf. 89:11). Created to be king, he has royal responsibility in the universe.

It is clear to us that the serpent in the Garden set out to subvert Man so that he, the serpent, would have Man in his grip and would win the kingdom of the world for himself, wresting it from God Himself. Indeed Christ called him 'the ruler of this world' (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and Paul called him 'the god of this world' (2 Cor. 4:4) and even 'prince of the power of the air'. If we understand history we know that God has been working to undo the deceits of Satan so that *a man* will reign as King, that man being the Second and Last Adam, and accorded the title rightfully of 'King of kings and Lord of lords'. Sooner or later, one is to come who will be that king. Had this not been prophesied then it would never have happened. If one were to come who claimed he was *the* king then he would have to be consistent with the prophecies. Israel would never accept any other claimant. This fact must have been in the mind of the writer of Hebrews when he began his Epistle. His first chapter dwells on the matter of Christ the King. Towards the close of his Letter he can say, 'Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a *kingdom* that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe' (Heb.

12:28). There is no kingdom without the King. Let us, then, look at the first chapter of the book:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs. For to what angel did God ever say, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee'? Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son'? And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.' Of the angels he says, 'Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire.' But of the Son he says, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades.' And, 'Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end.' But to what angel has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet'? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? (Heb. 1:1–14).

It is true that the author of Hebrews shows that Christ is 'greater than . . .', i.e. greater than the prophets (1:1–2), angels (1:6–14), Moses (3:1–5), and Aaron (ch. 7), and his sacrificial system is greater than that of Aaron (7:12), and is thus in a different and higher bracket. The writer is out simply to show that Christ is King above all. To do this he uses at least six Psalms in his first chapter. In order they are Psalms 110; 2; 97; 104; 45; and 102. These need to be read and understood. For us they are very important because they constitute part of God's blueprint for history. They are the essential background to our understanding His history for creation. They all have to do with kingship; in fact Christ's Kingship over all creation. How was it, then, that the author of Hebrews came to these Psalms?

We remember that on the road to Emmaus Jesus told the two disciples who had misunderstood the events of his death and resurrection,:

O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25–27).

Those who listened to Christ heard nothing that was not already in the Old Testament Scriptures.

That very night, when at most ten disciples were in the upper room, Christ spoke to them on much the same lines as earlier in the day:

'These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem' (Luke 24:44–47).

In addition to these times when he referred back to the Scriptures, he also taught the disciples during the forty days he was with them and his subject was 'the Kingdom of God'. We would very much like to have every Scripture he quoted and to hear his teaching from them, but we can be certain of one thing and that is that the apostles would

have heard them and retained them, and that we will find them, if we look through their writings and their teaching. For example: both Psalms 2 and 110 are quoted over twenty times each in the New Testament. It may even be that the writer of Hebrews, who had certainly heard the apostles' teaching, may be quoting things which Christ said in those post-resurrection days. Of course some scholars in Israel had worked on these texts of Psalms and Prophets in regard to Messiah, the King chosen by God to lead Israel in His universal plan. Let us then go back to the text of Hebrews chapter 1.

Verse 3b says, 'When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high'. This is a quote from Psalm 110:1, 'The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool"'. Verse 5a quotes Psalm 2:7, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you'. This brings the King as 'the LORD's anointed' (Messiah) into Psalm 2, at which we will shortly look. Verse 5b quotes the passage of 2 Samuel 7:14, *passim*, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son'. Verse 6a quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 (LXX)—'Let the sons of God worship him. Rejoice, you nations, with his people, and let all the angels of God ascribe strength to him.' Note also the use of the term 'the firstborn' (cf. Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6; Col. 1:15) which is a messianic title referring to the king of Psalm 89:27 at his coronation. Having enjoined angels to worship the King he then describes the angels and their ministry to Messiah from the text of Psalm 104:4, 'who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire'. The point is that Messiah is King and the angels serve him—they are not equal to or higher than him. The comparison comes from Psalm 45:6–7, 'Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity; you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions'. Then, from Psalm 102:25–27, the Son whose throne is for ever is shown in his relationship to creation (cf. 1:2) so that he is eternal beyond the ability of creation to endure. He controls all creation, so then what a King he is! To cap it all he quotes Psalm 110:1, 'But to what angel has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet"?'

In Hebrews chapter 1 the writer has presented us with a person who is indeed a King beyond any king ever known on this earth. He is called 'Son' in the first few verses, and is shown to have been in the entire work of creation, has ever 'loved righteousness and hated lawlessness' uniquely, is worshipped by celestial creatures and is crowned King over all the earth—indeed over all creation—after the manner of some six Psalms which we have, as yet, barely touched. He has been made uniquely Son–King by the Father–King over all nations, and will defeat them in their rebellion against 'the LORD and his anointed'. Our conclusion is that the history of Israel and its great destiny is tied up with this King, and, furthermore, that the destiny of all creation will be achieved by the Father–King through this Son–King.

Naturally we are intrigued to find that Israel has ever been occupied with Yahweh as *the* King. Indeed it is not possible to understand the Son–King unless we first understand the Father–King. This is seen in such Psalms as 47, 93, and 96 – 99, for Israel was theocracy no matter what its failures turned out to be, and these 'enthronement Psalms' are powerful in their confession of Yahweh as Israel's true monarch. When, then, we read Psalm 89 we are introduced into a brilliant exposition of the Davidic King. This accords with what we have seen in 2 Samuel 7:14, *passim*, and 1 Chronicles 17:16ff., especially in regard to Yahweh's 'charter for the nation' (i.e. 'this is the law for man') with which we dealt in a previous study. With this Psalm 132 is the guarantee that the 'sure love for David' (Isa. 55:3–5) will be fulfilled in the Son–King, for in David's future son both the matter of the Kingdom and the Covenant will be fulfilled.

We are in a position now to deal more fully with all that Christ disclosed to his disciples on the day of his resurrection and the forty days he companied with them before his ascension and session at the right hand of God. Having done a short review of Psalms 2 and 110, we will proceed to the use of these in the New Testament.

THE THRUST OF PSALMS 2 AND 110

Psalm 2 follows Psalm 1 which sets forth the matter of *torah* (the way, instruction, law). The statement of Israel's true obedience to law—cf. Psalms 19 and 119 on an expanded scale—is followed by the statement of the lawlessness of the nations. They are concerted in their action of opposition to Yahweh and rebellion against His sovereignty and His 'anointed one', i.e. His Messiah. The Lord is scornful of their aim and action, and opposes them with His Son-King who is set up on the holy hill of Jerusalem. He declares this anointed one to be crowned and tells him that he is now declared King. As a result this crowned Messiah will defeat the rebellious nations. He shall 'break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel'. The kings and rulers of the nations are enjoined to be wise and to serve the Lord with fear and submit—kiss his feet—lest they feel the actions of his wrath for their not submitting to the Son-King. Psalm 2, then, represents *the mission of God* to bring all the nations under the rule of Son-King of the Kingdom of God. Of the application of Psalm 2 in its context in history, and referring to David's lineage, Walter Brueggemann has this to say: 'The notion of king as "son of God" does not concern any ontological claim or metaphysical status, but is a powerful political claim of peculiar legitimacy', and adds in a footnote, 'Perhaps an important exception is Ps 45:6, which appears to address the king as "elohim"'.¹

Psalm 110 has some similarities. The Psalm seems to have two section oracles—verses 1–4 and 5–7—the first being that of battle with the enemies, all of whom shall come under the feet of the King who has a 'mighty sceptre'. He, as with the King in Psalm 2, will rule in the midst of his foes. He is to be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek—he who was king of Salem (Jerusalem). The second section speaks of the victory over the nations, a parallel with Psalm 2.

Both Psalms were uttered in their contexts in Israel's history and had local application which is why they are called 'enthronement Psalms', but their connotation is prophetic and universal. Even so, often their utterances and writings were to do with the future. In Acts, David is quoted as a prophet (cf. 1:16; 2:25; 4:25), and in 4:25–28, Psalm 2:1–2 is accorded to him—'by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit . . .' It is here that those praying were saying that Psalm 2:1–2 was fulfilled in the crucifixion of Christ. We may even take it that Christ quoted this Psalm to them on the day of his resurrection and the forty days following. Leslie C. Allen in speaking of Psalm 110 said, 'The great assurances of the psalm fell deep into the well of time till they finally plunged into the waters of NT revelation'.² It is that view we present of the two Psalms which are treated as messianic in the New Testament. Incidentally, Allen says that Psalm 110 holds the record for being the Old Testament text most frequently cited or alluded to in the New Testament. Of course our enquiry will not be limited to the two Psalms for we have seen that they are linked at least with Psalms 45, 89, 102, 104 and other related Scriptures.

¹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997), p. 606.

² Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, Word Biblical Commentary, no. 21 (Word Books, Waco, 1988), p. 87.

GOD'S MISSION IN CHRIST AS KING OF KINGS, THE RULER OF KINGS ON THE EARTH, AND LORD OF LORDS

We will look first at the fulfilment of Psalm 2 as a prophetic, royal Psalm. In Revelation 12:1–6 the great portent of the woman (Israel?) is presented who is to bring forth her seed—‘a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron’ (cf. Ps. 2:8–9). A woman was always going to bring forth her seed to crush the serpent under his heel (Gen. 3:15). Here the serpent, the red dragon, tries to take the murderous initiative at the birth of the royal seed in order to subvert the ‘counsel of his will’, though without success, but what is signalled is the prophecy beginning to be fulfilled. Of course Matthew 2:13–18 is in view, i.e. the massacre of the innocents. Note the fulfilment of the Hosea prophecy, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’, its link with Exodus 4:22 and Jesus being at once Israel and the Son of God. The baptism of Jesus is really his coronation by the Father–King. In Matthew 3:15, John the Baptist sought to refuse Jesus’ request for baptism since his baptism was one of repentance with a view to the remission of sins—conditions for entering the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ answer, ‘Let it be so *now*; for thus it is fitting for us [i.e. John and Jesus] to fulfil all righteousness’, meant it was part of God’s will that this baptism take place.³ As verses 16 and 17 show, *the baptism was a fulfilment of Psalm 2:7*—‘He said to me, “You are my son, today I have begotten you”’— and Isaiah 42:1, ‘Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations’. Without discussing for the moment the dual role of King–Servant (cf. Zech. 9:9) ‘in whom my soul delights’ is the same as ‘with whom I am well pleased’. The role of the Son in Psalm 2 and of the servant (‘Suffering Servant’) of the Isaianic Servant Songs are brought together. ‘I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations’ tells his program and the substance of his Kingship and Servant being.

When we said Jesus’ baptism was really his coronation we meant he was now the Son–King of the Kingdom which he was about to proclaim by word and deed. At the same time we can speak of a coronation which is in parts or steps. For example, when at his transfiguration the Father says, ‘This is my son, my chosen one. Hear him’, then he is closer to the ultimate coronation following his resurrection and ascension in that the Father says, ‘Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool’.

The Sonship accorded to Jesus in the baptism was debated in *the temptations in the wilderness*. Again Psalm 2 comes into view. Firstly we see that Jesus was led by the Spirit to this testing situation. The essence of Satan’s attack was in the words, ‘If you are the Son of God . . .’ Satan did not question the *fact* of ‘the Son of God’ but only Jesus’ designation as that one. In the third temptation the devil had dropped that question of Jesus being the Son of God. A high prize would be to have Jesus, as the true Son of God, to worship him! As it was, Jesus was about to commence his ministry of the Kingdom of God, being the King wherever he went, and causing the power of the Kingdom to come upon his listeners by the Spirit who had descended on him and remained with him (John 1:33–34)—the sign that he was the Son of God, i.e. the Son–King of the Kingdom. Thus he claimed, ‘But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Matt. 12:28).

It is interesting to see that understanding Jesus as ‘the Christ, the son of the living God’ was intelligible to devoted readers of the Old Testament Scriptures. In the words of Brueggemann, ‘The notion of king as “son of God” does not concern any ontological claim or metaphysical status, but is a powerful political claim of peculiar legitimacy’. Any

³ See Appendix 1 at the end of this paper.

Israelite might have put the various 'Son' prophecies together and arrived at a view other, say, than the Johannine one. When the high priest said to Jesus, 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God', he was pointing to a great Messianic figure, known to all, yet Peter needed to have a special revelation of that figure before he could burst out with the confession, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!' To link the man Jesus standing before him with the figure of the royal Psalms and prophecies had not occurred to him. He needed, as do all human creatures, the revelation of the Spirit of the Father. As early as chapter 12:17–21 of Matthew, Jesus had referred to a hidden Servant ministry and Matthew had linked this with the Isaiah 42:1–4 Servant Song. Not until 16:15 does the full-orbed revelation come.

In Matthew 19:28 the throne of Psalms 2:6 and 110:1 is an eschatological throne:

Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall *sit on his glorious throne*, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel'.

The *transfiguration* may be called the further element in the coronation of the Son. In Matthew 17:5 we might be back at the baptism, for the word which the Father utters, 'He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him"'. The 'listen to him' is a glorious imperative, for by this time in his ministry his words and deeds have just about polarised the nation. Israel has not heard his words properly for one who is 'the Christ, the Son of the living God'. We remember that 'in whom I am well pleased' is from Isaiah 42:1, 'my chosen, in whom my soul delights'. Luke includes 'my Son, my chosen one' (9:35). Of course his transfiguration was a significant event in his Kingdom ministry. It was not only the repeated affirmation of his Son-Kingship but it was also the facing of the coming climax of the cross and resurrection—the work which would establish his Kingship for ever—which he was discussing with Moses and Elijah in the presence of the Father. He was transfigured by the Father and the Spirit that he might be disfigured (Isa. 53:4–6) so that we who are disfigured by sin might be transfigured by the glory of his cross-resurrection Kingship (2 Cor. 5:17). When we come to the action of the cross, according to Psalm 2:1ff. we will see that it constitutes the battle against the rebellious nations.

Virtually on his way to rejection by the leaders of Israel, Jesus had brought Psalm 110:1 to the attention of the people and the Pharisees. In Matthew 22:41–46 he had posed the question of the fatherhood of the Messiah, showing it was not David, thus implying it was God. God was seating Messiah at His right hand. Thus in the trial of Jesus the issue of his being the Son-King of Psalm 2:6ff., and 110:1 was the main point. In Matthew 26:63 the high priest asks 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'. Jesus' answer—'You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated *at the right hand of Power*, and *coming on the clouds of heaven*'—invokes both Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, both references relating to Messiah's kingship.⁴ *The event of the crucifixion was interpreted in the light of Psalm 2* by the company of believers in Acts 4:23–28:

When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign

⁴ Son of God' and 'Son of Man' were both understood as messianic titles and to do with Messiah's reign in the Kingdom of God.

Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed”—for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.’

In this passage we have the key to what we might call ‘the conflict of the cross’. In Israel the leaders opposed Christ virtually from the beginning and were not satisfied until they had killed him because he ‘made the good confession’ before Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13). When they came from the temple to apprehend him Jesus told the leaders and their accompanying rabble, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? 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 [*exousia*: authority] of darkness.’ *Psalm 2 was being enacted at the cross*, and the pictures drawn in two messianic Psalms—22 and 69—are of homicidal enemies battling to destroy him. These same enemies we will later meet in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 where their utter destruction is stated. The battle is really with the ‘nations’ and ‘the peoples’, and the weapons are not of human *materiel* but spiritual power, moral strength which is deadly to deceit and untruth. The battle was won on the tree, and it was to be sealed by the resurrection.

Paul, in Acts 13:15–33, in proclaiming the gospel at Antioch of Pisidia opens his exhortation with some history of Israel, arriving at the matter of a king (13:21f.). He assumes his teaching will be followed in the synagogue along the lines of 2 Samuel 7:6–16, i.e. ‘Of this man’s [David’s] posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised’. The rulers did not see him as the Saviour (Messiah) but killed him. He then proceeds:

And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, *this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus*; as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee’ (vv. 29–33).

Paul, then, sees Psalm 2:7 as referring to the resurrection. In addition he quotes Isaiah 55:3, and Psalm 16:10 as relating: (i) to the Davidic king and covenant; and (ii) to Christ who is established by the resurrection.

Romans 1:3–4 speaks of ‘the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God [cf. Ps. 2:6f.] in power according to the Spirit of holiness *by his resurrection from the dead*, Jesus Christ our Lord’. These verses show that Jesus was a descendant of David and was designated or declared to be the ‘Son of God with [in] power by his resurrection from the dead’. The resurrection then is a continuing part of his coronation, if we may look at it that way. The resurrection considered properly means that the most deadly enemy of humanity—death—has been defeated. Life now reigns. He who is the Son of God has wrought resurrection. In history only he has done this. The effects are enormous not only because ‘he was raised for our justification’ but also because he reigns by right of accomplishment—he has ‘abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel’ (2 Tim. 1:10). No human being has such power, of himself (cf. John 5:25–29). As for the nations, they have never manifested this power; their death is inevitable. ‘The first-born of the dead’ is by

nature 'the ruler of kings on earth' (Ps. 2; Rev. 1:5). His Kingship is universal and supreme: 'When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades"' (Rev. 1:17–18).

What then shall we say of his ascension and enthronement? Psalm 110:1f., is the command to the King–Priest 'after the order of Melchizedek'. In Revelation 12:5 we saw he was the male child who was to 'rule all the nations with a rod of iron' and that he 'was caught up to God and his throne'. Yes, but between the massacre of the innocents and his ascension he fought the red dragon and defeated him. Now it is that 'the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God' (Rev. 12:10). The Kingdom of God has come and the authority of Christ has come, for 'all authority . . . has been given to [him]' (Matt. 28:18f.; Ps. 110:1) who is now seated at the right hand of the Father. This is evident in that the gospel having been completed by the work of Christ, his disciples are to go in this authority and make disciples of all nations. This is the true conquest of the nations and we will have cause to see how his authority is effected through his people.

In the Book of the Revelation the whole matter of Christ's kingship and *the throne on which he is seated* (cf. Ps. 110:1) progresses along the lines of the enthronement Psalms, especially Psalms 2 and 110. In 1:5 we read of 'Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth'. 'The first-born of the dead' involves Psalm 16:8–11 and the resurrection of Christ. 'The ruler of kings on earth' involves both Psalms 2 and 110. 'Made us a kingdom, priests to our God' takes up the promise of Exodus 19:5–6 as fulfilled in 1 Peter 2:4–10. Revelation 2:26–27 promises participation in the reign of Christ—'He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power [*exousia*] from my Father'. Likewise in 3:21 is the promise, 'He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne'. Both Psalms 2:6–7 and 110:1 show the power of his reigning at the right hand of God. Ephesians 1:19–22 speaks of the enthronement of Christ in terms of Psalm 110:1, whilst Ephesians 2:5–6 speaks of us being raised with Christ and seated 'with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus'.

Again in Revelation 4:2, John sees by revelation the throne of God and its centrality to all creation figured in the seven spirits (sevenfold Spirit, cf. Isa. 11:1–9), the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. In 5:1 there is the seven-sealed book in the right hand of Him who is seated on the throne, and the only one in all creation worthy to open the book, i.e. competent to handle all history, is the Lamb—as though it had been slain—to whom the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing a new song, saying, 'Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them *a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth*', i.e. in accord with Exodus 19:5–6 and 1 Peter 2:9–10. It is then that all creatures celestial and terrestrial accord their praise to the Lamb and 'to him who sits upon the throne', i.e. God and the Lamb are now one together, and from that point onwards in the book all action comes from the throne. In 22:1–3 it is twice called 'the throne of God and of the Lamb'.

Here it is fitting that we advert to 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 which is a summary of all action of the Father and the Son between Christ's enthronement and the destruction of all enemies in terms of Psalms 2 and 110. These five verses speak of the Kingdom being

fulfilled in every aspect and the Son delivering the Kingdom to the Father 'that God may be all in all'. Indeed the Book of the Revelation is the extended story of this action of the Son and the Father throughout all history.

In Revelation 6:16–17 the wrath of God and of the Lamb is spoken of in terms which remind us of Psalms 2:4–5 and 110. We have already described the one who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron in Revelation 12:5 (Ps. 2:9). In 19:4–5 we again have the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures giving due worship to God 'who is seated on the throne'. In 21:24–26 the nations are shown to have been subdued and are now gladly under the reigning of 'the throne of God and of the Lamb' (Ps. 2:6f.; 110:1f.). Of course in treating passages which directly refer to the Old Testament prophecies we have only partially touched on the great events of the Book of the Revelation but the sovereignty of the Father and the Lamb is spelled out in magnificent and triumphant manner. Indeed the whole action of the book can be summed up in the message of the seventh angel in Revelation 11:15, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever'! The response to this definitive message was that the twenty-four elders who sit on thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying,

We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast,
 that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.
 The nations raged, but thy wrath came,
 and the time for the dead to be judged,
 for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints,
 and those who fear thy name, both small and great,
 and for destroying the destroyers of the earth (Rev. 11:17–18).

So, then, we conclude our section titled 'God's Mission in Christ as King of Kings, the Ruler of Kings on the Earth, and Lord of Lords' with the assurance that the gospel covers the plan of God—the whole counsel of God—as the entire Scriptures proclaim the will of God. For us the ruling of the Father and the Son, the obtaining of the victory of the Kingdom of God, must be fully understood. It is only with this scriptural 'blueprint of history' in our hearts and minds that we can rest in faith, and work in obedience within His story of the creation.

THE KINGS OF THE KINGDOM

From the beginning of this study we have seen that God is King over all the earth because He is its Creator and in the ultimate, 'the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one' (Zech. 14:9). We have also seen that the Father is King and has made His Son to be King of His Kingdom (Eph. 5:5; John 18:33–37; 1 Cor. 15:24–28; cf. Rev. 1:5; 17:14; 19:16). There can be no question that as the Son of God, 'He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power'. As the incarnate Son, 'he who has seen [him] has seen the Father'. The two Kings of the Kingdom are as one (1 Cor. 15:24–28). This is not only a strong witness to the love of the Triune God but also it is the power by which all history operates. Because we are thinking on the principle of 'mission' in history, we need to see how it is that we—as His people—operate in proclamation and righteous living. Creation, rightly understood, is a theocracy and we, His people, are theocrats—royal people. What, then, is the nature of the Father–King and the Son–King

and what is the manner of their operations? The answer to this is most important for it determines what is our manner of being 'on mission'.

In Deuteronomy 17:14–20 *true kingship* is set forth. It speaks of a humble ruler. He must be a brother and not a foreigner. He must not be a power-monger—i.e. to multiply horses as was the ploy of Egyptian monarchs. He must not multiply wives for himself and riches. He is to write a copy of the law and read it all the days of his life, so learning to fear God and thus will continue long in his kingdom. His heart is not to be lifted up above his brethren, reminding us of Habakkuk 2:4, 'Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith'.

The king to come in Israel—the king who has been the subject of our recent studies—is described in Zechariah 9:9, 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass.' Israel has a history of kings good, bad and indifferent and they make for Israel's history. Who of them would qualify as 'triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass'? As we have seen, the Suffering Servant is likewise humble and that references to the King and Servant often seem to coalesce:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law (Isa. 42:1–4).

This one is gentle, compassionate and long-suffering. So, too, is the Song about him in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12. He is not only humble but also he is not comely, attractive and, as such, indeed despised and rejected of men. His redemptive, vicarious suffering is of such a kind to make us turn from him, although he has done no violence nor is there deceit in his mouth. It is true that none of it is wasted for (v. 11), 'he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities'. As a reward, God says, 'I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors' (Isa. 53:12).

When it comes to the incarnation of him 'born to be king' (Matt. 2:2–4), it is to be a matter of humble beginnings as in a stable in Bethlehem, as with the mind of Christ Jesus described in Philippians 2:5–8—not coveting glory, emptying himself with all that that means, taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men (cf. Gal. 4:4, 'born under the law'). Being found in human form 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8:3), 'he humbled himself and became obedient unto death' (Phil. 2:8). It is to be noted that he did not humble himself to become human, but humbled himself to go to the cross with all its demeaning, disgusting and degrading elements—its unutterable horror and vicious evil. Christ was never humiliated, for he who is humble can never essentially be humiliated. In all his life he never sought his own glory but walked humbly before God. He seemed to be almost naive when he uttered these words:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28–30).

He never once sought human glory or human fame, and he taught so many elements—what it means to be truly humble, to serve, to take the lowest place, to be poor in

spirit, to mourn, to be meek, to be merciful, reconciliatory, and to accept all kinds of reviling, persecutions, bitterness and criticism without retaliating. To love is to love one's enemies, to do good to those who hate one, to pray for those who spitefully use one. In every situation this was the way he lived, even to death upon the cross. The nine-fruit harvest of the Spirit is a shining forth of Christ himself in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. So too Christ shines forth with the love which is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, not arrogant and rude, does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice at wrong but only in what is right. Such love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

These elements, we say, are those of true Kingship under which *subjects learn how to live truly*. How, then, do things apocalyptic—such as we read in Revelation—comport with gentleness. Does not the wrath of God seem so heavy, and do not the judgments seem so severe and even cruel in the face of the love and gentleness we have set forth? The answer is that unrighteousness, cruelty, selfishness and evil bring upon themselves the wrath of God. God's judgments are firstly set to be saving judgments, and for the finally impenitent, retribution and punishment must result from the rejection of the grace of justification and the love of God which comes to Man in his sinfulness.

As to the manner of spiritual warfare, our weapons are not those of mass destruction of the enemy. The Messiah of Isaiah 11:1–11 is the Messiah who is working at the right hand of the Father, putting down all powers of evil and enemies of Man. His working over the nations must be seen in the terms of the weapons he has given us, such as 'the girdle of truth', 'the breastplate of righteousness', 'the footwear of the gospel of peace', 'the shield of faith', 'the helmet of salvation', 'the sword of the Spirit', 'the patient endurance of the saints'. These are the weapons which Paul calls 'spiritual', saying that they are mighty to the pulling down of many Satanic strongholds. Such weapons he used at the cross to liberate Man into eternal life as he destroyed the weapons of guilt and fear of death and judgment. Such weapons he uses in the final battles against evil, described in Revelation 19:11–21, and 20:7–10. These are the weapons of 'the armies of heaven' which follow 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 (Rev. 19:15–16).

In our next study we will look at the power with which the Son of Man was endowed when he was baptised in the Spirit and was crowned the Son–King of the Kingdom. We will also look at the power and authority which comes to us so that with the same humble and meek spirit as was his, we shall prove to be the true army of God, one with God and His Christ in the mission he undertook before one atom or molecule was ever created, namely, the making of His holy community of love under His Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords. The law of the Kingdom of God is its demand (*dikaioma*) of love and this is the power of *mission*.

Christ the Promised King and the Kingdom

INTRODUCTION: THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

In seeking to see all aspects of God and the church being on mission we have taken up the important matter of all history being ruled by God the King of all creation. In His Kingship are included His creation of all things, His redemption of all things and His final consummation of all things. Together with the Father in the creating of all things was, and is, His Son and His Holy Spirit. Creation was, and is, Trinitarian. His decision to create Man in His own image and so to give him dominion—kingship—over all things (Gen. 1:26–30; Ps. 8:5–8; 15:16) was to do with human kingship by the human race. Man's failure to use his given kingship under God for God, gave the Serpent in Eden (cf. Rev. 12:9) the opening to usurp something of Divine–human kingship, so that later this creature came to be called 'the prince' or 'ruler' or 'god' of this world. The responsibility, nevertheless, was still on Man (Adam) to subdue the creation and have kingship over it. What the first Adam refused to be and do, the second Adam became and did—and is and does. In our last study we saw the prophecies regarding Israel's coming King (Messiah) and his fulfilment of these. In particular we covered Psalms 2 and 110, with references to further Psalms (cf. Ps. 47; 89; 93; 96 – 99; 102) and other prophecies. We saw also that Jesus taught especially regarding these prophecies, but also more generally in his ministry to all and, in particular, to his own disciples (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; Acts 1:3–8; cf. John 14:25–26; 16:13–15).

What concerns us regarding God's mission is the meaning of the term 'the gospel of the kingdom' and whether this is the same in essence as what we generally call 'the gospel' 'the gospel of God' (5 times), 'the gospel of Christ' (11 times), 'my gospel', 'our gospel'—and so on. The term 'gospel of the kingdom' is used in Mark 1:14, in Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14, and as 'the word of the kingdom' in Matthew 13:19. It is used in Luke 8:1, 'the good news of the kingdom of God', and in Luke 9:1–6 and 10:1–12 firstly the twelve are sent 'to preach the kingdom of God and to heal' and secondly 'the seventy others' to say, 'the kingdom of God has come near you'. It is noticeable in Matthew 24:14 that Jesus said, 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come', and in 25:34, 'Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"'. These statements indicate that the gospel of the Kingdom and the saving gospel of God are one and the same.

In the Book of Acts, Jesus is said to have taught his disciples on the one subject—that of the Kingdom of God—during the forty days of his accompanying with them (1:3; cf. 1:6–8). In Acts 8:12 Philip preached 'the good news about the kingdom of God'. In Acts 14:22 Paul told the new-found churches that 'through many tribulations we [shall] enter the kingdom of God'. In Acts 19:8 Paul was busy for some three months 'arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God' in the synagogue at Ephesus and then in the school of Tyrannus, the effects of which were astounding and far-reaching. In Acts 20:24–25 Paul equates the 'the gospel of the grace of God' with 'preaching the kingdom [of God]'—a most important parallel. It is in Acts 28:23, 31

that we find Paul at the last at Rome preaching to the Jews the message of the Kingdom of God.

If we look for the origin of the term 'the gospel of the kingdom' we will find it in Isaiah 52:7–10, whereas the Kingdom of God as Israel understood it was in somewhat different terms:

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.' Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

That was the message John the Baptist brought—that God reigned, even though to Israel under the rule of Rome it may not have seemed to be the case. He also quoted Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 relating to his preparation for the coming of the King (Mark 1:2–3; Luke 3:4–6). We have seen that Jesus was born to be King (Matt. 2:2; Ps. 2:6–7; Isa. 9:6–7), crowned King at his Baptism, defeated Satan in the three temptations relating to kingship, proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom as himself being the very King of the Kingdom, was to a great degree acclaimed as Israel's prophesied King on Palm Sunday (Zech. 9:9), was crucified as 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' at the cross, rose from the grave being designated Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead, ascended and was seated at the right hand of God where he is now reigning as the Son-King with the Father-King and is presently putting all enemies under his feet and will come again to consummate the Kingdom of God which all his people shall then inherit. All these elements were prophesied before his incarnation and substantiated his being as King. The gospel from one point of seeing it is therefore the gospel of the kingdom, i.e. of the triumph over Satan, his evil aeon of rebellious celestial and earthly powers, the liberation of God's people and the acclamation that henceforth Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, and indeed King over all the earth. From another point of seeing it, it is the personal salvation of all who have faith in God, in His Son Jesus Christ and the works of this King's earthly life, death, resurrection, ascension and heavenly reigning. From yet another vantage point the gospel of the Kingdom is seen to be the rule and reign which will ultimately destroy all evil powers and cause all saints to be 'a kingdom and priests unto their God' so that they will reign forever in the new heaven and the new earth.

Whilst at the point of Messiah's baptism as King the good news was of the Kingdom and the *King*, yet it remained for him to carry out all his works which formed the gospel, i.e. those named immediately above. All of this being accomplished, the gospel was henceforth to be proclaimed in all its elements to all the nations. This gospel, therefore needs to be first fully understood by its proclaimers, lived in by them, and uncompromisingly declared to all the nations. It is to be asserted clearly in the presence of the enemies of God. It matters not what adjectives are used—or not used—to describe the gospel, but it does matter that we see it always as the gospel of the Kingdom.

THE TRUE VIEW OF GOD'S KINGDOM AND ITS KINGSHIP

The terms 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven' are not used as such in the Old

Testament but the concept contained in these terms is well enough known. Isaiah 52:7 may well have been in the mind of the Israel of Jesus' day when John the Baptist proclaimed the nearness of the Kingdom, yet the whole matter of the Kingdom and its Messiah and its power was well developed. David had stated it when all the offerings for the building of the temple in Jerusalem had been given by the people:

Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; and David said: 'Blessed art thou, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank thee, our God, and praise thy glorious name' (1 Chron. 29:10–13).

In Deuteronomy 17:14–20 instructions had been given for the installing of a king over Israel 'whom the LORD your God will choose' and the king was to rule after a certain manner commensurate with Israel's theocracy. It was stated as important—as we will further see—that he should not be a power-monger, getting wives in number, gold and silver, and that:

... when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, from that which is in the charge of the Levitical priests; and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them; that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel' (Deut. 17:18–20).

In Exodus 19:5–6 (cf. Deut. 7:7–9; 14:1) the meaning and purpose of Israel as God's Kingdom had been told them. They were to be a humble people and a holy kingdom:

Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.

IMAGES OF KINGS AND KINGDOMS FORMED IN HISTORY

The Book of Daniel was primarily concerned with showing the movements of kingdoms which rose and fell at the time of Daniel, and which were predicted as rising and falling in the future. The records of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus are given, and it is from these accounts that we see kings who are power hungry and have imperial ambitions. Nebuchadnezzar's fall through pride and his humbling are intended to speak of true kingship and a proper kingdom blueprint, or road-map, as he describes the Most High and His sovereign control:

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives for ever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing; and he does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What doest thou?' At the same time my reason returned to me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendour returned to me. My counsellors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and

honour the King of heaven; for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase' (Dan. 4:34–37).

This passage is the template for humility in kingship and kingdom, but much was to be said about pride and arrogance of kings and kingdoms, especially when compared with the Kingdom of the Most High. Belshazzar arrogantly used the holy vessels of the temple in wine-drinking and praised 'the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone', so 'his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly' as had once been the case with his father Nebuchadnezzar. So, then, Belshazzar lost the kingdom to the Medes and Persians. The rising of the four vicious beasts, their power and their demise is in the face of the appearing 'of one like the son of man' before 'the Ancient of Days', and the passage of Daniel 7:9–28 speaks of things which greatly parallel the things of Revelation chapters 13 onwards, especially the fourth beast in Daniel which at one point 'made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom' (7:19–22). This fourth beast of Daniel 7 resembles the first beast of Revelation 13. The outcome of these kings and nations raging against the Most High in terms of Psalm 2 is seen in Daniel 7:26–27:

But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.

Daniel in the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream had to tell the king that the judgment on him was 'to the end that the living may know that *the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men*'. The beasts in Daniel as kings and kingdoms did not repent as did Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Rev. 16:10f.). It should be noted that the ram which Daniel saw in the third year of Belshazzar's reign represented in his horns the kings of Media and Persia, and the he-goat represented the king of Greece. In the *RSV* both are said to *magnify* themselves, whilst the *NRSV* and other versions speak of them 'growing great', but undoubtedly self-magnification is the key to their overweening pride and arrogance. The opposition to 'the Prince of the host' of heaven (8:11) and 'the continual burnt offering' results in 'truth [being] cast down to the ground' (8:12), for:

His power shall be great, and he shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people of the saints. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall magnify himself. Without warning he shall destroy many; and he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes; but, by no human hand, he shall be broken (8:24–25).

One of the keys to this rising and falling of kingdoms is shown in Daniel 10:10–21 where the kings of Persia and Greece are angelic powers which are behind the human kings of these empires. They are powers which we would call 'evil powers' from the perspective we have in the New Testament (Col. 1:13; 2:14–15; Eph. 6:12; cf. Rom. 8:38; Rev. 12:4; Gal. 4:8–9; 1 Cor. 2:8). These supernatural princes sought to withstand the great angelic power which came to Daniel as a result of his prayer and only by the aid of the archangel Gabriel did he succeed in arriving. On returning to his place he

would again have to fight the angel of Persia and then the angel of Greece.¹ This strange unveiling of the battle for the kingdoms gives us a window into the matter of the conflict of nations which ought to be helpful for us in understanding the battle that has been going on in heavenly places whilst Christ has been reigning at the right hand of God (Eph. 1:19–22; 1 Cor. 15:24–28). It is the key to Revelation chapters 13 to 19, especially the passage of 17:7–14.

We set out under our heading ‘The True View of God’s Kingdom and Its Kingship’ to see the difference between the Kingdom of God and its King, and the kingdoms of this world which are of Man and the ‘prince of this world’. Shortly we shall see the differences but what we have seen of earthly rulers does not endear their image to us. We have only to look at the kings of Israel, then those of Judah and northern Israel, to see the fact that no king has ever been entirely a good king. Even kings such as David, Solomon and Josiah have fallen far short of the King prophesied as Ruler of the coming Kingdom of God when ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever’ (Rev. 11:15). Let us keep in mind also that having been created to have dominion over the earth, all the children of Adam *have no time for kings other than themselves*. Only the regenerate will ever have an icon of the true King and the Kingdom. Even they have to overcome an unacceptable image of a king which has been formed.

THE TRUE IMAGE OF GOD’S KING AND HIS KINGDOM

Israel knew it was a theocracy and it was glad God was King over all the earth and was rightfully so because He was its Creator. It took His revelation of Himself to destroy the fear in which they held other kings, particularly the Pharaohs of Egypt. By His acts He revealed that He was more powerful than they. Kings were supposed to be fathers and shepherds of their people and Yahweh took these titles to Himself. He was always ‘the living God’ i.e. the God who acted. Through His actions he showed Himself to be King of Israel in His covenant with the people and with His sovereignty over all nations. He had chosen Israel by His love to be His special people (Deut. 7:6). Even so, they desired an earthly king, and such a king was to be the image of their God–King, though, in fact, he was rarely so. Man, of course, was created to be the regal image of God the King.

The story of Israel’s kings we well know from the writings of the Former Prophets—Joshua to Nehemiah—when there were good kings and bad kings who deeply affected the life of Israel for good or evil. The promises of the prophets heartened the faithful who heard them in the midst of national and international embroilment of wars and conflicts. These faithful ones looked to the coming of the King of the prophecies, who would secure them in the Kingdom of Yahweh and release them from the judgments which were coming upon their nation for its disloyalty to the Lord as their King. It is fair to say that almost all their kings had been political in the modern understanding of the word, i.e. seeking power and domination by whatever means and

¹ In Daniel 8:9–11a the prophet describes one of the horns (kings) of the he-goat:

Out of one of them came forth a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven; and some of the host of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled upon them. It magnified itself, even up to the Prince of the host.

‘Some of the host of the stars’ means the angels of heaven, and in Revelation 12:4 the red dragon sweeps down one third of these stars (angels) of heaven. These are the unseen happenings which link us with Ephesians 6:12. A matter for deep thought, indeed.

manipulation possible. A king who would not be after this order would be difficult to envisage.

In one way we ought to understand the puzzlement and disbelief of the Israel of Jesus' day when he seemed to come *incognito*. He had none of the accoutrements of royalty as the nation understood that word. His 'self-emptying'—*kenosis*—was certainly complete. He brought no special glory that was recognisable as royal in the days of his flesh. Even so, the activities of angels and saints of the Spirit showed they were aware that the child of Mary's womb was to be a Saviour—'he shall save his people from their sins' (Matt. 1:21), 'a light to lighten the Gentiles and for glory to thy people Israel' (Luke 2:29–32, AV), that 'He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end' (Luke 1:32–33). Joseph knew 'that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit', and Mary knew that the angel spoke truly, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God' (Luke 1:35). Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna and others knew the great hour had arrived. The Magi knew that the King of the Jews had been born.

In our previous study we saw that he was, and is—in accordance with the law and the prophets—truly the King. For recognising their King and their Kingdom the Jews had been given certain biblical criteria and Jesus did not appear to fit these because the Jews had not recognised the criteria, and did not think they were mistaken. In Matthew 13:1–17 Jesus told the story of the sower sowing the seed, which was evidently not understood, and when the disciples asked him why he spoke in parables, his answer was:

To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: 'You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.' But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Later Paul was to say of his Jewish brethren, 'I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness' (Rom. 10:2–3). John recorded, 'He came to his own home and his own received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become the children of God' (John 1:11–12). In terms of Isaiah 53:1–3 his report was not received. There was nothing attractive about this 'man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief'. In fact, rightly understood, there was everything about him to attract men and women and children of faith, and this was the case. Those who would not believe the resurrection did not see Jesus as fitting the prophetic criteria of 'the law and the prophets' (Matt. 5:17; 11:13; Luke 16:17) because, as we noted, the unbelieving Jews had changed the biblical criteria, and yet did not think that they had done so.

We conclude then that Jesus had two sets of hearers—those who heard and believed, and those who did not. This is borne out by Luke 8:1–21 where to hear truly is to act upon the word heard. Our study now addresses this category of hearers. To them only

is Jesus King: to them only is the Kingdom the present reality of God. In previous papers we have shown that he taught the nature of the King and the Kingdom by enacting it in word and deed, teaching it in parables as in the chapters of Matthew 5 to 7, and then securing the triumph of the King and the Kingdom over all evil—irreversibly and forever—in the cross, the resurrection, the ascension and the reigning at the right hand of God. In all of this living proclamation of the Kingdom there was no politicking, no hubris, no self-magnification, no departure from the principle of his *kenosis* as described in Philippians 2:1–11, but only outworking of true humility. Taunt him as they would and cruelly persecute him as they desired, they never drew a corresponding reaction from him. ‘He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly’ (1 Pet. 2:22–23). This, of course, accords with Isaiah 53:7–9:

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. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

The Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3–16, although directed to faithful hearers as members of the Kingdom, are the perfect portrait of the true King, and hence of the life and action of the Kingdom of God as he fulfilled the law and the prophets with a view to the fulfilling of ‘the whole counsel of God’—the *telos*. He was ‘poor in spirit’, ‘mourned’, was ‘meek’, ‘hungered and thirsted for righteousness’, was ‘merciful’, ‘pure in heart’, was ‘persecuted for righteousness’ sake’, was unprovoked when people reviled him and uttered all kinds of evil falsely on the Father’s account, for ‘he rejoiced and was glad’ in the midst of all this. Moreover he was above all men and for all men, the salt of the earth and ‘the light of the world’, and he did his good works before men so that he might glorify his Father in heaven. He was not just the model and paradigm for those who had entered—and would enter—the Kingdom but as their King he was the source of the life of his people. For many centuries and in all eternity this law of the Kingdom was, and would be, for him and his people as ‘the sons of the kingdom’. No wonder he spoke not in order to radicalise what some have called ‘the old law’ but to show the true nature of that law, and that it led to its ultimate peak in Matthew 5:43–48—the peak of ‘other-persons-centredness’ which is the essence of Trinitarian interpersonal relationships and the perichoretic giving and receiving of the Persons which makes space for the Others for mutual interdwelling:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

It remains only to see in regard to the Sermon on the Mount that he was the King pronouncing the law of the Kingdom, not as in the Greek *nomos* or the Roman *lex*, but as God’s holy ‘Torah’, i.e. ‘instruction’ and ‘the way of truly living out the righteousness of God in proper human living’. We may well call this royal teaching

‘God’s charter for humanity for all time’.² Nor should we leave the Sermon on the Mount without referring to the whole of his life as one of genuine humility, one devoid of human pride and arrogance, one centred in glad submission and obedience to His Father, though never in any sense servile. In Philippians 2:5–11 we see this mind of humility and remember that the text does not say he humbled himself to become a man, but that he humbled himself to the death of the cross, a state which was evil beyond measure, yet one in which he never became evil. Of himself he had said:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

THE KINGDOM AND THE ASCENDED, REIGNING KING

For the remainder of our study we will concentrate on the church, the world and the Kingdom of God as it pertains to Christ the King reigning at the right hand of God, especially in this present aeon. It is essential for us to know what is the outcome of the Kingly, Priestly and Prophetic work of Christ accomplished in the days of his flesh and now being worked out from the throne of God, for this is the era in which we live and we are the church and are commanded to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom to our age. It is the Kingdom for which we are suffering persecutions and afflictions, as Paul tells the Thessalonian church (2 Thess. 1:4–5; Matt. 5:10–12) and it is the Kingdom which is in conflict with the kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13; cf. Rev. 16:10). An account of this is given in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 where it is designated that the Son–King under the Father–King is putting down all the enemies of the Kingdom of God, until they are destroyed and the Father becomes all-in-all. An enlarged and detailed account of this occupies the whole text of the Book of the Revelation. So far as the man Jesus was concerned, Peter had announced at Pentecost that ‘The LORD said to my Lord, sit thou at my right hand till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet’, and added, ‘Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified’ (Acts 2:36). The Revelation shows the action of God and Christ in bringing the present *eschaton* to its *telos*. We have seen that the conflict of nations is portrayed throughout the Old Testament, that the arrogance of kings and nations is clearly set out in the Book of Daniel, and that the background to all this conflict is God’s creational, everlasting covenant, and the place of the Abrahamic covenant with promise of blessing to all nations who bless Abraham and the curse which come to all nations who curse Abraham.

In the light of this and other elements which we will name and examine, we ask ourselves the question, ‘In what manner, then, shall we live in and for the Kingdom of God under the bi-fold Kingship of God’s throne?’³ In the Book of the Revelation the throne is the place of power. From it issues all the action which we call ‘apocalyptic’ and which we do not take literally but symbolically of true action. Hence the seven seals,

² See the article by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honour of Oswald T. Allis* (Gen. ed. John H. Skilton, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974) entitled ‘The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity’. The same article is found in the book *Towards an Old Testament Theology* by Walter Kaiser (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1978).

³ In using the term ‘bi-fold’ we do not mean ‘binitarian’, for the seven spirits (the sevenfold Spirit) are ever before the throne of God and are the sight and strength of the Lamb (Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6; cf. Isa. 11:1–3). In this understanding, the throne is Trinitarian.

the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath signify *actual* happenings but are not to be taken *literally* as, for example, beasts with horns, a he-goat and a ram as in the Book of Daniel. A red dragon, a beast from the sea, and a beast from the land, and a harlot which is Babylon are to be seen as apocalyptic but not as literal in the Revelation.

In seeking the answer to our question regarding the way we should live in the Kingdom, we need to take one powerful fact into consideration, namely the work Messiah carried out from his birth as a man to his session at the right hand of God. The outcome of Jesus' *kenosis*, his humility in his death upon the cross, was that 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2:10–11). We mean that the babe of Mary is now King over all the creation, but we do not mean he is any the less humble because of his exaltation. He did not become 'humble for a season' but exhibited the humility that was his. Assuming humility in order to become great is a horrible matter. Zechariah 9:9 pronounces what he had always been and will be, 'triumphant and victorious . . . humble' We are saying that triumph and victory are not of another ilk than being humble. To the contrary: if one is triumphant and victorious apart from humility, then a dreadful contradiction exists. Nebuchadnezzar did not rule truly until he was humbled. The Son of God is forever humble and rules in his humility. Sheer metaphysical power cannot transform evil by its pressure. Only holy love can do that. One is indebted to Peter Forsyth for that powerful insight which I quote below. I mean that on the one hand 'the kingdom of God is not [matters of] food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit', whilst at the same time the kingdom of God does not consist in (arrogant and empty) talk but in power (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; cf. 4:19), i.e. the power of the Spirit. We put it this way so that we may not think we have to counter the weapons of evil by weapons which are worldly and so similar to those of the world (2 Cor. 10:1–6):

To a holy God the salvation of the world's evil soul is a matter of conscience. We are all standing before the judgment-seat of Christ. And one day we shall know it. We end where we began—in Him. All things are set at last in that light. His love—our great boon or else our great doom—is the deep and cryptic formula of the movement of Time. Time is great with that Eternity. But its process is no mere metamorphosis of Humanity by the progress of humane civilisation, philanthropy, and social reform—inevitable as it makes such things to be. Love is not simply the great propelling and enriching principle; it is the great discriminating, consuming, selective, reconstitutive principle. Its holiness is the principle of sifting, and creative and redemptive judgment. The consummation does not arrive with the gradual leavening and organisation of Humanity by the law of sympathetic love. It is more creative than that, and more of a gift from above, more of a holy justification. *It goes back at every point for its source and power to the decisive, finished, ultimate, and eternal act of the God of holy love in His Cross. It comes as this ceaseless Act works up through all things in a creative evolution to their control, taking effect, taking selective, rejecting, condemning, saving effect in history, and guiding or forcing every soul upon its moral relation to the redemption of Eternity far more than to the ameliorations of Time. The Christian word of the Cross is not that God is love, but that God's love as holy is the omnipotence of the world with the final reversion of all things* [my emphasis].⁴

The great act that took place in Christ was the total, irreversible one which took all the power out of evil, and made it for ever impossible for evil to defeat God. When we use the term 'evil' we mean personal evil, Satanic evil, the evil of the Serpent, the arrogant pride which began its attacks on God and His righteousness in Eden. Since at the cross the enemies of sin, death, Satan, the world system, idols and the flesh were defeated by

⁴ *The Justification of God* by P. T. Forsyth (NCPI, Blackwood, 1988, a reprint of the original edition of 1917), p. 187.

the suffering of Christ which brought forgiveness of sins and justification by grace to humanity. The conscience-purifying blood of Christ has destroyed the guilt basis in sinful human beings by which all evil held humanity in cruel bondage. The Initiator of this cross-act was the Father. Forsyth has written, 'The Father of Jesus was the Father in Heaven, the Father from above us all, the royal, the holy, the absolute Father, of an infinite majesty. *And Christ went to His death in His function as King, not to become King.*'⁵

Part of the great act by which evil can never triumph is what has been called 'the fruit of the travail of his [Christ's] soul' (Isa. 53:11; cf. John 12:24). It is that the believers, the forgiven ones, the justified ones, the members of the Kingdom, have been regenerated. They have put off the old Adamic humanity and have put on the new humanity 'created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph. 4:24; cf. Col. 3:9–10).⁶ This act of a new creation points to the original creation in the righteousness and holiness which come from the truth. It is the same as 'the new creation' of 2 Corinthians 5:17. The New Man is Christ (Eph. 2:15) and his is the corporate humanity in which each person is new—stripped of the old humanity (Adam) and clothed with the new humanity. These are those who constitute 'a kingdom, priests to his [Christ's] God and Father' (Rev. 1:6), whilst he is 'the ruler of kings on earth' and 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). They are part of 'the armies of heaven', those who oppose the beasts, and 'who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name' and who 'sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb' (Rev. 15:2–4; cf. 14:1–5; 19:14) all of whom have been persecuted (Rev. 12:17), and some of whom have been martyred (Rev. 6:9–11; 18:24; cf. 19:1–2).

CONCLUSION: THE PRESENT WORKING OF THE KING AND HIS PEOPLE

We come now to look at the presence and action of the King and his Kingdom in this eschaton in which all creatures celestial and terrestrial are involved, creatures both righteous and wicked. Immediately we are confronted with the fact of the reign of the Son with the Father. We know it is the time of defeating and destroying all enemies of God and His Kingdom. We seek to understand the actions of God in the light of God's own law, and what our actions should be in the light of that Torah as it has been given to us, especially the passage of Matthew 5:43–48, linked as it is with the injunctions against anger in Matthew 5:21–26 and Paul's related statement of Romans 12:14–21. These passages, which we need time and again to ponder deeply, tell us God loves His enemies and so should we.

We think in terms of God's strong judgments in the Old Testament of the nations, and of His painful chastisements of Israel for her idolatry, her arrogance and trust in other nations rather than in God's promises. We watch the nations in terms of Psalm 2 rebelling against God and seeking to be free of Him. It does not seem that God's distributive righteousness is different in the New Testament. We also look at the judgments and the seemingly punitive actions of God which come with the opening of

⁵ op. cit. p. 176.

⁶ *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42, by Andrew T. Lincoln (Word Books, Dallas, 1990), p. 287.

the seven seals, the sounding of the seven trumpets and the pouring out of the vials of wrath, the very wrath which is of God and the Lamb (e.g. Rev. 6:12–16). We then look at the lake of fire and the enemies thrown into it—the Devil, the beasts, the false prophet and the armies of evil—creatures both celestial and terrestrial, and our minds and heart seek to grasp the matter of theodicy, God’s impeccable righteousness and justice in the long history of the battle between God and Satan, when the God who is essentially love appears also to be the God of wrath and One who does not appear to love His enemies.

We consider these things today when God as wrathful appears to be unacceptable anyway to much contemporary human thinking, and when the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount seems to have rightfully led us out of what are called ‘the ways of the God of the Old Testament’: the God who was—it is said—grim, legalistic, wrathful, vengeful and severe. Jonathon Edwards’s sermon ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’ is judged as infamous to a point where it said that it is now ‘God in the Hands of Angry Sinners’—i.e. the demand from high human moral ground is that God must be consistent with His own claim to be love. In all this confusion Jesus is looked upon as love, and one to calm his Father from any wrath He might have. Of course this thinking arises from not understanding—indeed not considering—‘the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith’, but trivialising this grand Torah of God, and refusing to face the holiness and righteousness of the God who created the world and who has implacable determination to destroy all that is finally evil and impenitent. The glory of His covenantal Fatherhood, His mercy, His grace, His loving kindness, his steadfast love and faithfulness abounding, and his forgiveness of the iniquity, sins and transgressions of thousands is within the holiness which will ‘by no means acquit the guilty’, i.e. the guilty who are incorrigibly impenitent. The truth is that God is not wrath. God is love, and for this reason can be provoked to wrath by what is evil. Innately He is ‘slow to anger’ but when evil powers seek to usurp His throne—His loving authority—then He must deal with them. Those who truly worship Him He will chasten in love when chastisement is appropriate (Rev. 3:19; Heb. 12:3–11; cf. Ps. 119:65–72).

As for Christ’s people, they must be one with the heavenly throne, praying that the Father’s will be done on earth as in heaven as they view Him as ‘the Holy One’ (cf. Rev. 8:1–5). They will remember such statements as Daniel 7:21–22:

As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom,

and Daniel 7:25–27:

He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time. But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.

The Book of Hebrews will remind them of the fierce and cruel treatment of the faithful from the time of Abel until now. They will also remember the teaching of Christ regarding the persecution of the saints and call to mind the persecutions that took place in the first century and, indeed all the centuries which have followed. The last book of the Bible tells them of the martyrs and of the blood of the saints as found in the unholy city of Babylon. It also tells of the vindication of God and His loyal creatures. In

13:1–10—as in Daniel 7—the beast ‘was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them’. Verse 10 is somewhat of an enigma, but its words are clear, ‘If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.’ It may mean that the saints are not to use such weapons but to endure patiently with the assurance that they who use these weapons will themselves be destroyed. Chapter 14:1–13 again calls for the same endurance, knowing that those who refuse the mark of the beast will have their reward in heaven.

In all of this they will trust their Creator as truly being ‘a faithful Creator’ who is bringing all His creation to its glorious goal when all bondage to corruption is finished and all share in ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:14–25). For them, ultimate inheritance of the Kingdom is in the *telos*, but in this *eschaton* they are in the Kingdom and proclaim the King and the Kingdom to all creation. We tell ourselves then that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual, even if they look pathetic in the eyes of self-magnifying human beings and fallen angelic powers. Ambition of an egotistical kind has dropped away from us in the humility of our loving, reigning Monarch. We do not see the gospel as ideology, even the highest ideology. We do not see humility as the highest to which we may attain, but as the *gift* of the victorious and triumphant King whose glory is his humility. We do not even desire to know the secret things which belong to our God, but we do seek to obey the things which have been revealed to us.

We have within us the imperishable conviction that the Creator–Redeemer has planned all that has happened and will yet happen, in order to bring us to the goal He purposed before time, namely that He will have a people for His own intimate possession, those who constitute the holy community, born of the Holy Community of the Three, and who are a kingdom, priests to God and to all His creation, living out the law of God Himself through all eternity. As for love and the ethical ways of peace, we trust God in His dealings with Satan and his kingdom. Fierce, savage and triumphant as it often seems to be in a war-ravaged and rebellious world, the truth is that it is a kingdom composed of creatures, and in the ultimate all creatures are fragile. So, too, is their troublesome kingdom. It is apt, we believe, to close with the words of Revelation 11:15–18:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.*’ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying,

**‘We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast,
that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.
The nations raged, but thy wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear thy name, both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.’**

The Church and the Kingdom

INTRODUCTION: THE GOSPEL, THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM

How should we view the church and the Kingdom? Are the terms interchangeable? Are they the one unit? We could ask many such questions, but when we say God is on mission and the church is on mission and we ask what this mission is and we give the answer 'God's plan and intention for creation', namely 'the counsel of his will' (Eph. 1:11), i.e. 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27), then we are saying His mission is 'the new heaven and the new earth' (2 Pet. 3:13), 'in which righteousness dwells'. In the historic process of that being brought about, the fall of Man associated with the system of Satan and his evil, has called for Man's reconciliation with God—by God—through the Cross, and so the reconciliation of all things, as also the unification, filling up and harmonising of all things (Col. 1:20; 3:14; Eph. 4:10). By His creating all things God is seen to be King over all creation, so that in history God has had to defeat a rogue kingdom—the kingdom of darkness (Rev. 16:10)—and establish His own Kingdom, not by sheer acts of raw power but by the power of His love in which are incorporated His goodness, righteousness, holiness and truth. In this 'mission' God has created a people for His own Name, i.e. those who are one with Him in His mission. These are called His *qahal* or *edah* (Hebrew: 'congregation') or *ecclesia* (Greek: 'assembly') who are called 'a people for his own possession' (cf. Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9–10; Exod. 19:5–6; Deut. 7:6; 14:2).

This people—the *ecclesia*—whilst they are ever on mission with God and servants of the King and His Kingdom, are not the Kingdom, but they are wholly identified with the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the reign and rule of God over all things and the *telos* of the Kingdom is the regeneration of the world (Matt. 19:28; cf. Acts 3:21). In this the people of God (*qahal*; *ecclesia*) are called 'a kingdom, priests to his [Christ's] God and Father' (Rev. 1:6) and it is said that the Lamb 'has made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth' (Rev. 5:10). That is, they are integrally kings and priests unto God or, like their Lord, Christ—the 'high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek' (Heb. 5:10; 7:15; etc.)—are royal priests or priestly royals (1 Pet. 2:9–10). Being one in the mission of God, they are, nevertheless, not the totality of the Kingdom, but servants of the King in the mission of the Kingdom.

CHRIST, THE CHURCH, AND THE KINGDOM

In our last study we observed that the gospel is not 'the gospel of the church', but 'the gospel of the Kingdom'. At the same time the *ecclesia* is that community of God which proclaims the Kingdom whilst living in the Kingdom, and whose life is Kingdom life as Christ set it forth in the Sermon on the Mount. It also battles with the kingdom of darkness which, in turn, seeks to surmount and destroy the Kingdom of God.

We have already seen that Christ was about the matter of the Kingdom as his ministry is described in the Gospels. Luke tells us that he taught the Kingdom in all the synagogues of Galilee, 'being glorified by all' (4:14, 15), and in 4:42–44 it is said:

And when it was day he departed and went into a lonely place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them; but he said to them, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose.' And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

In Luke 8:1 we read, 'Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God'. This is brought out strongly in Matthew 4:23–25 and 9:35, and all we have seen in these references shows us that his mind and heart were on the matter of the Kingdom and at that point nothing indicated his concern for an ecclesia. If there was one, then it was the present whole congregation (*qahal*) of Israel to which he was preaching the Kingdom. He had no intention of making a religion or raising a rival *qahal*. At the same time, the disciples he was gathering about him, and the deliberate choice he made of the twelve—and the seventy—shows he had a community in mind (cf. Luke 9:1–6; 10:1–12). As we see he was primarily urgent about Israel hearing the gospel of the Kingdom. When he sent out the twelve disciples he said, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10:5). He finally set his face to go to Jerusalem outside of which none of the prophets had perished (Mark 10:33). On one occasion (Matt. 5:35) he called it 'the city of the great King' which showed how he thought about the capital of Israel's *qahal* and kingdom (*basilea*). He had a proper and deeply felt concern for Jerusalem and her coming judgment, and so much so that he wept over her (Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34; 18:31–32; cf. 23:28).

We have made our point, then, that at no time is the church the Kingdom, though at no point is it not at one with the Kingdom and not the proclaimer of it, in that it proclaims the gospel of the Kingdom with all that that means. In this regard John Bright in his *The Kingdom of God* has written of the mission of the church:

And that mission is no forlorn hope doomed to defeat, but a victorious calling. Indeed the victory has already been won in the 'payoff battle' of the cross. The cosmic struggle continues, to be sure, with seemingly undiminished fury, but it is now in the nature of a rear-guard action, a mopping up. The issue is not in doubt. The Kingdom of God moves on to its inevitable triumph: the unconditional surrender of the Foe, the restoration of all creation under the divine domain (Acts 3:21), and the submission of all powers in heaven and earth to the name of Christ (I Cor: 15:24–28; Phil. 2:10; cf. Isa. 45:23). In the victorious army of that Kingdom marches the Church. Not that the early church ever imagined that it could produce that victory, could by its labours bring in the Kingdom! That is a modern delusion of grandeur which the early church simply would not have understood. Rather, the Church was sent into the world as a missionary witness to a Kingdom *already set up*, a witness to what Christ had already done (Acts 1:8). It would on that mission, like the Servant, meet all manner of persecution, take all sorts of brutal casualties. But there is no question of defeat—for this is the Church, and the very gates of Hell do not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Nor does this little detachment march alone, for the Invisible Christ goes with them every step of the way: 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:20). To the call of that victorious faith the Church could have but one answer, and that a triumphant one: 'If God is for us, who is against us?' (Rom. 8:31; cf. Isa. 50:7–9).¹

In history we have known to our sorrow that the church has often thought of itself as the Kingdom. The church has often operated in a kingdom mode though not *the* Kingdom mode. It has become imperialistic, losing the humility stance of its true King. By humility we do not mean in any sense evasion of the issues of righteousness and justice, but we mean the church setting up itself as arbiter of the affairs of nations. Those days

¹ *The Kingdom of God* by John Bright, sub-headed 'The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church' (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1953), p. 233.

of church imperialism are dark pages in its history and these have caused confusion and bitter enmity. It has been the church militant undoubtedly but not with spiritual weapons such as faith and hope, salvation and the gospel of peace, but with political armoury and by a hierarchy which has held power and self-magnification in the name of Christ. Within the church there has been domination by harsh powers which have set themselves to rule. The church has often seen itself as the Kingdom and has been a kingdom without doubt. We are grateful that in its history this is not the whole story.

As for the church setting up the Kingdom of God, as John Bright's quote above shows, imperialism was far away from their minds. They did not seem to think that the discipling of nations would mean building up the Kingdom of God in any numerical or political sense. It is wrong thinking to speak of 'building up the Kingdom', or 'enlarging and extending the Kingdom' for then we are thinking of a realm and a quantity of people as being the Kingdom, whereas it is the rule of God but then of the holy, righteous and loving God. The early Christians saw themselves—indeed knew themselves—to be a persecuted people and understood why this was so. It has been many times observed that the fourth century Constantinian Edict which pronounced Christianity to be a licit (permitted by law) religion was the beginning of the Roman Empire's using the church as a servant of the State. The banishing of paganism as a decision of the State in favour of Christianity was to some degree counter-productive, for paganism was never banished essentially. It has remained deeply ingrained in the West as it has been overtly present in the East. The dark days of the church in Europe and western Asia have been most evil where its actions and philosophy have often been far from that of the Nazarene. Augustine in his *The City of God* perceived that the covert paganism which was ensconced deeply in the Empire was what helped to fell Rome. Many opinions have been put forward regarding the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as being detrimental to the life of the church, even though gains also came to it in the struggle against medievalism, superstition and entrenched scholasticism.

The result of the battle for supremacy between Christianity and Islam had helped to build Christendom as a force of its own, having a security of its own. When we say 'Christendom' we do not equate that wholly with the church although that would seem logical enough. The polarisation of political powers into these two definable camps of Christian nations (Christendom) and Islam has in many ways been shattered by the restless movements of numerous nations in the 20th and 21st centuries. Colonialism by conquest has been largely dissolved, giving way to the internal politics of power. Christian missionary activity from the West was looked upon as a deliberate means of invasion by the West, but Third World countries have seen a growth in the gospel far beyond that in the 'enlightened' West. The terrorism of our days has shown that whatever the force of Christendom and the realm of Islam were at the end of the 19th century these placements can no longer be seen as static, inviolable and permanent. We are virtually driven to books such as Daniel, Obadiah, Zechariah and Revelation to understand the movements of kingdoms and rulers in history and to understand Christ the King and the Kingdom of God. We are forced to examine the movement of the empires in which Israel became involved, as they also in her history. Those who have grown up within the comparative security of Christendom are now faced with an exposure to old invading forces made new, resiling from the domination of the West. In this paper we do not have space to discuss the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinistic and Orthodox views of the Kingdom of God but we need to get to know them.

In his book *The Promise and the Presence*, sub-headed 'Toward a Theology of the Kingdom of God', Isaac C. Rottenberg speaks about a wrong identification of the church with the Kingdom:

Since the medieval period, the equation of the kingdom of God with the Church has been quite common, particularly in the Catholic tradition. During the Reformation, serious questions were raised about this position. Through insights gained from a rediscovery of biblical eschatology, the Reformers began once again to write theology in dynamic historical categories. They viewed history in terms of continual reformation as the pilgrim people of God journey toward the future of the kingdom.

Still, a close relationship between the Church and the kingdom was maintained, sometimes even appearing to approximate a new identification between Church and kingdom. Yet, whatever difficulties the Reformers may have had in formulating the nature of the relationship, they never lost sight of the problems posed by interpreting the kingdom in triumphalistic ecclesiastical terms.²

In all this it is imperative that we understand the true nature of the ecclesia and the Kingdom of God. We are aware that when communism was born in the Christian West it was atheistic and ideological—dialectical materialism—and that out of fear of persecution many church adherents rejected their Christian faith. The rise of National Socialism in Germany in the form of Nazism and in Italy of Fascism drew many of the churches into its stream of infamous activity. Of course there were millions of Christian believers who resisted these pressures, some being martyred and others suffering for their faith. Even so, it shows us why we should comprehend as churches, i.e. as the Community of Christ, that the church and the Kingdom are inseparable in the movement of God's plan in history from its beginning in creation to God's ultimate *telos*.

THE DOMESTICATION OF THE CHURCHES

Many analyses of the condition of the churches are available today from numerous sources. In fact ecclesiology has been the centre of much contemporary theology. Roman Catholic, Protestant and Eastern and Western Orthodox churches are deeply involved in 'Faith, Life and Order' studies, and Consultations and Conferences abound in regard to inter-communion and church union. At the same time inter-faith discussions and inter-religion worship are being held with the hope of an understanding developing between the world religions and an enlargement in religious and cultural tolerance. The theology of church structures, worship and practice is to the forefront. Some forms of clergy-laity hierarchical structures are being called in question and reforms are taking place in many congregations. Theology determines to a great degree the practice of life and worship in the churches, and theology is incorporating developing hermeneutics. It is a fact that growth in churches in the West is minimal or non-existent and that—so far as the matter of numbers is concerned—mega-churches have mostly drawn members from other, less successful congregations. In Third World countries church expansion is at a rapid rate, especially where churches are not theologically sophisticated and doctrinally complicated. Stories of many of these growing communities read like pages out of the Book of the Acts even though—or perhaps because—persecution is often quite severe.

All I have written in this section tells us there is great activity in churches in the world. It is about churches in countries that are relatively secure that I want to refer to as becoming domesticated. Where strong religious and ideological differences are still present in a country or nation, and there is persecution of churches by other religions and where the State is in action against the Christian faith, then churches seem to be very

² Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1980, p. 65.

much alive and even flourish from opposition. In so-called 'safe' nations churches can be quite alive in the sense that they are culturally accepted and seem, even, each to have a life of its own. However, organisation and activity and even animation are not necessarily the expression of a true organism in which the Spirit of God is present and is working powerfully. Many churches have continued the traditions formed decades ago, and even generations ago. Some simply have old folk in them and appear to be on the wane, their youth not attracted to them or having departed from them to more lively scenes. Some have separate worship services for young and old, whilst often older folk join the younger people for what purports to be more lively worship. This is sometimes called 'contemporary worship'. Some churches have begun to hold two services—traditional and contemporary—at the same time, joining each other at coffee at the close of the worship time.

We are certainly mistaken if we think churches are about to dissolve in the West. They are employing so many different patterns to keep going, such as mega-church planning, dismissing pastor-elder groups from leading to be replaced by managerial structures, marketing practices utilising music and entertainment attractions, light and sound equipment—decibels and watts—for communicating what they are about. Trained counsellors are employed to cover, where possible, emotional and relational needs so that therapies and advice on family and societal living are to the forefront. Financial planning for denominational groupings is the order of the day so that they will not be decimated by lowered economic support by traditional tithes and offerings. Much of this pattern has been developing since the end of the 19th century when hitherto unheard of church halls and recreational facilities began to be used to bring people together outside of worship services. Charity services could find a good venue. Sunday Schools could thus be held. Clubs to cater for boys and girls, for men and women, came into vogue. These changes have to be made in conformation with contemporary culture. Contemporary culture has always had some effect upon churches, but more so in these days where moral and ethical values have changed, and secular youth culture has affected youth in the churches.

This description could be greatly widened but most of it relates to the shaping up of churches into local communities, if not into clubs. Care is exercised in order to preserve the local church by all means available. Behind it is an ecclesiology of sorts. What better than reasonably moral societal units where religion can be carried on with genuine respectability and acceptable democratic sociality? Churches are thus significant in modern society, especially if they are missional which means they seek to draw others into their groupings and offer them the benefits of healthy religion. I believe the thinking behind much of our evangelism—so intended—is the theology that the church is what matters most. 'Kingdom', if it is considered at all, is the extension of churches and their ministry to humanity—a greater bloc effect, an increased density of acceptable religion. The church, then, is what matters! The idea of God's ruling over creation, the defeat of the evil kingdom of Satan, the liberation of human beings in bondage to this other destructive kingdom is to a great degree not considered. The emphasis on the salvific work of the Triune God in all history so that ultimately all evil will be defeated and banished from creation seems to be an ideal or just an idea that is unrelated to current human living. Teaching that there will be a new heaven and new earth in which only righteousness and justice dwells is too high flown and even too esoteric for a generation concerned with its present wellbeing, comfort and progress.³

³ See this paper's Addendum, 'The State of the Church in Today's World'.

I hope what I have listed is not taken as a generalisation for all churches in First World countries but as a critique of softness in living, declension in public moral standards, along with the effects of theological liberalism and certain adverse cultural factors—elements which need to be seen and addressed. No one ought to object to churches being social groups for they are this by nature of the case. At the same time there are many clubs; indeed innumerable clubs because humans seem to need such. When, however, the churches become clubs, and when the church—the aggregate of churches world-wide—thinks itself to be the Kingdom of God and does not see itself as servant of the Kingdom, as God’s people proclaiming the Kingdom and suffering for its sake, then the church local and universal foreshortens the historical, panoramic view of the Kingdom of God. True churches feel the impact of human and demonic hatred. Churches, it is true, are *domestic* by reason of the fact that they are to do with family, i.e. the family of the Father, God. Just by being ‘the church’ the local assembly is doing its job, especially if it has representatives on ‘the mission field’. However, churches can also become *domesticated* when turned into and upon themselves and concerned primarily with themselves. The great issues—the ‘eternities’ as they used to be called—were those of the churches from the beginning as we see in the New Testament writings and especially in the seven letters to the churches of Asia. The sevenfold church to whom and for whom the Book of Revelation was written (1:4, 10–11, 20; chs. 2 & 3; cf. 22:16) are those amongst whom Christ walks and then calls to be overcomers in a world of conflict. The most domesticated is the church at Laodicea. The churches have their life in the world in which are the actions of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath, which are nothing to do with the world of comfortable clubs! Of course in this apocalyptic action there is little time for ecclesiastical clubbiness.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM

We note that the seven churches, i.e. the sevenfold church of Revelation chapters 1 to 3, are spoken to by the Holy Spirit—‘Hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ (plural). The whole prophecy of the Revelation was given by the Holy Spirit. The whole book is about the whole Kingdom. We learn from Acts 2:14ff. (cf. Joel 2:28ff.) that Pentecost marked the beginning of the new era—‘in the last days’—i.e. in the eschaton, which can be called ‘the era of the Spirit’ in contradistinction to ‘the days of his [Christ’s] flesh’, i.e. the era of Jesus the Son. In practical fact this era or eschaton is the era of the unseen Christ as well as the felt era of the Spirit.

We remember that John’s message of the imminent Kingdom of God contained teaching that the Messiah—Jesus—was the one on whom he saw the Spirit alight at his baptism. God had said to him, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit *descend* and *remain*, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’. John then said, ‘I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God’ (John 1:33–34). He had linked the Kingdom, Jesus and the Holy Spirit in Matthew 3:1–11. John 3:31–36 endorses this, ‘For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit’. The phrase ‘it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit’ is capable of two meanings, either: (i) the Father does not measure out the Spirit to the Son but gives wholly; or (ii) that this refers to the ultimate sending of the Spirit through Jesus, the gift of the Spirit not being measured out to the coming people of God. Acts 2:33 shows that in any case the Son on receiving the gift of the Spirit at his ascension pours him out without measure on the day of Pentecost.

We may surely make the point that those who followed Christ had three things in mind; the taking away of the sin of the world, the full coming of the Kingdom, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by Christ which must have had Old Testament connotation to the hearers. In the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels little is said of the Holy Spirit. In regard to the Holy Spirit Luke said, 'how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' (Luke 11:13). By comparison much is said of the Kingdom and the forgiveness of sin. On one occasion Jesus said to his disciples, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom', and on another an even stronger statement, 'and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Luke 22:29–30; cf. Matt. 19:28). He also spoke about entering the Kingdom, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 18:3; cf. John 3:1–14). To Israel he said, 'The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently' (Luke 16:16). The point we want to make is that he proclaimed the Kingdom in word and deed by the power of the Holy Spirit: '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 10:38). He, himself, said, 'if it is by *the Spirit of God* that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Matt. 12:28). At Pentecost—when the Spirit came—the Kingship (Messiah) of Jesus was declared dynamically: 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:36). From now onwards the Kingdom would be proclaimed, and would be present in power.

We have seen that 'the gospel of the Kingdom' was preached from Pentecost onwards. When we trace references to the Kingdom in the Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation, we gather the glorious nature of the Kingdom and the power of the Holy Spirit for the declaration of the gospel of the Kingdom and for the battle of God's Kingdom against the kingdom of darkness.

We saw in a previous study that in Acts 1:1–11 Jesus spoke for forty days to his disciples on the things concerning the Kingdom. Following this he told them that very soon they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit. Putting together his teaching on the Kingdom with their being baptised in the Spirit they assumed that God was about to restore the Kingdom to Israel since in the Old Testament, promises of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were linked with 'the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel'.⁴ His reply to their question regarding this was clear:

He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:7–8).

In other words the matter of the Kingdom was not just for Israel, but also for Samaria and the Gentiles, 'to the end of the earth'. The main encouragement was that, being baptised in the Spirit, they would have power for witnessing—telling the truth—concerning Christ, as the telling related to the Kingdom of God. Would they, then, proclaim the Kingdom as they saw Jesus so doing—'doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil'? In Hebrews 6:4–5 the writer speaks of tasting 'the

⁴ See my *The Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985), pp. 78–99, 128–59.

heavenly gift', becoming 'partakers of the Holy Spirit, [tasting] the goodness of the word of God and the powers [*dunameis*] of the age to come' (cf. Eph. 1:21), i.e. of the new age of the Kingdom. This tells of the power of the Kingdom of God which had defeated Satan as Jesus confronted him—the liberation from darkness in the lives of those who heard his word. The power of the King was also present with the apostles when they did 'greater works than these' (John 14:12). See, then, such works in Acts 3:11–16; 6:8; 8:4–13; 9:32–42; 14:3; 19:11–20, as 'the power [works] of the age to come' breaking in as the Kingdom (Heb. 6:4–5).

Jesus had showed his disciples in the upper room on the night of his betrayal that when the Holy Spirit came to them—as he did at Pentecost—they would remember all things he had said and done in their presence, and they would come to know all the truth, and the Spirit would convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. Thus Paul was later able to state that truly living in the Kingdom was 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit', that the Kingdom was not in empty talk but in power, that they (the Thessalonians) were enduring affliction which was so 'that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering'. In the same way John could say in the Revelation that in Jesus he shared with his readers 'the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance' (1:9; cf. 13:10; 14:12). Again in Colossians 1:12–13 Paul could write to the church, 'giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.' These references are enough to show involvement of the church in the life and ministry of the Kingdom. Of course, as history shows, the attacks on the church by Satanic powers were, as Christ had warned his disciples would be the case, fierce, unrelenting, working through massive religions, idolatry, politics and philosophy, to say nothing of cultures which to a great degree arose out of these differences of lords both supernatural and human, as idols before and against the true God.⁵ All of this reinforces our understanding that the church being on the mission of the Kingdom of God ought not to move a step without the leadership and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' pronouncement of Acts 1:8 (cf. Luke 24:48–49; Acts 2:33; 4:29–33) regarding the church witnessing to Christ in Israel, Samaria and the 'end of the earth' (Ps. 2:6–8) brings us again to the manner of the continuous flowing of the river of God, if we may take up that theme from John 7:37–39:

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.

We might well ask why this happened and what it meant. In John 4:1–30, in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus revealed the mystery of divine water:

Jesus said to her, 'Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.' (John 4:13–15).

⁵ Beginning with H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (Harper and Row, New York, 1951, there has been a spate of material on the subject of culture and religion. For the widening view on culture see the bibliography of the Addendum to this present paper.

Likewise in John 6:35, Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst'. Now at the Feast of Tabernacles he was offering thirst-quenching water of life as against the river of God's life rejected, often, in Israel. So in Jeremiah 2:13, 'for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water'. They needed 'water' or they would not have made their own cisterns of idolatry, trusted in other nations—and so on. Now in John 7:37–39 Jesus was speaking plainly of the coming into them of the Holy Spirit. 'As the Scripture has said', has baffled some commentators. Raymond Brown⁶ cites Psalm 78:15–16, 'He cleft rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers.' He also quotes Zechariah 14:8, 'On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter', and links it with Revelation 22:1 and 17. Whatever the case, the one who comes to thirst (cf. Matt. 5:6) may now come to Christ and drink of him, believing in him. Out of this one shall flow rivers of living water, i.e. the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who was to be given at Jesus' ascension which was the time of his glorification.

Having faced the enormous task of a sea change of the whole world—the restoration of the Kingdom not being limited to Israel but extended to Samaria and then to the whole world, i.e. all nations—we see that in fact at Pentecost began the out-flowing of rivers of living water to 'Jerusalem and all Judea' based on the fact of Jesus' Kingship (Acts 2:36). The rivers flowed out of the assembly of believers—the apostles and the others—and it flowed into Israel. The same rivers flowed out of Philip into Samaria for he proclaimed the Kingdom (Acts 8:12–13), but until the apostles Peter and John came down, rivers had not begun to flow *from the Samaritans*, but rivers flowed when the apostles laid hands on them. Likewise, when Peter went down to the receptive Gentiles at Caesarea under the apostolic word, not only did salvation come to them, but also *out of those Gentiles* began flowing rivers of living water. We might speak of three Pentecosts, or one for all flesh distributed by a Samaritan and a Gentile outpouring, and that from then onwards Israelites, Samaritans and Gentiles had begun to flow the Holy Spirit, initial releasings of the Spirit which would be for all history which lay ahead. Thus what Joel had said (2:28) and Peter had quoted (Acts 2:17), the outpouring of the Spirit was upon '*all flesh*', the rivers of living water were for *all* peoples and nations. If we take Christ's words, 'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth' to be the case, then *being witnesses is the essence of the people of God*. For this see my *The Day of the Spirit*, pages 122–40 and Allison A. Trites's *The New Testament Concept of Witness*.⁷

Being witnesses is telling the truth, and the truth can only come through the Spirit of truth (John 16:13; 1 John 5:7–9). Christ was 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14, 17), having come to bear witness to the truth, and truth relating to the Kingdom and his Kingship (John 18:37). In Revelation 1:5 and 3:14, Jesus is 'the faithful and true witness', borne witness to by the Father (John 5:36–38; 12:27–31). Christ is the truth of God (John 14:6) against the enormous lie of the Serpent (John 8:44–47). A glance at a concordance will show the church was about witnessing. Its gospel was the truth. Our point, then, is that without the Holy Spirit no one can witness. Being filled with the Spirit a person cannot but witness. Acts chapters 2, 4, 8, 10, and 19 are a testimony to the fact

⁶ *The Gospel According to John I-XII* by Raymond Brown in the Anchor Bible (Doubleday, New York, 1966), pp. 320–25.

⁷ Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series, no. 31 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977).

that the filling of the church with the Holy Spirit is indispensable for the church being constantly active in the truth in proclaiming the gospel and living in the truth.

Returning to the matter of John 7:37–39—the outpourings on Israel, Samaria and the Gentiles (Caesarea) so that the river flows throughout the world and the Kingdom of God is being given to all flesh—then may it not be that down through the ages the churches have recognised, in some cases dimly, that supernatural power is needed for the church to minister in all the world, and is it not possible that we often see the church forsaking the Fountain of living waters by building up its own reservoirs from which to drink? ‘There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God’ must refer to Jerusalem but it did not, materially, have a river of water. In God, Jerusalem did have such a river as indeed the same river now flows through the Holy City (Rev. 22:1, 17). Are not some of the resources some churches have used and are using patently reservoir water, and even from the reservoirs of the world? Do we not personally develop private reservoirs and drink of them? Living water is sweet but reservoir water without an outflow can become stagnant. Is it even conceivable that we might covet the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to further plans which we think are God’s but which are our own? Martin Bleby’s hymn well says, ‘What can our mean little kingdoms be worth, When God has brought all of His heaven to earth?’

THE IMMENSE BATTLE OF THE KINGDOM FOR FREEDOM AND THE CONFLICT OF TRUTH AND THE GIGANTIC LIE OF EVIL

When we live in a world which is brought into our homes by the media daily we should be appalled at so much and so many kinds of evil. So much evil can be seen if our minds and consciences are alert, but often we are bemused so that what is shown belongs to some other world and time. Titanic issues are trivialised. We are still straining at gnats and swallowing camels. We have left the Cross out of our reckoning or have joined those who see in it but a beautiful act of a beautiful God who is not really wrathful on all that is evil. The Judaism of Jesus’ day was not benign: it crucified Christ. It was inhabited by demonic powers. Its leaders did not make a simple mistake. They did not want to see people liberated in the way Jesus went about it. They did not want to see his followers carry on in the same way. To Judaism a crucified Jesus was a scandal. There was dreadful evil in Judaism. Samaria was also in a dreadful bondage. The woman at the well was intelligent but uncomprehending of the real issues. To her Jesus opened a wide vista of the truth. He spoke of a freedom from her own sin, a fountain which could spring up in her, and she conveyed this powerfully to her Samaritan city. Her compatriots came to see Jesus as ‘the Saviour of the world’! When Philip went down after the stoning of Stephen they were ready for the Kingdom gospel:

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralysed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city (Acts 8:4–8).

As in all cities personal evil was rife. It had been no less rife in Palestine when Jesus the King moved through it in liberating power.

As for the Gentiles, had they not always been under the bitter bondage of the gods and lords and idols, and had not the King through his servants brought them into a

kingdom of freedom, out of the wrath of God described in Romans 1:18–32? When Paul spoke to a church in Asia Minor was it not speaking of the Father ‘who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light’? Is not the ‘inheritance of the saints in light’ the Kingdom? Did not this mention of inheritance take them back to ‘the Ancient of Days’ in Daniel chapter 7?

As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom . . . But the court shall sit in judgment, and his [the beast’s] dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them (Dan. 7:21–22, 26–27).

These words sound very much like passages in the Revelation and in particular 11:15–18:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, ‘We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.’

All of this is speaking out of a Bible which treats sin and evil seriously. God’s commission to Man is never to be taken lightly. We have all refused it. God’s law allows no variance from it and never treats transgressions lightly. We cannot treat sin in a cavalier manner, nor speak critically of a ‘forensic fiction’ when talking of the Cross on which he was made to be sin for us and bore our sins in his body. Forensic is forensic, for law is law. Sin is transgression of the law and no disease, no infection we have unfortunately caught. Sin is wholly reprehensible in the sight of God in its evil, in its power, in its pollution and presence and is deserving of penalty. ‘Forensic’ is not just a theologian’s pet word but has to do with a whole world of judgments and the Judge who ‘in wrath remembers mercy’ but will ‘by no means acquit the [impenitent] guilty’. In Daniel and the Revelation, men and women of faith suffer for the Kingdom in the face of beasts of evil, blasphemous creatures whose cruel delight was to crucify God. Of these suffering faithful ones, Hebrews 11:32–38 tells the tale:

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

If we have a certain legitimate glorying in the church, for which Christ has given his life, then we should see that to be the proclaimer of the gospel of the Kingdom is not a responsibility to be taken lightly or to be shed. The church is the Warrior’s Bride and she is one with him in the battle to destroy all evil. In Daniel and the Revelation she

evinces 'the patient endurance of the saints'; she opposes the beast and the mark of the beast. In fact she had 'conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name' (Rev. 15:2; cf. 1 John 2:12-14). She is part of the 'armies of heaven' (Rev. 19:14). She refuses ever to drink of the 'reservoir' of Babylon, and rejects the brilliant gaudiness of that creature in favour of her own pure, white linen wedding garment, fashioned out of 'the righteous deeds of the saints'. She must match the Warrior King in all his purity (Rev. 14:1-5; 19:14).

What we must never allow to fade from our minds is the fact that the sword with which the King smites the nations (Rev. 19:5-16; Eph 6:17) is 'the sword of the Spirit'. Christ is the Lamb that was slain, yet this Lamb has 'seven horns [power] and seven eyes [discernment, truthful perception], which are the seven spirits [sevenfold Spirit] sent out into all the earth' (Rev. 5:6). The Holy Spirit goes out into all the earth, witnessing to the truth of the King. We must remember that the river flowing is that Spirit, that he witnesses through us in all the universe and he is the Spirit of power in the proclamation of the gospel. The church must be constantly filled with the Spirit 'unto all the fullness of God' so that the Kingdom may come in all its glory and power and justice. How shall we penetrate the minds and hearts of those in the 'kingdom of darkness', how unmask the enormous lie of the Serpent's deceit, how expose evil for what it is and does, and how give revelation of the one who is 'ruler of the kings of the earth' and 'King of kings and Lord of lords'. Triumphalism and self-confidence will not stand us up in the face of Satan and even less in the face of the Day of God's visitation.

Again, we must not think, 'He is *there*, far removed from us, on his throne, ruling all things in his way. We are *here*, a long way from him.' The truth is we are seated with him in heavenly places and with him we fight spiritual powers and their wickedness in the same heavenlies (Eph. 2:5-6; 6:12). This is a mystery but he said he would be with us up to the consummation of the ages.

Then we will be with him, *there*:

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . . Truly I say to you, as you did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Matt. 25:34, 40).

Addendum to the Monthly Ministry Study, August 2003

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH IN TODAY'S WORLD

It is axiomatic that the moment the church came into being at Pentecost it was to be subject to the attack of Satan and the kingdom of darkness. Paul said to the elders of the church of Ephesus, 'I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them' (Acts 20:29–30). In the New Testament church we see so many faults and failures of men and women who are church members. All churches are in need of rebuke and correction. Jesus speaks to the seven churches of Asia Minor, encouraging but also rebuking, correcting and chastening. A community so important to the Kingdom of God was always going to know penetration by Satanic forces. So early on the church began to know infiltration of a dangerous kind.

Post-biblical times brought not only persecution but also the intrusion of heresies. From being a warm community, power setting, power striving and power positioning began to take place. The clergy–laity error became established. Monarchical bishops emerged. Hierarchies formed. Priestly control developed and the hierarchy of prelacy. Christianity became involved in state politics. So many changes took place. The simplicity of church life and the life of the Kingdom gave way to complexity throughout Christendom, especially when the Latin churches and Eastern Orthodoxy knew a cleavage.

We could spend much time scanning history through medievalism, scholasticism, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment, and times of Western colonialism of lands outside of Christendom. This we do not intend to do, but it is what all Christians ought to do because our history as the church is both good and bad. Since the beginning of a new missionary surge in the late 19th century we have seen enormous changes develop to the present day. We have had good minds trace the development of changes in ecclesiology and ecclesiastical practice. This paper could not begin, even, to deal with these.

Having said all these things which appear to be adverse to the Church, we know that the Kingdom of God far transcends the shortcomings and blemishes of the church. On the one hand Christ the Husband is her King, who 'loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:25–27). He ever walks among the golden candlesticks and by the Spirit speaks to the sevenfold church, i.e. the church is not left to her own devices. Christ continues to rebuke, correct and chasten, as also to edify and enable. The Parables of the Kingdom speak of both good seed and weed seed being in the Kingdom; likewise good fish and bad fish—and all are sorted out in the end. God's Kingdom is universal and many rebels and evil creatures are in that wide reign and rule of God, awaiting the day of His visitation.

With all these things in mind let us see that God has set watchmen in the Kingdom for both church and Kingdom. The Head of the church is Prophet, Priest and King and

his community is prophetic, priestly and royal. Enormous resources are present as it is filled unto all the fullness of God. The 'inexhaustible riches of Christ'—'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' assure us that the Christly resources are present to see the church through to 'that day'. Christ now, as ever, speaks through men and women, and out of the mouths of babes and infants has established wisdom. The riches of our church fathers and mothers, the writings and the sermons of Spirit-filled servants, the music, hymns and songs show that the watch is being kept in regard to the Word of God. That Sword is not tarnished and ineffective. Where there is simple faith that Word is about its business of smiting the nations. We must hear what Christ is saying through all these servants. My life has been so aided by so many that I urge others who do not hear them to be quiet and to listen, deliberately. They are set to help us interpret not only the past but this present age.

Take for example a number of books which have come out under the hand of men like Francis Schaeffer, Harry Blamires, Peter L. Berger, Jaques Ellul, Os Guinness, Paul Vitz, David F. Wells, and D. A. Carson—to name a few. These are men of discernment who translate the spirit of the age which affects the church and a spirit in the churches against which we need to be warned. I thought it good to give the Contents list of one book *No God but God* so that the substance of its critique might be known:

No God but God 8

Introduction: 'The Idols in Our Churches and Hearts'. Evangelicals are falling victim to the worst sin against faith—idolizing the products of the 'imagination of our hearts'.

1. 'The Idol Factory' by Richard Keyes. We are all prone to idols—good and useful things inflated as substitutes for God, compensating for our need for control and significance.
2. 'Up to Our Steeples in Politics' by Michael Cromartie. Political activism by Christians on the Left and Right too often politicizes faith and idolizes politics.
3. 'Nostalgia for a Lost Empire' by John Seel. Gratitude for the past and an unwise appeal to a 'Christian America' often falls into reliance on majority status and a false sense of entitlement.
4. 'More Victimized than Thou' by Os Guinness. The present rage for blaming and victim-playing leads Christians to a politics of resentment and away from trust in God and forgiveness of those who do us wrong.
5. 'Leaving Psychology Behind' by Paul C. Vitz. It's time to appreciate where psychology works and where it does not, and to see how the gospel is the best fulfilment of its insights.
6. 'America's Last Men and Their Magnificent Talking Cure' by Os Guinness. From small and controversial beginnings, psychology has grown to become a religion and a way of life that rivals the gospel itself.
7. 'The Grand Inquisitor Lives' by Alonzo L. McDonald. Every organization has a built-in drive toward self-perpetuation that is both idolatrous and the source of its potential downfall.

⁸ *No God But God*, sub-headed 'Breaking with the Idols of our Age', eds. Os Guinness & John Seel (Moody Press, Chicago, 1992). Other books by Os Guinness are *The Gravedigger File* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), *Dining with the Devil* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1993), *Time for Truth* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 2000). These are all critiques of Christian participation in contemporary Society.

8. **‘Sounding Out the Idols of Church Growth’** by Os Guinness. The church-growth movement can be distorted through an uncritical use of management and marketing techniques, creating a religion that has no need for God.

9. **‘The D-Min-ization of the Ministry’** by David F. Wells. The recent trend toward professionalization in the ministry has changed pastoral character and priorities, making both God and theology irrelevant.

10. **‘On Not Whoring after the Spirit of the Age’** by Thomas C. Oden. An infatuation with the latest modern ideas has led the church to whore after the spirit of the age and lose its living sense of Christian tradition.

Afterword: **‘God’s Impossible People’**. For followers of Christ, breaking with idols and living in truth ultimately is not a test of orthodoxy, but of love.

In addition to these writers of discernment we have an army of truly biblical theologians who make a good defence of the apostolic gospel. They are too many to name but James Packer is in the forefront of these, as fine a mind as can be found in exposition and apologia. We need to use all these available resources. In particular those who oppose and debate the liberalising of the Cross, the rationalising of sin, the genialising of God, the erasing of the wrath of God, the total relationalising of justification by omitting its forensic elements, and the omission of the power and action of conscience, all of which dilute the nature of God’s grace and His own holiness as Creator, Redeemer and Consummator of all history, and His nature of love—holy love.

Power for God's Mission in the World—1

CHRIST BAPTISED WITH POWER TO BE THE PROMISED KING IN THE MISSION OF THE FATHER

There are many words in the Old and New Testaments for our English word 'power'. For the most part these words can be seen in their various nuances and particular meanings by aid of lexicons and the concordances. The most used word for power in the New Testament is *dunamis*. Indeed it is used 119 times and is generally used with the idea of strength, ability and power. The Septuagint translates various words related to might, strength, ability and power. For example, Isaiah 11:2 speaks of Messiah as having the Spirit of counsel and *might* (NRSV) or *power* (NIV). Power is associated primarily with God, i.e. Psalm 62:11, 'power belongs to God', and Romans 1:20, 'his eternal power and deity', where the two words are virtually synonymous. In any case every human creature understands the idea of power as strength, ability and dynamic action. In older translations of the New Testament *dunamis* (or plural—*dunameis*) was translated by such words as 'mighty works' (Matt. 11:21–23), 'virtue' (Mark. 5:30, AV), 'powers of the heavens' (Matt. 24:29), 'miracles' (Heb. 2:4), 'violence' (Heb. 1:3–4, AV), and 'abundance' or 'wealth' (Rev. 18:3).

If we may take it that 'all power belongs to God' then we can recognise Him as the source of all power. Authority (*exousia*) and power (*dunamis*) are sometimes used synonymously, but from the story in Matthew 8:5–13 it can be seen that he who is under authority can speak with the authority of that authority. Authority, then, is often translated as power—as in Matthew 28:18 (AV)—and it appears to contain the idea of power to accomplish.

The New Testament teaching of incarnation seems to infer that 'mild he lays his glory by' is predicated of Jesus as he became Man. Because we have no precedent or parallel, we do not quite know what this means. What we must grasp is that as a man he never called on the eternal power and authority of his own deity to carry out being a man in this world. He had no special power of himself, beyond other human beings. Of course we would have to explore what is power in a person wholly obedient to God by comparison with a human being who is disobedient to God—as are all the children of Adam.

What we have gathered from our previous studies in this series is that the Messiah–King of such Psalms as 2, 45, 89 and 110 had to be anointed as King or Son–King of the Father–King. It is not always put in precisely these terms but it is certain that he does not have authority (*exousia*) until he is anointed—i.e. crowned as King—and so he does not have power, i.e. the strength or ability to reign, until given authority. It is assumed that power will come with given authority.

Shortly we will look at the power with which Christ was endued at his baptism–coronation but firstly let us look at the immensity of the task he undertook when he viewed becoming incarnate for the salvation of humanity and the creation. In both Testaments many reasons are given for the Incarnation. A number of these reasons we viewed in our preceding study, namely to face nations and peoples who set themselves against the 'the LORD and his anointed', and to vanquish them, and to rule the world. In

Isaiah 11:1–11 we saw it was to bring peace to creation. In widest perspective it was to bring in the *telos* of God. When we come to nominated various reasons, then both the immensity and particularity of them is overwhelming. The prophecies of Genesis 3:15 to Malachi 4:5–6 speak of a powerful person who is at the same time a most humble deliverer and who bears the titles of 'son of man', 'Son of God', 'Immanuel', 'shoot . . . of Jesse', 'Davidic King', 'righteous Branch', 'anointed one', 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace', and generally 'the Suffering Servant'. For all anyone might know of these titles they might refer to numerous persons, but they seem to be terms which obtain for the *one* person, and are therefore marvellous, indicating so many varied offices and functional works. In total they are those operations which will bring the creation to freedom from its present bondage to futility (Rom. 8:21) into the glorious liberty of the—then emancipated—sons of God. Peace and tranquillity will come in the regeneration of the world (Matt. 19:28; Isa. 11:1ff.; 25:6–9; 65:17ff.; 66:22f.; Rev. 21 – 22). In the *telos* all things will be shown to be saved, reconciled, filled full, harmonised, unified, sanctified, glorified and perfected.

Some of the particular works he was to do 'in the days of his flesh' were 'to destroy the works of the devil'; 'to translate us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love'; to die for all, 'that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised'; to 'save his people from their sins'; 'to give his life a ransom for many'; '[to give] 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'.

These things indeed constitute a vast work, and whilst that work is wholly Trinitarian so much of it is linked with the man of the Old Testament prophecies and the New Testament fulfilment of those prophecies. The mystery of his being both God and man is to a great degree unknown because we have no precedent or parallel for such a being, but in a way we do comprehend the mystery as the Holy Spirit opens it to us. All I have written above is to give the setting to these words, 'A man who has so much to do in God's history to fulfil and complete it must indeed be endued with the power by which he will be enabled to do so'. Our minds fail to cover this amazing person and work and we cannot comprehend the nature of the power required to do so.

THE ENDOWMENT OF THE INCARNATE SON OF GOD WITH POWER

Works of power were associated with the conception and birth of Jesus as in Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:35, as also with the filling of Elizabeth and Zechariah with the Holy Spirit. The development of Jesus until the time of his maturity can also be accorded to the Holy Spirit. Jesus' baptism however was the occasion of his being 'anointed . . . with the Holy Spirit and with power'. Peter later commented on this (Acts 10:38). He told the God-fearing community of Gentiles at Caesarea, 'how God anointed Jesus 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'. Matthew 4:23 (cf. Matt. 9:35) supports this: 'And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people'. The attestation of the Father was, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased', which has its origin in Psalm 2:6–7, and Isaiah 42:1, referring to both Son and Servant and referring to the program of this man, this son of Mary, as both the Son and Servant of God. Of course Psalm 2:2, 45:7, Isaiah 11:2 and 61:1f., all

point to the fact that Messiah will be anointed and indicate in some cases that it will be an anointing with the Holy Spirit. It is with this baptismal occasion that the Transfiguration was later linked:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Pet. 1:16–19).

Between the Baptism and the Transfiguration—and of course beyond these two events—the power was always with Christ. It was with him as he was led into the desert to face the Satanic temptations regarding his being the Son of God (Luke 4:1). It was in the power of the Spirit that he returned to Galilee (Luke 4:14), and it was his claim in the synagogue at Nazareth that the Spirit-anointing was upon him then for his forthcoming ministry (Luke 4:18–29). In Matthew 12:15–21 he claimed that Isaiah 42:1–4 referred to him and his Spirit-empowered ministry. In Matthew 12:28 he claimed that if he cast out demons by the Spirit of God then (the power of) the Kingdom had come upon the demonised persons. In Luke 5:17 we are told of the occasion when the paralysed man was brought to him on a bed that 'the power of the Lord was with him [or was present] to heal'. In Luke 6:19 we are told that all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came forth from him, and he healed them all. At the time of the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage Jesus felt power—sometimes translated 'virtue'—go out of himself (Luke 8:46) but he was not diminished or denuded of power by such happening. The power was always present with him but it worked strongly in men and women of faith, and less readily where faith was absent (cf. Mark 6:5–6).

Almost synonymous were the terms 'word' and 'power' so far as Christ was concerned. In John 7:46, 'No man ever spoke like this man!' the officers from the temple reported back to the scribes and chief priests. In Luke 4:36, following an exorcism, the onlookers 'were all amazed and said one to another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out"'. This followed the comment of Luke 4:31–32, 'And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the sabbath; and they were astonished at his teaching, *for his word was with authority.*' The word was the power communicated, as in the case when he commanded the man with the withered arm to stretch forth his hand, an action impossible for the man but for the power of the word. Of course later we have Paul stating that the (word of the) gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16–17) and the word of the Cross is the power of God to those who believe. We know that Jesus' teaching was in word and in deed and such were called 'mighty deeds', i.e. *dunameis*. Teaching was not limited to words, but accompanied by acts of power.

In the Book of Acts we have seen the passage of 10:34–38 speaking of Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. On the day of Pentecost Peter addressed his audience with the words, 'Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know'. By 'mighty works' are *dunameis*. A mighty work was the healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful, and when the people gaped at them Peter told them, 'Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?'

. . . And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all' (Acts 3:12, 16). As we will see, the apostles and the church operated only in the power of Christ for they had no power that was of themselves.

In the Epistles there are statements regarding the power of Christ. Jesus' resurrection proved Christ to be 'the Son of God in [with] power', however we may understand Romans 1:4 (cf. 1 Cor. 6:14), and Jesus' resurrection state. In 1 Corinthians 5:4 Paul speaks of the church being assembled to deliver the incestuous man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. Paul says his spirit would be present 'with the power of our Lord Jesus'. In 2 Corinthians 12:3–9 Paul speaks of his 'thorn . . . in the flesh' and is told, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness', so that he concludes, 'I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me'. In 1 Corinthians 1:24 Paul speaks of 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God'. In this case he was speaking particularly of Christ crucified. In Philippians 3:10 he speaks of the power of Christ's resurrection, something we will examine later.

In 2 Peter 1:3, 'His divine power' could be accorded either to God or Jesus Christ but it seems here that it is accorded to Christ. This seems to be supported by verse 8. In passing we note all the things 'that pertain to life and godliness' and which come from Christ's power.

Later we will come to two more factors involved in Christ's power: (i) his ability to give or delegate power and authority out of his own power and authority so that others may share with him in his ministry as Son, Servant and Messiah; and (ii) what we may call his eschatological power as the risen, ascended and reigning Lord as he brings history to its close by the defeat of evil and his glorification of all things.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD BAPTISED IN POWER BY THE FATHER AND CHRIST TO BE ON MISSION WITH GOD

We now come to the matter of what has been called 'the baptism in—or with—the Holy Spirit'.¹ The point of making much of the baptism in/with the Spirit is that the people of God—i.e. the ecclesia—is that Christ is working in and through the church to help fulfil the mission of God—of Father, Son and Spirit. Christ needed to be 'anointed with the Holy Spirit and power' to carry out his work of redemption. No less do the people of God need to be endowed with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was baptised in the Holy Spirit the outcome would be that this man of the Spirit would—as the Son with His Father—be pouring out the Spirit from on high (Acts 2:33), that the Spirit would be the Spirit of the man working in the new community of Christ to bring the plan of God to completion. We repeat: all in Christ would need to receive the outpouring of the Spirit which is, in essence, the baptism in/with the Spirit.

¹ Under this section, 'The People of God Baptised in Power by the Father and Christ to Be on Mission with God', I have used material directly from a small book I have written on the subject, *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit* published by NCPI, Blackwood, 2003. Further material from this book will also be used in the September Monthly Ministry Study. The book is sub-titled 'Christ Pouring out His Spirit in the Last Days'.

THE BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT, OR THE POURING OUT OF THE SPIRIT BY CHRIST AND THE FATHER FOR THIS AGE

WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM 'THE BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT'

The term 'the baptism in the Holy Spirit' is one which is often used by folk as a biblical term, but in fact is not found, in this precise form, in the New Testament. It might be deduced as such from 1 Corinthians 12:13, 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit'. Here the preposition 'by' may indicate the Spirit as the baptiser, but most translations choose the prepositions 'in' or 'with'. It is made to be a locative dative rather than an instrumental one. The 'all were made to drink of one Spirit' seems to indicate an action not made by the Spirit but rather 'in' or 'with' the Spirit. It is best for us not to think of this as 'Spirit baptism' in comparison to what has been called 'water baptism'. This twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians is really given over to the matter of the functional unity of the body in the diversity of the gifts.

The next place where we might speak of 'the baptism in the Spirit' is Acts 1:4–5, 'And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, for John baptised with water, but before many days you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit"'. This was referring back to what John the Baptist had promised—'John answered them all, "I baptise you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie: he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire"' (Luke 3:16; cf. Matt. 3:11; John 1:26–27). In John 1:33 the Baptist had said, 'I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptise with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptises with the Holy Spirit"'.

About one thing there can be no doubt, namely that Jesus' disciples and other hearers were sure that Jesus would be the one who would baptise in or with the Holy Spirit. Like John, Jesus also baptised in water (John 3:22–30). We cannot be sure what those who listened to John and Jesus understood of the term 'baptising in the Holy Spirit'. It must have been most significant and we should seek to understand it.

The third passage which can help us to understand is Acts 2:1–4, for this must certainly be the fulfilment of Jesus' words, 'before many days you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit':

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

At this point we can understand that the 120 or so (Acts 1:15) were present and the noise, which sounded like a rushing wind, filled the whole house where they were sitting. Surely they were immersed in what filled the house. In fact it is said that they were filled with the Holy Spirit: 'tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them'. They then 'began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance'. The outcome was most notable, for hearing the words of the speakers and the words of

Peter in particular, some three thousand people believed in Christ as being both Lord and Messiah, and were baptised.

WHAT INDEED IS THE MEANING OF JESUS' ACT OF BAPTISING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?

As there are many views held on the idea of 'the baptism in the Spirit', we need to stick faithfully to the text of the Scriptures which relate to the subject. There are so many references to the actions of the Holy Spirit in the early church that it is no wonder many ideas have emerged which, in fact, are not faithfully based on the text from which they have been drawn. For example, in Acts 11:15–18 Peter describes the gift of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10:45ff.):

'As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, "John baptised with water, but you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit." If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?' When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life.'

From this account we gather two things: (i) what happened to the Gentiles at Caesarea was the same, in principle, as what happened at Pentecost; and (ii) it is now called 'the same gift', that is, the gift of the Spirit and at the same time the gift of the forgiveness of sins (cf. 10:43) and 'repentance unto life' (11:18). It is also notable that the Gentiles were 'speaking in tongues and extolling God'. The matter of the Spirit and terms used such as we read in the quote below have led many into confusion and some wrong conclusions. One of the reasons is that some readers of the subject have worked from certain presuppositions. We know we live in streams of history and are to some degree the product of our training within them. Not realising how conditioned we are, we bring our presuppositions to the text of Scripture. We do not realise our own hidden agendas. Look, for example, at the quote below. See how many different terms there are which are related to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and subsequent occasions. What do we make of all this? Do they indeed fit our presuppositions of the subject, the baptism in the Spirit? For example, what does it mean when in Acts 2:33 the happening at Pentecost is described, 'Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear'?

So we press on to face the reality:

At Samaria, the new believers had not received the Spirit, 'for it had not yet *fallen* on any of them'. The apostles laid hands on them 'and they *received* the Holy Spirit'. It was something which could be *seen*: '... Simon *saw* that the Holy Spirit was *given* through the laying on of the apostles' hands...' *At Caesarea*, 'the Holy Spirit *fell* on all who heard the word'; 'the gift of the Spirit *had been poured out*... on the Gentiles' and '... the Holy Spirit *fell on them* just as on us at the beginning [Pentecost]'. Later, Peter described it as giving 'the same *gift* to them as he gave to us'.

To Paul, it was said simply, '... you may... *be filled* with the Holy Spirit'. In the Epistles are found these descriptions: '... the Holy Spirit who *was given* to us'; '... *given* us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee'; '... *receive* the Spirit... by the hearing of faith'; '... might *receive* the promise of the Spirit through faith'. Peter speaks of '... the Holy Spirit sent from heaven'. Again, Paul speaks of '... the Holy Spirit who dwells within us', and says in the same vein, '... the Spirit of God dwells in you', adding, 'Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him'. His meaning in these three statements is that believers

have received the Holy Spirit. Indeed, many more of his references to the action of the Spirit in the believer likewise presuppose possession of the Spirit. He says clearly, '... God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts ...'

John says, 'And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which *he has given us*', and 'By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because *he has given us* of his own Spirit'. He also speaks of believers having been 'anointed by the Holy One', and adds, 'the anointing which you have received from him abides in you'. This anointing is undoubtedly that of the Holy Spirit ...²

Let us, then, put together terms which are used in our quote, adding in those used at Pentecost. They are, 'like the rush of a mighty wind ... tongues as of fire', 'filled with the Holy Spirit', 'pour out my Spirit', 'poured out', 'poured out this', 'fallen', 'fell', 'gift', 'gave', 'given', 'receive', 'sent', 'sent into our hearts', 'receive through faith', 'anointed by the Holy One'. There are so many terms that we could easily be confused by such which speak of Christ and the Father sending and pouring out the Spirit, then of the Spirit himself falling upon people and filling them, and again of the recipients receiving an outpouring, and knowing the indwelling of the Spirit with all that that entails. Whatever the terms and the action, the heart of them is the main thing which Peter described on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:29–33:

Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear.

Here it is very clear that Jesus was—and is—the Baptiser, the one pouring out the Holy Spirit. On the night of his betrayal he had said: (i) that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in his—Jesus'—name (John 14:26); (ii) that he would send the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit from the Father (John 15:26); and (iii) that he, himself, would send the Counsellor (John 16:7). In very clear terms he said why the Spirit had to be sent and what he would do when he came, namely, that he would bring to their remembrance all that Christ had told them, that he would teach them 'all things', lead them into 'all the truth', would glorify Christ to them, showing them all things which the Father had placed in his hands, would tell them 'things to come' and would convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. These things they could always expect would be the case when the Spirit would be sent to them. So many and so powerful were these things!

JESUS TELLING THE APOSTLES THEY WOULD BE BAPTISED WITH THE SPIRIT

Acts 1:1–11 is indispensable to understanding Jesus' outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:33):

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles

² This quote is from *The Day of the Spirit* by Geoffrey Bingham (NCPI, Blackwood, 1985), p. 158. I have not given the references for the various texts, but they are set out appropriately in the book. Also, I have not included the terms used in Acts 19:1–7, the account of twelve disciples Paul found at Ephesus and upon whom the Spirit came when Paul laid hands on them.

whom he had chosen. To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, for John baptised with water, but before many days you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

What strikes the eye first is that in the forty days in which Jesus appeared to them and taught them, his subject was the Kingdom of God. Jesus had taught them much about the Kingdom prior to the crucifixion. What, then, was he now teaching them? The second thing which catches our attention is that he 'charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, for John baptised with water, but before many days you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit"'. Why did he call the coming baptism 'the promise of the Father'?³ Why did he tell them that? The third thing which surprises us is that they put the question, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' What had caught their minds seriously was that the baptism in the Spirit has much to do with the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, that is, the *promised* restoration. It was the talk in John the Baptist's ministry and throughout Jesus' early ministry. Only once did he relate the Kingdom to them, personally. He had said, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12:32). Apart from the night of his betrayal when he spoke of the gift of the Spirit, he had only once said, 'If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' (Luke 11:13). Now in Acts 1:1–11 we are seeing how the coming establishment of the Kingdom and being baptised in the Holy Spirit fit together.

What is often missed in our thinking is that in the Old Testament, promises of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are linked with the prophecies of the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. It appears that they linked Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom with the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. This was excellent perception. It supplies us with the key to the baptising in the Spirit. Jesus has said, in effect, 'Now don't you go worrying about the immediate restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. When I baptise you in the Holy Spirit then you will be witnesses to me, first in Jerusalem and all Judea (Israel), and then in Samaria (the Samaritans), and to the "uttermost parts of the earth" (the Gentiles, i.e. all the nations). When all this happens, then the Kingdom will not just be Israel being successful but all nations being in that Kingdom.' Now we see the need for power—the power from being baptised in the Spirit—to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom to all the world. The proclamation of the gospel—the gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 20:24–25) which is at the same time the gospel of salvation—would have to do

³ The term 'promise of the Father' is also found in Luke 24:49, 'And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high'. In Acts 2:33 Peter says, 'and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear'. In Ephesians 1:13 Paul speaks of 'the promised Holy Spirit', which, it is true, is capable of being translated 'the Spirit of promise', but whichever way we look at it the Spirit is promised by the Father to fulfil the promises of the New Covenant (cf. Ezek. 36:22–32; 37:1–14; 2 Cor. 3:1–18; etc.).

with the final outcome of God's plan and purpose which is both time-wide and world-wide.

JESUS, THE PSALMS, THE PROPHECIES AND THE LAST AGE

We know that on the day of his resurrection Christ talked to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and later to the apostles gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem. He first spoke to the two along the lines of, 'And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them all the scriptures concerning himself', and then he spoke later to those in the upper room:

'These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things' (Luke 24:44–48).

He was saying that the Scriptures spoke of him and were definite about the facts that 'the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem'. That was why he added, 'You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high', for they would have to witness to Christ. They had to await Pentecost. Again we see the universal nature of the gospel and the need for special power if the gospel was to be preached to all nations.⁴

We now return to Acts 1:8 and the picture of the Kingdom having to do with all the nations. The Kingdom means, of course, 'the reign and rule of God'. Acts 1:8 speaks of the apostles witnessing to Israel, Samaria and 'the uttermost part of the earth'. This statement is a quote which was well-known to them. It was from the prophecy of Psalm 2:7–9:

I will tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, 'You are my son,
today I have begotten you.
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'.

Psalm 2 was certainly one of the powerful Kingdom Psalms, a Psalm which figured largely in the early church as Messianic and which had to do with the anti-God nations coming under the rulership of Jesus. It was a well-known Psalm, and probably one which Jesus spoke about personally on the evening of the resurrection as well as in the forty days of teaching on the Kingdom. One needs to study the whole Psalm which is

⁴ 'Beginning at Jerusalem' may well be linked with Isaiah 2:1–3 (cf. Micah 4:1–3) where the nations will say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, *and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*'

that the kings of the earth⁵ and the peoples (nations) set themselves against God and His Messiah–Son. God laughs at them in scorn for the little they can accomplish and tells His Son to ask for these nations and He will give them to him. The Son will possess all the nations ‘to the uttermost part of the earth’, the very phrase which Jesus in Acts 1:8 refers to the empowered apostles.

At Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:17) and at his transfiguration (Matt. 17:5) the Father really spoke from Psalm 2:7, ‘You are my Son. Today I have begotten you’. In Matthew 28:16–20 Jesus spoke of the authority given to him over all nations, virtually quoting from Psalm 2:8–9. In Acts 13:33 Paul quotes Isaiah 55.3, collating it with Psalm 2:8 and equating it with Jesus’ resurrection. In Hebrews 1:5 the writer quotes Psalm 2:7 and 110:4 in relation to him being God’s Son and greater than the angels. In 5:5 he quotes Psalm 2:7 as appointing him an eternal high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Two Peter 1:17 refers to Jesus’ transfiguration in the light of Psalm 2:7. Revelation 2:26–27 comports with Psalm 2:7–9 regarding power over the nations for Christ and his people. Revelation 12:5 refers to the ‘male child’ as ‘one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron’ (Ps. 2:9) and 19:15 says of the Conqueror on the white horse that he will smite the nations and ‘rule them with a rod of iron’. In fact this is fulfilment of the worldwide scope and action spoken of in Acts 1:8, Luke 24:47, and Matthew 28:18–19.

Another Psalm—Psalm 110—which Jesus quotes in Matthew 22:44 (Mark 12:36; Luke 20:43) is linked by Peter at Pentecost with Jesus’ ascension and reigning at God’s right hand over all the earth. Hebrews 5:5–6, Psalm 2:7, and 110:4 are linked in regard to Jesus’ Sonship and his eternal priesthood, ruling over his enemies. In quoting Psalm 110:1 Peter used it to confirm that Jesus had been made ‘both Lord and Christ’.

I have always thought it a pity that in looking at the nature of Christ’s baptising his people in/with the Holy Spirit very few scholars have seen this baptism of the Spirit and of fire as having to do with the Kingdom of God. In the Book of Acts we are shown how the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost soon covered ‘Jerusalem and all Judea’, and then—with Philip’s powerful visit to Samaria—the Samaritans were enabled to come into the Kingdom. Whilst the visit of Peter and John to Samaria gave the apostolic seal of approval by the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans through the laying on of the apostolic hands, nevertheless Philip’s ministry had been that of preaching the Kingdom of God to them—that is, the ‘gospel of the Kingdom’ (Acts 8:4–8; cf. 20:24–25). Sadly enough the happening in Samaria has been interpreted as one being able to be converted without being baptised in/with the Spirit, so that the strange doctrine of ‘a second blessing’ has been formulated. When we see that it was the apostles who were given the keys of the Kingdom⁶ and under their ministry ‘Jerusalem and all Judea’ were

⁵ ‘The kings of the earth’ are of special note also in the Book of Daniel and the Book of the Revelation. They represent, with their peoples, this world’s opposition to God and His Kingdom as they seek to set up their own kingdoms in place of His.

⁶ In Matthew 16:13–19 the meaning of verses 18 and 19 is greatly debated, ‘And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ The keys given to Peter were to open or close the Kingdom to persons. We might get a hint from Luke 11:52 where the key of knowledge is to help people to enter the Kingdom but the lawyers by taking away that key have prevented others entering. The keys are the gospel of the Kingdom, and Peter at Pentecost and the days following in Jerusalem certainly opened the Kingdom. Likewise in Samaria he acted in that role, as also he did in Caesarea. He locked the Kingdom to such as Simon Magus and, we might say, Ananias and Sapphira. Peter was not infallible in this respect as Galatians 2:11–21 shows. In Matthew 18:15–20 binding and loosing is addressed to ‘you’ in the plural, not as in Matthew 16:13–19 in the second person singular. Whatever binding and loosing went on, Peter was not the only one with the keys. A similar message was delivered to all the disciples in John 20:21–23. In regard to Israel, Samaria and the Gentiles, only Israel—in some sense—had entrance into the Kingdom until Pentecost where it was announced that the Spirit was henceforth poured out upon all flesh.

brought to entrance into the Kingdom by Pentecost, then we understand why the apostles went to Samaria—the second-named place of their witness-to-be in Acts 1:8—and why it was Peter the apostle who was sent to Caesarea by the Holy Spirit.

‘The uttermost part of the earth’—the Gentile nations—came into a situation somewhat similar to Pentecost when Peter preached the gospel and there took place what we might call ‘the Jewish Pentecost’. In Acts 8 there was a Samaritan ‘Pentecost’ when Peter and John laid hands on the believing Samaritans. Now in Acts 10 – 11 there was entrance into the Kingdom for Gentiles forever when Peter preached the gospel at Caesarea. So there was like entrance to the Kingdom for Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles (the nations). The position of the apostles was most important but they were not the only ones upon whom the Spirit came at Pentecost, for the entire 120 were so affected. In Acts 6:1–7 the people were encouraged to ‘pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom’ and this they were able to do. One of them was Philip who later went to Samaria as an evangelist. Another was Stephen ‘full of grace and power [who] did great wonders and signs among the people’. In Acts 4:31f., the Holy Spirit had come afresh upon the whole church and all were filled with the Holy Spirit and all ‘spoke the word of God with boldness’. The whole community was in rich unity and had great care and concern for the needy among them. Also, ‘with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all’.

WHAT HAPPENED AT EPHESUS WITH THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST?

In Ephesus Paul found a group of disciples whose minds were linked with the teaching of John the Baptist. It is possible that they had learned certain ideas from Apollos but, whatever the case, they were not as yet disciples of Christ. Paul obviously found something lacking in their situation and asked, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ Their answer, ‘No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’, showed where they stood in regard to Christ. They said they had been baptised into John’s baptism. When it was pointed out to them that John had exhorted his disciples to believe on the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus, then they were baptised into the name of Jesus. Paul laid his hands upon them and the Spirit *came upon* them and phenomena which had happened at Pentecost and Caesarea now appeared, such as speaking with tongues and prophesying. Since the men were Jews it was a kind of ‘filling up’ for these at Ephesus, consistent with the event of Pentecost. What is clear is that the men became Christians under the teaching of Paul. The power of the Spirit in their lives was indicative of what happened when folk were baptised into Christ and he gave them the gift of the Spirit. At Pentecost, Peter’s injunction for Jews to be baptised in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins also contained the promise of the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38). We are not told that certain phenomena attended the baptism of the three thousand Jews, but the change in them was phenomenal. The signs evident in the sound of rushing wind and tongues of fire did not need to be repeated for the baptisms were the fruit of Christ’s outpouring of the Spirit. We can note, at this point, that the baptising by Christ of Jews (Pentecost, Acts 2), Samaritans (Samaria, Acts 8), Gentiles (Acts 10 – 11), and erstwhile disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19) all fit in

with the teaching of Acts 1:8. Christ is the out-pourer of the Spirit in this age in accordance with Old Testament prophecies.

It does not appear advisable to make a paradigm out of any of these four happenings because Christ as Lord and Baptiser is the one who has caused them. We are not to shape paradigms out of certain criteria and then work to induce baptisms in the Spirit. The freedom of Christ to baptise and the freedom of the Spirit to 'blow where he wills' precludes us from setting up 'Baptism-in-the-Spirit' situations!

Power for God's Mission in the World—2

THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (CONT.)

Introductory Note: Our Monthly Ministry Study for September should be read to pick up the threads of the whole subject 'The Baptism in the Spirit'. In that study we saw the need for Christ to be baptised in the Spirit, i.e. to be anointed by the Father as 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' because he was a man who needed the power of God for his vast ministry and work on earth. He told John the Baptist who objected to baptising Christ, 'Let it be so now: for thus it is fitting for us [i.e. John and him] to fulfil all righteousness'. Identifying himself with sinful mankind which needed salvation, he was baptised. Later they were to be identified with him, i.e. baptised into him, into his name, into his death—and so on (Acts 2:38; 8:12; 10:48; 19:5).

THE LAST DAYS ARE THE ERA OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit has always been present in the world he helped to create (Gen. 1:1–2; :3; Job 33:4; Ps. 33:6–9; 104:29–30). He was in the time prior to the Flood, in the time of the patriarchs, and he was always with Israel as any history of Israel will show (cf. my *The Day of the Spirit*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1985, pp. 6–40). In Israel, in particular, he was present in the prophets with great power. He was present and active in the life of Jesus from his conception to his ascension. He was ever the Spirit of the covenant, so that like the Father and the Son he has ever been active as the Spirit of the Father and the Son. He is also the Spirit of 'things that are to come' (John 16:13). Even so, in another sense this is the era of the Spirit.

This era can be said to commence with the conception of Christ through the Spirit in the womb of Mary and to have continued until Christ's ascension at which point—ten days later—Christ poured out the Spirit, that is, at Pentecost. In assisting Christ in effecting salvation, and having been intimately with him in all things, the Spirit of truth is the true one equipped to teach and empower the church in the mission of God. I believe it has to be said that the day of Pentecost brought together all the prophecies which spoke of Israel being the recipient of new life through the outpouring of the Spirit. This would mean that the Ezekiel prophecies in chapters 36 and 37 would come into action. Ezekiel 37:11–14 nominates what God will do:

Then he said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off." Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD.'

Ezekiel 36:24–27 comports with the above prophecy:

For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

In addition there are what we might call revival prophecies such as the following:

The wild beasts will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise (Isa. 43:20–21).

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring (Isa. 44:3).

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water (Isa. 41:17–18).

They are prophecies linked with ‘the restoration of the kingdom to Israel’ which we previously discussed regarding Acts 1:6. Most related, however, is the passage of Joel 2:28–32:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit. And I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Peter on the day of Pentecost insists that what has happened before the eyes of all, and in the ears of all, is nothing less than the fulfilment of the Joel prophecy:

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

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” ’ (Acts 2:14–21).

From the passage we deduce that at Pentecost began ‘the last days’ and that they shall continue up until ‘the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day’. In other words the present age is the age of the Spirit. We then deduce that it will be the age of prophetic activity—‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my

menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy'. Most important are the words, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh'.

At no time had God's Spirit been poured out on all flesh. One of the most dramatic events had been that described in Numbers 11:24–30. Seventy elders were placed around the tent of meeting and the Lord came down in a cloud and took some of the Spirit that was upon Moses and the elders prophesied. Two elders—Eldad and Medad—were not present but were in the camp and simultaneously they prophesied. Joshua objected to their prophesying but Moses answered him, 'Are you jealous for my sake?'

Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!' Joel 2:28ff. was to be a part answer to that prayer, but the important thing is that the age of the Spirit would not come until Messiah first came and effected the salvation prophesied by the prophets. Two such prophecies are Isaiah 59:20–21 and 61:1–2:

And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the LORD. And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD: my spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your children, or out of the mouth of your children's children, says the LORD, from this time forth and for evermore. The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

The second quote shows that the Spirit of the Lord is upon His Servant to liberate the people of the Lord. This is the same as in verse 20 of the first quote, but verse 21 indicates that God's Spirit and His word will always be with His people, and this comports with the Joel prophecy of Pentecost and the last days. Seeing these things we can understand that the Holy Spirit is the eschatological Spirit, that is, the Spirit of the eschaton which is the last age. He is to be the one who tells us 'things to come' (John 16:13).

ALL THAT HAPPENS IN THE LAST AGE IS BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE AND WORK OF THE SPIRIT

The last age could not have happened had not Messiah come to earth, fulfilled the work of salvation by the aid of the Father and the Spirit, and then been elevated to the right hand of the Father, 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come', for the Father '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' (cf. Eph. 1:21–23).

As we have seen clearly, the last age is to witness to Christ among all the nations until the whole counsel of God is fulfilled and history climaxes in the triumph of God. Said in one sentence such as we have just written, it sounds so simple, but so much has to happen before the end comes. In and through all that is happening, Paul's description of what the Father, Christ and the Spirit are now doing helps to see the heart of the matter:

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 (1 Cor. 15:24–28).

First we see that all things are moving to supremacy of the Kingdom. Christ is now occupied with 'destroying every rule and every authority and power' and this includes death. The Son will then deliver the Kingdom to the Father that 'God may be all in all'. This is a stupendous accomplishment. Christ has been reigning for some two thousand years at the Father's right hand in fulfilment of Psalms 2 and 110. He has so much to accomplish since he is also head of the church. The work of the Spirit in this age has been defined in many ways, and without the Spirit—sometimes called 'Christ's *alter ego*'—nothing could be effected. Indeed the Spirit was poured forth that all things be completed. It is clear from the Book of the Acts, from the Epistles and the Book of the Revelation that the Spirit works in everything—nothing excepted. The New Testament nominates one work after another. This means that the people of God called the ecclesia, that is, the gathered community of believers, need to be baptised in/with the Spirit in order to be true members of the community of God, and to be with Him in His mission to His creation. It is worth reminding ourselves of Acts 1:7–8, 'He said to them, "It is *not* for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. *But* you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." ' We are reminded that the scope of God's work is gigantic. So much to do. So many things to cover. All of it, in its tiniest details to its mammoth fulfilments, can never be assessed by the finest of human minds nor the most comprehensive of computing devices. It all defies the most massive coverage.

Our point in looking into Acts 1:7–8 is to say that the program opened to us on the day of Pentecost requires power for accomplishment by the successive stream of the human community of God, to say nothing of all the other powers which God has working for Him in His venture of bringing the creation to its *telos*—its goal, end and completion. We have seen the statement in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, 'Then comes the end [*eita to telos*] . . .'

We repeat: the members of Christ's community—the church of God—have to be people of a special power and that is the meaning of Acts 2:33, 'Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Christ the Son] has poured out this which you see and hear'. Peter was saying, 'Some extraordinary thing has just now happened which must be understood. I am quoting prophets and psalmists and pointing to their fulfilment right here, in this place, and you had better know that the one you took and crucified by the hands of wicked men, God has done with him what has never before happened in history. He has pushed back death and brought this man to resurrection and now placed him at His right hand to reign forever. He has proved and appointed this man as both Lord and Christ!' What was uttered was the truth spoken through Peter by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit who *is* the truth, and a brilliant witness to Christ was accomplished. So far as each person was concerned, he may have been encouraged to know he would be equipped with power for the task. So far as the task was concerned, it would be staggering beyond understanding.

For this reason we will look at the idea of the power of God, keeping the work towards the *telos* in mind.

THE SPIRIT OF POWER: THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Our thinking to do with the power of the Spirit has in mind the matter of Christ baptizing us with, or in, the Spirit. It would take reams of description to cover the biblical accounts of the Spirit's power in creation, in the acts of God, in the prophets, in the realm of moral being and moral living.¹ It is best to take a description such as in Isaiah 11:2 and consider it:

The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

The sevenfold Spirit here has all the moral elements which will constitute Messiah in his person and his ruling. These cannot be surpassed and nothing is lacking. If we link them up with 'the seven spirits who are before his throne' (Rev. 1:4) and realise that 'before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God' (4:5) and that the Lamb is 'standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns, and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth' (5:6), then we know this is the same sevenfold Spirit by whom Messiah will reign. He is the very horns (power) of Christ, and the very eyes (discernment) of him who is 'both Lord and Christ'.

We could say so much more, but in Acts 1:7–8 the power the Spirit brings when he is poured out on God's people is *the power to witness*, and to witness in all the world until the *telos*. We have, then, to see what 'power to witness' really means. Witness is simply stating the truth, telling what one has seen, and speculation in any form is not permitted.

Only one man ever spoke and lived the truth. That was Jesus:

Jesus, the Logos, the eternal Word and Son, by whom the worlds were made, became flesh, i.e. human. He came 'full of grace and truth', i.e. he was essentially truth, 'the truth of the Father'. As he told Pilate, 'I am come into the world *to bear witness to the truth*'. He said to his Father, 'Thy word is truth'. He was the living Word, the living truth bearing witness to the truth of God. He did this by what he was and by what he did. He showed God as Father, as Redeemer, and as love. He went against all the lies piled up in the dossiers of men from the time of the fall, and refuted these untruths. He said simply, 'I am a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God.' Living that truth, he died, rose and ascended. This was showing the truth which man needed to know. That is the truth which the Holy Spirit brings to man in a convincing and convicting way. He has this ability to make truth real to human beings.²

In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is called 'the faithful witness' and in 3:14, 'the Amen, the true and faithful witness, the beginning of God's creation'. He said that many things bore witness to him, such as John the Baptist, the Scriptures and Moses. His trust lay in the Father's witness to him, 'But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me' (John 5:36–7).

How then could the truth of Christ—his incarnation to his reigning in heaven—ever be communicated as the truth? What a mammoth task! Yet the Holy Spirit is the one who is both the truth and bears witness to the truth and empowers the people of God to be witnesses to the truth. John wrote in his First Letter (5:7), 'the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth'. Jesus had told his followers on the night of his betrayal,

¹ I refer to Sections 31 and 32 in *The Day of the Spirit*, pp. 140–8.

² Quoted from *The Day of the Spirit*, p. 126.

'But when the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning' (John 15:26–27). In Luke 24:48 he told the disciples in the upper room, 'You are witnesses of these things', and in the same breath enjoined them to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to come to them. So then the humanly impossible task of witnessing to Christ was to be in the power of the Spirit.

The New Testament bears witness to the witnessing of the church. The Book of Acts describes the occasions of witnessing and the strong reactions to them. All the time we have in mind the battle for the truth when the evil power of Satan was in action against the truth. Described as 'the deceiver of the whole world', he and all his dark powers are out to deceive in every possible manner. Satan's vast lie is that he is true and advocates the truth. Jesus said of him to the Jews:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me (John 8:44–45).

Witnessing in the power of the Spirit often leads to death. Millions have perished in this way, down through two thousand Christian years of this era. Revelation 6:9–11 speaks of 'the souls of those who had been slain . . . for the witness they had borne'. Of such the Spirit cries, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. "Blessed indeed . . . that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!" ' (14:13).

THE NATURE OF POWER AND WITNESS

Sometimes, and particularly when we use the language of battle, we might think, erroneously, that to have power to witness and to do battle our power must be supernatural, and our warfare almost a physical one, a kind of quasi-military operation.

How wrong is such an idea! Paul once made it very clear that the weapons of our warfare are not worldly or carnal, but are spiritual and mighty to the pulling down of many strongholds of evil (1 Cor. 10:4). Jesus said that they who take the sword shall perish by the sword (Matt. 26:52), a thought repeated in Revelation 13:10.

What, then, are these spiritual weapons and how shall we fight? Looked at from one point of view they are frail and ineffective, for Paul lines them up with such things as faith, hope, love, truth, salvation and the like. Testimony to the truth of Christ and the gospel come only from such things. Such things the natural man does not even recognize until the Spirit invades him with the truth. Love becomes to him a brilliant revelation of the nature of God and the power for the redemption of Man. God forgives the sinner, justifies the ungodly, purifies the polluted heart, relieves the conscience of heavy guilt, reconstitutes the idolater, makes holy the evil heart and mind, and reveals God the Father truly as love. The gospel then is the power of God unto salvation. The word of the Cross saves the perishing, and the love of God is poured into the hearts of the hateful and hating humanity which is ours.

What we can say with truth is that none of these things could happen unless the Spirit of truth and love reveals these to human beings. His power is that he is the Spirit of truth, of love, of sonship, of holiness and of life. His presence in the ecclesia is what keeps it in love, unity and fellowship. The pictures of the company of believers in the

chapters of Acts are so heart-warming. The testimony of history in times of persecution and suppression of Christians is beyond the natural actions of humanity. It can only be of God. So do we know the reality and power of witness by the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. What commenced in the new company of believers on the day of Pentecost has gone on in this age of the Spirit.

We ought not to idealise the Community of Christ, nor make heady claims of extraordinary success. Christians are not paragons of virtue, moral beyond all reproach and perfect above others. Sadly enough their history is stained with terrible deeds claimed to have been in the name of Christ and for the advancement of the human race.

We question whether many of these deeds came out of the true people of God, for we know so often the Community has been in the hands of wicked men, and at times dreadful evil has happened and cruelty executed. Wars cannot be justified and some have been fought over unjustifiable causes. At the same time such things cannot be excused.

The church has known apostasy and has betrayed its Lord. Yet, given all this to have been part of its history, the church has come to see and acknowledge these failures and to give renewed witness to the Lordship of Christ and the glory of the age to come, and the holy triumphs of the *telos*. This is the true Community of eternal life.

WHAT, THEN, OF THE SPIRIT TODAY; OF CHRIST'S BAPTISING AND OF THE SPIRIT'S WORK AND LIFE IN US?

This study has been written to put forward the matter of Christ as the risen and reigning Lord, of the plan of God for all history, and of the ecclesia living in the power of the Holy Spirit and witnessing to the world in the last stage of what we call 'the Common Era', or 'this age', to distinguish it from 'the age to come', that is, the commencement of eternity.

It is intended to refresh and renew us in an understanding of this present age and the age to come. At the same time we face the fact that some of us are uninformed about these matters, or we have confusion in our thinking regarding them. In this section of our study I would like to deal with points which may help to clarify our thinking.

One of the simplest questions apt to be asked by some is whether he or she has been baptised in the Spirit or whether that was a phenomenon of the early church which no longer happens. More complex questions are asked, such as whether the gifts known in the early church—as *dorea*, the gift of the Spirit himself in Acts 11:17, as *domata* in Ephesians 4:7–11, and *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and other places—are still in existence and in operation. Some ask whether or not one has to speak in tongues—the gift of glossolalia—as a sign or proof of having been baptised in the Spirit. To discuss all these points at length is beyond the scope of this study, but some indications need to be given as at least a part answer to the questions posed.

Baptism in the name of Christ³ was the custom and ritual by which those who had believed in Christ became his disciples (Acts 2:38–42; cf. 4:4; 8:12–13; 10:44–48;

³ In Matthew 28:19–20 we read that those who believed in Christ were to be baptised in the *name* of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This may or may not be intended to be a specific formula for baptizing new believers. It is noted that it is baptism *into* the *one* name and not *three*, *but it is surely baptism into God*. This injunction, if indeed it is a formula, seems not to have been followed, as such, in the New Testament, but the principle of incorporation into the Godhead is certainly present in apostolic teaching. In the added portion at the end of Mark's Gospel we read, 'Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned"' (Mark 16:14–16, *NRSV*).

11:13–18; 16:34; etc.), received the forgiveness and cleansing of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). By passages such as Acts 13:38ff., we know that believers received forgiveness of sins and were justified as the law of Moses could never justify.

In Romans chapter 6 Paul gives teaching regarding baptism, saying that in that act we were baptised into Christ and buried with him in his death and rose again with him in his resurrection. In Colossians 2:11–15 similar teaching is given.

When it comes to the matter of the gift of the Spirit, Paul says quite plainly in Romans 8:9, 'But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.' Nothing could be plainer than that! The fact that is linked with baptism is the newbirth, and the new birth cannot happen without the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught these things in John 3:1–14. We have also seen in such passages as Galatians 4:1–7, Romans 8:14–30, 1 Corinthians 6:11, and Acts 13:38–39, that sonship ('adoption as sons') is effected by the Holy Spirit. All these regenerating and transforming works are by the Spirit who reveals and applies the work of Christ to the human spirit.

What has happened is that the baptised person lives in 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' and so in him the righteous demand of the law (*to dikaioma tou nomou*) is fulfilled (Rom. 8:2–4).

The baptised person now walks in the Spirit (Rom. 8:5–17; Gal. 5:16–26) and so bears the fruit of the Spirit. The love of God has been poured into the heart of the baptised one by means of the Holy Spirit. All elements of love, fellowship, unity and worship are manifestly operative in the body of Christ by the presence and power of the Spirit. The Spirit himself is working in this age to convince (convict, rebuke) the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, in accordance with the principle, 'about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned' (John 16:9–11, *NRSV*).

Have we come any closer to defining the baptism in/with the Spirit? Is it just the same as being baptised in the name of Christ? Are there two baptisms, one of water and one of the Spirit? Surely the matter is very simple: we are baptised into the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and are now 'participants in the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4, *NRSV*), but that does not mean participators in the substance of the Godhead so that we achieve divinity, but are participators in the work and plan and fellowship of the Trinity of Three Persons.

One key to understanding is surely to heed the words of John 7:37–39:

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.

This is an immensely important passage for it brings to our notice all we have said about the prophecies concerning the coming of the Spirit and his power. Up to this point in his ministry Jesus has said in John 4:10 to the Samaritan woman by the well, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water'. It was to this thirsty woman that Jesus later spoke of the Father, of the Spirit and of true worship. He has also said to his Jewish listeners, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst' (John 6:35). Continually he had offered eternal life to those who believed in him. Life from him was lavish. John the apostle is the one

who fully records John the Baptist's account of Jesus being the one who will baptize Israel in the Holy Spirit. Here, at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles when a golden jar was brought in from the stream of Siloam and poured at the foot of the altar to the chanting of Isaiah 12:3, 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation', Jesus stood up and gave his invitation: 'As the scripture has said, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" '. This has no precise scripture to parallel it, but we have seen Old Testament Scriptures which speak of the river of God, beginning with its creation in Eden and the indication that it will water the whole earth.⁴ There is the invitation of Isaiah 55:1–3 to come and drink of the waters:

Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

John recognises the saying from his own, later, point of view, for rivers of living water had flowed out of him and others at Pentecost and were continuing to flow. Christ had to be humiliated by the action of the Cross before the gift of the Spirit could flow to the world—to 'all flesh'—but the flow of the Spirit from the time of Pentecost has always been lavish. Only those who will not believe and will not drink do not know that flowing.

Way back in Jeremiah 2:13 (cf. 17:13), God had spoken prophetically, 'for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water'.

Proverbs 4:23 had said, 'Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs [issues] of life'.

We have drawn our attention to the passage of John 7:37–39 for it stands continually as a promise to all believers who drink to quench their thirst and so have the issues of life flowing from them to the world. All of us have to know the Spirit has been poured out upon us from on high, and that this is the era of that outpouring, that baptising of God's people in or with the Spirit—the initial, principal outpouring in Israel, Samaria and the Gentiles—has happened. Being baptised into Christ assures us that the Holy Spirit is present both to us and in us. It is for us to heed such injunctions as 'Be aglow [fervent] with the Spirit' (Rom. 12:11); 'do not get drunk with wine . . . but be filled with [or by] the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18); 'But you, beloved, build yourself up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit' (Jude 20); and 'walk by the Spirit' (Gal. 5:16, 25).

One equally strong injunction is, 'And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption' (Eph. 4:30). In Acts 5:29–32 Peter is seen speaking to the Jewish Sanhedrin who sought to forbid them to preach the gospel of Christ:

But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'

Peter is not saying one must become morally obedient before God will give His Holy Spirit, but He gives His Holy Spirit to those who believe, for belief is obedience to the

⁴ See my booklet, *The River of God* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2001).

gospel (Rom. 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26). To believe on Christ is to obey the gospel. Likewise, obedience having been given to us by the Spirit is a practical principle in our living. To quench the Spirit is juxtaposed with 'do not despise prophesying' (1 Thess. 5:19–20), and this is understandable since we are the prophetic community, as we saw in Acts 2:14–21.

CONCLUSION: WE ARE GOD'S PEOPLE, DESTINED TO BE FILLED UNTO ALL HIS FULLNESS

It is very clear from John's Gospel that the Holy Spirit is the one who brings Christ's life to the believer. That life is by the Spirit springing up as a fountain. It satisfies our thirst continually, but rivers of living water also flow from our inner beings—our hearts. We know that God in Israel was known as 'The Fountain of Living Waters' and water means—and is—life, life from God as breathed into Man, and that Man is ever dependent upon God to sustain his life with its many issues. Man's refusal to be dependent upon God in the interest of his autonomy brought him immediately into idolatry. He is always busy about his idols. Christ's entering the world was so that Man would abandon the tricky idols and find his fullness from God in God.

When in Acts 2:4 it is said that all present at Pentecost—the 120 disciples—were filled with the Holy Spirit, at the same time it could be said they were all filled with Christ and that they were filled 'with all the fullness of God' (Eph. 3:19). It is in this way that we come to the teaching of the Trinity that the Three Persons indwell one another. To be in the fullness of Christ is to be in the fullness of the Father and the Son.

By 'fullness' we do not mean being quantitatively filled so much as being relationally wholly one with God—Father, Son and Spirit. It is only when Man is filled with and by God that he is truly human, truly the image of God. When his fullness—so-called—comes from idols he is empty of God. In Romans 1:28–31 sinful Man is said to be filled with evil, but evil is not morally substantial and so Man has a sickening emptiness, his broken reservoir dry of and empty of God:

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

When, then, we speak of being filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9; Eph. 5:18), we mean that the Spirit has brought God's fullness to us. It is interesting that Paul in Ephesians 3:14–19 prays that the Spirit may strengthen us within, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts and we may know his love and the love of God and be filled unto all the fullness of God:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Linked with this is Ephesians 5:18 where Paul enjoins his readers to be filled *with* the Spirit or—as some see this correct exegesis to show—they are to be filled *by* the Spirit;

that is, they are to be filled *with* God's fullness by the Holy Spirit. It seems to me that the writers of the New Testament were not so much talking of a 'Father fullness', a 'Son fullness' and a 'Spirit fullness' as they were emphasising the fullness of God which Man needs to become truly human, just as the Samaritan woman needed to drink of the water Christ offered her so that she would not thirst.

Over many years of preaching, teaching and pastoral counselling ministry I have found that human beings know extreme misery when they are empty of God, and some who are Christians undergo anxiety when the baptism in/with the Spirit is posed to them as a kind of power-pack which they lack and must obtain. One of the cruellest demands is that they must speak in tongues so that they may indeed know that they are baptized in the Spirit.

This springs from ignorance of the use of gifts—*dorea, domata, charismata*—and so becomes an endeavour of achievement which makes some to be elitists, whether or not they intend to be that.

If we look at what we might call the 'filling' happenings in the New Testament, then we see they are varied. At Pentecost there was first Christ's outpouring of the Spirit and then the baptism of 3,000 who responded. The phenomena of being baptised in the Spirit experienced by the 120 was not said to be repeated at the baptism of the 3,000.

Even so, some time later, the whole Christian community was again filled with the Spirit after they prayed a prayer that had no explicit request for such an outpouring. Peter and Paul were two apostles who being, we would say, habitually filled with or by the Spirit were suddenly filled to meet certain contingencies which had arisen, such as Peter speaking to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8) and Paul to Elymas the magician (Acts 13:9). In Samaria the Holy Spirit was received with the laying on of the apostolic hands of Peter and John but, it appears, without special phenomena, whilst at Ephesus when Paul laid hands on the twelve disciples of John there were phenomena such as at Pentecost and Caesarea.

From another angle there is teaching by Paul that Christ is filling all things—for example, Ephesians 4:6ff.—but in the same Letter he speaks of Christ having given his fullness to his body, the church. In Colossians 1:19 he says that all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ and in 2:9–10 states, 'For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority'. 'Fullness of life' is characteristic of all members of the ecclesia.

When we think that 'fullness' is a special factor which happens only on special occasions then we are virtually relegating ourselves to 'non-fullness'. On this score it is helpful to read part of Paul's Letter to the Romans. In 15:18–19 he says, 'For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, *by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit*, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ'. We do not gather the idea that Paul braced himself for special cases and girded his loins for it, so to speak, but that his ministry was habitually powerful by reason of the Spirit's presence and action.

It is also interesting to note later in the chapter that he is sure he will 'come [to them] in the fullness of the blessing of Christ' (vv. 28–29). I once shared in a Pastors' School where we mused on this. Some thought that Paul was going to gird himself up for this special occasion and be sure that he came in strength and power—so much we project ourselves onto the great Paul—but our conclusion should have been that this was always the way Paul would go about things. It is the way that we should always go about things.

It is often argued today that the phenomena known in the New Testament as 'signs and wonders' were for that time and have not reappeared in history.⁵ The facts of history are that they have appeared and do appear, especially when the apostolic gospel is preached with simplicity to sympathetic audiences. Stories by Christians who have lived under oppressive regimes read and sound like pages of the Book of Acts. The gospel is received more easily in countries which have not been subjected to revealed religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism. We need to read history to realise this. It seems a contradiction to say that where Christianity has been for years, the gospel would not be easily accepted. Unfortunately in some Western countries the period of the Enlightenment not only destroyed medieval superstition but also human reasoning has rejected what we call the apostolic style of the gospel and the kind of life which follows its acceptance.

Islam is strongly opposed to Christianity and Judaism and there is prejudice against the Bible as being God's truth for today. This flow of history has scarcely touched animistic beliefs and practices and often the gospel is readily received. See, for example, a book such as *Christianity Rediscovered* by Vincent J. Donovan (published by both SCM, London, and Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York). This speaks of an apostolic approach to the Masai tribes and the extraordinary impression made upon them by Donovan preaching the apostolic gospel to them.

I am pointing out these things because I want to repeat my thesis that genuine preaching of the gospel is by those upon whom Christ has poured out 'the promise of the Father', that is, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of revelation and of power. It is a strange twist of history that when groups of folk in Third World countries receive the gospel in simple faith today, phenomena such as we read about in the Gospels and the Acts are often manifested. We can appreciate the massive output of theology and missiology these days from colleges and universities, but so much of it is for Academe and not for Christians in the rough and tumble of history, religion and culture that we do not wonder so little of it stirs the pool in Third World countries. Missiology can be our mission rather than mission itself.

At the risk of being thought simplistic and my ideas passé, I wish to refer to the work done by Roland Allen and some of his colleagues back in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1966); *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Christian Church: And the Causes Which Hinder It* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1967); and *The Ministry of the Spirit: Selected Writings of Roland Allen*, edited by David M. Paton (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1965), demand our attention as much in this age, if not more so. When the world is in its present upheaval we might not think it the time to be able to act along the lines of Christ's wisdom but some are doing so, and times of crisis are no final barrier to the gospel of Christ when the Spirit of the Lord—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord—is empowering his people.

Prophetic voices are still to be heard in the land and Christ is indeed the present Lord over all history. None sees or can understand, nor can say, 'Jesus is Lord!' but by the Holy Spirit.

I am sure it is right for us to go back to the fourth chapter of Acts for a closing meditation. In this chapter we read the account of the disciples being reprimanded by the

⁵ The book *After the Apostles* by John Foster is subtitled *Missionary Preaching of the First Three Centuries*. Originally published by the SCM Press (London, 1951), it was republished by Anzea Publishers (Sydney) in 1972. It gives us a good view of the church in its first 200 years and shows continuity between it and the apostolic church in doctrine and what we might call spiritual phenomena. Its quotes are lavish from early Christian writers and pagans who opposed the gospel.

Council of Elders, the Sanhedrin. They charged the apostles—presumably Peter and John—not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus:

But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old (Acts 4:19–22).

Having been released the apostles 'went to their friends', that is, the company of believers, and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them. Immediately there was a response and the company prayed. Their prayer was powerful:

Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'—for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:24–30).

It is noteworthy that Israel was in the grip of strange happenings: the disturbances throughout Palestine occasioned by John the Baptist and Jesus; the miracles and teaching of the Nazarene; his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem; the priests and leaders apprehending Jesus, judging him, crucifying him; and then the stunning claim that he was risen from the dead and present to his disciples, and had even ascended to God—so they were saying! How uneasy the Jewish leaders had been and how confident Jesus' followers! The prayer is worth pondering: God's sovereignty, the use of Psalm 2, the recent enacting of it in the crucifixion and the battle which was yet ahead. Then comes the prayer for the apostles for power, with its immediate fulfilment:

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. 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 (Acts 4:31–33).

Note the strong point, 'they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness'. Not only the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, but also the whole company. This was not the first time they had been filled and although 'the first time' signified much, the power of the Spirit was to be theirs in every contingency. The community was greatly refreshed in love, unity and compassion, 'And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all'.

By this we learn that not only is being baptised in the Holy Spirit an initial act determinative of the continuing life of the one on whom the Spirit has been poured by Jesus, but also it is on the basis of it that we can pray for affusions of such power by the Spirit in order to pursue the mission of God through all His people.

God's Mission of Love in the World

THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGERS

Without doubt the message of the gospel is 'God is love' (1 John 4:8, 16) though not stated as a theology or a philosophy. It is not stated, as such, in the evangel (*euaggelion*) or proclamation (*kerugma*) but is unmistakable as being of the very essence of it. It constitutes the sum of both Testaments of the Bible. This message is unique in all religions. Its implications are many and deep. It can rightly be taken as an anti-idolatry message in which case it is rooted in the biblical doctrine of creation. It is quite obviously salvific, i.e. salvation from the bondage of human sin and death as well as from supernatural powers which are evil. It relates simultaneously wholly to law and grace. It deals with the Divine judgment and wrath which is upon human sin and rebellion, bringing the revelation of God as *the* One who loves and *is* love. It is to do with the renewal of fallen humanity and provides the *eschaton*—in Christ—which culminates in the *telos* which can be called a love *telos*, in that the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb *is* the culmination of Divine-human love, and the Community of God *is* God's people of love for the new heaven and the new earth.

So, then, the prime Messenger or Missionary of the gospel is Christ who has forged the gospel, having been sent by the Father who Himself has always been on mission. Those whom God has sent as ambassadors in the matter of reconciliation are the messengers of His love and who as persons have come to know the love of God and become the Community of love—the *ecclesia*. The *telos* of all things having been unified, reconciled, filled and harmonised means that everything lives in love. The new creation is the love creation.

THE CREATION FORMED BY GOD, IN LOVE

Ephesians 1:3–14 describes the work which God planned for the creation He had not yet made. In verses 4–5 the term 'in love' can be translated as belonging to verse 4, 'holy and blameless before him in love' (*NRSV, ESV*) or as belonging to verse 5, 'He destined us in love to be his sons' (*RSV, NIV*). It does not greatly matter: the end goal God had set was holiness *and* adoption as sons and we are justified in saying all His intentions for His creation were based in love. Love was their matrix. The creation accounts in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis assure us that every stage of creation was 'good' and the climax of the sixth day was 'very good'. Man being created in the image of God has to mean 'in the image of His Kingship', and as we shall further see, in the image of His love. Certainly the union of the man and the woman was one of love, she not being created parallel to him but *from* him. Paul was later to say that this event was 'a profound mystery', meaning that it was protological of the coming—and eschatological—Husband and Wife union, i.e. the Church's marriage to the Bridegroom. We can deduce much from this protology as to the relationship of the primal man and woman. Whilst 'family' is not explicitly in sight, yet it is presumed even by the narrator

of the Eden event. Human corporate being was to be part of the creation and would have its origin in the Divine–human relationship by nature of the case.

The provision of creation and the care of it is set out in many parts of Scripture, e.g. Psalm 104, the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5:43–48), and we know that the Community of the Trinity worked in unity to make the creation. Without specifying the works of the Three Persons we can say confidently that the essential nature of the creation and all its configurations came through love and display the unity of the Godhead, i.e. its love. The basis, then, of all creation is the unity of love and demands the response of love which includes the obedience of love. It is *in* love that Man truly responds to God and the law which is innate to Him and was gifted to Man as he was made to be the image of the Creator. This is why created beings ought ever to have loved and obeyed the Creator (cf. Gen. 14:17–24, esp. vv. 19, 22).

What was taught powerfully to the people of God was that the whole creation was formed in wisdom, 'It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens' (Jer. 10:12; 51:15–19). It was also clearly taught that God was neither locked into or out of His creation, nor was He ever to be likened to anything in creation. His power and deity could be clearly perceived in the things that have been made (Rom. 1:20) but He has no form (Deut. 4:15; cf. John 4:24). Here the principle is shown that nothing formed can ever be God nor may He be likened to any created thing (Isa. 40:18–26; 46:5ff.). To have been created by Him is sufficient for Man to responsively love Him. That was so clearly obvious in the law of Israel. At the same time a person's love for God which proceeded from God's prior love to him (cf. 1 John 4:19) should be matched by the person loving his/her neighbour. In this way the whole creation could and would be at peace. We are assuming, then, by the revelation to which we have come, bit by bit, that the human race is an ecclesial matter. Edward Farley says, 'Theologically expressed, ecclesia is that form of corporate human existence whose origin and continuation is made possible by Jesus Christ'.¹ Firstly he assumes that created Man is an ecclesia and not just a gregarious community as are birds, fish and animals. God is the Creator of Man to whom it is indispensable for his being human to be ecclesial, since it is in his corporate being and vocation that he reflects the Creator. He then takes the whole sweep from creation to the *telos* as the nature and destiny of Man. Man's nature as 'community' is dependent upon his relationship with God vertically and with the human race horizontally.

In addition Man as the lord of all creation has his responsibility to Edenise the whole earth and all its inhabitants, so that his regime is indispensable to the wellbeing of all things and the fulfilment of the determinate *telos*. On him, then, would depend—under God—the whole community of creation. We conclude, then, that the whole creation was made by Him who is 'fearful and wonderful' for all His works are wonderful (Ps. 139:13–18). *Every thing and all things are structured for love and peace and joy by creation.*

THE LOSS OF LOVE AND THE BIRTH OF IDOLATRY

Because Man was created by God and is in his essential being in the image of God, he is a creature of love as he is also a creature of holiness, righteousness, truth and goodness. To be affected in one of these derived properties is to be affected in them all.

¹ *Ecclesial Man* by Edward Farley (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1975), p. 127.

We cannot measure the power of love, unity, worship and adoration that lay in Man's state of innocence as he was one with his Creator. Whatever may be said about Man, innocent, deprived, or depraved, he is essentially a creature of love. The rule that Man was given in creation was one without fear. If so, then it must have been in love. This is seen in Genesis 9:1–7 when God virtually renews the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28–30. In the primal mandate there had been no fear. In the post-Flood mandate all creatures were from henceforth to fear Man, and fear would be among humans because of the loss of corporate human unity and love. The break of love-relationships came to ecclesial Man in the rebellion against God in Eden. Man now feared God. All relationships which had been in love were now in jeopardy. Man, nevertheless, must love or he will deny what he is even if he only be a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God! If he loves according to true law then he will also worship God truly and serve Him. If he refuses that love to God then he will have to find an object for his love or he will not be able to find any relief to his insistent, ontological, worshipping faculty. Raymond C. Ortlund Jr in his book *Whoredom*, sub-titled 'God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology',² bases his theology of God and His people on the passage of Genesis 2:18–24, especially in regard to Yahweh and Israel. No such detailed examination of the love relationship of God to idolatrous Israel has been written as in this Ortlund thesis. Especially moving is his chapter entitled 'The Ultimate Marriage as One Spirit' (pp. 137–69) where he takes the marriage bond of Yahweh and Israel in the Old Testament and applies it to the Husband and the Wife—the Bride and the Lamb in the New Testament. We know that Israel was considered the wife of Yahweh by Yahweh. The marriage relationship was especially expounded by the prophets. Any infidelity by Israel was deeply reprehensible. To worship an idol was whoredom. Of course it broke the holy bond between God and His people—His 'special possession' which is the nature of holy love.³ The dreadful matter of the golden calf manufacture and the worshipping of it would have almost decimated Israel had not Moses stood in the breach. As a result Moses demanded that God should reveal His glory to him, which He did. As a result Moses 'made haste to bow his head towards the earth and worshipped'. God then warned against the idolatry which had gripped Israel in the temporary absence of Moses on the mountain:

And he said, 'Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with you. Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it become a snare in the midst of you. You shall tear down their altars, and break their pillars, and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters play the harlot after their gods and make your sons play the harlot after their gods. You shall make for yourself no molten gods' (Exod. 34:10–17).

If we take this quote bit by bit and listen to it as persons who have known much idolatry in life it will come home quite sharply. Idolatry is wholly harlotry. If we take the

² Apollos Press, Leicester, 1996.

³ For the whole matter of marriage, divorce and remarriage see my *The Profound Mystery* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1995) and the recent excellent works on this subject in the bibliography. Without this Husband–wife theology of God and Israel we miss the profundity of Divine–human love.

passages of Ezekiel chapter 16, Hosea chapters 1 and 2, and Isaiah 54:4–8 we see the whole action of God as Husband to Israel, Israel's love at the beginning—'Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown' (Jer. 2:2)—the faithlessness of Israel, the plunge into idolatry, then the forgiveness of the Husband and His promise of Hosea 2:19–20, 'And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD'. God will act in sovereign love and compel His errant wife to love Him. This principle is also in Deuteronomy 30:6, 'And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live'.

A Christian sociologist, J. A. Walter, in his book *A Long Way from Home* and sub-titled 'A Sociological Exploration of Contemporary Idolatry'⁴ works on the basis of 'the sacred', and shows that idolatry always relates to the sacred. He names four aspects or elements to do with the sacred, namely idolatry, homelessness, nature and immortality. It is interesting that he notes that whilst individuals do have their own idolatries—fads as he calls them—yet idolatry is generally practiced in a community:

The sacred, by contrast, involves the elevation of a particular social institution or idea to such a level within a culture that it forms a major and indispensable part of people's identity. Patriotism in the Third Reich illustrates this. Patriotism can be a good thing, but when it is made the highest value to which all other values are subordinated, then it becomes sacred. Here we are not talking about the over-patriotic crank in an otherwise more balanced society, but about the kind of patriotism that existed in Nazi Germany where patriotism was primarily a societal and only secondarily an individually held value. It was the Nazi *culture* that made patriotism sacred; it was the culture that provided the altars at which individuals subsequently bowed.⁵

He says that 'the sacred' aids the homeless—made homeless in the sense of those who find life meaningless and without protection—and says, 'The sacred takes the fragility of human existence and gives it solidarity; it takes the fragility of human existence and makes it massive'.⁶ Again, in relation to what we call 'nature', Man seeks to control it for his own security but finds that sickness and death are part of nature. 'Telling man how to relate to the other inhabitants of the world and to the earth itself is one of the time-honoured functions of religion. Through ancestor cults, pantheism, creation myths and so on, man is placed in relation to the rest of the world.'⁷ Man then takes mortality with its concomitant sickness and suffering which often seem undeserved and has to make his own theodicy via 'the sacred' in order to live with the unintelligible. Edward Farley comes at the problem of Man's condition and Man's rationalisation of it as requiring idolatry. Idolatry is what he calls 'the transcendental refusal of chaos', that is, Man has to evade living without the knowledge of God, 'The religious a priority means that man is so constituted that knowledge of God is essential and proper to him'.⁸ Man sees redemption in religion which is why he pursues it as helping him refuse external determination of his life and being.

All of this sounds very much like Paul's dissertation of Man coming into idolatry in Romans 1:18–32. Man knew God's 'invisible nature, namely his eternal power and

⁴ Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1979.

⁵ Walter, pp. 14f.

⁶ Walter, p. 16.

⁷ Walter, p. 19.

⁸ Farley, p. 130.

deity' in the things which had been made, but refused this knowledge, preferring his own autonomy. This decision against God could not be made without a dynamic result. Man had wrenched his created being away from its matrix, and the shock of denying being in the image of God was such that he had to invent the idols, there being no such creative authorities ontologically as Paul attests in 1 Corinthians 8:4–6:

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one.' For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Man, as Paul told us, preferred to live in a monstrous lie rather than live before God as Man truly is before God: hence the idols. What we perceive is that the whole ontological order of things is perverted and the corporate nature of ecclesial Man, which is living by God and so living by love, is now ordered by hatred. Romans 1:24–26 shows that when Man 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator [then] God gave them up to 'dishonourable passions'. What was 'natural' (ontological) became 'unnatural'. What had been love which is always 'other-person-centred' now became destruction in its self-centredness. Love is never ego-centred but it became that, and the result was a fragmentation of all relationships as God successively gave Man up to his own evil which burgeoned, compounding itself by reason of a suffering of intense guilt and a bad conscience.

At heart, then, an idol is a replacement of God by the invention of Man so that Man can control and use that image for his own self-being and benefit. No one can control God. The golden calf of Exodus 32 was made by the Israelites and their worship of it was lustful, a thing of delight and sexual lust. The idolater makes demands of his god and in essence they are what he would have of God were God to be the genuine object of his worship and service. The idol is, after all, the image of the Creator, and where Man senses his lostness and the chaos of refusing to be in the image of that Creator, he makes demands of his new idol that would bring him love, joy and peace of the kind that he would dictate. Idolatrous Man wants an idol which is no threat to him but this can only be so when the moral glory of God is regnant, not as when, 'They made a calf in Horeb and worshipped a molten image. *They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.* They forgot God, their Saviour, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red Sea' (Ps. 106:19–22). Much analysis of idolatry is to do with the individual heart and its altar there to that person's god, and without doubt this is a legitimate analysis, but it is noticeable that idolatry is a corporate matter, and sanctuaries are for the corporate 'sacred'. In essence Man is corporate, ecclesial and community, and worships in unity with others. Paul speaks of the ecclesia as being, corporately, the temple of God. He also speaks of the person's body being the shrine of the Holy Spirit. The antithesis of the personal and corporate is the heart of the sinner being the shrine of the idol, and the community of idolaters being the sanctuary of their deity—or deities.

Our conclusion regarding idolatry then is that it is the utter perversion of what is true of God, Man and creation. Natural law is resident in humanity, so that much worship of idols would seem to be conducted along moral lines so that conscience could be reasonably quietened. This is a wrong reading of the matter. Self-justification in religion is an action to calm the conscience and counteract guilt, but what is not generally recognised is that the idolater is not in control of his worship. As the Serpent in Eden

brought the word of death to the primal couple, so personal evil inhabits the idols and dictates slavery to the worshippers. The evil *qahal* or *ecclesia* has fellowship with demons when it meets for its 'eucharistic' feasts at the idol sanctuaries. The imitative nature of Satan and all personal evil is shown in its false 'fellowship of worship':

Therefore, my beloved, shun the worship of idols. I speak as to sensible men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Cor. 10:14–22).

There is a yearning in the depraved heart for fellowship to be as it would have been when it was in fellowship with God and His people. The ontology of the creation is love ontology. It is no wonder that God chose out for Himself a people whom He deliberately loved, a people who would be for His own possession. The regeneration of idolatrous Man would require a unilateral covenant commensurate with His own Being as love. The deformation of idolatry would require the transformation of the Divine love. Slowly, slowly would the law of God Himself come to be seen as the true way for the loving society. The pain of the history of Israel would require the personal revelation of the Creator–Redeemer–King as love by the incarnation of the beloved Son. The true image of God would have to appear as a man in the midst of humanity. Only out of him could come the true *ecclesia*, the love-community of God.

GOD LOVES THE WORLD: THE ANSWER TO IDOLATRY AND WRATH

In Acts 17:16–24 we have the account of Paul in Athens on his own, waiting for Silas and Timothy to come. 'His spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city was full of idols. So he argued ['reasoned', *NIV*] in the synagogues with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there.' The outcome was that Epicurean and Stoic philosophers took hold of him and drew him to the Areopagus to hear him out. Because he spoke of 'Jesus and the resurrection' they thought, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities' for they took the word *anastasis*—resurrection—to be the name of a god. Jesus' message was that God is Creator. He does not need to live in shrines made by humans. He gives to all men life and breath and everything. He created all humanity from one primal man. Geography and history are so oriented that men must seek after God. A Greek poet had said that God is not afar off for 'in him we live and move and have our being', and also, 'For we are indeed his offspring'. Paul pressed home his critique of idolatry:

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:29–31).

Paul was saying, 'Since God is our Father, then we ought not to represent Him by all these forms—these images—you have made, no matter how beautiful, awful or varied

they are'. Paul knew the old statement of God, 'To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?' He also knew that Man was created to be 'the image and glory of God' (cf. Gen. 1:26; 1 Cor. 11:7). He certainly would have had in mind Jeremiah 2:26:

As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed: they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave me birth.' For they have turned their back to me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble they say, 'Arise and save us!'

That human beings should so distort the Eternal God and represent Him thus, and that they should so demean His Fatherhood was what had 'provoked within him' a great outcry against this form of blasphemy. He knew God's wrath on such depictions of His Being so that Paul rather generously calls the times of idolatry those of ignorance. Even so, God has had in mind His chosen King to rule all creation, and has given assurance of this King by raising him from the dead. As we know, the resurrection was proclaimed as the first great element of the gospel and when listeners were astounded, then the gospel of the Cross followed naturally, and so God's love was proclaimed in forgiveness and justification.

In this message was the revelation that God—the God of all creation—is the Father of all human beings. Some theologians deny that 'offspring' means children, but when in Luke 3:38 Adam is called 'the son of God' and when a son is the likeness of his father (Gen. 5:3) as Man is of God, and when in covenant the people are called 'sons of God' (cf. Deut. 14:1–2; 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8), then it is for us to see how the race rejected God's Fatherhood for idols; male and female as creators, as fathers and mothers! Adam the son refused the plan of the Father and His familial love and thus orphaned himself from the Edenic community.

Paul's message was the full answer to idolatry—Man should return to the Father via the man who has been made King over all things, since this man of all human beings has been raised from the dead, never to die again. Of course Paul has expounded this marvellously in his sermons and letters. It is the teaching of the Gospels and of the Apostolic band. Its essence is that the God who is love has so loved the world that He has sent His Son to redeem the world and to save its inhabitants from perishing in everlasting darkness. The Son came to bring us to the Father so that we might enter into the great Family of His people. The messengers who take this message to the nations are themselves in that Family and speak out of it with powerful witness to its truth. This is the Family which must not tolerate hatred within it and is commanded, 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols'.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE MESSAGE OF LOVE

Paul has a great passage which tells of the love of God—Romans 5:6–11. The person who reads it simply and trustingly will find his heart filled with the knowledge and experience of love. The account is of the work God has done in Christ to save Man who is a desperate sinner. Verse 5 states, 'and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us'. We now make the point that the love of God which is arguably perceived in the saving works God has done in Christ has to be interpreted and revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told his disciples that the Spirit would reveal all things to them,

him being 'the Spirit of truth'. He also said that only by the Spirit would the world be convinced (convicted) of sin, righteousness and judgment. That is why they would need to be baptised in (or, with) the Holy Spirit as we have seen in previous studies and so become messengers out of that love.

We know that the Spirit is the Spirit of love for in Romans 5:5 he pours the love of God into the heart. Romans 15:30 speaks of 'the love of the Spirit'. In Colossians 1:8 Paul speaks of having made known to him 'your love in the Spirit'. The famous passage of Galatians 5:22–23 speaks of the harvest of the Spirit, the first fruit of which is 'love'. Ephesians 4:3 talks of the unity of the Spirit, and Philippians 2:1 talks about 'fellowship in the Spirit', a term Paul uses again in 2 Corinthians 13:14. In 1 John 4:12–13 (cf. 1 John 3:24) the apostle virtually says we come to know the love of God and have His love perfected in us through the Spirit: 'No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit.' In many places we see the Spirit's ministry is in the great themes and works of love, unity and fellowship, which Man receives from God and shares in the context of the whole community of Christ.

Doubtless we could name verses, pile upon pile, and whilst we might well make a teaching point of the Spirit bringing fallen Man to the community of love, unity, fellowship, harmony and peace, we should still await the essential meaning of these words as revealed reality. This is what the Spirit does. Paul, speaking of the eschato-logical glories which await the people of Christ says they are, in fact, indescribable (1 Cor. 2:7–9) but then says, 'But . . . God *has* revealed [them] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.' This is an immensely powerful statement. It has a ring of Proverbs 20:27 about it, 'The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts'. The word 'spirit' here is *neshamah*, the same word used in Genesis 2:7, 'the breath of life'—virtually a synonym of *ruach* (breath, spirit) which made Man a living being, i.e. 'soul', or 'person' (*nephesh*). The idea is of a kind of self-awareness in a person which searches his depths for the purpose of him being constantly enlightened regarding himself. Yet it is 'the lamp of the LORD' at the same time. So in the Triune God, 'the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God'. The marvel is that he imparts to us this truth of God. We could call the Spirit 'the Imparter'. The fact is that one of the simplest statements in Scripture is 'God is love', yet at the same time it is the most profound of all. What we are so confident that we understand cannot be comprehended unless the Spirit impart it.

If we ask, 'How does the Spirit reveal the depths of God as love to a person?' then the answer must be that he is the One who speaks irresistibly into the heart of the person. He is the Revealer and his revelation brings irresistible conviction (John 16:7–11) so that the person responds and receives life, or reacts and is sealed into death (John 3:36). This 'Lamp of the LORD', this Spirit of God Himself, shows the glory of God. He is the Spirit who brings new birth to fallen humans and affects every part of each person. He brings the revelation of the Cross of Christ which otherwise would be a moral scandal to the religious person or utter foolishness to the so-called wise man. He brings a person to bear the 'harvest of the Spirit' beginning with love. He is the Spirit of ecclesia, of community, so that he creates the new congregation of love and unity and fellowship. When repentant human persons are baptised into the one-ness body—the body of Christ—by the Spirit, and then are made to drink of this one-ness Spirit himself, then all ethnic, social and gender separations are no longer present (1 Cor. 12:12–13; Gal. 3:27–28; Col. 3:9–11). The community of love is thus established out of

the revealed 'depths of God'. The very configurations of this new society are the configurations as in the Community of the Triune God. Thus God who is love and so gives—'God so loved that he gave'—blesses ecclesial Man with the 'whole spiritual blessing' (Eph. 1:3f.; cf. 2 Pet 1:3–4). In such giving He distributes the gifts of ministry—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher—as also the gifts called *charismata* for the purposes of love which are unity of the body, the supply of all needs to all persons and that intimacy which has been described as being 'members one of another' and is the very nature of the Trinity. *Out of all these things and more, the Holy Spirit creates the new Community which is so equipped with love, gifts and weapons that the world of Satan and the community of fallen Man cannot hold out against it but must fall or rise on account of it.* Though appearances would seem to be against this declaration yet 'appearances' to human sight are not what are so in the sight of God. That is why Paul emphasises the fact that 'we walk by faith and not by sight'. John writes, 'But you have been anointed by the Holy One and you know all things' (or, 'you all know', 1 John 2:20, 27).

Behind all we have said in this section is the vast coverage of God's everlasting covenant, planned prior to creation in love and for love. This covenant was rooted in His own Being, given to Man in creation, established afresh to Noah, asserted with Abraham for his children and the nations, set out in the covenant cut with Israel at Sinai, envisaged in 'great David's greater son'—the Messiah—and blossoming out to all the world in the New Covenant which is linked with the coming of the eternal Kingdom of God. We need not repeat the whole matter of Israel's law being that of love, prescriptions being spelled out for all relational situations, for Christ summed up its essence in loving God with all one's being, loving one's neighbour as oneself and going to the point of loving one's enemies. So powerful has this law been that, far from abolishing it, Jesus revealed its true nature for the ecclesia and the Kingdom. There are warnings to Christians against breaking this law (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:9f.; Eph. 5:5, 11; Col. 3:5) for it is the law of love in all covenants. We see, too, that the Holy Spirit is present in this covenant as we look at Ezekiel 36:24–28 and 37:1–14 where both passages speak covenant-wisely regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit to purify the heart and renew it, and write its law deeply into the inner person who has been born anew by the Spirit of God (John 3:5; Jer. 31:31–34; with Titus 3:1–7). Well does Paul say, 'God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code *but in the Spirit*'.

THE MESSENGERS OF LOVE

We have spoken of the Community of Christ as reflecting in principle the Community of God. We have seen that 'God is on mission' but that this does not mean He is struggling against heavy odds, but that He has won the redemption of Man and the entire defeat of evil in Christ and so this victory is irreversible. God declares Man's freedom which He has already effected. Even so, His messengers must be authentic as the ambassadors of reconciliation. They must so have come to know that reconciliation that they can speak out of it, and because of it, to others. They must speak as those whom God has reconciled to Himself by the blood of the Cross. They do not have a case to argue so much as they have good news to proclaim. If, then, the local community of the entire ecclesia is not living out its reconciliation then it will not be able to witness to the truth it proclaims.

When we look at the world-wide church in its visible elements and retrace the past two thousand years of its history, we see so many gaps in its being reconciled to God in

all its parts. In many cases it has been short on conciliation also, i.e. 'keeping the peace'. There is peace making—reconciliation—and peace keeping, i.e. conciliation within the reconciled community. We see how vital is the presence and working of the Holy Spirit of love to bring people to see the love of God and then to live out His love in the Community. In spite of what we have said of the work of the Spirit it happens that messengers of the church are often not, themselves, wholly reconciled to God and so not to one another. We say this by way of yearning for true unity. If there be weakness in loving and disobedience in not loving, then is it because God's gospel of love is not fully understood? We have noted the writers of all the New Testament Epistles teach and exhort much concerning the love of God and the consequent love of Man.

I myself have a problem in this regard. Whilst I believe the truth the Father brings to the heart of His children by means of the Holy Spirit is seated there and goes beyond a person's total conscious grasp of it, I also believe some things must be grasped by the mind which will affect the whole person. Of course no *theory* of the atonement can save anyone. Theories will colour the way we think about Christ's atoning work but if we delimit Christ's work then we will delimit our understanding of God's love. It is purely through the atonement that we understand God is love. John has made this quite clear, 'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation [propitiation] for our sins' (1 John 4:9–10). There is also the saying of Romans 3:24–25, 'they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation [propitiation] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.'

My special point is that so many refuse to believe that God has wrath upon the person who sins. They do not see sin as a deliberate act of the human will against the divine will and so as the demeaning of God, His law, His righteousness and holiness. They say, 'God is love, and He will not pour out wrath'. If that is the case then the conscience will never be quietened in a person. P. T. Forsyth once said that nothing will satisfy the conscience of a man which does not first satisfy the conscience of God. For God to propitiate His own wrath within Himself by the willing love of His Son *as a man*, is surely the key to knowing God is love and so loving Him and all others. This is what is meant by saying the Holy Spirit must bring this revelation to us and keep us in it, when the flesh of our humanity would genialise God to be a 'no-wrath' deity. I believe that to be true messengers we must live in the powerful reality of reconciliation in which God disimputes sin to us through authentic atonement (Rom. 4:5, 8; 2 Cor. 5:19). I can understand why a person may hate the idea of a substitutionary atonement since it makes human sin to be so hideous that it should require so dreadful an atoning death under wrath, but I think the person who hates the idea of substitution should be honest and say it is the very essence of the New Testament and the Old Testament which he is opposing. Only when we realise God's love is holy love will we understand paradoxically its incomprehensible dimensions (Eph. 3:14–19).

Many who would oppose substitution will nevertheless agree that sins are forgiven through the Cross and sinful man is justified by the blood of the Cross but they shy away from linking these two benefits with law and judgment as a 'forensic fiction'. How fictional would a murderer find a sudden, seemingly impossible but tangible pardon from the law? To him it would be the most wonderful and wholesome reality which had ever come to him. It would have to be *forensic* to be real! Let us have no diminution of *forensic*. Let us not talk of 'relational' before we have spoken of 'forensic'. Then, truly, let us talk of 'relational'. No wonder the Scriptures talk of the

Holy Spirit as 'rivers of living water'. It takes the king-tide of the Spirit in all his works to overcome the apathy and lassitude of love-drained human beings and vivify them into sensitive lovers of God and Man, seeing love in true atonement.

We have, then, to understand that the Spirit brings us to full ecclesial being and doing, so that we are the sons of God's Fatherhood (Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 8:14-30) and as such are His Family (Eph. 1:5; 3:14; 4:6; 1 Tim 3:15) and are members one of another in the corporate body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:25) and members of the Bride (Eph. 5:29-30; cf. Rev. 19:9). All of these relationships are of love, i.e. of God's power by the Spirit for the unity of His creation. All of these relationships tell us we are the community of love and are ecclesial.

It remains, then, for us in this study, to contrast the impossibility of the Satanic kingdom and the Satanic ecclesia ever to attain to unity, harmony, and the pacification which comes from reconciliation. The Serpent who dared to subvert Man from his Creator, from his Creator's plan, who perverted love to hatred, purity to pollution and sought to change the law and the seasons, now faces the judgment of his arrogance and self-magnification. His false prophet who apes the Lamb of God cannot give true life to the hideous image for it does not know the truth and has never uttered the truth. The abyss will abort to the lake of brimstone and fire all that is evil.

The reality is that the messengers, the ambassadors of God, the brethren of Christ, have been transformed by love. Time and again throughout these studies we have seen that love conquers hatred, humility banishes arrogance, gentleness triumphs over triumphalism, submission unseats rebellion, brokenness of spirit brings healing of the heart, giving outshines coveting, holy worship outlasts uneasy idolatry, spiritual weapons outplay carnal armoury, faith quenches unbelief, salvation destroys destruction, hope is strong where ambition is perilous, peace defeats disquiet and joy displaces empty exuberance. So we could go on, but what we are endeavouring to show is that evil can never be coherent, never can integrate itself in ecclesial being since it lacks love. It never can sacrifice for another, never can displace the knowledge that its time of doom is coming, that God's judgment of it is righteous and irrefutable. It is not that, in the end, love wins despite the power of evil. Love was ever greater than all hatred, enmity, anger, arrogance and boasting though for a time—seemingly for a long time—evil seemed to be triumphant. It is the sword of love that in the long run will strike down evil. Raw power can never succeed, but only God's love. Evil hates and despises suffering and wreaks it on others, but it is at the heart of God who loves His creation and His people, to suffer for them and with them as is required by His own eternal wisdom and compassion. When His people know these things, then indeed are they true messengers of the Message.

In our closing study we will look at the discharge of the message, and the ways in which the Lord's Spirit presses the command of faith to submit to Christ the King and to be caught up into the Kingdom of the Father, for ever. Meanwhile we must go on being filled with and by the Spirit, and come to live in the reality of God's love—the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in the love of all the brethren.

God's Mission from Beginning to End

We come to our final study in this series which began with the principle that God has always been on mission, that He sent His Son into the world as His special missionary, and that His people have always been on mission with Him in the creation He has planned, which will ultimately be resolved into the new heaven and the new earth in which dwells only righteousness where they—the ecclesia of God—will be 'a kingdom and priests to our God' (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; Exod. 19:5–6; Isa. 61:6; 1 Pet. 2:9–10; cf. Rev. 20:6). All of this was to do with the everlasting covenant of God, which was also planned before creation. In all the studies which followed we sought to show the vast dimensions of God's plan on the principle that the more one sees and understands what God is about in salvation, the richer our understanding of His grace will be. We can be simplistic in the preaching of the gospel so that the word 'salvation' means that a person is saved from judgment, assured of eternal life—all of which is true—so that the individual is content with what has happened, and lives comfortably in and with the local assembly, anticipating the 'great day' of Christ's return whilst seeking to live a creditable moral life. The wide purposes of God may then be too little known, i.e. God's plan for the purification of all creation, His aim to glorify it and all His creatures, His intention to defeat Satan's deadly plans to subvert God's Kingdom, and His determination to have His creation ruled over by His Son whilst He, Himself, will be 'all in all'. If it appears we have been overly wide-ranging regarding 'mission' then it is because these are the very dimensions of mission.

Readers who have a 'How to?' mind should be pardoned for thinking the materials we have used are vast but for someone who wants to get on with the job, they do not prescribe what to do now and how to go about it. It is noticeable in the Book of Acts that the early church was obedient to what was commanded and commissioned, but they moved as those who believed Christ was in action with them by the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit was 'the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:18), and that all his powers were and are present and active in bringing Christ's salvation to all nations thus bringing the *eschaton* to its *telos*. We have many accounts of what has happened in the world from the time of Christ's exaltation to rule over this age if we wish to interpret and understand Christian Messianic history. In the 20th century a subject and discipline called 'missiology' was introduced and we can be greatly aided in knowing what has been done in relation to mission in these two millennia. I am sure we are grateful for all the labours expended in this pursuit, and we should take advantage of them whilst at the same time being aware of the sovereignty of the Father, the active Kingship of His Son and the powerful action of the Holy Spirit. To repeat what we have observed so many times, we need to know the ecclesia is not its true self if its main purpose and action is not to proclaim the Kingdom, to call men and women into the Kingdom by repentance, faith and the new birth, and themselves to suffer for it, even to martyrdom. It is not its true self if it fails to recognise the reign and rule of Christ, to obey him as Lord and to be ever filled with the power and love of the Holy Spirit.

What then do we say to those ask, '*How* do we do this? What ought to be *our principles?*' We should say, 'Whatsoever he says to you, do it!' Seeking a 'how to?' can be putting off the moment of action for *how* can we unless we know *how*? It can

also mean we think we are the subjects (doers) who use means instead of being Christ's means as he uses us. Jens Christensen in his book *Mission to Islam and Beyond* takes a chapter headed 'Means' and shows that we cannot develop the 'how to?' The quote will help us to know how the apostolic church went about preaching the gospel:

In this and all the following chapters it is being taken for granted that you, yourself, are a captive of Christ, that He is your Master. If this were not so, if you were not a captive of our Lord, you would not have heard His command to proclaim the Gospel, nor would you be interested in what this book may have to say to you. But now, being a captive of Christ, you desire to be obedient, you wish to live and work according to His good pleasure. But you know that doing so is not easy, for we live by faith and not by sight. *How* is the command of Christ to be carried out by *you*? If you could be dead sure about this 'how', your act of obedience in carrying it out would no longer be a 'walking by faith', you could then use your intellect and get on with the job, without constantly referring back to Christ. As it is, you cannot. Daily you come back, hoping to get a clearer, better idea of the teachings of our Lord and His apostles. Faith—walking and working by faith—makes you dependent on your Master. Man is, however, always up against that very natural sin of wanting to walk and work by sight, and not by faith. The work we do must at least 'make sense', it must be such that people will not say we are crazy, devil-possessed or 'Samaritans'. They said that about our Lord, but in some undefined way we seem to think it is just not the right thing to say about us. The 'Cause' might suffer. Of course, the disciple is not above his Master but, even so, we prefer to avoid facing up to situations of this kind, if we can.¹

This means, according to Christensen, that there is no 'science of mission' as such, i.e. an examination of the facts of mission and then the adducing of principles from the procured knowledge and so the development of their application in the form of methodology. This could mean that we would be walking by sight and in that sense would not be walking by faith since God is the One who is on mission. If missiology can help us then it can do this by helping to clarify what God wants us to do and to be as we are on mission with Him as His means. In other words we need to see what we have been seeking to see in all our studies, namely what God is about in creation, in its time and history and what is His goal for history. If this can be called 'the science of history' then so be it, for surely Scripture provides us with all the knowledge we—as His means—need to know of what He is about. Knowing what God is about does not make us experts in bringing it about but it enlightens us to what we are to be about in His will and by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit in this present age.

THE PRESENT AGE IS THE LAST AGE OF GOD'S MISSION

The present age as regards time is the *eschaton* which is leading to the *telos*. This is shown in Acts 2:14–21. Peter says that in accordance with Joel 2:28–32 these are the last days (2:17) leading up to 'the day of the Lord . . . the great and manifest day' (2:20). Paul talks of this age and that (age) which is to come, thus distinguishing the two. He speaks of this age (*aeon*) as 'this present evil age' (Gal. 1:4), and the 'age [*aeon*; course] of this world [*kosmos*]' (Eph. 2:2), and uses *kosmos* and *aeon* interchangeably in 1 Corinthians 1:20. John the apostle speaks of the world (*kosmos*) generally as evil and says, 'the darkness is passing away'. In 1 Corinthians 7:31 Paul talks about the fashion (*schema*) of this world (*kosmos*) as passing away. When related to the ruler of this world (Satan) this age is an evil one, but Satan is never depicted as

¹ *Mission to Islam and Beyond* by Jens Christensen (NCPI, Blackwood, 2002), p. 13. Originally titled, *The Practical Approach to Muslims*, it was published by his widow Mrs. M. Christensen and the North African Mission.

ruler of God's created world and of His creatures and people, for 'the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof' (Ps. 24:1; 1 Cor. 10:26).

Some who regard this age as troubled look to an age when all things will be at peace and Christ's rule will bring love and joy and purity of living so that the evil age will have passed into the good age. This fits certain prophetic interpretations of the millennium or that which is post millennium. We will not here venture into these interpretations or seek to evaluate them but work on the Joel–Acts order of things, namely the preaching of the gospel in all the world and the climactic conclusion of this—the day of the Lord. This age, whether looked at from its evil action under the Devil or its ultimately triumphant nature under Christ as King, is an age of great conflict. Those who see Christianity as an ideology will see the gospel as the panacea for all ills effecting the marvellous and pacific time of Isaiah 11:1–9 and passages kindred to it. There can be no doubt that Christ is King over this age and that he is at work as described 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 is not an ideology working out this age to perfection, but the King working the creation to its sanctification, purification and glorification. The age itself will always be convulsive and we will be disappointed if we look for world peace before the day of the Lord. Matthew chapter 24 tells us that until the coming of the Son of Man there will be wars, conflict, convulsions and upheavals:

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?' And Jesus answered them, 'Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Christ," and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved' (Matt. 24:3–13).

The teaching of Jesus includes not only the ultimate last day, but also the days of the defeat of Jerusalem and the polluting, pillaging and destruction of the temple as happened in 71 AD. Some commentators see two 'comings'. In any case this will be a troubled age so that Christians should not be shocked by the hideous things which will happen within it. For many it will appear that Christ is anything but triumphant. The point to be made is that this is the age of Christ's reigning and the age when the church is God's means of proclaiming the Kingdom and opening it to many. Against the arrogance and aggression of Satan, Christ will seem to be an absent person, far removed from the catastrophic scene and appearing not to be victorious, but the opposite. The age will close with the defeat of all evil, the vindication of Christ as King and his people as 'a kingdom and priests to our God', and 'they shall reign for ever'. When we see these two sides to the present age, then we will not be deterred by the odds nor 'love [our]

ives even unto death'. The dreadful events and outrageous evil will not crush us. If, however, we see them as the defeat of Christ we will lose heart as in 'men's hearts failing them for fear'. What we must understand is that this present age as the eschaton is a most wonderful age. The gospel could not be preached, as such, until Christ had formed it through his life and ministry.² Men and women who have believed in God in previous ages surely received salvation, and the prophets had remarkable views of the Messiah to come, but to us the things of the gospel have been revealed, things they desired to look into. Having had the gospel formed for us we can now rightly talk of 'the power of the gospel', 'the power of the cross', 'the power of his resurrection' and 'the power of the Holy Spirit'. The testimony of history will be that God's people lived in the light of His Kingdom and that 'a multitude that no man can number' has been redeemed and that 'the sword of the spirit which is the word of God' has smitten the nations and brought many to salvation. When the *telos* comes it will be seen that Satan has never accomplished anything. His imitations and counterfeits have never wrought anything. His powers—so called—have been parasitic upon the good but at the end this will be finished. The glories accomplished by the gospel of Christ through the Holy Spirit will be marvellous as we tell them out.

TELLING OUT THE GOSPEL IN THIS AGE

There has been much debate about whether what is called 'the Great Commission' is in the imperative or not. I think it can be successfully shown that in the four Gospels, and especially in their endings, Jesus gives *direction* as to what they will do rather than commanding them to do it. For example in Matthew 28:18–20, verse 19 'Go [going] therefore make disciples of all nations', i.e. they will have gone and the command is to disciple the nations rather than one to go. I think this can be seen to be the spirit of Luke 24:46–49. If there is a command it is to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Mark 16:15 the going is again a participle—going—which is presupposed. The command is to proclaim the gospel to all the creation. In John 20:21–23 (cf. John 17:18) Jesus puts the sending on a high level, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you'. Having said all this I think we should be careful not to put imperatives into the indicative lest we withdraw the power from the imperative. I have said elsewhere that the measure of a true human being is to love to be commanded and so to be one with God's will rather than be induced to do it by the seduction of the will. This latter takes away the dignity of being one, voluntarily, with God in His plan and purpose for creation. The disciples were one with Jesus in doing his Father's grand will and purpose.

Johannes Verkuyl in his book *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* makes a most interesting point in his Epilogue. Having completed his splendid book on mission he adds this note, 'A. A. Ruler used to say that if a theology of the apostolate really got going, it would produce an earthquake so violent that every single theological discipline would feel the shock waves. He may well have been right. At least the earthquake has hit Christology and the view of the salvation Christ brings. Missiology definitely must increasingly function as a seismograph for the rest of theology.'

I find this a fascinating statement. Not being a missiologist nor even the son of one, I am not sure of the nature and function of such a person. I repeat what I have said above, 'If missiology can help us then it can do this by helping to clarify what God wants us to

² See P. T. Forsyth's *The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1987, reprint of 6 articles).

do and to be as we are on mission with Him as His means. In other words we need to see what we have been seeking to see in all our studies, namely what God is about in creation, in its time and history and what is His goal for history.' Working on the basis of Christensen's description of mission—i.e. God is the subject, we are the means He uses to carry out His object, which is mission, that which effects salvation in sinners, then I do not quite know what is a missiologist. I try to discover this gift in the Scriptures although, of course, I do not expect to find the word 'missiologist'. If he is simply a prophetic exhorter, explicator and encourager in the ministry of mission then anyone could be included in this category.

I have been impressed by a thoughtful book, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth* by Andreas J. Kostenberger and Peter O'Brien, subtitled 'A Biblical Theology of Mission'.³ It seems to me these two theologians have produced a helpful book, showing us biblically what mission is and what God is about in it. O'Brien was a missionary in India and has been a Lecturer in New Testament for many years in a Sydney theological college and writes substantial commentaries. Kostenberger is an Assistant Professor in New Testament in a seminary in the USA and writes extensively regarding missiology. Their book is most helpful as a treatment confined wholly to the Scriptures. Other books on missiology help us to get a picture of what the church has been about in the last two millennia.⁴

Returning to A. A. Ruler quoted above and fastening on the statement, 'if a theology of the apostolate really got going, it would produce an earthquake so violent that every single theological discipline would feel the shock waves', we would examine what Ruler meant. It would have been helpful if Verkuyl had defined his terms for I would take 'apostolate' to mean the teaching of the apostolic truth in what could be called 'the apostolic way', out of which came the apostolic people, the ecclesia, the people of the Holy Spirit. We know that Paul claimed to be an apostle and therefore would insist his authority and responsibility to teach what he did and in the way he did. He would oppose any 'gospel' which differed from that communicated to him directly by the Lord (cf. Gal. 1:6–16; 1 Cor. 9:16–27; Rom. 15:17–21). The apostles taught as those commanded and accredited by Christ and the earthquake through the apostolate sent the new people of God across the world. Is Verkuyl saying that this is the theology we need, or is he saying we need a new theological apostolate to fill out all the implications of the first apostolate implications for the age in which we now live, since two thousand years have happened with immense changes and we need to attend to these? I do not know but it seems to me that our blunderings have been innumerable in what we call 'missionary work', and yet in spite of these there have been powerful movements in Third World countries with virtually no missiological consciousness and little understanding of Cartesian reasoning, the Enlightenment and Modernity and Post Modernity.

³ Published by Apollos, IVP, Downers Grove, 2001.

⁴ These books are Hendrik Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Edinburgh, 1947, first published 1938); J. H. Bavinck's *An Introduction to the Science of Mission* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, Philadelphia, 1960, first published in Dutch in 1954); Roland Allen's many books, starting with *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours* (World Dominion Press, 1956, first published in 1912), see also *The Ministry of the Spirit* subtitled 'Selected Writings of Roland Allen', ed. by David M. Paton (World Dominion Press, 1960); *The Responsible Church and the Foreign Mission* by Peter Beyerhaus and Henry Lefever (World Dominion Press, 1964); J. Blauw's *The Missionary Nature of the Church: A Survey of the Biblical Theology of Mission* (McGraw Hill, New York, 1962); David J. Bosch's *Transforming Mission*, subtitled 'Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission' (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1991, as also *Believing in the Future* (Trinity Press International and Valley Forge, 1995); *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God*, by David Macdonald Paton (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996).

When it comes to telling the gospel to others in our present human situation what does that mean? It means as ever that we must know the gospel and tell it as we know it in whatever situation we may face others. Given in all the complexities of human history the gospel is still shared by the grateful redeemed with the needy unredeemed. If we attribute failure to have 'finished the task' as Lesslie Newbigin has put it, then let us realise afresh that the father of lies—the Devil—has not been absent from the church, nor left off trying to destroy or dishonour it. We must just go on proclaiming the gospel—whatever!—realising that we, the church, the people of Christ, are secure in God the Father (1 and 2 Thess. 1:1), who is all in all. We are at the same time in Christ and he is in us. He is present with us, through the Holy Spirit, and he is working from the throne in power as ever he worked on earth (cf. John 14:12–14). He is not simply a doctrine, a subject to be taught to others, but his person is working with us through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is *the* power of this age and his movement is irresistible and unstoppable because undefeatable. He has opened to us the great work of the Cross and Resurrection and shown us this is the source of personal redemption and the power of the Kingdom. He is the Spirit of witness to Christ and the truth. No matter what the situation he will enable us to witness, whatever form the witness may have to take. The *message* we give is the same gospel the apostolic church gave at the beginning, even if the speech forms and language forms are different.

The proclaimers of the early church went into situations as multi-cultural as they are today, when they were called upon to do so. They had a desire to do so, and their greatest delight was to see their fellow creatures delivered from darkness and coming into the light. There is no joy like joy. They lived amidst religious differences, cultural differences and national differences, for every age has these and in every age these have been no final barrier. Paul entered Corinth with only one thing in mind—to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. This cut through the cultural differences, varied thought patterns and other communication conditions to find the mark of the human heart. It was not even a theory about Christ which Paul proclaimed but the person of Jesus, and this they understood. They believed the word of Jesus. The gospel is by nature cross-cultural and the Spirit is supra-cultural, able to speak—and to make us speak—into the hearts of people. There is a language of love which can penetrate the heart in a way that human persuasion cannot do. As we have seen, he alone can fully communicate to the spirits of human beings. He alone can convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, and he chooses to do that through us. By him folk in every culture, nation, and gender have been shown that Christ is their Saviour and their Lord as well as King of kings and Lord of lords. In many lands today this is also how it is. As has been observed, 'they make much of Jesus'. They believe in him and his powers of forgiveness, cleansing, healing, emancipation and the like. In the Spirit, Christ is present amongst them. The joy of salvation has come to them in the new knowledge of God, and they have a future in this world and the next. They have become citizens of eternity.

We rightly observe that the West is sophisticated and that often the gospel we proclaim seems to send the message of the culture of the West. Properly proclaimed this need not and should not be the case. Often gifts and signs and wonders are known as they happened in the apostolate and continue to be known up to this day where the power of the Spirit is manifested. The facts of the matter are that in the Third World people have taken up the gospel with great fervour and the response to their proclamation has far outpaced the response to it in the West. It is true that the story of the church has in some cases been one of grievous mistakes and loss of the thrust that comes from grace—the acts of God's love. Many centuries have passed with erroneous practices. Roland Allen, a perceptive missionary, was born 1868 and died in 1949. In his

books, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Christian Church*, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* and *Missionary Principles*, along with other books and articles, he points to the way in which the Holy Spirit worked in the early church so that churches sprang into being and spread the gospel locally and subsisted in the truth.

If we ask, 'Why does not this happen today?' the answer is that it *is* happening in many lands and peoples. The bottom line is that a forgiven sinner, a person born of the Spirit, cannot but tell others. That is how churches come into being and how they grow. The joy of salvation cannot be contained in a local assembly. It spills over from that assembly and other churches are born. If, however, evangelising is proselytising then this will not happen. If the promises of aid of any kind are made in order to induce conversion then the work of proclamation will die, or a 'rice Christian' church will be formed without the dynamic of heartfelt salvation. Giving aid in cases of dire necessity is the responsibility of all human beings towards all others and should not be a power wielded to entice into conversion.

All this and much more that Allen taught is well known to missionary leaders today. Allen's teaching has been affective in the 20th century and indigenous churches have sprung up in many lands. His books will always be helpful when read. I, myself, went to what we call 'the mission field' and worked with what I had learned from him and his like-minded colleagues always in my own mind. That is still the case. What he had really done was to lead my thinking to the Bible and especially to the whole thrust of the New Testament, the power of the Cross, of the Resurrection, of the Word; all of which were, and are, released by the Holy Spirit. This, as I have said above, is still the case. I have never been dependent upon Allen or others, but upon the Scriptures and God speaking to my heart as I seek to work in His will. At the same time I greatly appreciate what I have been taught by others and I trust, in simplicity, that my own teaching has also been fruitful, bearing in mind that it is 'the fruit of the travail of his soul' which is always coming to fullness in us all.

We lack no accounts of the witness of God's people down through all ages. The accounts are there in the Scriptures and the records of history. One is tempted, here, to give personal accounts of others one has known, but it would be highlighting only a few of the many proclaimers. One interesting book is *Christianity Rediscovered* by Vincent J. Donovan,⁵ first published in 1978, again in 1982 in a second edition, and which has fascinated innumerable readers. It is the story of a Roman Catholic priest who worked as a missionary in Tanzania. He asked his bishop if he would allow him just to go to the Masai people and simply preach the gospel which had never been done in over one hundred years. The missionary method, so called, had been to teach the Masai in schools and get their goodwill by assisting with hospitals and the like but never to talk to them about God. The Masai had their own strong and proud way of living and of culture and felt no need to be taught the gospel. So far as they knew there was no gospel. The bishop thought the priest's request a strange one indeed but gave permission. Donovan began to move amongst the various Masai tribes and was disturbed to find that he himself had to learn what the gospel is. He persisted when there seemed to be no entrance into the minds of the tribal people. What puzzled his listeners was why the missionaries had not told them the gospel before if it really was all that important..

Donovan spends some pages discussing Roland Allen's principles (pp. 32–40) to which he had been introduced by a Lutheran colleague. We do not have time in this study, of course, to discuss all his teaching, but the Roman Catholic priest went about

⁵ First published by Fides/Claretian, Indiana, 1978, then by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, and finally SCM Press, London, 1982, the seventh impression being 1991.

his ministry and the outcome was quite remarkable. One day a Masai elder told him the word for 'faith' used by Donovan and his catechist was weak:

He said for a man to really believe is like a lion going after its prey. His nose and eyes and ears pick up the prey. His legs give him speed to catch it. All the power of his body is involved in the terrible death leap and single blow to the neck with the front paw, the blow that actually kills. This is the way the lion kills. And as the animal goes down the lion envelops it in his arms . . . and pulls it to himself and makes it part of himself. This is the way a man believes. This is what faith is . . . 'We did not search you out, Padri,' he said to me, 'We did not even want you to come to us. You searched us out. You followed us a way from your house into the bush, into the plains, into the steppes where our cattle are, into the hills where we take our cattle for water, into our villages, into our homes. You told us of the High God, how we must search for him, even to leave our land to find him. But we have not searched for him. He has searched for us. He has searched *us* out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end the lion is God.'

The book needs to be read and its value assessed. Whilst the preaching of the gospel was accepted by some of the Masai tribes, yet it was rejected by others, and later it partly lapsed among some but was then taken up by others who had formerly rejected it. Donovan returned home to the USA and in 1989 published a book, *The Church in the Midst of Creation*⁶ which shows his endeavour to apply principles amongst Afro-Americans which he had used in Africa. If you like, he used the Pauline way which brings churches into being which are fellowships and not organisations but rather organisms; people communities which have little regard for buildings and ecclesiastical structures and none whatever for their politics. Such new groups are ecclesial rather than ecclesiastic. We call them indigenous but we cannot say they are groups who have been indigenised for that would be implying they have been shaped according to some blue-print we have. They are really Christ being his body and knowing his members while working in their midst and through them to society. The last chapter of Donovan's book is powerful though some may not quite see the birth, life and goal of churches in the way he explains their action.

In viewing the two millennia of the church's activity there is much breast-beating and crying of '*Mea culpa*' for the mistakes the church has made in life and order and also in its ways of being on mission, or not on mission! There is much despair and also much fear evinced by missiologists concerning the various waves of adverse movements in history which have caused what are called 'paradigm shifts'. Bosch talks of six paradigm shifts in missiology, taking his cue from Hans Küng's various writings.⁷ They are: (i) The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity; (ii) The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period; (iii) The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm; (iv) The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm; (v) The modern Enlightenment paradigm; and (vi) The emerging ecumenical paradigm. I have not seen it written in missiology that these period waves have had anything to do with the battle of the two kingdoms, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The theology of Christ's present Kingship is also absent from surmise. What we do know is that the simple in faith and the humble in spirit have been the servants of God who have always kept the faith so that we could write a Hebrews 11 parallel account for this Christian era. We need to be ardent readers of church history and the expansion of Christianity, and keep up to date with its present

⁶ SCM Press, London, 1989, in conjunction with Orbis Books, Maryknoll.

⁷ In his book *Believing in the Future*, Bosch shifts from what seems was a condemnatory view of the Enlightenment to talking about 'the legacy of the Enlightenment', i.e. he saw also much good coming from the movement. His missiology is one related primarily to the West with its past and changing paradigms.

spreading.⁸ This footnote has in view folk who have read little church history. We should not then be entranced by the interpretations of missiologists without ourselves having our own understanding of church history. Foster's book *After the Apostles* shows us that some of the sign phenomena of the New Testament continued for centuries as it is rightly claimed that churches which are freshly growing in Third World countries manifest it today.

Interesting and helpful as these missiological paradigms may be, yet we seem to have forgotten that God is the subject, His people His means, and Man and creation the object. Man has always been affected by God who is the Missioner. We have forgotten that what is happening in the eschaton is with a view to the ultimate triumph and fullness of the Kingdom and eternity. We keep trying to walk and work by sight and not by faith. We have thoughtlessly disregarded what Christ has taught us regarding this age and what apocalyptic reveals to us of the action of God in this era. The gospel may well have to be preached against many and varying backgrounds but it is ever the power of God unto salvation. Nothing can be altered in its message for it to be presented in a better way. It is, we repeat, a scandal to the Jew (the religious) and a thing of foolishness to the Greek (the intellectually wise person). Even so, it is never to be presented with hostility, with patronage and condescension to others, but with assurance and authority, humility and compassion.

As I read so much writing by those called 'missiologists' I am grateful for all their helpful information and interpretations. At the same time, having lived as an evangelist and teacher in a prophetic way, I have seen churches act in what one would call 'the way of the apostolate' and have been heart-warmed by them. It is true that in the West we need to see more of the apostolic action, but it does happen. I have preached in many countries other than the ten years I had in Pakistan and without knowing the culture and customs of the peoples I have seen folk weep at the preaching of the gospel in every country where I have preached. This was not because I drew on their feelings by emotionalising them by emphasising the physical sufferings of Christ at the Cross, but because the love of God broke through to them by the Holy Spirit through the text of Scripture in showing them the necessity of the Cross as God's saving power for them perishing under judgment. I wonder, then, what qualifies us to talk about mission other than that we have been, and still are, wholly involved in it.

'THEN SHALL THE END COME': 'THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE'

Jesus in his Olivet discourse said, 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come'

⁸ Helpful books are two by John Foster *After the Apostles* (Anzea Publishers, Sydney, 2nd edition 1972, 1st edition SCM Press, 1951), and *They Converted Our Ancestors* subtitled 'A Study of the Early Church in Britain', SCM Press, London, 1965). Also see the 7 volumes, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* by Kenneth Latourette the first volume being published in 1937 and the last in 1945 by Harper and Row and by arrangement with Paternoster Press, Exeter. Also by Latourette the five volumes series *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age* subtitled 'A History of Christianity in the 19th and 20th Centuries' (Zondervan Publishing House, 1969). Another useful series is *2000 Years of Christ's Power* by N. R. Needham, being published by Grace Trust, London. Volume 1 'The Age of the Early Church Fathers', 1998, and Volume 2, 'The Middle Ages', 2000, will be followed by two more volumes. The one volume *A Short History of Christianity* by Martin E. Marty, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1959 is a useful publication. The classic 8 volumes *History of the Christian Church* by Philip Schaff in the 19th century was reprinted in 1979 by Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids. Another five volumes *History of the Christian Church* written by Henry C. Sheldon published in 1895 was reprinted in 1988 by Hendrikson, Peabody.

(Matt. 24:14). All would have to be appraised of the 'gospel of the kingdom'. Then it will be the time for 'the day of the Lord' as we saw in Acts 2:20. In Matthew 28:18–20 Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples 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 [*sunteleias*] of the age'. The *sunteleias* can be translated 'end', 'very end' (*NIV*), or 'consummation' as in 'climax', or 'close', of the age. It means that existence as we have known for millennia will be terminated, though consummated is a better idea. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:9–10, 'For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth'. The end and the fullness of time are the one. In Revelation 15:1 we read, 'Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for *with them the wrath of God is ended*'. This too is a wonderful thing, for what lies ahead, beyond the ending of wrath, is the fullness of love, never to be reversed.

In my book *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*,⁹ I put the proposition that three things mentioned in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are protological of the end, the *telos*, namely vocation, the sabbath and marriage. I think I would add 'the kingdom' if I were to revise the book, since Man was to be king over creation (Gen. 1:28). Even so, the three things mentioned are there through history awaiting their consummation. At the same time they are being realised in the continuing present. The other word for vocation is 'calling' which is that sovereign act of God commanding us to be covenant partners with Him in creation. It is Man's very being to do what God commands. Man is blessed so that he can carry out God's commission (Gen. 1:28). To be truly human is to desire to be commanded, for the command is the blueprint for what we shall do and what we do is not just live righteously as obeying a law, but righteously as being in the will of God and doing that will. Likewise in Luke 24:50–53 Christ blessed his disciples as he ascended. He had given them what we call 'the Great Commission'. The writer of Hebrews in 3:7 to 4:13 takes up the fascinating subject of sabbath rest, exhorting his hearers to 'strive to enter into the rest'—a seeming paradox. He points to this ultimate rest, 'So, then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God'. The third matter is the wedding to come in which all marriages take a part. It is the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Blessed are all who are invited to this glorious occasion.

These three—nay four—elements are mentioned because they are what lie ahead beyond the eschaton. Up to that moment the world will be in much chaos, much fear, much action of evil, but beyond it are these elements to be consummated for all eternity. The Kingdom into which Christ will induct the nations called the sheep, who were one with him in the work of his Kingdom, will be the Kingdom of God and His Christ (Matt. 25:31ff.). Now they shall see God face to face, and they shall be like Him (1 John 3:1–3) as they will be His true images in Christ. This means that the community of love and faith that works by love is at the same time the community of hope and so endures with patience the afflictions and tribulations of this present era. This has been the case since the time of Abel. Knowing they will be perfected in vocation in the new age as 'a kingdom of priests' gives substance to hope. Knowing they shall be the Bride to the Lamb further strengthens hope, and knowing they will enter into their rest for all eternity means they have a peaceful hope.

⁹ Published by Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 1997.

We need, now, to look afresh at the matter of kingdoms and the Kingdom of God and the consummating point in history where the judgments come, such as in the parables of the sheep and goats, the wheat and the tares, the haul of fishes where some are good and some bad. It will do us good to look again at the beastly kingdoms such as we find in the Books of Daniel and the Revelation. It must have been a strange world for Daniel to have lived in as a prophet and to have received the visions, to have been accepted at court and given security, then to face the reign of Belshazzar. Ronald S. Wallace puts it vividly, in his commentary on Daniel:

His interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream shows that he was already deeply conscious of the sheer vanity that could mark all attempts at empire building. But now in the new and more sombre vision of history that came to him at this stage of his life, instead of seeing, as before, the succession of coming world empires as four deteriorating parts in a magnificent but unstable colossus, he saw them as a series of four filthy and cruel *beasts*, arising out of, and belonging to, the wild slimy *sea* of this world's turbulent life (verse 3)—knowing only such chaos for their origin, and lusting only with an insatiable desire to spread cruelty and further chaos, each preying on its predecessor, and existing mainly to fight and devour. As the whole fearful drama was played out before his eyes his horror mounted, for each succeeding beast became more cruel and more monster-like than its predecessor. The face of humanity was blotted out in the struggle. The first beast alone had some nobility in its bearing and actually stood on its feet, and momentarily took on the appearance of a *man* (verse 4). But the cruelty became more cruel, and the brute force became more uncanny, and the whole culminated in a fourth beast whose savagery so surpassed, and was so different from, that of any wild animal known on earth that no comparison with any is made (verse 7). Whatever escaped its *great iron teeth* was ruthlessly *stamped* to death by its feet. Its most grotesque feature was its *ten horns* out of which sprang a *little horn with eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things* (verse 8). Its cruelty was thus shown to be capped by its pride. Had Daniel described it today its eyes would have flashed with devastating radial beams, and its nostrils would have exhaled nuclear poison.¹⁰

What is our reaction to these powerful words of their author? Is it to turn to more charming or comfortable words of the Scripture? How often do we turn to Daniel and the Revelation? Yet the kingdoms of this world have always been as the two books portray them. Then we should value more than ever the Kingdom of God and Christ the King as he is now bringing history to its close by putting down all such enemies and their dreadful rulers. With the memories of World War 2 in which some 50 million people were killed and the pictures before us every day of homicides and suicides in our own society and genocides in others, how can we not understand the terrible depravity of humans, including our own selves? Yet we rarely turn to the Revelation where seals and trumpets and bowls of wrath are doing their judgmental works throughout the world. Yes, but at the same time all these things are under the control of the Father-King and the Son-King, and the Holy Spirit is energising God's people to be part of 'the armies of heaven' and as we have seen, gentle but mighty weapons have been given into their hands by which they are pulling down strongholds of evil. The Strong Man (Satan) is hard at work but the Stronger-than-the-Strong Man is in the ascendancy. He has worked the works of the Cross and the Resurrection, which can never be cancelled or reversed. We need to know all this for it is into this world and its conflicts that we go on mission, and the goal of mission, as we have said so many times, is the victory of the Kingdom of God when 'the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever'. If we refuse the conflict and the disturbance and the tribulation and do not face it all with 'the patient endurance'

¹⁰ *The Lord is King* subtitled 'The Message of Daniel' (published by IVP, Leicester, 1979 in the series 'The Bible Speaks Today'), pp. 120–1.

of the saints, then on the one hand we will not share in the ultimate victory and reign with Him for ever, and we will also not have our robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Those who trust Him for the outcome will live in the promise:

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 great songs of the Revelation take out all the sting and pain of the present battle:

After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever (Rev. 15:5–7).

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

'Great and wonderful are thy deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are thy ways,
O King of the ages!
Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord?
For thou alone art holy.
All nations shall come and worship thee,
for thy judgments have been revealed' (Rev. 15:2–4).

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

The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price (Rev. 22:17).