

## about this book . . .

Loneliness and restlessness have always been part of human experience. Can there be a lasting and genuine solution to this problem? The author of this book thinks so. He is sure that the presence of God in the human heart can be a reality, and can lead to genuine intimacy with other human beings. In a day when the last bastion of human intimacy has been breached—i.e. the sexual one—men and women are discovering that true intimacy is vanishing.

Knowing the Presence of God is not a new thing in human history. The mystics have long sought this intimacy and have used the language of human sexuality to symbolize this deepest union of all—that between man and God. Whatever service has been rendered by the mystics has been outmoded and outclassed by the coming of God in the flesh, in Christ. He proved—and proves—to be the way to wholesome and eternal intimacy with God.

This book—which researches the union of God and man—should be read. It can lead into participation in The Everlasting Presence.

*Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, writer, missionary, and family man, as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live. Some have found his books life-changing.*

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# THE EVERLASTING PRESENCE



**GEOFFREY BINGHAM**

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The Splendour of Holiness  
The Things We Firmly Believe  
True Preaching: the Agony and the Ecstasy  
Truth—the Golden Girdle  
The Way and Wonder of Worship

# *The Everlasting Presence*

Geoffrey Bingham

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## *Foreword*

### **'I NEED THY PRESENCE'**

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So sang John Newman in his famous hymn, 'Lead Kindly Light'. The hymn explains why he needed the presence of God. He could not face the demands of living, of doing, and of facing death without the Presence. As our book seeks to show, every human person needs the presence of someone. Today a certain measure of teaching is being given on having 'a soul-friend'. Whether this particular approach to close friendship is good or not, it shows the need for human intimacy.

The primary question is whether the presence of God is indispensable to a human being—indispensable to him being truly human. Agur, son of Jakeh of Massa, knew it required much to be truly human. He said to Ithiel and Ucal,

Surely I am too stupid to be a man.  
I have not the understanding of a man.  
I have not learned wisdom,  
nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.

Being a man is a demanding occupation, and it requires wisdom and a personal knowledge of God. In many faiths and religions approaching God is a serious and responsible matter. Devotees do not easily claim intimacy with their deity. Paul the apostle spoke of 'the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see.' Here intimacy is not easy, but then Israel knew God was 'enthroned on the praises of Israel', i.e. He dwelt—at least symbolically—at the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant with the outstretched wings of the adoring cherubim. Worshipers could think of Him dwelling in the midst of them, and sometimes manifesting His Shekinah glory, i.e the glory of His presence.

All that seems far away from our modern world. We are confronted with so many 'presences' in the forms of many leaders, heroes, and stars in entertainment, sport, advanced technology and science, that we need never feel alone. Yet it is an age of loneliness. Man still needs a presence, but he surely needs *the* Presence. Nothing gives him the joy and fulfilment that he needs. Our T.V. screens are largely occupied with the sexual presences which are supposed to bring the best of intimacy, but they seem dryly unsatisfying. The most intimate of all human acts—sexual union—becomes a repetitious happening without essential oneness. It is attempted union outside true union. Perhaps it is the most un-ontological of all things. It is a passing presence, often tantalizing, often so empty that it brings anger and disappointment—two regular elements of human guilt.

Even in Christian experience God's presence can be

more an idea than a personal reality. Theology must be the living word of God Himself or theology will block off the Father, the Son and the Spirit from their primary work of coming to dwell in a human being. Whilst the concept of God indwelling us may not be easy to grasp, the experience of that reality is not denied to us. 'Christ lives in me!' must be one of the most dynamic sayings of the new man. All our theology and doctrine is livingly embodied in this man. He translates himself into the action of our lives. That is when our hearts are 'strangely warmed within us', for Christ has come to live there.

Our book takes up the theme of God's presence in His creation, in the nations, among His people, and in the heart of each child of His. It also takes up the loneliness of man without God—the denial of the intimacy that should be His by creation. One trusts that the unmasking of this terrible loss, and the separation from the living God which is its cause may prompt some to read this present book with deep attention. Few, these days, attend deeply to what they read. Television—of all the media—presents itself as the authentic presence, the real thing. Like all things which become idols it demands we give it entrance, that it be our sole presence. All idols make demands, because, by nature of the case, God indwells His worshippers, and these other idols insist that they indwell us.

Understanding these things this book may not be just another to read. It may prove to be heart-transforming and life-changing as we realize His Presence is for us.

*Geoffrey Bingham*  
*Coromandel East, January 1990*

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## CHAPTER ONE

*The Battle of the 'I Am'*

The baby, scarcely born into the world, felt the warmth of its mother's love, and seemed to delight in that security. Then there came that slight pressure to do this or that—the compulsion of authority—and the little body stiffened, just so much. The conflict of two wills was beginning. The child listened to the father's command—supported by the mother—and a sense of loneliness, of alienation from the two who loved it began to take its place, the wills in silent conflict. The adolescent stared with barely concealed anger at its parent and said, 'I have discovered I am an individual. I want to live my life.' The dislike was of restriction, the hedging around of a will that needed to be free.

The young man adored her—his wife—and he wanted only their oneness, but he noticed, very early in the marriage, that she desired to be free of his images of what a

wife should be, and what marital oneness ought to be. She fretted under the domination of his maleness and his purpose for them both. The seeds of separation were sown silently in event after event. For her part she desired the autonomy that alone makes for mutual freedom. She was irritated that he could not understand this. Even so, he was not without the suspicion that she was trying to assert her view of life on him. Her remarks—quiet and unaggressive as they seemed to be—threatened him no less than his did her. The ‘I ams’ were in silent conflict. It might be thought that a crack was developing in the foundations of the marital union.

Every person ought to be emancipated from humanly devised strictures. There is no limit to what a human being can experience. Once—at creation—this was how it was. Only the fallenness of man demands some provisional authority, but education and liberal training should soon dissolve even this—so the teaching goes.

She was a wife who had helped to rear their children, who had given her time and abilities aiding them when they did not understand—shaping them towards maturity. He, too, had helped, but for the most part had been busy earning the money and possessions they had needed. Now that was virtually over. The children, being married, were having their own children. A new vista of life spread out before her—the adventure of being herself, finding her own powers, shaping a new and rich vocation. It was not too late. He, himself, had thought of later life as a time of discovery, a new era of creative freedom, a quiet being, discovering and living together.

Everyone is his or her own person. However could it have arisen that some should be servants of others, that

such restrictions should descend on the human race? True freedom is exhilarating, something to exult in, something in which to fly free as do the birds over the landscape, or to move swiftly as does the antelope on the veldt or the fish in the vast ocean. Freedom is for all.

So runs the myth of autonomous self. It is a pleasant—even beautiful—myth which has always haunted the human race. The most beautiful of all creatures whispered to the primal couple, ‘You shall be as God.’

Each echoed, ‘A god! Can I be a god?’

The thought was a fascinating one, the initiator of a delirious joy. ‘I, of myself, can be myself’, was the dream. And why not? ‘I, within myself, have unknown powers and incredible capacities.

‘This surely does not mean that I have to be in competition with every other, or even any other creature in the universe. We surely have great social powers to relate, to have intimacy, and yet not destroy the autonomy.

‘Autonomy! Self-rule! Self-determination! All of this without having to hurt or destroy one another. This is the delightful “I am” of each person.

‘By all means let God have His “I am” and each of us have his or her “I am”, and let none conflict with another.

‘If we have not quite achieved this, let us not be disheartened. We are learning. Had we had a more sensible start we would long ago have learned it. Now—in this enlightened day—we are learning rapidly. We have broken down the barriers erected by superstitious and blindly moralistic generations. We are emerging into the light, where everybody has right of choice about everything.

‘What we see on the horizon is not an Eldorado, or a mythical Utopia, but what it was always intended should be—a humanity fully free, and without foolish restrictions. No spirit needs to fret at needless limitations, nor know curbs upon its creative powers. Everyone is a Jonathan Seagull, or something.’

There surely is no question regarding the anger that builds up in the human spirit when its will is circumscribed, when its personal desires are thwarted, and its intentions impeded. Each, by nature, wants freedom to carry out the plans and ideas that come to the mind. There is not one of us who does not visualize the sweetness of pure freedom. We all believe in the sanctity of each human will. We recognize the indignity of that will being restricted by another. Oceans of anger accumulate across the human race because of the gagging of our wills, and violence is always impending because of the vast injustices done to the human spirit. Even so, one day we will all be free, and even retribution will not wait in the wings—biding its time.

The babe, the child, the youth, the adult, the middle-aged and aged persons are following an illusion if they think it is possible for a human being to be autonomous. Think of millions of autonomous human units, and see if there will not be conflicts of a most complicated nature. There can be no question that human beings do have great powers and capacities, and that they can develop them. Even so, common sense—and experience—tells us that man has never managed his world, and is not likely to be able to do so, in spite of some high optimism here

and there, especially with ‘black-and-white’ young people. By ‘black-and-white’ we mean that many young people can-not see all the issues involved, and battle aggressively to assert what they are sure is right.

The statement of Jeremiah is most pertinent, ‘I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.’ The prophet is saying that man is not complete in himself, and therefore cannot determine his end, and certainly not his way to the desired end. He may set a course for himself, but he will not know whether it is *the* course and so *the* way.

Jeremiah, of course, was the man who said, ‘The heart [of man] is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt.’ That is, a man cannot be at one with himself, let alone have enough knowledge of all things to plan out his way of life. Certainly he can never determine the end, and make sure that end is good—no matter how much he tries.

It is no wonder Jeremiah was thought to hold pessimistic views of man, but in fact he simply held realistic views.

The question then is, ‘Does man have an authentic being? Can he claim properly to be an “I am”? In what sense can every human being be an “I am” in the face of millions of other “I am”s?’ Along with this is the even more significant question, ‘How does man have an “I am” in the face of God who is *the* “I am”, i.e. the “I AM”?’

It was in pursuit of the answer to these questions that I believed a book on the holy and loving Presence of God would be good to write. Personally, I felt the exercise and research that would be required would be of great benefit

to me, let alone to others who might read it.

Let me then say that as I see it, no human being is truly a human being without a personality, a self-consciousness, and an activity issuing from his—or her—self-being. At the same time, a human being is not an authentic person unless he is wholly in union with God, i.e. completely dependent upon Him. I see man as only being man when his life and actions are contingent upon God. I am sure that this was how he was when created, and how he will be at the end-time when he is fully re-created.

That is, man's 'I am' is authentic only when it is in union with, dependent upon, and operating from, God Himself. The I of God—i.e. who *is* God—is wholly other-related and other-considering. This is how a true human 'I am' should be, but in fact will not be until it is in God, one with Him, abiding and dwelling in Him, and drawing its actions from Him.

The truth is that man is not a way *in* himself. He cannot devise a true way *from* himself. He can only walk in or on a way, and whilst he may devise some sort of a way, it will be futile. Unless he learns his creaturely nature and comes to accept it, he will always be frustrated by what he calls his finiteness, for he will surely attribute infinite being to God, and feel it is unfair that he has been limited to finitude.

This last thought is untrue, i.e. that man is limited to finitude. The question of man's finitude or God's infinitude does not arise. It is the question of God's Creatorhood which arises, and so of man's creaturehood. Within the realm or perimeter of his creaturehood, man has so much scope that he can never fill it out or utilize it all. In one sense the dimensions of his creaturehood are as vast

to him as are the dimensions of Creatorhood to God. Man need never feel restricted or encumbered by his creatureliness since it is the very essence of his being. Man who asserts his own 'I am' sees a relationship with God as an encumbrance to his personal freedom.

This, then, leads us on to the heart of the matter which occupies the whole of this book, namely *the holy loving Presence of God with man*. This was present at creation, and so is necessary for man's humanity to be true and total. The story of man's virtual rejection of the Presence of God, the distortion in human existence that separation from the Creator brought, and the dogged insistence by God of always being present to man, is the story of our humanity in history, and the goal God has set for us out of His grace. It is the story of God's relationships with man.

## Chapter Two

*God Being Present to Man*

In biblical history we have many instances where God has appeared to man, revealing Himself to the degree which was appropriate for His purposes. Because He created man He did not reveal Himself to them, in the sense that He had not been hidden from them. Creation of man must mean He had relationship with them—such as commanding them to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth and have dominion over it; such as forbidding them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and such as walking with them in the cool of the day.

These things show the primal couple were one with God. It was the testing of them by the sinuous serpent which determined whether they would hold to the word God had spoken, or to a new and treacherous word of the superb serpent. When they chose the latter they rejected God's word, that is, they refused His holy utterance from

Himself. So they died. They were afraid of His appearance. They sought to hide from it. The word God had spoken to them remained poised in their memories, and it is still present to the human race. The couple tried to cover their guilt. In this sense they were dead to God. In Paul's word of Romans 5:12, the whole race—i.e. the race in Adam—died to God.

That is why God's personal manifestations of Himself to men and women must be seen as acts of sheer grace. We do not mean that God absented Himself from man, but that there was an absence of the Presence<sup>i</sup> which was—and is—man's most painful experience of this world. We mean that the separation of God's personal Presence from man brings intolerable anguish, even though that Presence would be unbearable to man who wishes to assert his own 'I am' independently of his Creator. When Paul approvingly quoted the Greek poet who had said, 'In him we live and move and have our being,' he was saying that there never has been an absence of the Presence, but rather that the Presence is such that it is torment to man. The 'absence of the Presence' is really the 'presence of the Absence'. It means God is absent from man as regards man's desire not to know Him and to live apart from Him, but is present in that He will not let man go, and such Presence is painful and confronting, and something about man must be active. We mean man is active in refusing the Presence, because the Presence is judgemental, invoking wrath upon the deliberate unbeliever. God, for His part, is Creator, and so will never abandon any element of that creation, let alone the creature, man. Whether for rescuing man or bringing judgement to him, God is never absent.

Man's action in refusing the Presence causes him to become idolatrous, recasting the true Deity in forms of a lesser deity and other deities, rationalizing it all so that he can still worship, so that he can escape the awful void left by the absence of the Presence, and so that he can utilize all things to feed and foster his 'I am'. He must devise his 'way' so that he can walk somewhere.

We now return to our statement—'In biblical history we have many instances where God has appeared to man, revealing Himself to the degree which was appropriate for His purposes.' These instances are many. Abel was a man who was a prophet, and men cannot become prophets until first God has shown Himself to them, and drawn them in to Himself. 'Enoch walked with God' is as close to the paradisaical as can be possible. 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia' is similar. Jacob at Bethel, Isaac on Mount Moriah, and Moses at the burning bush are, no less, occasions of revelation. Judges, kings, prophets and priests—so many of them—saw God in His manifestations. Thomas saw Him in the risen Christ, Paul on the road to Damascus, Augustine in the hour of his realized depravity, and the other saints in their bewildering variety of states. Blaise Pascal<sup>ii</sup> has left us a description which might fit any one of us who has seen 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'. There can be no doubt that God reveals Himself personally to human beings, and His purpose is simply the act—i.e. to reveal Himself and bring His Presence to the recipient.

God, of course, reveals Himself continually through His ever-present and active media, such as creation, the prophets, dreams and visions, the word of law, the

related action of conscience, His deliberate acts, His judgements, His Son, His Spirit and His church, but these media are ignored because man wishes to keep his 'I am' intact. Where God is represented as indispensable to man's total being as an 'I am' in the I AM, then man sees his desired autonomy to be threatened. He has invested everything in not knowing God. Whilst he knows of the existence of God, he must insulate himself against His Being. Hence his rationalizations of religion, philosophy, agnosticism, atheism, and his attempt to control religions which claim to be revelation of God.

If God were only to reveal Himself irresistibly to certain persons and not to others, we might think these manifestations to be arbitrary, i.e. 'off the cuff'. The continuous presence and action of His dynamic media give the lie to this thought. If a man would know God then he could, but he does not will to do so. When God decides to know a man then he comes to know God as Paul puts it clearly in Galatians 4:8 (cf. I Cor. 8:1-2). Man can never excuse his ignorance of God by saying God did not choose to know him, for Paul says the very fact and communication of creation makes man guilty for not knowing God. He also claims that man deliberately 'suppresses the truth by acts of unrighteousness', which indicates man knows in some way the truth he refuses to know. This is because he 'exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator'.

It is interesting to see that man who rejects God still demands His Presence, even though it is intolerable. Is this because he knows that the deliberate absentation of God by His own decision is too dreadful to

contemplate? Cain did not wish to go out from the Presence of God. The writer of Psalm 22 cried out at being forsaken by God, and this was properly interpreted by Christ in the hour of his own dereliction—the hour of the Cross. Man dreads to think he might come to the place where such a cry as this would be wrenched out of him, i.e. ‘My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?’ Is this because it is a thought too terrifying to man to believe that somehow, at some time, and because he deserves it, he will be left to his own ‘I am’, which then may prove him to be—and for ever—an ‘I am not’? Was this what the philosopher meant when he cried, ‘I, myself, am hell!’?

### THE JOY AND TERROR OF ‘GOD WITH US’

It seems clear that God did not appear to men and women simply for the sake of appearing to them. Doubtless that manifestation was life-changing to the recipients, but it was always with a view to God’s action in history and man’s corresponding vocation. For the moment we shall have to leave the mystery of why some had faith in God and others did not. The fact of history is that there has always been a people of God, as also a people who were—and are—*not* people of God.

Abel was the first prophet. His ‘righteous deeds’ (I John 3:11–12) which Cain hated were not merely moralistic acts. The witness of sacrifice was that of faith. The dynamic nature of this evoked the dark hatred of his brother and the inevitable murder. Enoch’s ‘walk with God’

may seem to have been a deeply pious action, but Jude 14–15 tells us that this man Enoch was powerful in prophecy. Was he saved from such a doom as Abel’s by being translated? We cannot be blamed for having this thought, since the prophets are generally killed. What we are saying is that God’s Presence is always vocationally demanding, and is always linked with God’s purposive acts in history, acts which man keeps opposing because they threaten his own plans and his own desired goals. This, surely, is the key to God’s grace towards Noah, and His fellowship with that ‘preacher of righteousness’—that He saved him from both the violence of the world, and His own judgement upon it.

Cain’s objection to the *measure* of God’s punishment was an indictment on him—as though it were deserved. Cain’s argument in not wanting to be ‘hidden from Thy face’ was that he would be left exposed to death. Reassured that this would not be the case, ‘Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden’. We might meditate on the kind of operation he undertook out of the Presence of God. Certainly from the account we have it appears to be secular, and his descendant, Lamech, was of an even more arrogant and bitter nature than he. We are reminded that the prodigal son of Luke 15 went to a far-off country, not wishing to do in the presence of his father the lustful things he desired to do!

For those persons who may be of a somewhat mystical nature in devotion, the fact of God appearing to man and His Presence ever going with them, may be seen only as a thing of wonder, adoration and joy, and whilst this may be true in part, it is not all the story. It is a fact that God’s

Presence with Abel resulted in his being murdered. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, but not in the eyes of men. Abraham is clearly set out as a man who was a pilgrim and sojourner in this world. The hour of God's 'cutting the covenant' at Mamre must be described as 'dreadful', for 'As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him'. It is no true experience of the Presence of God which does not have its revelation of the lofty holiness of the Most High God. It is the awe which evokes 'the fear of the Lord' which is 'the beginning of wisdom'.

Jacob experienced the terror of awe at Bethel, and he wondered at Peniel how he could have seen the face of God and lived. Isaiah in the temple saw the glory of the Lord but it only served to convince him of his own unholiness, and he likewise wondered that he had seen God and lived. Moses at the burning bush was inclined to intrigue and put his critical faculty to work, only to be rebuked sternly. He hastily removed his sandals and worshipped. Later, when he wished to lead Israel into the promised land, God revealed His character to Moses in wonderful terms (Exod. 34:6-8), and we are told 'Moses made haste to bow his head towards the earth, and worshipped.'

The angel of the Lord who was called 'the angel of his presence' (Isa. 63:9) was the one who was seen. He was an intimate manifestation of God, yet was not God Himself. This seems to be the case when in the Pentateuch it appears that God gave the law to Israel, yet in Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:19, Stephen and Paul both state that it came through angelic mediation.

When, then, we speak of an angelic communication of the Presence of God, we are not saying God was not present in the events described, but that He was present after the manner of a theophany. Since God is Spirit, and does not have a form that can be seen, it is evident that He must be made manifest in a seen form such as theophany, or by His uttered word which communicates Himself. We will examine both of these elements more particularly later.

When, then, an angel appeared to Gideon, his terrified conclusion was, 'Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.' To this the Lord replied, 'Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die.' Only in this way could peace come to Gideon in the midst of terror. When the angel of the Lord appeared to the barren wife of Manoah, it was to tell her that she would have a son, Samson. She described the event to Manoah, 'A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of the angel of God, *very terrible*.' When the angel appeared to them both, Manoah said to his wife, 'We shall surely die, for we have seen God.' Again there was terror at seeing God. We observe in passing that Gideon and the parents of Samson were given revelations of God with a view to the outworking of covenant in the life of Israel.

Samuel's experience of God was a simple and rather gentle one, though nonetheless effective because of that. Elijah's experience was of a varied nature. He stated his relationship with God, 'As the Lord the God of Israel lives, *before whom I stand* . . .' The magnificent action of God on Mount Carmel in consuming the true sacrifice ought to have encouraged the prophet, but some

threatening words of Jezebel the queen sent Elijah fleeing into the wilderness. Twice he was ministered to gently by an angel, but later—at Mount Horeb—the powerful manifestation of God came to him, but not in the strong cyclonic wind, the terrifying earthquake and the consuming fire but in ‘the still small voice’. ‘And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.’ It was then he heard what God was saying to him.

The Book of Daniel describes the visitations of the angel Gabriel to the prophet. Later we will examine the event in more detail, but it is sufficient to say here that Daniel was to be given an understanding of God’s action in history, relating not only to Israel but to all the world. When Daniel saw the angel he swooned—‘I fell into a deep sleep’ (8:18). In 10:2–12 we have the account of another angelic visit. ‘So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me; my radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground.’

We might say that all these varying manifestations were revelations of the many aspects of God, but whether that were so or not, we know that the viewers of the theophanies went on to do the deeds God had commanded them. This would be as much true of the New Testament as of the Old. When the angel appeared to Zechariah—the one who was to be the father of John the Baptist—he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah.’ Mary was troubled by the greeting of the angel, if not by the angel himself, but was told, ‘Do not be afraid,

Mary, for you have found favour with God.’ When the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds ‘they were filled with fear’, but were told, ‘Be not afraid . . .’

We need not trace all other appearances of angels, but need, at least, to glance at the Book of the Revelation in which the appearances of angels were many. In particular John the Seer was attended by at least one angel (cf. 1:1; 19:9; 21:9; 22:8–9), and we see that John was so moved by the angelic visitant that he wished to worship him, only to be forbidden. We must keep in mind that every appearance of an angel to man is not a theophany, even though in some way it is connected with ‘the Presence’.

All of these events which have been mentioned have to do with God visiting His people. There are many more occasions which we have not recorded, but they can all be seen to be vital to the action of God and His plan. Whilst they tell us of human reaction—and response—to God’s visitation, the main point of them all is God’s forwarding of His plan, and His bringing it to its climax. Even so, it is a rich teaching given to us to know that God’s Presence as manifested in these forms is both awe-inspiring and wonderful. It is also confronting, facing us up to the reality of human relationship with God, and what we can expect from being one with Him. Perhaps there are all too few indications of this, and of the nature of man having fellowship with God.

That is why we need to pursue the matter further. It would not seem that by doing so we will be walking on forbidden ground, for the materials in Scripture are plentiful, and richly informative.

## CHAPTER THREE

*God Present to His World*

## GOD PRESENT TO HIS CREATION

Peter said that God is a faithful Creator. ‘Faithful’ in the Old Testament is the equivalent of ‘truthful’. That is, He cannot be the Creator of all things and not be true to His intention for that creation. Since He said of creation, ‘It is very good,’ then as Creator He must sustain that goodness or full functionality, and bring it to whatever goal He has planned for it. Warning man—creation’s key-figure—against the temptation to become autonomous, He, nevertheless, did not abandon man or the creation at the time of the Fall. The idea of God creating man and then forsaking him because of his failure does not fit with the idea of a concerned and faithful Creator.

The descent of man into sin, and the creation into the curse means only that God will rescue His world from its sin.

<sup>i</sup> Note that throughout the book we will refer to God’s presence as ‘the Presence’, but at times we will omit the capital P when we are referring to presence—even God’s presence—in general.

<sup>ii</sup> On the evening of Monday, 23 November 1654, Pascal had an ‘extraordinary assistance’ of God’s grace. His account of it was written on parchment, sown into the lining of his coat where it remained until the day of his death. The substantial part of it is reproduced here:

FIRE

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scientists.

Certainty, Certainty. Feeling. Joy. Peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

*Deum memum et Deum vestrum.*

Thy God shall be my God.

Forgetfulness of the world and all, except God.

He is to be found only by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Greatness of the human soul.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee.

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I separated myself from Him.

*Dereliquerunt me fontem aquæ vivæ.*

My God, wilt Thou forsake me?

May I never be separated from Him eternally.

‘This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.’

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ

I separated myself from Him; I fled Him, renounced Him, crucified Him.

May I never be separated from Him!

He is to be kept only by the ways taught in the Gospel:

Renunciation, entire and sweet.

This is the promise of Genesis 3:15, that the Tempter will be crushed, and this by ‘the seed of woman’. Long before He spoke in grace to Abraham, He spoke in grace to the human race. Even Cain knew a measure of grace. The Flood was a judgement, but one which helped to liberate the earth, although full liberation—as we see in the prophets—belongs to the last-time, the climax of history. Noah knew the grace of God, not only in being saved from the judgement of water, but also in the promise of the future that there would be no further judgement by a flood. God assured the preacher of righteousness that his family had a special place in His plan. He was concerned for Noah and his descendants, and would be faithful to His ‘fixed order’ (Ps. 148:5–6; Jer. 31:35–36) of creation.

Because of this, Noah said, prophetically, ‘Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. God enlarge Japheth, and *let him [God] dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.*’ An Aramaic (Jewish) Targum renders it, ‘He will cause his Shekinah [dwelling] to dwell in the dwelling place of Shem.’ This is the first indication—as such—of God dwelling with man, and doubtless it is linked with God’s covenant promise. Covenant with God was an agreement which was unilateral, i.e. God was the Initiator and the matter was of grace.

### GOD PRESENT IN THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

The Abrahamic Covenant introduces clearly the idea of God’s making of a special people. The promises to

Abraham that Abraham would be special to God, and God to him, are contained in the statement, ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ The promise that ‘I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be God to you and to your descendants* after you . . . and *I will be their God*’ spoke of an intimate relationship. Abraham had so much contact with God that he was called ‘the friend of God’ (Isa. 41:8), and theophanies were even in human form (cf. Gen. 15:1), so that when the theophany was finished ‘God *went up* from Abraham’ (Gen. 17:22) which means He had personally companied with him for a time.

The relationship between God and Abraham underwent a test in the offering up of Isaac on Mount Moriah. Here Abraham came to see how deep it was. He saw the God ‘who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist’ (Rom. 4:17). His belief in a God was not merely that of mental assent but one which was deeply personal and total. Likewise, Isaac, as he lay on the altar, witnessed the drama of that relationship, and knew himself to be in the line of such fellowship with God (Gen. 17:21).

‘The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia,’ Stephen told the Jewish Sanhedrin of his day. What did it mean for this young idolater with his father, grandfather, and other members of the family away there in Mesopotamia? What did it mean for God to appear to him? Well, just about everything. For a man to see God is an extraordinary event. To suddenly be confronted by God with His Being is as much—and perhaps more—than a man can experience. To be drawn to Ur of the Chaldeans,

then to go out into a place he did not know, i.e. to change from a sedentary to a nomad life—that is a radical revolution in a person’s life. To be given a vision of ‘a city to come’ is to have one’s present life truly significant in the light of what is yet to be. To have God visit—time and again—and each time to have His glory to con-front the spirit of man, that is to come to know what it is for God to dwell—even if only somewhat—with man. Revelation after revelation unfolded itself to Abraham, and he saw Sarah from a new point of view, Ishmael and Hagar from different vantage points, and Isaac as his beloved, on whom his future and the future of the nations depended. Who can scan the heart of Abraham on the night of the covenant sacrifice, or the day of the ordered offering up of his own son? Who can understand the impressions of the fine and mature old man as the promises of God soaked into him, and as he became the very friend of God—a term given to no other man on earth (cf. Exod. 33:11)? Who can tell the greatness that comes to a man when God dwells with him? Who can understand, that apart from God, the way of a man is not in himself, and then understand that it is, indeed, in God?

It was Jacob who pursued the covenant promises. God appeared to him at Bethel, telling Jacob that He was ‘the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac.’ Then He said, ‘I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.’ This was presence, and this was intimacy. Henceforward Bethel was—as its name indicates—‘the house of God’. The ‘house of God’ is the affirmation that God dwells with His covenant people.

The account of Jacob wrestling with God—i.e. the angel of God—at Peniel deserves close reading and thoughtful contemplation. It was no mere incident. Jacob was intent on receiving the blessing of God, and knowing the name of God, i.e. having a full revelation of His Being. The astonishing thing to Jacob was, ‘I have seen

God face to face, and yet my life is preserved’. Here the I AM of God met the Jacob ‘I am’ of carnal human endeavour and transformed it into a princely ‘I am’ of new worth. Again, we see the purpose of God in the intimate theophany. Subsequently, when God again met Jacob at Bethel at a yet later time, He confirmed to him the covenant promises as given to Abraham and Isaac, after which ‘God went up from him’.

### GOD PRESENT IN THE COVENANT WITH MOSES

We need to see that God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was expressed in His covenant with Moses, as later He would make a covenant with David, and then the New Covenant through Christ with his people. These covenants are all the one, whatever their particular purposes may have been in the flow of history and according to God’s specific intentions. AM

The suffering of Israel in Egypt caused the people under bondage to cry for help. We do not know whether it was to God they cried, and cried in virtue of the covenant, but in any case ‘God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob’, and made plans for their liberation from Egypt into Canaan. His theophany of the burning bush at Horeb to Moses was the revelation of Himself. Moses was to tell them, ‘the God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and when they asked, ‘What is his name?’ to tell them, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ He told Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’

Here, then, we see God moving to bring His presence first to Moses and then to His people. Whilst God spoke in dreams and visions to the prophets—even of Moses' time—yet of Moses He said, 'With him *I speak mouth to mouth*, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the Lord.' A kind of epitaph to Moses was, 'And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom *the Lord knew face to face*'.

The story of Moses is the story of Israel from its suffering in Egypt to the edge of the promised land. It is the story of a man to whom God spoke time and again. It seems there was scarcely a time in the last forty years of his life when God was not present to him. It was said of Moses that there was 'none like him for all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel.'

God directed him in all these things. Moses spent time with God on the forty days at Mount Sinai, beholding Him in a wonderful way and receiving the directions which were to be for the well-being and worship of Israel to their covenant God. Moses argued with God for his near apostate people who had made and worshipped the golden calf. He met the Most High in the tent of meeting where 'the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend'. Yet even all these things did not fully satisfy the hunger of this 'meekest man upon all the earth'. He insisted on knowing more, and doing what was right. 'Now therefore,' he told God, 'I pray thee, if I have found favour in thy sight, show me now thy ways,

that I may know thee and find favour in thy sight. Consider too that this nation is thy people.'

God's answer was '*My presence* will go with you, and I will give you rest.' Perhaps no more thrilling or comforting words have ever been spoken to a human being.

Moses wanted to seal the promises. His answer, too, is of great character. 'If *thy presence* will not go with me, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in thy sight, I and thy people? *Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?*'

Here, then, in history the great event had happened. God had appeared to a people, had chosen them within covenant and had promised His presence would always be with them. Had He not told Pharaoh, 'Israel is my first-born son'? Was it not written later that God had said,

Surely they are my people,  
sons who will not deal falsely;  
and he became their Saviour.  
In all their affliction he was afflicted,  
and *the angel of his presence* saved them;  
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;  
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

It was the dwelling of God with His people that became so prominent. God did not simply reveal Himself from time to time, and help from situation to situation. He made what we might call elaborate provisions for dwelling with them, His covenant nation. His command to Moses was, 'Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may

dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.’

There was to be nothing arbitrary about God’s dwelling. Nor was there to be any presumption on the part of the people, any easy familiarity with their Creator-Redeemer God. The tabernacle was to be in the midst of the camp, so that God was in the midst. The shape of worship was to teach His holiness and induce reverence. He would dwell above the mercy seat which was to be overshadowed by the cherubim. God’s promise was, ‘I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt *that I might dwell among them*; I am the Lord their God.’

Something of great importance had happened in Israel, but it was of importance to all the world. Whereas man had died to God, and his death throes had been seen down through all history, and man had been separated from the living God by the death and deadliness of his sins, now a new era was opening. God was dwelling with a race of His people. God was bringing His presence to bear upon this people, and the goal of it all was blessing to all the nations of the earth. Man was learning—even as a nation—what it was, and is, to know the presence of God.

Great prophet Moses—prince among men and worthy successor to your ancient ancestor Abraham—how was it with you and God? What questions we could ask you who spoke face to face with God as does a friend speak to his friend. What did you come to know as

you shared in manifestation after manifestation? You heard the words which themselves told the glory of God and were the glory of His character—‘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’. What did you learn on the Mount, not only of the wonderful and terrible law, but of Him whose glory you saw, and in which you lived those forty days? Was it all this that made you a man of compassion, and the meekest man on all the earth? Was it the glory you could not forget which took you through those demanding years with a nation that began as a rabble, that was rebellious and idolatrous, but for whom you were prepared to have your name blotted out of the book of life? When the end came and yet your eye was not dim, nor your natural force abated, was there regret for the incident in the wilderness when you twice struck the rock in your anger, profaning the Lord, or did the great grace of the Redeemer heal you of your failure, and set you moving towards Him ‘seeing him who is invisible’ so that you might have the true sabbath rest which is the crowning glory of creation? We hear rumours and intimations and have understandings of you in your psalms, and in the strong and noble songs you sang, for when a man sees God he sings as never any other time he sings. You have taught us what it is to have God dwelling in a man, as also what it is for a man to dwell in God.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## *The Presence, the Glory, the Angel, the Word, and the Spirit*

God was present to Israel. The ark of the covenant signified His presence for it was called ‘the ark of the covenant’ and ‘the ark of testimony’ containing as it did the two stone tablets of the law. How reverently was the ark to be handled in times of travelling, and how specific the instructions for its conveyance. Crossing into the promised land it was ‘the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth’ which was to pass over Jordan before the people, and in its passing the miracle of stopping the waters of the river took place. God was the living God. God was with them.

Later the ark became a thing to Israel almost of superstition. They took it out to fight their enemies the Philistines, and God broke their use of it as a mere fetish

by allowing it to be captured by the enemy, but then it was to the enemy’s hurt and humiliation. Dagon, the Philistine deity, fell face down before the ark leaving only the trunk of that idol intact. When the temple was built, the ark was placed in the holy of holies, and was a thing to be revered.

The glory of God was linked with the ark. When Eli’s daughter-in-law was giving birth to her child in her own death-throes, she heard the news of the capture of the ark by the Philistines and named her child ‘Ichabod’, saying, ‘The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.’

The glory of Israel was that God’s glory dwelt amongst them. By ‘God’s glory’ we understand the nature of God Himself. The Hebrew word *kabod* carried the idea of substantiality, something heavy, hence the ideas of wealth, honour, dignity and power. Other words such as *addereth*, *tiphara* and *tsebi* had the connotation of beauty, radiance, majesty, power and glory. Altogether the words conveyed the ideas of esteem, essential worthiness, reputation, prestige, fame, position and honour.

When Moses requested God to show him all His glory (Exod. 33:12—34:9) we might have expected that he would have been given visual representations of it, but the essential glory was communicated by *the word of God*, especially in the language of Exodus 34:6–7—the revelation of the very nature of God. Doubtless there were visual elements, and if so, then they, too, were interpreted by the word of God.

We have seen that the glory of God was symbolized in the ark of the covenant, but the whole covenant, the law,

the presence of God—the Shekinah—all combined to be the glory Israel knew. The glory of the idols was a transitory and foolish glory, one having no true substance. The worship of God was the worship of His glory—the glory which was seen in theophanies such as Isaiah witnessed in the temple where celestial creatures proclaimed the holiness of God—the *trisagion*—and said that the whole earth was filled with His glory, and it was this vision the prophets pronounced—that one day the earth would be filled with the glory of God and the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

At one with the glory was the Shekinah, the presence of God—the cloud of glory. Although the Hebrew word *Shekinah* (dwelling) is not present in the Bible, yet the glory-cloud of Exodus 13:21–22 (cf. Exod. 14:19, 24; Num. 14:14) was representative of God’s presence and glory.

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

When the congregation was at rest the glory-cloud stayed over the tabernacle (Exod. 40:36; Num. 9:17; 14:14). When God wished to speak personally with Moses, the pillar descended to the door of the tent of meeting. When the tabernacle was completed it was attested by the descent of the glory-cloud upon it (Exod. 40:34–38; Lev. 9:23f.). Again, at the dedication of the temple built by Solomon, the temple was filled with the cloud of glory (I Kings 8:10f.; II Chron. 5:14). In

Deuteronomy 5:24 it was said, ‘Behold, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire; we have this day seen God speak with man and man still live.’ The glory of that Mount Sinai visitation with the law is described in other—and most beautiful—words in Deuteronomy 33:2,

The LORD came from Sinai,  
and dawned from Seir upon us;  
he shone forth from Mount Paran,  
he came from the ten thousands of holy ones,  
with flaming fire at his right hand.

The glory of the Lord is described with great beauty and pathos in the prophecy of Ezekiel. With *beauty* because the majesty of His glory is depicted in terms of fire and attendant celestial worship and service, and with *pathos* because the glory rises up and departs from Jerusalem—the sign of His wrath on its evil and pollution, and the seeming renunciation of the whole covenant. However, Ezekiel also shows a new temple, of vast proportions and significance which foreshadows the return—the eschatological return—of the glory of the Lord. Haggai 2:7 prophesies the filling of the second temple with the glory of the Lord. All in all, the people of God knew Him to be present because He manifested His glory amongst them.

We have already spoken of the angel of the Lord who appeared to different ones of God’s people in order to reveal to them the will of God. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew such visitations. So did Moses in greater measure than others. As we have seen, it was the angel of the Lord

who gave the law at Sinai, for the angel was as the Lord Himself. Joshua was met by 'the commander of the army of the Lord' near Jericho, and he was not aware that this was a theophany until he was told, 'Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy.'

The judges were likewise visited, as also prophets and kings. Such visitations were outward manifestations of Yahweh who was present to His people.

God's presence by His word is not to be thought of as mystical and occultic. The word of God was the direct expression of His will, and of His intentions for His people. I Samuel 3:1 speaks of the period of the Judges, and especially at the time of the judge Eli: 'And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision'. This passage was speaking of the rarity of the prophetic word. We saw in Numbers 12:6 that the prophetic word was given in dreams and visions, i.e. 'in dark speech'. Even so, the prophetic word was given.

If God were not present, then He could not speak, but He spoke from His presence with His people. It is true that His law revealed His righteousness, and constantly demanded the obedience of His people, but from time to time He expressed Himself personally at points of their living history. Left to their own thinking they would undoubtedly make deficient decisions and proceed on wrong paths, such as the devising of the golden calf. God's presence, then, was made effective in His giving of the word. The deposit of that word—the covenantal, legal and prophetic word—was a rare treasure for Israel. This can be seen by the revival that happened in the time of King Josiah when the book of the law was discovered in the temple.

The word of God was never apart from the Spirit of God. The prophecy of Ezekiel had identified the glory and presence of God with the Spirit of God. He was the Spirit of the Lord, and in Haggai 2:4-5 God told the people not to think He had forsaken them: 'for I am with you, says the Lord of Hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not.' The thought here is that the Spirit of God had never really departed from them, and so God has always been with them.

Isaiah 63:7-14 is a powerful passage speaking of God's leading of His people out of Egypt into Canaan. In this remarkable and comforting passage the Lord personally leads His people and is a Shepherd to them for, 'In all their affliction he was afflicted'. At the same time it is really the angel of the Lord who cares for them and leads them for 'the angel of his presence saved them'. Yet again it is the Spirit of the Lord who was present: 'he put in the midst of them his holy Spirit'. It is true that 'they rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit'—doubtless by their murmuring and complaining, but most terribly by their invention of the golden calf—yet 'the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest'.

The Holy Spirit, then, was the Spirit of His presence. As the Spirit came upon Moses, upon the seventy elders, upon Joshua and Caleb, upon Bezalel, upon the judges, upon prophets and upon such kings as Saul and David, so always the work of the Spirit was the inspiration of the word of God, and was at the heart of the glory of the presence of God.

So then the presence of God was manifested in and by the

glory, the giving of the word, the angel of the Lord and the Spirit, so that Israel never was without the Presence. Sometimes it indeed seemed that the Presence was absent, but the absence of the Presence was what made the Presence so precious. It became ever so much more real by its absence, yet its absence was intolerable. Israel could not live without the Presence, and since God had promised, 'I will not leave you nor forsake you,' Israel knew that in the ultimate God would never absent Himself from them.

Indeed they looked to the day when the glory of God would fill Israel to overflowing, and the nations of the earth would come to Jerusalem and partake in the 'house of prayer for all peoples' and the whole earth would worship Him. That would be the day when the glory of the Lord and the knowledge of the glory of the Lord would cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## *God's Presence in Jesus Christ*

## GOD IN THE FLESH

'Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.' Also, 'But as he [Joseph] considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."'

What God had told Ahaz the king of Judah through Isaiah (7:14), He repeated through His angel to Joseph, applying it to the conception and birth of Jesus. Emmanuel means 'God with us'. No stronger name could be given in regard to God's settled and continuing presence with Israel through His Son, the Son of whom the prophets spoke in such Scriptures as II Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 9:6-7; Hosea 11:1; Psalm 2; and Psalm 89. This Son was to be the King set on holy Zion, to whom the

nations of the earth were to be given, who would sit upon the throne of David, ruling the nations with a rod of iron, and who would cry to God, 'Thou art my Father!'

John portrayed firstly the Word, the eternal Logos. By this Word all things were made, for when the beginning began he already was. He was face-to-face with God, and he was God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

Firstly, these words just quoted of John 1:14 contain more than we catch at the first reading. The term 'became flesh' can also mean 'tabernacled amongst us', so that just as God 'tabernacled' amongst His people in the 'tent of meeting', so Jesus 'pitched his tent amongst us'. Secondly, the phrase 'full of grace and truth' has been seen to link with Exodus 34:6–7. The word 'gracious' (*chen*) in that reference equals 'grace' (*charis*) in John 1:14, but it carries the idea of God's good favour. The word 'truth' (*aletheia*) in John 1:14 is really the same as 'faithfulness' (*emunah*) in the Exodus passage. The 'glory' (*doxa*) is the same as the 'glory' (*kabod*) which was always in Israel. So, then, God was now present in Israel by the presence of His Son, who in his coming was even more God than the angel of the Lord.

John goes on to show that the incomparable Moses was the means by which the law came to Israel, but even

more than that wonderful law, 'grace and truth' have come by Jesus Christ. That is, the nature of God has come to the earth dynamically in the person of Jesus Christ—the one who has become man. Not all the theophanies of the Old Testament add up to this revelation of God. 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.'

That is why John continually records the fact that the Son has been sent by the Father, into the world, to redeem the world, and to give perfect revelation of the Father. The ultimate act of that revelation was the death on the Cross in which 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself'.

The Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—are concerned with the incarnation, not only in its origins, but in its effects. Mark speaks of 'the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God', and speaks about 'the gospel of God'. For these three writers there is the fascination of this man who does such remarkable things, and speaks such wonderful words. For them he is historic flesh and blood. There is very little contemplation of who he is. They scarcely develop any theology of him. Thirty-seven times Mark, having described the quick and complete actions of Jesus, says that *straightway* he went on to the next thing.

Without doubt, descriptions of him as 'Son of God' are present, but most of his works are done—as it has been said—'under veils'. Jesus is not anxious to prove himself as Son of God. He often refers to himself as 'Son of man', and this title firstly refers to his flesh-and-blood humanity—a fact which no one doubted. Even so, his humanity was special as 'Son of man' for he had authority

to forgive sins, authority over the Sabbath, and undoubtedly referred back to the man who had universal authority and judgement, as set out in Daniel chapter 7.

It is not our intention here to develop the ideas of him as Messiah, as Son of God, and even as Son of man, but just to see that—in John’s words—he tabernacled amongst us. Later, John in his Epistles is anxious for all to believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. He was no phantom, no illusion of a man. He was man, and as such was present amongst humanity.

Even in the Gospels which emphasize his coming to Israel and for ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’, there are intimations that his mission is universal. He is to be ‘a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to thy people Israel’. In the apocalyptic passages such as Mark 13, Matthew 13 and 24, and Luke 21, the Gospel is to be preached among all nations, thus precipitating the end. The ends of the three Gospels speak of the Gospel being preached to every person on the earth, to all the nations, and of the nations of the earth being baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The point of all this is that God’s presence will be in all the earth. As though to emphasize this, Jesus tells his disciples, ‘*I am with you always, to the close of the age*’ (Matt. 28:20).

Paul also makes much of the incarnation. His magnificent passage of Philippians 2:5–9 shows that the Son was prepared to become man for all time, and to enter into the historic stream of the human race with redemptive purpose. In Galatians 4:4 the apostle says he was ‘sent forth out of’ God (*exapostello*), and was born of woman, born

under the law that he might redeem them who were under the law. In Romans 8:3 he says that God ‘sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh’. These are all statements much in the same ethos as John’s description of the incarnation.

Paul speaks of the incarnate one as ‘the visible expression of the invisible God,’ a statement which is almost parallel with ‘the Word was with God, and the Word was God’. Like John, he attributes the creation to the Son, even saying it was ‘unto him’, i.e., that the purpose and goal of creation is to Christ, and is Christ, a thought which is substantially repeated in I Corinthians 8:6.

The writer of Hebrews richly takes up the matter of the incarnation. The same greatness as Creator-Mediator is expressed in 1:2 as in Colossians 1:15–17, but in 1:3 his work of the Cross is mentioned without speaking of his incarnation. In 2:5–8 the author identifies the ‘son of man’ of Psalm 8 with Jesus, which in Psalm 8 means created man. 2:10–18 speaks of his incarnation which led to salvation. As the children ‘share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature’, for ‘he had to be made like his brethren in every respect’ in order ‘to make propitiation for the sins of the people’.

The rest of the Epistle is given over to showing that this man Jesus was greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Aaron and his order of priesthood, as his sacrifices transcended those of the former covenant, and were wholly effective. Jesus was a greater mediator than had been those before him, especially as he was the mediator of the New Covenant—‘a better covenant’.

Moses was the builder of the former 'household of God', but Jesus was 'faithful over God's house as a son'.

If we wish to spell out the implications of the person and work of Jesus as set out by the writer of Hebrews, then we see that the wonder of the covenant as Moses saw and proclaimed it—including the amazing presence of God as He indwelt His people—has been superseded and transcended. Just as in the former covenant God had promised not to fail, leave, or forsake Israel—i.e. His presence would always be with them and go with them—so in Hebrews He gives the same promise regarding the church, the new people of God (Deut. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5; cf. Heb. 13:5).

Not only was God present with His people, but through the new and living way Christ had opened because of his death, God's people could now enter into the holy of holies—hitherto denied to the congregation as a whole—and come into the presence of God; that presence in all its awfulness and holiness, now became the place of the living God, the Holy Father of all grace.

Oh, Son of man, it is an amazing matter that you should become man, that you should empty yourself of your divine prerogatives—though not of your divine self—and become man. We humans who are ashamed at the forms our fleshly humanity take, and who are even horrified—from time to time—at the devilishness we can devise, we are astonished beyond measure that you should desire to become human. Glorious as was our created humanity in the beginning, and recognizing that it will be even more glorious in the end, we nevertheless are astounded that you should wish to become not merely *like* us but *become us*.

We have learned that unless and until you became one of us you could not live for us, die for us, rise for us and ascend for us.

Without your humanity we could never be redeemed from our corruption. One part of us can understand you *temporarily* taking on our humanity, and then putting off that humanity as a garment which has fulfilled its function, but you never disrobed your humanity. It is with you, and it is you, for ever! Your Deity has a human face for ever.

Had you become incarnate, simply to be with us, and to encourage us, and to empathize with us, then that would have gone down in history as a great act of God—perhaps the greatest. But you came not simply to temporarily tabernacle, or even permanently to tabernacle, but to die for us so that we might live with you for ever. So great was your tender mercy.

We tell you in the humility that weeps that we see the greatness of God as He revealed Himself to Israel in the ancient covenant: we see that greatness in you, greatness become man, and greatness walking Palestine in your flesh, and walking the roads of all lands, the seas of all oceans and then moving through the airways of all skies, for having become enfleshed you did not bid us 'Good-bye!' as you returned to your own heaven. Your presence is with us now, and in you the Father of us all is also present, and through the eternal Spirit you both abide with us, and you are our home, and—as we have been taught—we too are your home.

We cannot now visualize what our world would be like had you not become incarnate, let alone not been our Redeemer. We cannot visualize what history would have been these past two millennia had you not visited us, and stayed amongst us, and done the work you have done. Not only we who believe in you have been deeply affected by your coming, but those of other religions and other faiths, too, to whom we have been witnessing these past 2,000 years. Doubtless our brethren in Israel-after-the-flesh cannot be other than mindful of you. The whole world is mindful, but then especially us, for we have been shaped after your likeness. We can never see human flesh without thinking of you who took on such flesh, for ever.

These are things of continual wonderment to us, but we must be vocal and let our doxologies flow for the greatness of your humility, and the humility of your greatness. Day by day and year by year we

must add to the treasury of praise and worship the new and wonderful things we realize about you, about your coming in that past time, and about your coming again.

## CHAPTER SIX

*The Abiding Glory***'WE BEHELD HIS GLORY'**

The writer of the fourth Gospel said (1:14), 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt [*eskenosen*] among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.' That was what John remembered—the glory. 'We have beheld' (*etheasametha*) can be translated 'we watched', or, 'we gazed on', i.e. 'we watched the whole event of his glory'. This kind of gazing may well have looked at the actions of Christ, and heard his words, but it was really what we might call 'the sight of faith'. That glory was 'as of the only Son from the Father'. It may well be that 'the angel of the Lord' in the Old Testament was the Word of God in theophanic form, but here—in John 1:14—he appears as the glory of God because he is the Son of God, i.e. 'the Word become flesh' and so is 'Emmanuel—God with us'.

In our last chapter we touched on the thought contained in the words ‘dwelt among us’. ‘Dwelt among us’ has been properly translated ‘pitched his tent among us’, or, ‘tabernacled [*eskenosen*] among us’, referring to the tabernacle of God in Israel. In Exodus 25:8–9 God said, ‘And let them make me a *sanctuary*, that I may  *dwell* in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the *tabernacle* [*skene*], and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.’ God always dwelt with His people—via the tabernacle, and, later, the temple—and showed His glory at various times. Anxiety often ensued in Israel because of the possibility that God would cease to dwell with them, and remove His glory from them. In Exodus 33:12–14 God promised Moses that His Presence would go with Israel on their journey to Canaan. Moses replied, ‘If thy presence will not go with me, do not carry us up from here.’ In Deuteronomy 12:5 Moses gave instructions to the people for God’s habitation in Canaan, ‘But you shall seek the place which the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there.’

How important to Israel was God’s ‘tenting’ among them is seen in various references. In the Book of Ezekiel much is made of the various scenes where God’s glory is manifested. The abominations in the temple are shown to be spurned by the active movements of the Glory—the *Shekinah*, the Presence-Cloud of the Glory. In Ezekiel 43:6–7 we read, ‘While the man was standing beside me, I heard one speaking to me out of the temple; and he said to me, “Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the

midst of the people of Israel for ever.” ’

Again, in Haggai 2:9 God’s promise regarding the second temple was, ‘The latter splendour [glory] of this house shall be greater than the former’. In Joel 3:17 God said, ‘So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who dwells [‘tabernacles’; *kataskenoun*] in Zion, my holy mountain.’ Similarly in Zechariah 2:10, ‘Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come and I will dwell [*kataskenoun*] in the midst of you, says the Lord.’ In Ezekiel 37, after the revival of Israel as a nation God says, ‘I . . . will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place [*kataskenoun*] shall be with them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people.’

In the light of the fact and importance of God dwelling with His people in Israel we should see the significance of John 1:14, ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory’. In Israel that glory had been seen by the Red Sea, on Sinai, at the giving of the law, in the tent of meeting in the camp (cf. Exod. 33:7–11) and upon the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34–38). It is to be noted that the glory was never simply a manifestation of God for its own sake, but was always connected with the action of God, the doing of His will for His people, for their doing of His will at His leading and command. Now, the glory comes to dwell amongst men, in Palestine, in the midst of Israel, but with a view to all the nations. We look now to see the glory that they gazed upon, the glory abiding in their midst. What was that glory, and was it to abide for ever?

## THE NATURE OF THE ABIDING GLORY

What we must see is that he pitched his tent amongst us for ever! Whilst in John chapters 14 to 16 Jesus made much of his going from them, to the Father, yet he made much of his coming back to them, first in his resurrection appearances, and then through the Holy Spirit when he ascended. 'I am with you always,' were his last words, just prior to the Ascension.

We now look at the glory of Christ which they watched, looked at and gazed upon. The first clue is given to us in John 1:14 itself, namely 'full of grace and truth'. We saw in the previous Chapter of this book that John 1:14 and Exodus 34:6–7 line up fairly well together. There was great glory at the giving of the law (cf. Deut. 33:1–5; Exod. 19:12–24; cf. Heb. 12:18–21), but when God showed His glory to Moses it was 'full of truth and grace', for that 'truth and grace' was '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'. This glory was to show forth in vastly greater measure in Jesus Christ the Word. We have seen that 'from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace', the ever-increasing revelation of glory, since God's glory is His very being.

The second indication of the nature of Christ's glory is in John 2:11, 'This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him'. When they beheld his glory they beheld it in signs, as also in other events. In what way

did Christ manifest his glory? The first element must surely be that he saved a domestic situation—the failure of the wine would have been an everlasting disgrace to the family. Glory is very real at the *domestic* level, for so many of the signs or miracles were domestic. If we put together all the references of the Scriptures to wedding feasts, Messianic victory-banquet, Israel and wine—mature wine and new wine—and if we think of Israel the Bride, and God the Bridegroom, and Christ attending a wedding when every wedding is a prophetic manifestation of the final wedding of the Bride and the Lamb, then something of this may have filtered into the understanding of the disciples. We do not know. We simply know his glory stood out and they recognized it—and believed.

In John 5:41 Jesus said, 'I do not receive glory from men.' He then asked his critics, 'How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?' In each case he seeks to show that the glory comes from the Father. In 7:18 he said, 'He who speaks on his own authority [from himself] seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.' Again in 8:50, 'I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it and he will be the judge.' In 8:54, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is your God.'

The sign of the raising of Lazarus was explained by Jesus, 'This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.' Martha acknowledged that he was 'the Christ, the

Son of God, he who is coming into the world,' yet she sought to prevent him from opening the grave—'By this time there will be an odour.' Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' The glory of the Father was seen in the action of the Son, especially in his being the Resurrection and the Life.

The text of John 12:37–41 indicates that the glory of God which Isaiah saw in the temple (Isa. 6:1ff.), was in fact the glory of Christ. The Son always had the glory of God, not only in his incarnation but prior, even, to creation, as is seen in John 17:5, 22, 24. In the days of his flesh Jesus set out to glorify the Father, but first needed to be glorified by the Father in order to do this. In 17:1–5 Jesus asked that he might be glorified by the Father so that he might glorify the Father. In 13:31–32 when Judas left to betray his Master, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.'

In this sense, then, all that Jesus did was *to* the glory of God and arose *from* the glory of God. John 7:39 says clearly 'Jesus was not yet glorified', i.e. not yet crucified. 12:16 says that when Jesus was glorified the apostles remembered what he had said. 'Glorified' here would mean when he had died, risen and was ascended.

Summed up, then, Jesus doing the will of the Father had glorified the Father. At the same time the very process of doing that will brought glory to the Son: he was thus essentially Son of the Father, whom Paul later called 'the Father of glory'.

One unusual statement is John 17:22, 'The glory

which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one'. Jesus had just prayed that God would glorify him, although almost all references in John—to glory—indicate that the Father continually glorified the Son. Certainly the Cross will be the special glorification of Christ, and of the Father by Christ. Hebrews 2:9 states, 'We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour *for* the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one'. Some translations have '*because* of the suffering of death', as though it were a post-crucifixion reward, but since we have the '*so that* he might taste death for every one' it would seem that the '*so that*' (*hopos*) places the glory prior to the Cross, which would mean he was glorified in order to be able to die the effective death.

The glory that Christ gave to his disciples was his own glory which brought forth love and unity. His glory was of God, from God, and constituted all he was, as also all he had done and would do. Out of this came love and unity to the disciples.

It must be admitted that following the thought of glory in John's Gospel has led us into what may seem a detailed and complicated examination. In practice, the disciples simply saw his life in all its aspects of glory. This was the glory which was always to abide with them, as they in it. So, then, everything which Christ did and said was the 'pitched tent', the tabernacle of his flesh in which dwelt the glory of God. John 17:24 shows Jesus desired that they—the apostles and those who would believe on him through their word—would see his eternal glory. What is

not stated, but which can be seen from I John 3:2, is that when they would eventually ‘watch’, ‘look at’, and ‘gaze upon’ his glory it would be such that it would make them like him (cf. II Cor. 3:18; Heb. 12:2; II Cor. 4:18).

We conclude, then, that in John’s Gospel the abiding glory is Emmanuel—God with us. The fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him, and that fullness worked out as the revelation of God’s glory. The glory was in the tent, but the tent was his manhood, so that glory was translated into knowable terms—actions and words which taught the truth of ‘God with us’. Though he—Christ—was before time, and Son of God, yet he came to us as man, and spelled out the Presence of God in palpable forms, terms which we know, and can understand.

With all these insights in mind, we can go to the other Gospels and translate them in terms of the revelation of John. Thus we see all acts, all signs and wonders, actions and happenings that came from him as manifestations of the Divine Glory, the True Presence. This fills us with great wonder. The Synoptic Gospels come alive in a fresh way. We can read them time and again until the very Presence permeates us, not by imagination or visualization, but by reading and seeing the Word become flesh.

In pursuit, then, of one special element of the first three Gospels, let us leave John’s Gospel and look at the Transfiguration—a rich revelation of the Presence.

### THE GLORY OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

Whilst in John’s Gospel the disciples saw Jesus’ glory at the enacted sign of the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee—

a glory which was not of a visual radiance—yet in the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—there is no account of them seeing his glory. Doubtless the post-resurrection appearances were such that they thought he was a spirit, but at the same time he seemed to show nothing of glory that was of a transcendent nature. Even so, the Synoptic Gospels all speak of the glory he manifested at the Transfiguration. Putting together the three accounts (Matt. 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36) it is clear that the glory often seen in theophanies was present, as the following descriptions indicate: ‘the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white’, ‘he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them’, ‘he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light’.

Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah appeared in glory, and that Peter, James and John slept heavily and on awakening ‘saw his [Jesus’] glory and the two men who stood with him’. Matthew tells us that ‘a bright cloud overshadowed them,’ whilst Luke says ‘they were afraid as they entered the cloud.’ All three say that a voice came out of the cloud. Matthew records the voice as saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him’; Mark as ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him’; and Luke as ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’

We naturally ask why this glory should have been manifested. Was it that the Deity of Jesus was allowed to shine forth, or was the reality of his manhood shown to encourage the watchers as to what it is to be man? We do not know. What we know is that Moses and Elijah spoke

to him of his decease which he was 'to accomplish' at Jerusalem. This 'decease' is the word 'exodus'. It may have reference to his ministry as the second—and greater—Moses, but there was no special glory to Moses' death. In John's Gospel Jesus' manifestation of God's glory is linked with the Crucifixion. There is no doubt that the Transfiguration (*metamorphosis*) of Christ was with a view to the Crucifixion. We can say, then, that 'he was transfigured, that he might be disfigured, and that we who are disfigured might become transfigured'. This effects man's 'exodus' from the bondage of his worldly 'Egypt' into the Presence of his Creator-Father. Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Psalms 22 and 69; with Zechariah 13:7—which are Messianic passages describing his suffering—all point to a terrible disfigurement of the Suffering Servant. This, then, is the glory of redemption, the glory of love. As in John's Gospel Christ's glory is moral, so here, at the Transfiguration.

What makes it so impressive to us is the presence of the *Shekinah*, the Glory-Cloud, or the Divine Presence-Cloud, in this case that of the Father. Not only does He attest to the Son, but speaks personally and powerfully to the humanity which once forsook Him. That is why in II Peter 1:16–19 the apostolic word is,

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 eye witnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour 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.

This Petrine teaching is encouraging readers to live in the light of the coming of Christ. He came once, and in particular his majesty was seen on the Mount of Trans-figuration, called here 'the holy mountain'; so, too, he would come again, and when he did the majesty would be no less. The wonderful and amazing thing is that 'he received honour and glory from God the Father'. The term 'the Majestic [Sublime] Glory' was doubtless inspired by the Glory-Cloud into which eventually the three disciples were taken, and out of which came the voice of God. They saw Moses and Elijah all in glorified form, speaking with Jesus of his imminent death. At the point where the glorified Moses and Elijah were parting from Christ, Peter—doubtlessly in confusion—cried, 'Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths [tents, tabernacles], one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.'

It would appear that Peter was gripped by the presence of Moses and Elijah—most important prophetic figures in Israel's history—and wanted to retain their glory, and the glory of Christ. It was then they were taken into the Glory-Cloud. Deep fear and awe came upon them. In fact, the Abiding Glory had been with them all the time. Sometimes—as with some of the signs—the Glory flashed upon them, and doubtless sometimes it was deeply sensed. Yet it was glory in human flesh, and for the most part they saw the flesh, and not the glory. Only when the revelatory Spirit came would the reality of that glory come upon them.

That was why John said, 'We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.'

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## *The Absence of Christ's Presence*

It seems that no sooner had God's presence come among us in Jesus Christ, than he was gone from us. The disciples were always uneasy about the intimations he gave of his crucifixion, his death, and his rising again. They feared to ask of these sayings, putting them out of their minds as best they could. The last hours before the betrayal and the death were heart-sickening ones, yet it was in the very hour of his betrayal that he told them,

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

When Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?' Jesus said to him,

*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him . . . He who has seen me has seen the Father . . .*

It was clear that Jesus was going to leave this world, and his going made his followers fearful. No sooner had they come to know him than he was leaving them. His presence had made him indispensable to them, but now he was going. During the evening of the last supper he said to them, 'I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also.' Later in the night he said, 'A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me' (John 14:18–19; 16:16).

These words have been generally interpreted to mean that Jesus would come to them after the Resurrection, and that he would be permanently with them indwelling them by the Holy Spirit. The passage refers to the new abiding form, i.e. 'In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you'. This is the powerful new fact that God is present to believing man through the Son and the Spirit, and so man is also present to God.

In John 16:16 Jesus said again, 'A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while and you will see me.' Whilst this may in some sense refer to the death, and then to the rising of Jesus, it would seem more to be fulfilled in and by the coming of the Holy Spirit, for in

previous verses he had just said that the Holy Spirit would show the Son and the Father in a rich revelatory way. Whilst the Spirit is present, Christ is present, and that is how it was to be for the disciples.

The ascension of Jesus was in one sense a terminal matter for the followers of Jesus. Those who saw him go were told by two persons in white that Jesus would come again. The event separated Christ and his disciples. He was gone beyond their sight. He had gone away into heaven—whatever that might mean. Jesus had told them, ‘Where I am going you cannot come,’ and, ‘I go to the Father, and you will see me no more.’ He had also told them plainly, ‘I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father.’

They should have rejoiced at the thought of his going—‘If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father.’ They were, however, sad, yet Luke records that having seen the Ascension ‘they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God’.

His departure to the Father, then, was not a thing of sorrow but a thing of joy. For one thing he had told them he would be preparing a place for them in his Father’s ‘many mansions’, and that they would meet him there. He had also said that his going would mean the coming of the Holy Spirit in that way which the prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus had said would happen. All this was to be to their advantage.

The seeming contradiction was that he had gone from them bodily, and in that sense was absent from the earth

yet in another sense he was with them in his unseen Presence. That is, he was present to them by the Holy Spirit. There was, then, the real absence of Jesus as well as the real Presence. In one sense he was more present to them than prior to his death since his person was made real to them by the Holy Spirit at—and following—the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. In fact it was only possible for him to be present because he had gone, for only in this way could the Spirit make him real to them.

If we say he had not really ascended and was present in unseen form, then we are wrong. If we say he really ascended and so was present by the Holy Spirit, we are right. The concept of the ubiquity of Christ is a theological rationalizing of the problem presented by the fact that Christ was the Creator-Mediator of the world prior to his coming to earth and yet had to be present to all the creation.

The term ‘ubiquity of Christ’ covers the attempt of the early and late theologians to explain how Christ could be present in heaven—following his Ascension—and yet be present to all things of the creation. The explanations are rather scholastic. Augustine and Hugo of St Victor held that ‘Christ is humanly in heaven, divinely everywhere’. With the incursion of the transubstantiationist view of the eucharist, i.e. that Christ’s body was actually present in the elements following their ritual consecration, then some doctrine of ubiquity had to be held. Luther held a consubstantiationist view, i.e. that Christ was present ‘in, through, and under the elements’, although such a statement is difficult to explain. He taught that ‘the body of Christ is exceptional and supernatural, different from ordinary human flesh and blood; that his flesh is born of the spirit, of a spiritual nature, and fit for spiritual food; and that the attributes of magnitude and extension do not apply to his body’ (*The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1977, Vol. XII, pp. 50–51).

It is essential to understand the doctrine of the Ascension, and with it that of the Session of Christ, i.e. that Jesus having risen from the dead ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father, and with the Father reigns over creation until the defeat of all evil powers is accomplished, and evil creatures are judged and brought to the punishment of destruction. ‘The right hand of God’ is not intended to be locative so much as a term for the place of authority. The Son who is the Word is the one by whom all things were created, and so he is present to them as Creator-Redeemer, although the *mode* of his presence is not easy to understand.

For these disciples who understood his Ascension and Session in functional terms, there was no difficulty in asserting the bodily absence of Jesus whilst insisting on his presence with the church as its Lord and its Head. Figurative terms do not mean the lack of reality. The early church knew Christ was present *to* it whilst they also knew he reigned *over* the creation, and did so *for* the church. Doubtless the theological exercises in seeking to rationalize ‘absence’ and ‘presence’ are numerous but it is the functional reality of both ‘absence’ and ‘presence’ that matters.

## CHAPTER Eight

## *The Abiding Presence*

We could come away from our last section thinking wrongly that God came amongst His people in the incarnation, which, although wonderful, ceased when Jesus Christ ascended to His right hand. This is because we confuse the presence of the Word (*Logos*) in flesh with the presence of God. God was present to His world from creation. In Him man has always lived and moved and had his being. For want of a better term we can say that creational man has always had his being in God even though relationally—through the Fall—he has been far from God. We have talked of his existential anguish which is his lot because of being alienated from God. The world of the Creator in which sinful man lives is God’s world, and does not belong to evil powers such as Satan and his fallen angels. It belongs to God. He is present.

We saw that the people of God related to Him by

faith in Him. They met with Him in worship, and addressed their prayers to Him. He brought them into covenant relationship with Him, set out the worship rituals, blessed them with His life, and was present in their midst. Again they acknowledged this presence by and in worship.

The coming of the Son was the greatest event of history. Emmanuel was God-in-the-flesh, God-amongst-them. Christ's humanity did not so much visibilise God to them, as it communicated the true relationship a human being can have with God. Christ's work was to deal with the sin which alienated man from God; deal with the rebellious spirit of man by winning him through the love of the Cross. The reconciliation brought man to God, and man to man. This was the presence of God. The going of the Son in his risen and ascended humanity altered nothing in the new relationship through reconciliation. Before the departure of his humanity from the human scene, Jesus set in motion the things which make for union with God.

As in Israel *the glory* was one of the elements of the Divine presence, so the Word became flesh and his glory was seen, 'the glory as of the only Son of the Father'. John's Gospel is the story of glory—especially how Jesus revealed the glory of God. He kept claiming that he did not seek his own glory but that of the Father, and that he had glorified the Father. Henceforth, men—seeing the incarnate Word—see the glory of the Father. It is 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'.

The glory of God in the covenant with Moses was set forth by *His word*. The two were inseparable. We saw that God communicates Himself by what He says. He spoke His covenant into being as He had spoken creation

into being. What began to be said to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, flowered out with Moses. The word of the covenant was both the word of the law, and the word of the prophet. We need to keep in mind that almost all communication is by the word, whether between men and men or God and men. The revelation to Moses of His glory in Exodus 34:6–7 was the spoken word about His being. So then, in the New Covenant, when 'the Word became flesh' there was no creation of a word which was other than God, though comports with God—an hypostasis, so to speak. No, it was—and is—the Son who is the Word (the *Logos*) who actually speaks to us in our time as God spoke by the prophets in past times (Heb. 1:1–2).

In Israel the glory of God was *His attributes* which were covenantal—'merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty'. The words 'mercy', 'grace', 'long-suffering', 'love' and 'faithfulness' are New Testament terms which take on enhanced beauty and significance, because of God Incarnate. If God met His people via His moral attributes, then no less under the New Covenant. God's presence is in His Son. He who has seen the Son has seen the Father.

The New Covenant was established, as Jesus was the Mediator of a better covenant. The legacy of this was the new worship in the Spirit. Just as God was 'enthroned on the praises of [His people]', so the new worship was of the Spirit and of a new kind. The new covenant people were able to break through by the living way—Christ's crucified and sacrificial flesh—into the holy of holies and

come to the Father. Jesus said, 'such the Father ever seeks,' so that when they come it is at the Father's initiative. Because of the Son—and out of his own Sonship—they cry, 'Abba! Father!' They are new sons worshipping the Father.

Because of all these things—and more—the covenantal presence of God is in the midst of His people. Christ's Ascension does not cancel out 'the benefits of his death and passion'. God's calling and gifts are without recall. The new community is established. He said, 'I will build my church,' and he did. If its Head is in heaven, then its body is on the earth, very much on the earth, moved in all its action by him. He has made of Jew and Gentile 'one new man', and he has made more. He has made the worshipping community to be the habitation of God through the Spirit.

The church is the habitation of God! That is a marvellous matter. The new temple was to be 'a house of prayer for all the nations', and so it began to be at Pentecost when the new worship came to be 'in Spirit and in truth'. The church is 'God's dwelling place in the Spirit', the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning 'the Israel of God', 'a spiritual house . . . a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ', for it constitutes a new 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation', those who 'were once no people, but now are God's people'.

All of these things, then, dispel the thought that with the bodily absence of Jesus Christ the benefits of his human mission were lost. To the contrary: they could only be sealed by his going. If God had dwelt wonderfully

with the patriarchs, and with Israel, then how much more now with His people who had been led to the heart of His Fatherhood by the Son! Yet in saying this we are led to enquire and examine how it is that in this age we have the closest intimacy with God that man has known in his history.

In you, oh Christ, are *hidden* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We say 'hidden' because they are not displayed to curious eyes. No one may see these deep things of God unless he be in God. In you, oh Christ, dwells the fullness of the Godhead, bodily. And we are filled full in you. Indeed our lives are hidden with you in God. Again the peeking world shall not see as with human analysis or discernment. No, we are the sons of God but the world does not know that any more than they knew you as the Son of God.

We are glad that you came as a human being to move amongst us. In all our afflictions you were afflicted. You were familiar with our griefs and sorrows, yet you did more than empathize and sympathize. You bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and you healed our wounds. You reconciled us to the Father. You brought us to dwell in Him, and Him to dwell in us. You effected this new and intimate relationship. Then you left us to work out what you had wrought. You are with us in it all. Your intelligence, will, love and encouragement flow down to us as we are the body to your Head.

We praise you for going to the right hand of the Father. With Him you move in history to bring the good end and climax to it, and you incorporate us in that plan, demanding our participation as you work it out to its glorious fulfilment, its holy *telos*.

Teach us, then, in this hour in which we live, love, and labour upon this earth, to know your personal presence in heart and mind and spirit, that we may know you more intimately, and so know the Father Himself more deeply. You have not left us as orphans, but as children of the Father, you being our Elder Brother, the One who unceasingly day and night intercedes for us, intervenes against the powers of darkness, and prepares the heavenly mansions for our coming.

## CHAPTER NINE

*Abiding in the Abiding*

The subject of Jesus' presence with his disciples is powerfully set forth in John's Gospel in chapters 14 to 17. Readers of the Gospels will know that these chapters of John are significant because they deal with the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching the relationships that obtain within the Godhead, and with believing man. We have noted that the disciples were feeling bereft because Christ had said he was leaving them. Jesus encouraged them to believe in him as they believed in the Father, and that he and the Father would send the Holy Spirit to indwell them—just as he, the Spirit, had indwelt Jesus—and finally he prayed the prayer of unity for them amongst themselves, with their converts, and with him and the Father. It was not to be expected that they would understand much of what he said. In hindsight they would understand. The coming of

the Spirit would remind them of what he had said, interpret it to them, and make it to be operative in their lives.

One thing that was made clear was that Jesus' departure from them would not put an end to relationship with him. This might well be the case when one human being died and left the sphere of this world, but not in his case. That is why the materials of these four chapters of John are of great importance to us, especially if we desire to be in union with the Godhead.

In John 14:1–14 Jesus taught them he was about to go to the Father, and that since he, himself, was the way of the Father, the truth of the Father, and the life of the Father, he could therefore lead them to the Father. The works which he had done as the Son of the Father would go on being worked in them. He would continue to work the works of God but would do such in and through them—the disciples—according to the Father's will. In verses 15 to 24 he spoke of their coming relationship with him, with the Spirit and with the Father. A key principle of these relationships would be obedience to his—Jesus'—word. If they would love Jesus then they would keep his commandments. The Spirit—who was at that time *among* them—would dwell *in* them. This was a rich revelation—the Spirit dwelling in them. Jesus would love those who kept his commandments and he would *manifest himself to them*. This would ensure the reality of the Presence.

Notice that when one disciple asked, 'Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?' that Jesus followed this up by saying, 'If a man

loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and *make our home with him.*' The Father and the Son will make the believer their home, but they will not make the world their home. They will not manifest themselves where there is unbelief. It is an extraordinary statement—that the Father and the Son will make their home with the disciples. It is the same as saying the Spirit will make his home with them. What, then, does it mean?

In 14:2–3 Jesus had said he was going to the Father to prepare a home for them; now he was saying that the Father and the Son will *now* make their home in the lives of the believers. The two homes may in essence be the same, but this is a home *in time* that God makes in the hearts of His people. Jesus makes a home for them in the future, in eternity—'that where I am there you may be also'—yet now he and the Father are making their home in the believer that 'where *you* are there *we* may be also'. If this is so, then here—on this earth—the presence of the Spirit, the Father and the Son is in the lives of the believers, personally as well as corporately. This surely is what Paul is saying when he insists that 'your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you' (I Cor. 6:19), i.e. God dwells personally in each believer, and 'you are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you' (I Cor. 3:16), i.e. God dwells in the body of the believers. When he tells the Ephesians that they are being built as a holy temple in the Lord, 'in whom you are also built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit' (Eph. 2:21–22), then he is saying that the prophecy of Ezekiel 37:26–27 is finding at least part of its fulfilment with them at the present time,

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them for evermore.

This prophecy is of immense importance. We need to be taught strongly that its part-fulfilment is with us—*now!* That knowledge is what will give us assurance of His presence, by faith. The ultimate fulfilment is seen in Revelation 21:1–4,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.'

In John 14:23, then, Jesus is referring to the foretaste of what will ultimately be, but then the 'foretaste' is not a light thing, a scarcely known reality. It is to mean everything whilst the disciples are on the earth. Beyond this life the home will be a thing surpassing their present dreams, but the present fact of the Father dwelling in them is an enriching reality.

In John 15:1–11 Jesus talks to his disciples on the matter of abiding. The verb 'to abide' is *meno*, and means 'to remain, to dwell, to wait, and to continue'. The vine

Jesus speaks of is, in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel (cf. Isa. 5:1–7). The disciples had no identity apart from Christ. They had their being in him. Even so, they could exercise their wills regarding remaining in him or not remaining in him. Abiding is a matter of the will. Judas was one of those who appeared to be in him, but who, in fact, was not abiding. He was to be cast forth as a branch and to wither, indeed was to be burned. Again it appears that indwelling relates to obedience.

The purpose of a branch being in a vine is to be fruitful. In verse 7 Jesus said, ‘If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.’ He went on to say, ‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.’ He then explained how one would abide, i.e. by keeping his commandments. This was the way he kept abiding in God’s love, i.e. by keeping His commandments. We can rightly conclude that to abide in Christ as the Vine is to continue in his love by keeping his commandments.

In chapter 16 there is nothing spoken directly on abiding or dwelling in God. Yet there is a term which is used, namely ‘in my name’. It was used in 14:14, and referred to again in 15:7, ‘If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, *ask whatever you will*, and it shall be done for you’. Abiding is the key to praying, for abiding is being ‘in Christ’. Thus when the disciples pray, they pray in Christ’s name, and have this power and ability because they abide in him. Abiding enables praying, and prayer furthers the exercise of abiding. In 15:16 Jesus said, ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit

should abide; so that *whatever you ask the Father in my name*, he may give it to you.’ We conclude that to abide in Christ is to be fruitful and to do the Father’s will. ‘Whatever you ask’ is not just a blank mindless asking, but one that comes from abiding, from knowing the mind of Christ and the will of the Father and is thus related to fruitfulness. When, then, we come to 16:23–24 the teaching is intelligible, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, *he will give it to you in my name*. Hitherto you have asked nothing *in my name*; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.’ We repeat: to be abiding in Christ is to be *in his name*, and so to ask in his name.

It is chapter 17—that great High-Priestly prayer—which speaks of the unity of the people of God. Jesus was clear in his mind about the fact that the Father had given him a certain group of people. He prayed that this community of the elect might be protected within the name of the Father, that they might go into the world and yet be kept from ‘the evil one’. Then he prayed for their oneness, especially as converts would come through their word, and a further experience of unity would be required:

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art *in* me, and I *in* thee, that they also may be *in* us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I *in* them and thou *in* me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

These verses—20 to 23—speak of the presence of the Father in the Son, of the Son in the Father, and then of the believers' presence in the Father and the Son, and of their oneness together because of that mutual indwelling. Perhaps there are no richer verses anywhere than these, and maybe that is why Jesus concludes his prayer by saying, 'I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.' Certainly we can conclude that the indwelling of God in man as Father, Son and Holy Spirit originates from the love and initiative of God. The obedience of His people springs from that love, so that love and obedience are the keys to true abiding in God and to His abiding in us.

## CHAPTER TEN

## *The Apostolic Abiding*

The Acts and the Epistles leave us with no doubt regarding the unity of the apostolic church. We will look at some of the elements which caused this unity, namely that the people of God were *in* the Father, *in* Christ and *in* the Spirit. At this point we can talk about the unity of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Spirit, and the love of the Spirit which the 120 came to know on the day of Pentecost, and of course as did also the 3,000 who were baptized.

What happened at Pentecost and continued in the days following was the worship, the special worship that the Spirit had brought. It is in worship that man approaches 'the throne of grace', 'having access to this grace in which we stand', and knowing that 'great grace' is upon all the church. The presence of God had come with the Spirit 'like the sound of a rushing mighty wind', hence

the whole place was filled with the Spirit, so that its participants were immersed (baptized) in this personal element of the Spirit, baptized into Christ, and made 'to drink of one Spirit' (Acts 2:1-4; I Cor. 12:13). This event brought the unity, love and fellowship of the Spirit.

It is heart-warming to observe that the early church was alive to the presence of God. In Acts 3 Peter and John healed the man who had been lame from birth, and they did it in the name of Jesus, much after the manner of which Jesus had instructed them in the 14th, 15th and 16th chapters of John. The people prayed for the disciples when they had been threatened by the Sanhedrin. They prayed to God and asked, '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.'

Here, and in other parts of Acts, they expect Jesus to still be present in power. Jesus had promised the apostles, 'I am with you always, even to the consummation of the age.' Where they would preach the Gospel, there he would be present. And so he was. The Sanhedrin feared the name, for they knew the person was working where his name was invoked.

We know that Paul was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus, and that he appeared at other times to this apostle. We know also that 'the Spirit of Jesus' was also present. The members of the early church believed in the dynamic presence of Christ as much as they believed in his dynamic absence. They knew they had to live not by sight, but by faith (cf. II Cor. 5:7). Organically he was their Head, and they the members of his body. He was

the Vine and they were the branches. They were the flock and he was the Shepherd. It was not a new thing for the people of God to 'endure as seeing him who is invisible', for that has always been the case with the people of God. Altars had been erected since the beginning of time, not to 'the unknown God' but to the 'known God' (cf. Jer. 9:23). Walking by faith and not by sight had always been the experience and life of God's people.

The Epistles bring us a wealth of understanding of the presence of God with His people. As we have said, they had an understanding of Christ as Head. They held fast to the Head (Col. 2:19), and believed that he had been raised to that Headship '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', since God has 'put all things under his feet and has made him head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all'.

It is doubtful whether the early church speculated about such things as the 'seen-ness' or the 'unseen-ness' of Jesus Christ. He was dynamically and functionally present. Peter could say, '[Jesus Christ] without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy.' Because of the action of life, they knew—in some way or another—that they were *in* the Father, *in* the Son, and *in* the Holy Spirit and that the Persons of the Triune Godhead were *in* them.

In the two Epistles to the Thessalonians Paul had addressed 'the church of the Thessalonians *in God the Father*

and the Lord Jesus Christ'. Paul's teaching was 'For us there is only one God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ.' Paul had a rich doctrine of God's Fatherhood. He had told the Greeks at Athens that one of their poets had said two significant things, 'in him [God] we live and move and have our being,' and 'we are indeed his [God's] offspring.' He later told the Ephesians that all familyhood (or fatherhood) flowed from God and spoke of 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all and in all.' He spoke most of all regarding adoption—that sonship of the Father for believing man—which had been achieved by Christ. Christ had come and died, 'that we might receive the sonship'. The Spirit was sent into our hearts crying, 'Abba! Father!', hence our spirits also cry to God this way, for we are truly sons.

Jesus—of all—had taught the true sonship of man through redemption. He came to show the Father, and did. He showed the Fatherhood by his teaching, by his actions, by his death, by his resurrection, and by his going to the Father. On one occasion he had said, 'And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.'

The four chapters of John's Gospel at which we looked, have as their primary subject the Fatherhood of God. For every one mention of the Holy Spirit there are three mentions of the Father. Jesus said he was going to the Father. In his Father's house there were many dwelling places. If the disciples listened to his word and obeyed it then the Father would love them, and come and dwell with them. Surely the temple, i.e. the church in which God dwells, is the habitation of the Father, but also—as Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians tells us—

the people of God dwell in the Father (cf. I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1).

Paul, in all his Letters, invokes peace and grace from God the Father. God's Fatherhood of His Son Jesus Christ and, of course, our sonship in the Son, assures us of His abiding presence. This is no mere doctrine of presence. The living presence of the living Father (cf. John 6:37) as He makes His home personally in each one of us is what guarantees that we shall never be lonely. Jesus had said of his Father, 'And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.' On the night of his betrayal he said, 'I am not alone, for the Father is with me.' He is no less present to each one of His children.

Being 'in Christ' and having 'Christ within' is a strong teaching of the Epistles. In fact 'in', 'with', and 'through' in relation to Christ and his people are so frequent that not much doctrine of faith and practice of life would be left if they were withdrawn. The variety in the use of the prepositions is remarkable.

A good place to commence looking at the themes of 'in Christ Jesus', and 'Christ in you [me]' is I Corinthians 1:30, 'He [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption'. We need to spend time looking at this. If we study 'He is the source of your life', it could mean man has *no* source of his life apart from God. This, of course, must be true, simply as a matter of creation and providence. The locative phrase 'in Christ Jesus' must mean that God is the source of our life 'in Christ Jesus', i.e. the kind of life we now have

springs primarily from Him *through* Christ Jesus. So, whilst God is the source of our life because He is Creator, Paul, here, is saying that God is the source of our redeemed life, and so of our true life. So, generally, scholars see it as meaning ‘From God’s action you are in Christ Jesus’, or ‘you are made members of Christ Jesus’, i.e. God has caused us to come to, and into, Christ Jesus, and so to salvation. As a result of this action of God we have the kind of life we live. The sum total is that we are nothing outside of Christ, but God has made us something—indeed *somebodies*—*in* Christ Jesus (cf. I Cor. 1:26–29).

Since we died to God at the Fall, we need to come alive to Him again, and this we do in Christ, whom God provided to bring us to life. Now we are again at the source of everything, i.e. God, but then God-in-Christ, for God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Now we are in Christ, having been reconciled to God.

The next verse speaking of Christ Jesus says, ‘whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness, and sanctification and redemption’. Some translators see it as ‘Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom in righteousness, sanctification and redemption’. This could well be, for in previous verses Christ-crucified is ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God’. It does not much matter, but it does matter that we see and know that the righteousness (justification), sanctification and redemption which is now ours comes solely from Christ—i.e. his saving death and resurrection—and so we have not become of ourselves ‘something’ where once we were ‘nothing’. The point which occupies our thoughts is that none of this wisdom of God in righteousness, sanctification and

redemption is ours outside of Christ. In him it is all ours. We will not devote time here to the elements of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, but simply recognize that they cover the entirety of the new life *in* Christ.

If we try to cover all the prepositions relating to us and Christ such as ‘from’ (*apo*), ‘through’ (*dia*), ‘in’, ‘into’, ‘for’ (*eis*), ‘in’, ‘at’, ‘by’ (*en*), and ‘on’, ‘upon’, ‘at’ (*epi*), then we will have to go through many hundreds of references. Ephesians chapter one shows that ‘in Christ’ we have been chosen before time, chosen to be holy and blameless, to be sons of God, the grace of forgiveness has been bestowed upon us, God’s purpose is planned in Christ, and all things will ultimately be united in him. Both Jews and Gentiles have been predestined and appointed to be to the praise of God’s glory. All things ‘in the saints’ have been wrought ‘*in* Christ Jesus’. The Letter goes on to say that we have been brought to life *with* Christ and have been made to sit *with* him in heavenly places. God will show His great grace to us in the coming age, ‘*in* Christ Jesus’. We have been created ‘*in* Christ Jesus’ with a view to good works. *Through* Christ we have access *to* the Father. Paul is a prisoner ‘*for* Christ Jesus’. So we could go on, touching such subjects as living in Christ, speaking in Christ, being a new creature in Christ, being faithful in Christ, and practise such things ‘*in* the Lord’ as being light, having the same mind, standing fast, being faithful, knowing joy, walking in him, and so on. Such things are without end.

What, then, is being ‘in Christ’? It surely means that we are in union with him, we have submitted to him. The

truth is that God moved in the matter of our salvation before ever we would have moved, had we ever been able. Before we came to know Christ consciously God identified us with him, and He identified him with us. At the Cross the whole Adamic body of humanity was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6) so that the body of sin might be destroyed—i.e. put out of action. When Christ was numbered with the transgressors, then we were numbered with him, i.e. he was numbered with us. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all, and he bore those sins of ours in his body on the Tree. God made him to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

At, and out of this act of the Cross and its atonement, the elect people of God became one with Christ. That is why Paul could say, 'I have been crucified with Christ.' In fact he could say no less. Unless he had been crucified with Christ his sins would have been for ever fixed and their guilt for ever remain irreversible. In him the heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt would have had to be eternally set in its evil. The baptism of which Paul speaks in Romans 6 meant that Paul—i.e. any believer—was baptized into the death of Christ. The death broke out into life. The believer was quickened together—i.e. brought into life together—with Christ. His new world, the new structure in which he lived, would have to be *in Christ*. There would be nothing for him but *en Christo*, but then there would have been no need for him to supply anything, seeing *en Christo* is all-embracing.

For this reason Paul cries, 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the

flesh I live by faith in [or, the faith of] the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' Elsewhere Paul says, 'For me to live *is* Christ!' Everything is 'in the Beloved'. So, too, everything of Christ is in the beloved. Christ lives in him. The believer walks in him (Christ). Christ in him is the hope of glory.

Many of the things we have said may be interpreted by some as being mystical, as though man may have a direct intimate union with God. In fact there is nothing mystical about union with God. The union is a faith-union. If one wishes to speak about 'faith-mysticism' then that may well be appropriate. In general, mysticism is that approach of a human directly to God without mediation, with a view to union with Him. Although some mystics may practise certain rituals and liturgies, yet the initiative and action come from man. Whether a person ever has actual union with God through mystical endeavour is debatable. Every religion, including Christianity, has its mystics, but the true believer's approach is always to the Father by the Son, and by the Spirit. He has been moved by the word of God, has believed it, and has come to faith and repentance, is thus reconciled to God, and united with Him.

This leads us on to the person and work of the Holy Spirit regarding the believer's intimate relationship with God. The prepositions *in*, *by*, *through*, *with* and *from* are also used regarding the Holy Spirit.

The first thing we note about the Holy Spirit is that he is 'the Spirit of God', 'the Spirit of the Lord', 'the Spirit of Sonship', 'the Spirit of the Father', 'the Spirit of Jesus' and

‘the Spirit of Christ’. This indicates that his work relates to the works of both the Father and the Son. It is the Spirit who reveals the Father and Son to us (John 16:12–15, 26; Acts 1:8; I John 5:7). Just as no one can come to the Son except the Father draw him, and no one can come to the Father except through the Son (Matt. 11:27), so no one can come to either the Father or the Son except through the Spirit. In that sense he is the Spirit of intimacy.

It can be shown that the Spirit was present in the work of creation; was, and is present in upholding creation; was functionally present in the work of salvation, and is presently effective in the application of that salvation to those who are being brought to faith and repentance. He is present in the life of the church and personally to all believers in the actions of life and sanctification. Also, he is the ‘eschatological Spirit’, i.e. the one who is present in the actions of ‘things to come’ (John 16:13).<sup>i</sup>

Generally speaking, the Spirit is concerned with activity, and not so much with states of life—as such. Even to be ‘in the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:9–11) means to be under the direction of the Spirit. We note that this is true also of ‘being in the Father’ or ‘being in the Son’. One cannot have a relationship with God which is not dynamic, and action-producing. The following list indicates the kind of action that obtains when one is coming to the faith and so is ‘in the Spirit’:

He will be filled *with* the Holy Spirit;  
 the Holy Spirit will come *upon* you;  
 Elizabeth was filled *with* the Holy Spirit;

Jesus, *full of* the Holy Spirit, returned . . . led *by* the Holy Spirit;  
 unless one is born *of* water and the Spirit;  
 You shall be baptized *with* the Holy Spirit;  
 when the Holy Spirit has come *upon* you;  
 they were all filled *with* the Holy Spirit;  
 Peter, filled *with* the Holy Spirit;  
 full of faith and *of* the Holy Spirit;  
 they received the Holy Spirit;  
 the Holy Spirit *fell* on all who heard;  
 sent out *by* the Holy Spirit;  
 having been forbidden *by* the Holy Spirit;  
 the Holy Spirit came *on* them;  
 You are *in* the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells *in* you;  
*through* his Spirit which dwells *in* you;  
 if *by* the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body;  
 all who are led *by* the Spirit;  
 the Spirit himself bearing witness *with* our spirit;  
 my conscience bears me witness *in* the Holy Spirit;  
 be aglow *with* the Spirit;  
 righteousness and peace and joy *in* the Holy Spirit;  
*by* the power of the Holy Spirit;  
*by* the love of the Spirit;  
 God’s Spirit dwells *in* you;  
 you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and *in* the Spirit of our God;  
*by* one Spirit we were all baptized *into* one body;  
 made to drink *of* one Spirit;

he has given us his Spirit *in* our hearts;  
the fellowship *of* the Holy Spirit;  
having begun *with [in]* the Spirit;  
*through* the Spirit, by faith, we wait;  
walk *by* the Spirit;  
you are led *by* the Spirit;  
if we live *by* the Spirit;  
who sows *to* the Spirit will *from* the Spirit reap  
eternal life;  
we both have access *in* one Spirit;  
be filled *with* the Spirit;  
your love *in* the Spirit;  
joy inspired *by* the Holy Spirit;  
sanctification *by* the Spirit;  
vindicated *in* the Spirit;  
regeneration and renewal *in* the Holy Spirit;  
sanctified *by* the Spirit;  
pray *in* the Holy Spirit;  
I was *in* the Spirit.

These references show us that the Spirit brings us to Christ and the Father, giving us a revelation of both. How transforming! In I John 3:24 the apostle said, 'All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, *by the Spirit which he has given us.*' Again, in 4:12–13, '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 this section we have seen that the Presence of God comes to us as the Presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and that the three Persons unite to make this union personal and true. In our next section but one, we will explore something of that most intimate relationship, and its effects. Prior to doing that we need to see again—and in more detail—the loneliness of man without God, without His abiding in man, and man abiding in Him.

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<sup>1</sup> In regard to the Person and work of the Holy Spirit see *the Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, 1985, 392 pp.), which is quite comprehensive.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

*The Lonely Man*

Who is the lonely man? It is he who does not know how to go, where to go, and what will be at the end of the road—if ever he should reach a terminus—if such there might be for him. He is the lonely man.

The lonely man is the independent 'I am', the one who has decided long ago that the rest of mankind is not trustworthy, that it is concerned with itself, and not with him—or her—who is the lonely person. Whatever element of trust he may have had for certain ones, such as a mother, father or a family member, that trust has faded, though not necessarily because those others are untrustworthy, but because the loner has decided to go it alone, and the sight of one who might happen to be trustworthy is no incentive for him to trust.

What makes the lonely man? Some would tell us that when he entered the world there was trouble in making

that entrance. The newly-born babe encountered a shock at its very birth. It felt its right was to have security, love, warmth and acceptance. Some incident or happening told it otherwise. It reacted and drew silence about itself. It outwardly made some appearance of accepting the persons and circumstances surrounding it, but inwardly it was disappointed and even angry. It built up walls about itself, whilst still giving the impression that it was a normal person. It saw itself as the victim of a number of things—perhaps parental oversight, difficult persons surrounding it in the form of family, family friends, persons at school, at work and even in marriage. The loneliness persisted from the beginning because its sense of injustice had developed and its demand for requital had never abated.

This may be the case with some; we do not know. What we do know is that no person is essentially the victim of the things, circumstances, happenings and persons who surround him, though they be the figures of incest, cruelty, cold indifference and utter selfishness. It is true that many of these situations present intolerable pressures and seemingly insurmountable odds, yet there is in the human spirit the ability to face them all, be violated by none, humiliated by none, and to retain integrity in the face of the worst. Whilst the ability to accomplish these things is present, it must be matched by the will to do it, and this is not always the case. Reaction, anger, self-pity and a sense of injustice may leave the onus on the offender, and even on society in general, to requite injustice done.

We are not saying that one person should face all suffering unaided and come through difficulties solely on his or her own. The human race is a body of people. All

are members one of the other—whether or not they will accept that this is the way it should be. Helpers are dotted around the landscape, and one can generally be seen when wanted, i.e. *if* wanted and *if* enlisted. Our human pride should not prevent us calling out, and we should not be too proud to receive the needed help when it is proffered. No matter how depraved humanity is, it can be appealed to, and will generally respond. When we refuse that help, we increase our loneliness.

The lonely man is the deliberate solitary, the one who seeks to work out his destiny apart from God and man. A man is not fully a man without God; a person is only truly a person in the context of the Person of God, and of fellow-persons. Sociality is part of our true being as humans. The loner is seeking to make his way without God, who alone knows the Way, and who is the only true Way. What the loner may not admit, but what yet is true, is that every person has his—or her—‘I am’.

The loner ‘I am’ says, ‘I can go it alone. It is pleasurable to be independent. It is bondage to have to answer to others, to need others, and to be under others.’ Statements such as these repudiate human sociality. Is this, then, the whole of the matter? Has some birth aberration determined the course of the loner’s life? It would seem not. The mystery of the human will is not easy to know, but the fact of its power, and its insistence, is known.

If a person reacts at birth, then why is that so? We know that some children appear to be born as aggressive persons. Others seem mild and compliant. Some children seem to react against many things, whilst others seem to respond rather than react, and—for the most part—the

latter enjoy life. It seems now to be an established fact that the foetus in the womb is a conscious being from the start. It also experiences much that goes on outside the womb, as well as within the mind and emotions of the mother. Jacob and his brother Esau had interaction even within the womb (Gen. 25:21–26). The Psalmist said, ‘The wicked go astray from the womb . . . speaking lies.’

Doubtless we could pursue this line quite profitably, but everything seems to boil down to the *attitude* of the child—foetal, born and growing. This is something we can observe, but if we need an understanding of the nature of man then we will need to pursue the biblical revelation. It is this revelation on which we have just touched. Further to it, Paul says that when Adam sinned the whole body of humanity sinned in him (Rom. 5:12). The consequences of what has been called ‘original sin’ are innumerable. Far from being born with a *tabula rasa*—a clear record—man comes into the world as a sinful creature. He sins because he is a sinner and it is not because he sins that he is a sinner.

He comes into the world with a bias or bent towards asserting his personal ‘I am’, opposing the I AM of God, and is immediately in competition with all the other ‘I ams’. He not only has the guilt of his committed sins, but the guilt of not being perfect, of not being a true human, and of not being an appropriate existent in the creation of God. It is difficult for us to escape the fact that some human beings seem drawn to faith in God, respond, and so can make something of this life. Others are the other way, and amongst these are the lonely persons.

We have suggested before that every human being needs to work out a way of life, and try to determine his end. In fact this is an impossible operation, for 'the way of a man is not in himself, it is not in a man to direct his own footsteps'. When Paul told us that 'God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus,' he was saying that God had given Christ to be the source of our lives. Without Christ there is no true source. That is why man-on-his-own is man-alone.

It is a frightening prospect to consider. Most human beings try to fill up their lives by calculated 'horizontal' living. That is, they see everything on what they call the human plane. It is living within three dimensions and the five senses, but has no future beyond this life. Hence all living is calculated within things which can be sighted or calculated, without any reference to the 'vertical', i.e. that dimension of God, heaven, or the supernatural. The anguish man knows in horizontal living is that—even if he is unaware—God has put eternity into his heart. This demanding dimension never lets him be satisfied with the horizontal because it is seen only in true perspective when it is linked with the vertical.

To put it another way, man experiences personal anguish because he is not truly himself without God. To put it rather crudely, he is a bolt without the nut, a power appliance without a powerpoint for its plug. He is seeking to be free-standing when he is—by created nature—dependent. He is unfulfilled because he can only be fulfilled in God. All of this is harsh reality, but it will not be seen this way without biblical revelation. In that sense man does not know what he/she is missing in life by trying to be autonomous.

The ideas of original sin and human depravity have never been popular, and why should they be since they seem to demean the human race? However, what we are trying to get at is the utter misery man knows when he is alienated from God. Our brave little attempt to describe what happens when a child is born, is no answer to the *fact* of man's misery. Whilst man's reaction to the world in which he was born may be an observable phenomenon, yet his misery does not spring merely from his reaction. His entire being is in misery, and it may be better said that his reaction springs from his misery, even if the reaction intensifies that misery.

Depravity, then, is a human existential matter and brings its own guilt, but the deprivation of God from a human existence is what causes and intensifies man's terrible loneliness. It is his self being denied its own fullness. It is the incessant ache that shows itself through much of our art, music and literature. Artists, musicians and writers give us glimpses of the beauty and glory of the creation, and even those rare flashes of God's own glory and beauty itself—not divorced from creation, but not just rising from it. If the heavens show the glory of God, then there will be those who see it, and by their brilliance of gifts pass it on to humanity. It is just that man wills not to see God because of the moral confrontation that He brings. Such a person wills to see the glory, but not to see the God of glory, or the glory of God. Thus he deprives himself of what is most wonderful, the most transcendent, and indeed the most immanent.

Much of man's art depicts this yearning, this restlessness, this anguish, this knowledge that what is true is there, but is not obtainable, or barely obtainable, or only

obtainable at great cost. Because the struggle for it is not moral, the truth—which is God Himself—is never found. Man's perversity makes sure God is not found. God for His part is ever communicating, but the lonely man astutely evades the messages sent out. He refuses the still small voice as much as the archangel's great trumpet blast. His pain comes from the knowledge below conscious knowledge, that he was never designed for loneliness, nor for aloneness.

The truth is that man was designed for the richest sociality conceivable, and a sociality even beyond conception. He was designed for love. He has often looked for it, and looked for it in everything and everyone, and his inner alarm increases as he does not see it. He cannot see it because he wills not to do so, because he wills not to see God, who is love, because that love is moral, and makes demands upon him to which he does not wish to accede. So he either diminishes into being a cynic, a bitter person, or a pessimist, a nihilist and even an anarchist, or he becomes an exploiter of the fragments of love—the first innocence of the simply pure, the salacious and sophisticated loves of the calculating vendor, or he retires into the inner pornography of the mind, titillating the tired appetites, and so finally sinks to mental and moral dereliction. The latter becomes the tired misery, the lethal torpor that destroys by its apathy and dull banality. Temporary stimulations only serve to bring deeper and drearier misery.

Man was designed for love, warm stimulating love, love that fills out his humanity to its joyous ends. Love is so moral, so much to do with being other-centred,

concentrating upon the needs of others, moving out to heal without condescension or patronage. Love is almost anonymous, showing itself only to witness to the reality that man-in-God can and does love truly. It is the absence of this love which brings so much misery whilst its presence brings true vitality to living.

For this reason we must press on to see the wonder of God meeting man and of man meeting God. We must see clearly the bliss that comes when the sin which separates man from God is so radically dealt with in the Atonement that a man meets God clear-eyed and filled with delight. The depraved and deprived part of man thus withers rapidly, and as the glory of God comes into his mind and heart and spirit, so his joy knows no bounds.

That is why we will look at the love which abides, and its fullness and its pleasure.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

*The Love That Abides*

The band of Jewish people that had struggled back from exile, and had witnessed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, longed to see the restoration of their temple. Many of them had misgivings about God. Had He received them, reinstated them, and was the covenant to be full, and were the elements of God's glory as taught and seen in that covenant to be renewed or to remain as they had been? Would God dwell among them? Were His mercy, grace, long-suffering, steadfast love, forgiveness and faithfulness to surround them once more?

The answer to these questions was given to the returning people by God, through the prophet Haggai:

*Take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not. For thus says the LORD*

*of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with splendour, says the LORD of hosts.*

If the returning people of God were encouraged by that prophetic assurance, how much more the participators in the New Covenant! As we study the great attributes of God as they were operative in the covenant with Moses, how much more then should we expect them to be present in the New Covenant. Unfortunately the fragmentary nature of much preaching and pastoral care seems to indicate that the love of God is a rarity, obtainable either by heavy and serious striving, or by the luck of the game!

The truth is that God's steadfast love—i.e. His unwavering, unvacillating grace and mercy—is unceasing. He takes the initiative, going out in love to us. It is through the terrible act of the Crucifixion and the awesome Resurrection that He brings us His love, and that love is not arbitrary, but constant and irreversible. It is covenant-love, and we live within the structure of that covenant which is eternal and unchangeable. By reason of it we are no longer lonely. It does us good to remember that we were once dead in sins, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience, and that we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of the body and the mind, and so were, by nature, children of wrath. It does us good never to forget that we were once separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. It is essential that we remember the former futility of

our minds, the darkened understandings which were ours, our alienation from the life of God due to our ignorance and hardness of heart, and that we had given ourselves over to the practice of licentiousness and every kind of uncleanness.

It is right to remember these things for then the contrast of life, and the radical change wrought by the Gospel, will stand out as brilliant grace. It is in this 'washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit' that we see and know the love of God. We are brought from the far-off land to the dear Father. Our misery has been swept away in the new release by the Spirit. Our sadness, cynicism and bitterness have been dissipated by the love which the Holy Spirit has shed abroad in our hearts.

It might be thought that new people in Christ would—and should—come timidly to the Father, the Son and the Spirit. This is not so, and it does not need to be so. The Father, the Son and the Spirit come boldly and richly to us.

The truth is that the Father and the Son come and take up their abode in us. The Spirit also comes to dwell in us. This we have seen, and with this the truth also that the church is in the Father, His people are in the Son, and all live in the Spirit. There is a great community of the Father, of the Son and of the Spirit. The presence is wonderfully powerful. Relationship is at full strength, and not something which begins tentatively, becomes somewhat emboldened, and then expands. As parents love their newly-born babes with full love, so do the Father, Son and Spirit love the new babes in Christ, and nourish and cherish them in great warmth. We now proceed to look at something of that love.

One of the choice statements towards which we would naturally gravitate is I John 1:1–3:

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

This passage makes the amazing and wonderful statement, 'our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ'. It is certainly difficult to take in. First of all it has echoes of John 17:3 when Jesus said—in his High-Priestly prayer on the night of his betrayal—'And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' The verb 'know' does not refer to intellectual understanding or recognition, but to interpersonal and relational knowledge. The very knowing is life. One is in union with the Father and the Son. Just as God *knows* man (I Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:8–9), so man comes to know God. This thought is repeated in I John 5:20, 'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.'

Of course to know the true God *is* life. Man is back in union with the God he spurned. He is back in his own true life. The nut and the bolt are one together. The unit is

plugged into the socket and now has power. The dependent furniture is fastened to its support. As we have said, these terms are inadequate, but they indicate the oneness of man with his source of life.

So, then, man has fellowship with the Father and the Son. We need not go back to the pattern by which this happens—the Father leading to the Son, and then the Son to the Father. The event has happened. It is wonderfully, deliriously true—union has been effected. Just as the apostles had had vital fellowship with their Lord, now they have fellowship with God. As a modern hymn puts it, ‘God and man at table are sat down’.

This, of course, is the miracle of history. It is the miracle Jesus had prayed for in that High-Priestly prayer, ‘that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us . . . I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou has sent me and hast loved them even *as thou hast loved me.*’ ‘As thou hast loved me’ seems impossible. That God should love us totally as He totally loves His Son is beyond our comprehension, though not, of course, beyond our experience.

To have fellowship with the Father and with the Son is to enter—as human beings—into the union that Father and Son have with each other. Whilst that is beyond imagination it is not beyond experience. In a later passage in this Letter John says, ‘No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.’ Is it true that

we *have* the Father, that we *have* the Son, that we *abide* in the Father and we *abide* in the Son? Astonishing! In II John 9 the apostle adds, ‘Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine *has* both the Father and the Son.’

In I Corinthians 1:9 Paul said, ‘God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.’ To be brought into fellowship with the Son was the great act of the Father, without which we would still be out in the cold. Now it is seen that our fellowship is with both the Father and the Son. We abide in both the Father and the Son (I John 1:24). In I John 4:13 the writer tells us how it is that we know of this union and this abiding, ‘By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit.’ We know from other places that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of fellowship, and doubtless without his presence and teaching we could not understand this union with God (II Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1; cf. I Cor. 2:9–14).

For a moment or two let us withdraw from seeing the biblical evidence of our union with God, particularly as it is fellowship with the Father and the Son, and as it is abiding in the Father and the Son, and they abiding in us. Let us ponder the implications and elements of this new union. Let us think of our lonely man who we saw to be racked with anguish and misery, a terribly solitary creature, having no home, and without hope and without God in the world, having no destination to anticipate except, perhaps, the destiny of ultimate darkness and lostness, the pains of existing for ever with his irreversible guilt. Jude describes it in terrible terms, ‘Water-less clouds, carried about by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam

of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.'

It is this lonely man, who, hearing the Gospel, comes into repentance and faith and is forgiven, justified and purified by God and so brought to union with Him. For this one to have fellowship with the Father and the Son is the miracle of the ages. No wonder John, writing of this fellowship with the Father and the Son, tells his readers, 'And we are writing this that your [and our] joy may be complete.' Well, of course!

Now we need to know something of the nature of this union. If we commence with John 15:1–11 we observe that the union of branches with the Vine is natural. The Son is in the Father, abiding in Him. So Jesus could say, 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.' Notice that he adds, 'These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.' These latter words would be of great comfort to the lonely man.

We see the way to abiding, and the process of abiding. It is the obedience of love. Jesus had told his disciples, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my commandments,' and had added, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.' Abiding, love and obedience all go together in the new union of man with God. See, then, in John's First Letter the following statements:

All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.

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.

So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

So, then, love and obedience are the basis, the way, and the fruit of true abiding. Another way of saying it is that, as the life of the Father and the Son flow into the believer, and as the Father and the Son dwell in the believer, and as he dwells in Them, so love will have gripped that one, and the urge for obedience constrain him. All of this will be his life, his will—his 'I am'—being in glad conformity with the will of God—the true I AM—and so the joy of being a true and full person will obtain. Autonomy will have become tasteless and union with God a beautiful way of life.

Another thing we need to see is that the union is not a mystical one. Whatever hidden elements there may be to it, it is first of all something God has accomplished. Colossians 1:19–22 says plainly that when we were enemies with God He reconciled us to Himself by the blood of the Cross, 'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to

himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled . . .’

Romans 5:10–11 says something similar, ‘For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation’. Note that the ‘saved by his life’ refers to present union with Christ, this union ensuring the ultimate goal.

Again in II Corinthians 5:18–19 we have the same objective act of reconciliation, ‘All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation’.

If then the work of reconciliation was objective, and we have been brought into union with Christ through baptism into him, then our union, whilst personal, warm and living, is nevertheless not dependent on our working, but on God who effected it. Whilst we may often be low on our consciousness of the union itself, we can always rest upon its objective reality by faith. Branches do not have to energize themselves up into consciousness of being in the Vine. It is God who takes the initiative and brings us into union with Himself. The lonely man need not be lonely any more, since God has come to Him and he is in Him.

At the same time the factors of love and obedience are

present, and essential to the union. Yet here we must realize that we only love because He first loved us (I John 4:19). The reality of God’s love towards us is the powerful factor of our living. Love can wane, fade, and grow cold, so that we must ‘keep ourselves in the love of God’ (Jude 21). We do not have to stimulate God’s love, but we have to be constantly aware of it. This awareness can be stimulated by simply looking at what the Scriptures tell us regarding His love for us. We should read about the great love of the Father, the love of the Son, and the love of the Spirit. The admonitions to walk in love, to be active in love simply lead us to the practical truth that the sap of the Vine flows naturally into the branches, but the branches do well to utilize it, and to bring forth fruit.

This awareness of God’s love, and of our dwelling in Him and He in us, will constrain us to obedience, and obedience will keep us warm in abiding. When we remember that God takes the initiative always, then we will not be so likely to come into fear. The union and the abiding are real. They are objective. ‘Our life is hid with Christ in God’, and what more could we say than that?

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## *I Need a Presence— Quick!*

**No man is an Island, entire of itself . . . any man's death diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankind*; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.**

John Donne's famous poem *Devotions* tells us man's being is not 'entire of itself'. Jeremiah has told us, 'the way of man is not in himself,' and that God alone can direct a man's steps. We are then, at the best, an under-fountain flowing from the Master Fountain of Life—the Fountain of Living Waters. That is why the dancers sang, 'All my springs are in thee.' Man is not a closed circuit within himself.

We all must have a companion, a god, a presence. The times of self-adoration pall after a time. What is in us only becomes stimulating when it is interfaced with another

personality or creature. We are so structured by creation that we need a presence. We really need *the* Presence—God Himself. Our past studies have shown us the barrenness and emptiness of living to ourselves, and trying to be complete on our own.

Man's rejection of God left him in a dilemma. Fascinated by the thought that he could be a god in himself, he had not calculated what he was letting himself in for. He had not thought that now he would have to be responsible for every decision he made. Freedom might appear to be heady, but it becomes a headache. We might think we know ourselves, but we are surprised by what we can do—especially by what is headstrong and frightening.

No man is an Island unto himself. As Donne said, he is part of a continent, so that every man's death diminishes him. To be part of the solidary body of humanity is to be conscious of the whole human race. If this were not so, we would scarcely be interested in the Six O'clock News. Folk of other races and cultures would not fascinate us. Interaction in international sports would have no appeal to us. It is apparent that we were made to be universal creatures.

### THE SEDUCTIVE PRESENCE—THE IDOLS

The truth about man is that he cannot be ever truly, fully satisfied as a human being, by anything other than the fullness of God. The delight a human being can know in God is inestimable. The Scriptures are filled with utterances and descriptions of man's enjoyment of God as his

Creator, his Redeemer, his Father and his Friend. Such a simple statement as, 'I love the Lord!' (Ps. 116:1), and another as, 'Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for ever more,' tell us how delectable is God to those who have felt His love. When the congregation can sing—even in the midst of great strife—'O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever,' and sing it so much so that it is a refrain verse after verse after verse; then surely man's heart is fully free—and only fully free—in adoring the living God.

When we look at the high worship and praise that Israel gave to God, and look down through two millenniums of Christian praise and adoration with its wide variety of music, psalms and song, then we know we are at the heart of man's union with God. We have only to see the love Israel had for the house of God, and the love Christians have for their living Lord, in order to know that man is in strong pain when he separates himself from God:

My soul longs, yea, faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.  
Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at thy altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in thy house,  
ever singing thy praise!

Again,

May all who seek thee  
rejoice and be glad in thee!

May those who love thy salvation  
say evermore, 'God is great!'

And what richer expression of longing and adoration for God than this part of Psalm 63?—

O God, thou art my God, I seek thee,  
my soul thirsts for thee;  
my flesh faints for thee,  
as in a dry and weary land where no water is.  
So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary,  
beholding thy power and glory.  
Because thy steadfast love is better than life,  
my lips will praise thee.  
So I will bless thee as long as I live;  
I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.  
My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,  
and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips,  
when I think of thee upon my bed,  
and meditate on thee in the watches of the night;  
for thou hast been my help,  
and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.  
My soul clings to thee;  
thy right hand upholds me.

We could go on and on, drawing from the experiences of men and women who have known God, not by mystical endeavours to be in union with Him, but by belief in the word He has spoken to them—the revelation of Himself. Armed with this knowledge we can now tackle the matter of idolatry, for it is the greatest shame of the human race, and the most dreadful rebellion against the Most High, the Holy One of Israel and of all the earth.

The resources for a study of idolatry are many. In the Scriptures we are given an understanding of its nature.

Perhaps the most telling is what St Paul sets out for us. In Romans 1:18–25 we have a description of man’s entrance into idol worship:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

In this passage Paul is saying that man refused God in His true nature, and sought to make a substitute—or substitutes—for Him. They knew, unavoidably, the true nature of God—His eternal power and deity—yet deliberately made idols to worship. By creation, man is a worshipful creature. He cannot *not* worship. He must worship something. So he gives to creatures and imagined things all the powers that belong to God. No doubt man has *distributed* the eternal power and deity of God amongst many gods. That, too, was cunning, for by this distribution man believes he can control the eternal power and deity.

The primal temptation, ‘You shall be *as* God [or, as gods]’,

once received, meant that man was the basic god, and he could give to gods the deity they needed. Paul, in I Corinthians 8:4 said,

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.

By this passage, then, Paul is saying that there are no gods, no essential gods. The gods which are so called, which are the products of men’s imaginations, are false and delusive.

What we need to see is what is contained in the title of this section, ‘I need a presence—quick!’ Because man is built to worship he must have a presence. He has rejected the presence of the true God for it is too demanding, it destroys his vaunted autonomy, it confronts him with his creatureliness, and so demeans him. He must have a god for the companionship every man needs. He must have a god, for it must supply him with emotional fulfilment. It must serve him with all the delectable riches that he would have from the true God, yet it must give him these without any moral demand, or without bringing him into the curse of guilt.

This is what man wants of the idols, but they cannot supply him with what he demands. The idols are very disappointing and the sages in Israel knew why. Some of their statements are most revealing.

For example, in Isaiah 44:9–20 there is an essay on idol makers and idol worshippers. It commences with,

‘All who make idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame.’ The Jerusalem Bible translates this last as, ‘Their servants see nothing, they understand nothing, and so they will be put to shame’. In other words, the idols are not substantial and nothing issues from them. So the prophet asks, ‘Who fashions a god or casts an image, that is profitable for nothing?’

In Acts 17:29 Paul tells the Athenians, ‘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.’ Paul knew that man delighted to cast God—as he knew Him, or thought he knew Him—in these art forms. Images come first as mental and then become iconic. Much delight is put into the work of idol making. One expects a good response from such care and imagination. Thus the prophet in Isaiah describes the patient care with which the idol maker applies himself to his task. With deep sarcasm Isaiah describes the emergence of the idol from the hand of its maker. Using part of the tree timber for cooking and warming himself, ‘the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol; and falls down to it and worships it; he prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for thou art my god!”’

The prophet’s comment on this is, ‘They know not, nor do they discern; for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their minds, so that they cannot understand.’ Idolatry deceives, hence the prophet concludes,

He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, ‘Is there not a lie in my right hand?’

This, then, is always the state of mind of the idolater.

Idolatry is an enormous hoax. The greater part of humanity has been caught up in it. In Psalm 115 we read the classic scornful diatribe against the idols which have mouths, eyes, ears and hands, but are wholly dumb and static. The Psalmist concludes, ‘Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.’ It is true that we become like the idols we make, and it is also true that they emerge from us, being the projections of our idolatrous minds, and being the very expression of them.

When we insist on ‘the presence’ of the idols, then we might fondly imagine they are subject to us. How many idols have been cast down and rejected when they do not fulfil our desires? Yet the idols have their revenge. It is we who are infatuated by them, and not they by us. Paul tells us the idols have strict laws. They are harsh legalists. They capture the conscience and bring it under their tyranny. If we will cast God in their image, then they will be severe and judgemental, exacting service and worship without mercy. In Galatians 4:8–10 he describes that bondage,

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

What we are now led to see is that idols are not the empty creations of the human mind. They are artifacts no doubt, but they are associated with evil powers. We might even say that the making of an idol is an invitation to a demon to come and take its place in the new shrine.

In I Corinthians 10:14–22 Paul contrasts the fellowship which believers experience at the Lord’s table, and the fellowship persons have when they eat food offered to idols. To eat bread and drink wine in Christ’s memory is to fellowship with God. To eat food offered to idols is to have fellowship with demons. He argues,

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?

In Psalm 106:36–37 the writer said of Israel, ‘They served their [the Canaanites’] idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons.’ There is a warning against this in Leviticus 17:7, ‘So they shall no more slay their sacrifices for satyrs [demons], after whom they play the harlot’. Deuteronomy 32:17 (cf. Exod. 22:20) says, ‘They sacrificed to demons which were no gods, to new gods they had never known, to gods that had come in of late, whom your fathers had never dreaded’.

It seems, then, that we cannot have idols without the occult powers attaching themselves to them. If this be so, then our idols of today are a source of evil and slavery. Our idols are not fashioned as idols, of course. They are idols of the mind—of the imagination. We have our egos which we idolize, our idols of persons, of sex, of comfort, of wealth, of pleasure, of sport, of passion. We make others into idols, and—most strangely of all—we fashion God Himself into an idol. By this we mean that

we imagine what the true God should be and we fix that image and worship it. By a careful selection of Scriptures we can turn God into a kindly, beneficent, non-judgemental, non-penalizing god who is wholly love, not at all legal, and is graciously tolerant of all our sins, even the sins we once called ‘mortal’. The trouble with this god is the same as with all gods: he becomes a tyrant, cannot give us freedom from guilt, and never satisfies us, because he does not comport with the inner knowledge which we have of the true God.

This is not the place to begin a survey of idolatry in the Scriptures. The subject is too vast to contain within our modest volume. If, however, we wish to study the subject, then a good place to commence would be the Book of the prophet Ezekiel. The prophet sets out in wonderful ways the true Presence of God. The Presence is described as a visionary but real glory. The radiance of God emanates in Israel. It is the *Shekinah*, the glory-cloud of His presence. This Presence is not simply visual but is most dynamic, for wherever it moves action happens. In 1:28 when Ezekiel viewed it, he fell upon his face. In 3:12–15 there is a great earthquake with the glory, and the prophet was transported to Telabib by the river Chebar where there were the Jewish exiles. In 3:23—on the plain away from the river Chebar—he again saw the glory and fell on his face, and was commissioned to preach.

In 8:4–5 he again had a view of the *Shekinah* and was shown the evil of idolatry that was in Israel. In 8:7–18 there is an account of the various forms of idolatry being practised. He was told, ‘Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here.’ He went in

and saw. ‘There, portrayed upon the wall round about, were all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel.’ After this he was asked, ‘Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every man in his room of pictures?’ Then he was shown ‘women weeping for Tammuz’ and ‘twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, worshipping the sun toward the east’. What is significant is that the idolatrous elders say, ‘The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.’ In other words if they do not have the Presence of the Lord, they will have a presence—whatever!

For those who think idolatry is a self-chosen occupation in which they can luxuriate, the Book of Ezekiel is an astringent antidote. In 9:1–11 the Glory-Presence came as a theophany-judgement. The six men appointed to execute judgement in Israel were told to go through the land and to smite all upon whom the mark of God was not imprinted. Just as in Revelation 13 some had the mark of the beast, and others had the seal of God—so also in this case, i.e. idolaters were destroyed, but the faithful remained untouched. It seems, too, that the glory of the Lord departed from Jerusalem, at least for a time—perhaps for the time of exile.

Now, in this section, we look briefly at the tragedy of idolatry. We see firstly that whilst idols promise much, they can do little that is of value to the devotee. Such gods are ‘no gods’. Behind them are the spirits and powers of evil, but they desire to do nothing but harm to human creatures. God so loves His creation that He is fiercely

jealous of those who would seduce His people from Him. The ultimate end of the seducers such as the dragon (‘that old serpent called the devil’), the beast, the false prophet and ‘the mother of harlots’—Babylon—are all destroyed, and those allied with them come to judgement, being cast into the lake of fire ‘which is the second death’.

God’s anger lies in this, that He has created all things, and set at the peak of that creation man, who is made in the image of God. He is jealous for man, whom He loves. Hence, when in the wilderness His people make an idol and say, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’ then the highest and most terrible of blasphemies is committed. God’s anger would destroy the nation and make a new people out of Moses and his house.

The charge against idols is that they are dumb and can do nothing. Hence Moses sang,

Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods?  
Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,  
terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

The gods of the heathen are helpless and stupid. How could anyone give them credence? The truth is that many did, and do. The idols stand with men against God. Behind them are ranged the evil powers who seek to manipulate humanity against its Creator. The fact is that no god can be a redeemer, and whatever redemption the gods may promise, none can be *the* Redeemer. Only God can be called ‘the Holy One of Israel, thy Redeemer’. The idols do not really own the creation, and none of them can give or sustain life—in spite of many claims for them. Nor can a god be a true father to any devotee. The gods

are devised from the rebellion of man, and are compounded of the fragmented elements of creatures separated from their Creator. No wonder that that which was born from man in whom 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually', should be portrayed in dreadful forms, horrible features, gargoyle grimacings and the like. At least the ancient and medieval depictions were honest, portraying as they did the hideous natures of the gods.

In contrast to this is the true Presence. We have spoken of the 'delectable Presence', but must not think that often that Presence is anything but delectable. He is the Holy God who cleanses His people by 'a spirit of judgement and by a spirit of burning'. No wonder His Presence brought terror to Isaiah's heart, yet it is that Presence which brings true assurance to those who love His appearing. The gods can do nothing, but He does everything that is profitable for His people, even if that includes judgements.

Finally, we are faced with the choice of presence in our lives. Do we wish to have the exciting, supernatural, emotion-fulfilling gods who will assist us to power and security, or do we desire the Everlasting Presence of the One True God?

Moses' last charge to Israel was,

See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you this day, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live

and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you this day, that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land which you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

That charge was to remain with Israel as a solemn injunction. Joshua, when he gave his last charge so many years later, seemed even less confident than Moses that the people of Israel would reject idolatry and follow the Lord.

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

Notice that Joshua refers to three sets of idols, the first being those worshipped beyond the Euphrates, i.e. such as were worshipped by Abraham's family, those in Egypt, and those of the Canaanites. The people were to choose to *serve*, i.e. to be bound by a vassalage agreement to the idol who, in return, would 'do them good'. The people would have to decide who would be the most

beneficial to serve. 'Beyond the River' seemed far away. Did the gods of Mesopotamia have territorial rights in Canaan? Did the gods of Egypt have such rights? Now that Yahweh had brought them to the land long ago promised by Him, was He stronger than the territorial gods in this land? They had to decide.

The people's answer was that Yahweh had shown Himself strongest—He had driven out the Amorites and so the local deities were powerless. Yes, they would serve Him. Doubtless the Abrahamic–Mosaic Covenant-contract was in their minds. Joshua's startling reply was,

*You cannot serve the LORD; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.*

The people's reply was 'Nay; but we will serve the Lord.' Then Joshua said to the people, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.' They then said, 'We are witnesses.'

We notice that no god or idol is worshipped without a contract. This seems to be the case that we saw in Isaiah 44:9, 'All who make idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame'. We saw that the translations 'witnesses' and 'servants' are virtually the one. In Galatians 4:8–9 we saw that devotees of idols are their slaves.

There can be a slavery which comes out of infatuation; the devotee adores the idol. In Hosea 4:17 God said, 'Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone.' He meant,

'Where such infatuation exists, rational argument no longer has any power'.

What, then, liberates a person from idols? The answer is clear, 'Only the Presence of the Lord.' If a person finds illicit joy in the idols, and the expression of his defiance of the living God, then only a revelation of that living God as Creator, Father and Redeemer in the palpable warm and living way will break the grip of idolatry.

The word of Paul to the Thessalonians who had believed was, 'You turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.' Paul had recorded, 'Our gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction'. That is, they saw God through the Gospel and capitulated to Him. They saw the glory of the True Presence, and in the light of that, their idols looked tawdry, shabby, frivolous, impotent and foolish, and they abandoned them, turning to the living God who came to them winning their worship and service by the gift of salvation.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*The Hideous Presence*

Some of us are repelled by the word 'hideous'. We have seen enough in life that is hideous not to want to see more. I know of numerous persons who will not read the Books of Daniel and the Revelation because they feel a sense of dread when the text is mentioned. Some people, of course, are attracted by things hideous, either out of curiosity or perverseness, or simply because they dislike what is beautiful. I wonder how many folk have declined to read C. S. Lewis's book, *That Hideous Strength*, simply because of the title, a book, by the way, which is most profound in delineating the evil action of Satan in the last days of this planet. As we will see, not all evil appears to be hideous. It is just the effects of it which eventually prove to be hideous.

Idolatry is the seductive presence. It promises so much. The writer of Hebrews can even speak of

'the fleeting pleasures of sin,' and one of the deceptive things about sin is the illusion that it is pleasurable. Idolatry is pleasurable in the sense that it promises everything that the human mind could envisage. Whilst some idols may look to be hideous, even the ugliness of them promises something of substance. They are past masters in the art of controlling the forces which bring luck and good fortune to their humble devotees. In this way even the ugly idols seduce.

When it comes to the matter of good and evil in the world, we discover a legacy of the Fall. It is this: every human creature is sure he knows how to discern good and evil. Human beings are adamant on that point. Each knows what is good and evil. Curiously enough, not every human being agrees on what another thinks in that regard. The serpent promised, 'You shall be as God, knowing good and evil.' Scarcely anyone denies the existence of good and evil. Indeed as far back as we can trace there have always been the stories, fables, myths, religions and philosophies which have spoken of these two things. Some approaches—such as monism—blur the distinction between the two, or make them to be two sides of the one coin, or relativize them, but somehow we all agree to the existence of both.

In one sense there is no 'good' and no 'evil', not anyway, as abstractions. There is no impersonal force, no power, no influence which is good or evil. There are beings—God, celestial creatures and terrestrial creatures—who do good, and there are beings—Satan, fallen celestial creatures and fallen human beings—who do evil. God is good, doubtless, but then His goodness issues in proper acts, just as Satan's person issues in evil or bad acts.

Another way of saying this is that two special presences determine much of the events and actions within the world of creation. The two presences are God and Satan. God is good, does goodness, and furthers the history of His plan, ultimately bringing it to a right conclusion. Satan does evil and only evil, seeking to further his plan and bring it to the climax he desires for it. Prophetic insight announces that God will succeed and Satan fail. In that sense we can say that history works out as a battle between good and evil, but even so, there are no such abstractions as *good* and *evil*.

It is our aim in this section of our book to examine the hideous presence, i.e. the presence of Satan and the system he has developed. We have already spoken of God's presence in a number of ways, especially as He is present to His people in the way of covenant, in the way of Christ, and in the way of the community of the Spirit.

Many are curious as to the origin of Satan. Little, if anything, is said about this in the Scriptures. Well known are two passages which may refer *in principle* to his beginnings. The first passage is Isaiah 14:3–21. It is an oracle addressed to the king of Babylon taunting him. It makes sense when we realize that Babylon was an enemy of Israel and eventually took her into exile. Indeed, Babylon and its pomp, power and splendour became a name for all that is secular and anti-God. In the Book of the Revelation it represents the idolatrous and worldly system that opposes the people of God. The pride of Babylon stretches as far back as building the tower at Babel, and forward until the destruction of the unholy city at the end of time, the city which opposes the Holy City and seeks its defeat.

Thus, when Babylon is addressed in Isaiah 14, it is not too much of a leap to say that the 'prince of this world—Satan' is also addressed; that is, behind the king of Babylon is the celestial king of the earthly Babylon, Satan himself. At least in principle, he is the one who says in his heart,

I will ascend to heaven;  
above the stars of God  
I will set my throne on high;  
I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north;  
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,  
I will make myself like the Most High.

Analysed in the light of our 'I am' thesis, the king of Babylon is putting himself above all creatures but God—'the stars of God' being the angels—and even making himself equal with God. We recognize this as the poison injected by the serpent into the veins of the primal couple, i.e. the 'I am' lethal thinking.

Again, in Ezekiel chapter 28 there is another taunt, this time directed to the king of Tyre, and all of it needs to be read thoughtfully. The king considers that he is a god, that he is incredibly wise, that he is wiser than Daniel, and that he has accomplished all things by his own power. Because of this delusion a second taunt is therefore directed against him, and in this oracle there are such statements as,

You were the signet of perfection,  
full of wisdom  
and perfect in beauty.  
You were in Eden, the garden of God . . .  
With an anointed guardian cherub I placed you;

you were on the holy mountain of God;  
 in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.  
 You were blameless in your ways  
 from the day you were created,  
 till iniquity was found in you . . .  
 Your heart was proud because of your beauty;  
 you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your  
 splendour.

This whole passage may well refer to the king of Tyre, but its references transcend the experience of an earthly king. Traditional exegesis and thinking has always applied this passage to Satan, although the more critical exegesis of the text in our day limits it to the earthly king. Even so, the spirit of the passage fits the character of the beautiful serpent who seduced the primal couple. Verse 14 says, ‘*With* an anointed guardian cherub I placed you’, and has been translated from the Greek version of the Old Testament and so the ‘with’ has been inserted. It may well refer to the subject himself, i.e. ‘*You* were anointed as a guardian cherub’ (*NIV*), or ‘You were a towering cherub whom I set’ (*NEB* margin), in which case the action transcends that of the king of Tyre and fits the celestial prince-motivator behind him—Satan.

If these two passages apply to Satan, then they are most revealing. Far from being the ugly and hideous creature we have sometimes been led to believe, he was originally a creature of great glory, whose moral perfection declined sharply as he fell in love with himself and became proud, arrogant and ambitious. In Job chapters 1 and 2 he is referred to as ‘a son of God’, i.e. an angel. The name Satan means ‘adversary’ in the sense that we often use the term ‘devil’s advocate’, i.e. one who

opposes a claim and sifts out the evidence against its being proven correct. Examples of this are seen in Zechariah 3:1–5, Jude 9 and Revelation 12:10—three cases where an accusation of doing evil are made against human beings.

Why, then, do we speak of ‘the hideous presence’? We need to see that the glorious serpent of Eden, the one who was ‘the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty’, the ‘Day Star, son of Dawn’ was later called ‘the great dragon [who was] thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9). His seduction of the woman, which in turn led to the transgression of the man, was what brought the horror of human fallenness into the world, the sinfulness that caused the frightening sins and crimes of the human race—the horror and terror of which cannot be computed. Sin and death came as two terrible monsters to fasten upon the body of humanity and bedevil it to the end of its days. This is why we speak of ‘the hideous presence’. Undoubtedly not all that looks hideous is hideous, and not all that looks beautiful is genuinely beautiful, but there is a moral hideousness in Satan which is beyond description.

In II Corinthians 11:2–3 Paul spoke to the church, saying, ‘I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.’ The truth is that the primal couple lived in the Presence of God, in a wonderful environment, and yet the presence of another could make them suspect the sincerity and verity of the true Presence.

This problem did not present itself only in that initial instance, but has continued ever since. By it Satan has built up his system, which in the Bible is called 'the world'. He has used deceit and seduction to accomplish this. In the 12th chapter of the Revelation we are told that the great red dragon—i.e. Satan—by use of his tail 'swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth'. We take this to mean he seduced a third of the celestial beings to follow him, and certainly such 'principalities and powers' are under his control. Out of them he has fashioned his army of helpers and deceivers. We read in Revelation 12:9 that Satan was called 'the deceiver of the whole world', so that we see his presence to all things to be most powerful. Jesus called him 'the prince of this world', and Paul called him 'the god of this world'. He also called him 'the prince of the power of the air'. Of course in the midst of all this thinking we should realize that Satan is simply a creature—as we too are creatures. He is not God, however skillfully he may imitate Him, and he has only power to do the things which he is allowed to do.

John the apostle lists some of the alluring elements of Satan's world system—'the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life'. We understand them. Such temptations were there in the garden of Eden where 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' was described as 'good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise'. In I Corinthians chapter 1 Paul speaks of the world having its own kind of wisdom. When we look at the chapter we see it is wisdom which has to do with being accounted high in this world, and

brilliant—elements which we find in Ezekiel chapter 28.

We might be tempted to think that 'the world' is simply a fortuitous, arbitrary collection of evil celestial powers, demonic creatures and sinful human beings who just do evil things by nature of the case, but this is scarcely so. Satan's world system is highly and brilliantly organized. We might say that the vast network of idols, idolaters and accompanying demonic powers covers most of humanity. When we see that all peoples and nations have angels which are set over them, and that, though some of these are good, many are evil, and are seeking to bring about man's enslavement, then we realize that unaided human beings are no match for such a system.

When we realize that the power by which evil forces keep man in their grip is human guilt, then we can see the slavery into which man's sin has sold him (see *The Clash of the Kingdoms*, NCPI, 1989, for a full survey of this matter). Seeing evil for what it is, we understand the dark clouds of the occult that have always hovered over the human race. These evil powers so deceive that they make 'evil good and good evil, darkness light and light darkness, put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter', so that what is moral darkness in himself, man mistakes for light. Paul said also that 'the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.'

Unfortunately many of us fail to read history correctly. We think of it as a collection of happenings which follow a cause-and-effect pattern. We believe that an analysis of this cause-and-effect pattern will show us what is history.

Others have a view that history is composed of a cyclic system of events, whilst others think of a determinative pattern of events that is evolutionary, constituting an upward spiral and an ultimate issue of success. Marxism's dialectical materialism is one of these views. In fact, biblically, history is the procession and the progression of God's plan for His creation. Satan's determination is to impede and destroy God's plan so that his own intention may succeed.

In the Scriptures we can trace this struggle. We see Satan build his world system, and we see this system oppose the rule and reign of God, that which is called 'the Kingdom of God'. We see the battle to win the nations from God, and God's battle to retain His people. In the last Book of the Bible—the Book called 'The Revelation'—certain elements emerge in clarity. These elements have been present at least since the fall of man, and they are the beasts—the evil personal forces of nations which emerge in beastliness of action—which are under the domination of the great red dragon. With them is the false prophet who deceives the nations, and then the queen of the nations, the brilliant but unholy city called Babylon. These, then, are the forces which oppose God and seek to enslave man. Only recognition that they exist will enable us to see history correctly for what it is.

The evil forces are really Satan and his clones, and the action of their evil is an imitation of God's goodness. God has a Kingdom, so Satan will have a kingdom. God is Father, so Satan will be a father. God redeems, so Satan has a form of redemption. God has a Son, so there is 'the son of perdition'. The Son is wounded, so that beast must have a head which is wounded. The Son rises

from the wounding of the Cross. The beast's wounded head has a resurrection from the death caused by its mortal wound. The Holy Spirit is the seven eyes and the seven horns of the slain Lamb of God, and the false prophet is the imitation spirit of the beast. As there is the holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so the dragon, the beast and the false prophet constitute an evil and false trinity. As there is the Holy City of God, so there is the unholy city called Babylon. As there is the Kingdom of God, so there is the kingdom of darkness. All of these constitute 'the hideous presence'. As we have already suggested, the amount of evil they have committed is beyond assessing.

When we know something of the things we have just looked at, then we begin to understand history. In earlier chapters we saw the indescribable misery of human creatures who have been deprived of the true Presence—of their former union with God, and the tragedy of man as he seeks to make his way in life, though 'the way of man is not in himself' and, 'it is not in man to direct his own footsteps'. Man lives in tragic loneliness, but the forces of his own egotistic ambition drive him pell-mell. He will ride over other human beings, crushing them in the effort. He is driven on by his own evil, often disguised as doing good. He is in competition with all, and the beastliness of the human race becomes a corporate thing, something which creates international rivalry, which attempts to assert the primacy of a race and a culture and which bring about merciless cruelty and horrible genocides. The personal sin of individuals results in selfishness, nepotism, cruelty, rape and murder. In the immediate past generation,

and in our own generations, we have seen the 'liquidation' of many millions of human beings under the pretext of 'liberating revolution' and 'liberal progress'.

All of this is what we call 'the hideous presence'. That which is evil seeks the presence of evil. It cannot 'go it alone', hence the corporate nature of 'the world'. The tragedy of the lost human spirit, the confusion which comes from being apart from the true Presence helps to foment cynicism, bitterness, despair, nihilism and anarchy. These all compound themselves, and it would seem there can be no end to the misery of the human race. In the Scriptures we see the way in which evil powers enslave guilty man. The enslavement of nations and peoples to their idols often issues in demonic bondage of persons, the inflictions of sickness and disease, the fearful insecurity that comes in the human spirit so that many suffer from forms of mental illness and madness, and much of it seems to be without effective healing. There seems to be no hope for men or nations. The future is dreary. Existence beyond death promises no freedom from the guilt which made life insecure and restless in this world. There is no reason to believe that the millions released from life on this planet take anything with themselves which will alter their lot as unredeemed creatures.

To amass the elements of 'the hideous presence' and present them as I have done above, is surely a terrible exercise, though one that is necessary. The picture painted is not merely dismal and one of hopelessness. It is one which seems to promise no light for the future. It appears to be one of extreme pessimism, giving no hope to the human race, and revealing no possibility of the situation

being radically changed. Man seems so depraved that it would appear impossible for him to regenerate into the nobility he once possessed as the created image and likeness of God. Everything seems to be gloom and doom.

If this world belonged to Satan and not to God, and if God were absent from His creation, then undoubtedly the hideous presence would be triumphant, the cause of man would be lost, and all history would be heading towards the triumph of Satan. This, however, is not the case. We have already said that history is the battle of two presences, of two kingdoms that are in conflict, and that we need not fear the outcome since Satan is only a creature and his forces are composed only of creatures, so that he cannot possibly defeat God, who is King-Creator over all things. The victory must be in God's hands, and the defeat of the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, the system of the beast and the system of the unholy city must surely eventuate.

The question is, 'How can, and how will the defeat of the "hideous presence" come about?' It is the answer to that question which we now propose to give.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

## *The Conflict of the Two Presences*

What we now look at is the conflict of the two presences, i.e. the Presence of God and the presence of Satan, and the conflict which comes because they both occupy creation, especially the world of human creatures. If we think that God by sheer might of metaphysical strength can crush all evil, and restore normality to His creation, then we are wrong. The battle is a moral one, of the holy will of God, and the unholy will of evil powers, and it must be resolved in a moral way. It is not simply that the love, holiness, truth, goodness and righteousness of God overwhelm the hatred, impurity, falsehood, evil and unrighteousness of Satan, but God's nature outworks itself (Himself) in the action of redemption. The victory is not one wrought by sheer power, but by the power that is holy love.

## THE CONSTANT HOLY PRESENCE

What we first need to see is that God is ever present continuously to every atom and molecule of His creation. He is present to it all in all His nature. Theologically this is called God's incommunicable attribute of omnipresence, meaning God cannot, and does not give us this attribute even though man is 'the image and glory of God'. There are many passages of Scripture which speak of His being present to all things. As Creator it is impossible that He should be absent from it, seeing it is dependent upon Him for its continued existence. He is 'one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and for whom we exist', He is the One 'for whom and by whom all things exist'. He is 'above all and through all, and in all'. In Jeremiah 23:23-24 God asks, 'Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.' The Psalmist asked, 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there.' Solomon said to God in regard to the temple he had built, 'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!'

We could multiply such references, but God's presence everywhere is really saying that creationally He is not absent to anything He has made. The Greek poet could say, 'In him we live and move and have our being,' and Paul could approve of that thought as though it were canonical. Creation is dependent upon God for its breath

and so its continuity of living, 'When thou hidest thy face, they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground.' Just as the Spirit is the sustainer of all things living, so is the Word by whom all things were made. Hebrews speaks of God's Son 'through whom also he created the world', and that this one is 'upholding the universe by his word of power'. This is much the same language as is found in Colossians 1:16–17, 'for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.' If he upholds all things by his powerful word, and if all things hold together in him, then doubtless he is present to all things.

Thus, God as Creator, the Son (or, the Word) as Mediator-Creator, and the Spirit as Agent-Creator, are present to all elements of creation. Many of the references above have been quoted out of their intimate context. Some of them refer to God's presence to His covenant people, or to the family of the church, and are not intended, perhaps, to have universal connotation, but they all add up to that—i.e. God is never absent from anything of His universe. However, to say that God is present relationally to those who reject Him, to those whose sins have separated them from Him, and to those who hate Him, is another matter. Whilst He is creationally present to them and sustains their existence until death, it is not the same as saying He is intimately, relationally and personally present to them. We have rightly spoken in this

regard of the absence of the Presence, and the presence of the Absence.

Isaiah records the exiled nation of Israel as crying to God,

Look down from heaven and see,  
from thy holy and glorious habitation.  
Where are thy zeal and thy might?  
The yearning of thy heart and thy compassion  
are withheld from me.  
For thou art our Father,  
though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not  
acknowledge us;  
thou, O LORD, art our Father,  
our Redeemer from of old is thy name.

Israel knew God relationally because of covenant, and it knew God to be both Father and Redeemer. It knew God had never been other than Redeemer-Father or Father-Redeemer. It knew that His being in heaven, and seemingly far from them, did not mean He was not present with them. Even as they cried they knew Him to be present, but they wanted Him to declare His present, personal, covenant, steadfast love and to rehabilitate them. They knew the truth of,

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

God, then, is present to a human being according to his attitude to God. This can be seen in Hebrews chapter 11

where there is the roll-call of the men and women of faith. Faith—i.e. trust in God—is the key to knowing and living in the Presence of God. It may well be that from time to time He sends theophanies for the encouragement of His people and the commission He gives them, but in essence God’s Presence has always been with them, though by faith and not by sight. They ‘endured as seeing him who is invisible’.

So, then, on the basis of these things we do not need to know the despair we spoke of at the end of our last chapter. Horrific as may be the scene of sin, of Satanic and human endeavour, and evil as may be the concerted working of the world system, yet God is never absent from His people, nor ever unmindful of His creation. One sign of this is that His ‘wrath is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth’. So dynamic is the truth that evil powers and human beings must suppress it, i.e. must hold it down in order that it may not succeed. All the time they are confronted by the dynamism of the truth, of God, and of His people.

The fact is that there is nothing in man which essentially corresponds with what is evil. We mean that man has the difficult task of remaining constantly perverse, for in evil there is no ‘deep’ which calls unto his ‘deep’. There is no essential affinity with evil. It is foreign to man, who was made to be the image and glory of God. Thus the constant Presence of God in the creation is a taunt and torment to man in his sin, and Satan in his evil. What we are saying is that the die is cast *creationally* against the system of evil even if there were no redemptional plan of God. There was—and is—of course,

the redemptional plan of God, and it is of this we will now speak.

When Israel cried out that God was the nation’s Father and Redeemer ‘from eternity’, it was crying out of a covenantal situation. Its background was that of Moses, but also—and even more—of Abraham. It was in the historic stream of faith. What we need to see, then, is that the Holy Spirit and the Son of God were present in all history—both creational and covenantal—otherwise we are apt to think that only He who was called ‘Father’, somewhat in the Old Testament and most widely in the New Testament, was the only Person of the Trinity present in history prior to the Incarnation.

We have already seen that both the Son (the Word) and the Spirit were present in the act of creation, and have always upheld that creation by their power, and so have been creationally and providentially present. That, however, was not all. There cannot be a creational Presence without a moral Presence. This is seen, for example, in Isaiah chapter 24, where God first declares He will judge the earth, and then the judgement comes to pass,

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 wine mourns,  
 the vine languishes,  
 all the merry-hearted sigh.  
 The mirth of the timbrels is stilled,  
 the noise of the jubilant has ceased,  
 the mirth of the lyre is stilled.  
 No more do they drink wine with singing;  
 strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.  
 The city of chaos is broken down,  
 every house is shut up so that none can enter.  
 There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine;  
 all joy has reached its eventide;  
 the gladness of the earth is banished.  
 Desolation is left in the city,  
 the gates are battered into ruins.  
 For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth  
 among the nations,  
 as when an olive tree is beaten,  
 as at the gleaning when the vintage is done.

It is here we see that the creational, the covenantal and the moral are all one. In our world today we have pollution of land and air and sea and we rationalize it as a wrong use of the creation, but the prophet said it was the judgement of God. We do not mean that judgement and man's foolishness are mutually exclusive, but we are saying that God is present morally to His creation and His people, and if He is present, then the Son of God is present, and the Holy Spirit is present.

That this is so is seen in passages of the New Testament which tell us that Abraham rejoiced that he was to see the day of Messiah (Jesus) and saw it and was glad (John 8:56). He saw this in his lifetime. In John 12:37–43 we are told that the glory Isaiah saw in the temple was

the glory of him who was one day to be the Christ. In I Corinthians chapter 10, Paul avers that the spiritual manna and the spiritual water from the Rock was Christ himself, and it was he who followed them in the wilder-ness. Many are the scholars and theologians who think that the Angel of the Lord—the Angel of His Presence—could have been none other than the true Son of God.

Again the Holy Spirit was patently present in so much of the Old Testament, and no less in the covenant than in his work of creation. Indeed we know little of the person and work of the Spirit if we miss his presence in the covenant God made with Moses. Especially significant was his journey with them in the wilderness, so graphically set out in Isaiah 63. All this leads us to believe that never was there a block of history in which the Spirit and the Son were absent. What seals this matter for us is the statement by the angel in Revelation 19:10, 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit?] of prophecy,' and this is consonant with Peter's revelation in his First Letter that, 'The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and enquired about this salvation; they enquired what person or time was indicated by *the Spirit of Christ* within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory.'

We have seen, then, that God has ever been present to His creation to sustain it, and then to redeem it. Both His covenant-grace and His judgements on all forms of evil are proof of that Presence. If we see also, that all history is 'salvation history', i.e. it is the outworking of the redemption that God has planned in order to liberate His people, then we have a true view of history. Only if God

redeems can history make sense, but we must keep in mind that God's mercy and grace are free. It is not incumbent upon Him that He should manifest these. All He does, He does in freedom—the freedom of holy love.

We must now return to the fact that Satan and his forces—his world system—have never been absent from man. Through the network of idols and idolatry, the lords and masters which have dominated man never give up on God's creation. They seek to despoil it. They are the dreadful vandals of history, desecrating the spirit of man and bringing him down to the lowest moral depths. Yet we see nothing of the beauty of a counterfeit or counterpart 'theophany'. Whilst it is true that Satan can appear as an angel of light, and promises emancipation from the tyranny of God, yet we see nothing beautiful in all that he has done. It was well said of him by Jesus, 'The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy,' and the writer of Hebrews hit the nail on the head when he said that through fear of death—i.e. through guilt and dread of its judgement—men and women have been all their lifetime under Satan's bondage.

In other chapters of this book we have pointed out that man can never be fulfilled by the Absence of God, nor by the presence of evil in his experience. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put eternity in man's heart. If this dimension is present with man, then nothing less than God can essentially satisfy him. Man is, then, a candidate for liberation. It is for this reason that the Presence came in the form of Emmanuel. In Chapter 5 we have dealt somewhat with the Son—the Word—of God coming in the flesh. Rich and wonderful as was the Incarnation, and utterly transcending any theophany man had known—it

was *the purpose of the Presence* which was—and is—the most significant thing.

What was it about the Incarnation—the coming of Emmanuel—which was most significant? It was the clash of the two presences which is significant. The following references highlight this:

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel, (which means God with us).

You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

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

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 of the devil, for God was with him.

And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every dis-ease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

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

*Our Saviour Jesus Christ who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.*

*O Death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. You are not under law, but under grace.*

Christ also died for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God put [him] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus . . . For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do; sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.

He died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age [aeon].

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

*. . . the cross, by which I was crucified unto the world, and the world unto me.*

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted, and divides his spoil.

This is your hour and the power of darkness.

Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the

course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

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

He [the Holy Spirit] will convince the world concerning judgement . . . because the ruler of this world is judged.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

These Scriptures tell much of the story of the Presence, for 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them'. The Presence of God in Christ attacked the presence of evil and decisively defeated it through the Cross and the Resurrection. The Presence came through the womb of Mary—'born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law'. It was born in the likeness of sinful flesh, though not in sinful flesh, and not in the mere likeness of flesh, but truly in flesh.

The references collated above tell us that he had understood the problem of man and had gone to its heart. The real Absence became the true Presence, presenting itself in the hour of the Cross and grappling with the issue of man's moral death through sin. In taking upon himself not only the guilt of men's sins but their accumulated griefs and sorrows, their dreadful evil, and the existential shame known to all men and women, he withdrew the sting of death—sin; he broke the power of sin—the guilt of the law;

and he tore the weapon of accusation from the hands of Satan and his cohorts. All evil was paralysed, put out of action, deprived of its deadly employment. This was the fruit of the coming of the Presence—God in Christ!

The coming of Emmanuel to our humanity which was sinful was thus the coming of strong salvation. The Mercy of God came as a small babe and a growing boy, and a full man, and as a Victim in the hour of sacrificial death, and as the Destroyer of death, and as the Giver of life, and as the one who left the mankind he had lately redeemed to fulfil his mission of climaxing the Kingdom of God, yet who still dwells in the heart of the humble and contrite one, to revive the heart of the humble and contrite one.

*His Incarnation was not for one brief bright hour only to conclude in a resumption of heavenly glory which would immolate his humanity for ever, proclaiming him to be true God but not true Man. No: his humanity is as much for ever as his deathless Deity as it was true humanity upon earth. He is for ever Emmanuel, 'God with us', daily dwelling in our hearts, daily the Vine in which we abide, the present Shepherd of his flock, the Head to which we hold and cling, the Fountain of life from which we daily drink, and the immortal Bread of life whose substance daily we consume so that, walking by faith, one day we'll see him peerless, see him face to face!*

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

## *The Continuing Conflict*

In chapters 6–9 we have looked at the fact of Christ's departure from the sight of the apostles and the church, and his Ascension to the right hand of God. We have talked about the principle of his presence with the church—'Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the age'. As Head of his Body—the church—he is present to all members. We have spoken of abiding in the Vine, being under the Shepherd of the flock, and similar relationships by which we participate in Christ, as well as in the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is no need for us to repeat these things.

By now we should be aware that although unseen, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are truly present to, and in, the church. They are not absent from the world, even though they may be virtually absent to those who personally are not in union with them. God is Sovereign

in His own creation, and He gives no place to Satan in it. Whilst Satan is 'the prince of this world', and 'the god of this world', the 'world' here spoken of is—as we have seen—not the created world, but a system of evil within the created world.

Because it is a system within the created world, it has to be seen and understood for what it is. We are not to remain ignorant of Satan's stratagems. We must know the foe who wages war with us, so that we might properly wage war with him. We must understand that he has been defeated principally by the work of the Cross and the Resurrection. We saw that the erasure of guilt by Christ means all evil must loose its hold on redeemed humanity. Scriptures such as we quoted in our last chapter show that God was present in Christ, defeating Satan, and liberating the elect from his bondage.

We also need to know that Satan's defeat, whilst being definitive, awaits its final death-dealing blow, i.e. the last battle and the decisive judgement. The verb 'to destroy' (*katargeo*) used in Hebrews 2:14–15—as in Romans 6:6, I Corinthians 15:24, 26 and II Thessalonians 2:8—does not mean 'to annihilate', but 'to paralyse', 'to render ineffective' or 'to put out of employment', so that whilst Christ rendered the power of Satan ineffective at the Cross, Satan, though mortally wounded, nevertheless fights on, seeking to do what damage he can whilst he can, and even, if possible, to yet fulfil his own devilish plan. There is an example of this in Revelation chapter 12 where Satan is cast down from heaven, is overcome by the brethren through the blood of the Cross, and yet rages on, knowing his time is short, but seeking to destroy what he can while he can.

We should conclude, then, that in this age Satan is still prince and god of his system, and the works he keeps devising must be attacked and destroyed, until at last he has no place to go, and no power to do anything more because it is God's 'fullness of time' for bringing his operations to a conclusion. A famous passage which tells us of the continuing conflict is I 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.

The battle in this age, then, is with Satan and his powers. Satan has already been defeated (Heb. 2:14–15; John 12:31), and the powers and authorities have also been defeated (Col. 2:14–15), but a process has to be taken until they are finally mopped up. This process is not a mild one, but, in fact, is an intensely concentrated one. This is all viewed by that kind of revelation we call 'apocalyptic', the kind of writing which uses symbols and figures for events and happenings, and whilst the language and symbols are most colourful, they stand for the realities of history—for what is actually happening or will happen. The apocalyptic passages of the Gospels and the Epistles detail the graphic events which take place in the conflict between God and Satan, and the Book of the Revelation takes up much of the Old Testament

apocalyptic and prophecy, and reveals the nature of the present conflict between those two Presences. If present history is not a continuing conflict between God and Satan, then it is largely unintelligible.

The conflict with Satan is not simply a personal one between him and God. It is a battle for creation, as it is a battle for humanity. The primary theme of history is the people of God. It is not even the personal salvation of individuals which is the central point; it is the gathering of the nations. Whilst salvation is always personal, and whilst each person is significant in God's eyes, and whilst His love is for His elect, yet the matter of the nations is what is primary. This can be seen in the early chapters of Genesis, where we have the fanning out of the sons of Noah throughout the world, where genealogies are traced, and finally the covenant is made with Abraham, the covenant which pertains to all the nations.

Our understanding of God's concern for nations can be obscured when we limit our gaze to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and when—more particularly—we focus all our attention on Israel under Moses in the wilderness, and the judges and kings in Palestine. Israel is but one of the nations, however significant its role may have been. It was a priest-nation *amongst* the nations, and really *for* the nations. Likewise, when we look at the church, we are tempted to think of it as a spiritual enclave amongst the vast sea of nations. We can be quite restricted in our understanding of what God is about with nations.

Christ came to be 'a light to lighten the Gentiles [the nations] and to be the glory of thy people Israel'. So much of the Old Testament is concerned with nations. God is King over all the peoples. The nations have their own gods,

and their own covenants with the deities. Psalm 2 speaks of the nations raging and have futile imaginings against God and His Messiah, but Genesis 49:10 speaks of all the nations gathering to Messiah—'and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples'.

Christ came to the lost of the tribes of the house of Israel, but the nations were in his mind. He told his disciples that the Gospel of the Kingdom would have to be preached to all nations. Without that action the end could not come. The Cross was with a view 'to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad'. When the nations believed, they were to be baptized into the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is, they were to participate in the Presence of God and in His action for all history. Christ thought in terms of the bulk of the nations coming to him. The Book of the Revelation depicts 'those out of every people and tribe and tongue and nation' as 'a multitude such as no man could number' before the throne of God, praising the Lamb for his salvation.

In chapters 13 to 18 of this same Book we see 'the battle for the nations', and for a moment we need to look at this subject, for it is greatly linked with the Presences of Christ and Satan. Before we look at these particular chapters we need to see that the operations and destinies of nations are linked with angelic principalities and powers. In Deuteronomy 32:8 we read:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

This passage is understood to mean that different nations were given their geographical or territorial boundaries,

and were allotted angelic powers to lead them, guard them, and even to rule over them. Paul may have been referring to this in Acts 17:26 when he said:

And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him.

The terms found in the New Testament of ‘thrones’, ‘dominions’, ‘principalities’ and ‘authorities’ must surely point to some situation where angelic powers rule. A reading of the Book of Daniel shows that the operations and destinies of nations were tied up with such ‘princes’ who were ‘people-angels’, i.e. were linked with the rise and fall of the nations. Jacob saw angels ascending and descending upon a great stairway when he had a dream at Bethel, and Israel understood that this represented the rise and fall of the nations—according to their familiar angels. Daniel had visions and angelic appearances which informed him of conflicts with ‘the prince of Persia’ and ‘the prince of Greece’. It would seem that when Paul was talking about ‘wrestling with principalities and powers’ he was speaking of the wider conflict of winning the nations to Christ. Nathanael was told by Jesus, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.’ This was plainly referring to the rise and fall of nations which were dependent upon the figure of Daniel chapter 7 called ‘a son of man’.

With all this in mind, we see that Christ is present to the creation with a view to the destiny of the nations. The climax of that conflict is seen in Revelation 21 and 22 in the Holy City in which ‘the glory of God is its light, and

its lamp is the Lamb’, and ‘By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it . . . they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations’. That City has the river of life with the tree of life on either side, ‘and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations’. What constitutes ‘the healing of the nations’?

To come to the consummation of history requires the outworking of the victory of the Cross, so the slain and risen Lamb opens the seals of the book and dispenses history. In Chapter 12 the child of the woman—Christ—is opposed by the dragon, who in Chapter 13, clones himself in the beast, the image of the beast, and the false prophet. So remarkable is the cloned dragon in the form of the beast that:

[men] worshipped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” . . . it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is those who dwell in heaven.

The ridiculing of the Holy Presence is allowed:

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.

Chapter 13 also speaks of a second beast which arose out of the earth, as the first beast had risen out of the sea. ‘The sea’ represents the many nations (cf. Rev. 17:15), and ‘the earth’ also represents nations—as the earthly inhabitants of creation—those who give rise to the beastliness of these self-constituted lords. In 13:11–17 the work

of the second beast is to deceive the nations, particularly by the signs which it does—

It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; and by the signs which it is allowed to work *in the presence of the beast*, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

We then read that the beast :

causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

Against this kind of ‘marking’ or ‘sealing’ 14:1–5 shows a body of people who have the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father on their foreheads. That is, they are sealed by Him. Sealing in the Epistles is really baptism, and the sealing of the believer is by the gift and action of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30; cf. II Cor. 1:22). Notice that Matthew 28:19–20 speaks of *nations* becoming disciples of Christ and being baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is, these nations are sealed by God and unto God. Such nations the beast is trying to subvert, and bring under the power of the dragon.

Further on, in Revelation 14:9–11, men and women are warned against having the mark of the beast upon them, for:

If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the *presence* of the holy angels and in the *presence of the Lamb*.

And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they shall have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.

It is necessary to note that this judgement shall be *in the Presence of Christ*, as formerly the action of the second beast was *in the presence of the (first) beast*. This teaches us that in the continuing conflict the Presence of Christ obtains, and that it is in conflict with the presence of the beast.

Chapter 15 gives us a picture of those ‘who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name’, for they sang ‘the song of Moses and of the Lamb’—i.e. the song of victory over evil as the Song of Moses had been sung over the defeated army of Egypt. In this chapter, as in the following chapter 16, the judgements of God, which have been coming in three series of seven from the hand of the Lamb, are completed. This is in pursuance of what we saw in I Corinthians 15:24–28. Chapters 17 and 18 are concerned with the nature of Babylon, the unholy city, and its sudden destruction by God.

Chapter 17 speaks of the alliance between the beast, the harlot called Babylon and the ten kings who have been given power for specified periods. We are told that:

[The kings] are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

Chapter 17 then goes on to show that the beast and the ten kings will destroy Babylon, and then together seek to get the nations to fight against the army of Christ.

This certainly links with Psalm 2, where the kings and nations rage, where they ‘plot in vain’ and set themselves against God and His Messiah. This is what calls for the putting down of evil authorities who seek to manipulate the nations—those principalities and powers of whom I Corinthians 15:24–28 speaks.

In chapter 18 the destruction of Babylon—the unholy city—is pronounced. This cruel feminine power had slain the saints of God, but she now receives her own punishment. In Chapter 19 the one who is ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ issues forth on a white horse and destroys the forces which come against him, so that the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire—the second death. Finally, the last battle ensues against the saints of God, and fire comes down from heaven and consumes the enemy forces, Satan himself being thrown into the lake of fire.

What we have written in the few paragraphs above will naturally seem somewhat obscure and difficult to understand. This is partly because it is written in apocalyptic language, and partly because we cannot always interpret its symbols and figures. In spite of the unusual nature of the language it is, generally speaking, simple enough to be understood. In the light of our present subject ‘The Continuing Conflict’ we should see it as follows:

Christ, who is Lord of lords and King of kings, is controlling all history. He leads the army which is composed of celestial and earthly creatures. The dragon—Satan—is seeking to destroy God’s angels and people and uses the beast he devises as a full clone of himself. This beast is

given temporary authority over the nations and seeks to subvert them. There is also a second beast which makes an image of the first beast, and tries to make all men worship it and to have its ‘mark’ or ‘seal’, i.e. its name upon them, thus showing they belong to him. This second beast appears also to be ‘the false prophet’. The first and second beasts try to make the kings of the nations, and the nations themselves, turn against God and do battle with the Lamb. Against all this there are the chosen people of God who are sealed with the mark of God, and who refuse the mark of the beast. They overcome the beast and its image, though doubtless many amongst them are slain ‘for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. There are ten kings who join with the beast, having surrendered their minds to his, and they join with the beast to fight the Lamb. The great commercial and sensual system of Babylon is also allied with the beast, but the beast and the ten kings turn against her and destroy her.

There are two final conflicts, the first is that in which the Lamb leads his army on a white horse and defeats the enemy—doubtless the kings and nations who are against the Lamb—and the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire, whilst many of the enemy are destroyed. The second conflict is by resurgent national powers named ‘Gog and Magog’ who seek to destroy ‘the camp of the saints’ but are themselves destroyed by fire from heaven, after which the devil is cast into the lake of fire.

Interesting as all of this is, it is only included in this chapter to show that history, which stretches from Christ’s

Ascension to the final judgement, is one in which he is always active. Though he may seem to be absent from the conflict and from the world—and he is certainly absent to *sight*—yet he is present all the time. As evil is done in the *presence* of the dragon and his clones, so holy action is done in the *Presence* of God and His Christ. The Presences determine the action. We write and read these things to show that whilst the Cross destroyed Satan and his powers, yet he still goes on working in history, and Christ also goes on working so as to put a final end to his defeated foe.

The value of this to us is that we should realize that there has never been the Absence of Christ, but only his Presence. Every day we need this Presence and every day it is here, in the world, and dynamically active and effective, despite what seems to be contrary evidence. Being caught up by the descriptions of history which we read in the Scriptures, we may seem to be spectators, and the events—though they might appear real enough to our imaginations—may yet seem to be distant from us. Yet this is far from the truth. Every day we are involved in conflict with the dragon, the beasts, the false prophet and with seductive Babylon. We are tempted to identify with the beast of selfishness, to be marked with its tempting evil, to ‘go with the crowd’, to flow with the world and its desire for power and self-security. Babylon is a constant seductive presence with us, sneering at the reality of God’s holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness and love. It sings its siren songs to lure us away from the strong truth of God’s judgements upon sin, and the pure Holy City of Eternity, with its true and everlasting joys.

In the midst of such pressures, persecutions, temptations and weariness we may feel we are alone, and very lonely. This we must not think, and this we must not feel, for the Father, the Son, and the Spirit dwell in us, in each of us personally, and in all of us corporately. God has made His home in us—incredible as that may seem. We live in Him, and He in us. We abide in His love and His love abides in us. Moreover, He has prepared our final home—the glorious eternal City, and one day—not far away in time and experience—we will be with Him and see Him face to face.

What encourages us greatly is that Father, Son and Holy Spirit, though scarcely hidden from us in this world and in this time, are working all things together for our good, for our maturity, and for our glorification. We endure as seeing Him who is invisible. We share in the great battle for the defeat of all evil, and the coming glorious consummation of history. Every day it is so in the small things, as it is in the large. Every day it is ‘Emmanuel! God with us!’

Oh, Father! Great Abba who loves His Family so much that He gives His Son for its salvation, and His Spirit for its continuing love and holy domestic joys! Great Father who is above us, and in us and through us all, we thank you that you never leave us or forsake us, that you are the Covenant Father who has promised us a rich and imperishable inheritance—a resurrection from the dead, glorification in the Holy City, and the sight of you for evermore. We bring our praise to you that you indwell us, your people, and have caused us to indwell your own Self. In this world we are in your hand, and none shall pluck us from it. We are never alone, and we are never lonely when faith believes that you are with us, for if faith believes, that does not make it to be so, but faith believes because it is so. We thank and praise you for this.

Oh Spirit of truth, without whom we know nothing, and by whom, we are led into all truth, we worship and praise you for bringing to us the breath of life, and for sustaining us in that breath. We know that we are spirits, but without you we are breathless and dead. By Christ's great work of the Atonement you have raised us out of the sinful existence of death, into the life of love and joy and peace, and we give you thanks for this resurrection. Because the way of us is not in ourselves, or from ourselves, and because we cannot walk the path of this life apart from your guidance, we thank you for the intimacy of your presence in our hearts, and the intercessory prayer that you continually make within us. You are our Comforter as you make so real to us the Presence of the Father, and the Presence of the Son. We adore you for your love, and we worship you as you have taught us to worship the Lord Most High.

Oh Son of the Eternal Father—Eternal Son—who has come to dwell among us as a man, and who has been glorified in that humanity! We worship you as the Lamb that was slain for our redemption. In your Sonship we come to Him who is your Father, and know it is natural for us to cry to Him, 'Oh Father!' It is, too, natural for us to cry to you, 'Oh Lord!' Every day we live under your Lordship, being held by your Headship, and holding fast to you who is our Head. Were you gone from us for ever we would cherish the memory of your visitation to this earth, but you are not absent. The great conflict of the Cross has issued in the continuing conflict of history, and in this you remain close to us. You are the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and all powers are under your feet. You love us. When dragon, beasts, false prophet and sensuous Babylon would beguile or seduce, coerce or threaten, you fortify us, stabilize us, and give us the immense comfort of your personal presence and love. We love you as our Saviour, our Lord, our Elder Brother and our King. Without your Presence we would be desolate. With it we are established and serene. All worship to you, oh Holy One of God!

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

*'The Secret Place  
of the Most High'*

**He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty . . . hast made the Lord . . . thy habitation.**

**He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty . . . you have made the Lord your refuge.**

**You that live in the shelter of the Most High, and lodge under the shadow of the Almighty . . . for you, the Lord is a safe retreat.**

The above quotations from Psalm 91:1, 9 are from the *AV*, the *RSV* and the *NEB* versions respectively. The 'secret place' is 'the shelter'. The Psalm is saying something much the same as in Psalm 46:1, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble'. To dwell in God is to dwell in safety. In this chapter we will try to examine—

even more than we have done—the dwelling of God in His people, and the dwelling of His people in God. The reason for this is that we can learn more of what it means to indwell God and to be indwelt by God.

We bow to great scholars who have used their alertness and brilliance of mind to discover the beginnings and growth of religion in the cultures of the world, and perhaps most of all in the history of God's people, but we doubt that any man through his native ability of intellect can understand what it is to a man when he meets God, unless of course that man meets God as we saw Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the other prophets meet Him. When Nathanael met Christ and cried out, 'You are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel!' and Peter, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!', then these men knew beyond others what it is to know God. When people of our generation come from stone age and jungle—as they do—and grapple with modern learning so that they attain doctorates in their own short lifetime, then we know the mystery of godliness is beyond the agility of human minds. All men are sinners, and their sin sometimes defies the simplicity of God and His grace in meeting a man and transforming him into His friend. Proud persons who themselves have not met God in this way, think it can only be after centuries of thought that man can reach upwards and know God as He really is. Often they overstep even this way of thinking, and believe we can do without God. We can dispense with Him—they think—because our minds have advanced beyond even the need for God. They say He was always 'the God of the gap' until human research, education and

knowledge has filled that gap, and now life is without mystery, superstition, and the thing called 'religion', or 'faith'.

'And what,' we ask, 'of this inner hunger, this need for a Fatherhood beyond human Fatherhood? What of the cry of the heart to be alive in God and be lived in by Him?' Is this part of mythical thinking of which we need to be drained? Does the heart find peace, and experience such fullness that it needs no more, simply by dismissing the mythical God from our minds, and by sharply rebuking those who tell us that guilt is indeed real, and redemption is what we need, beyond even the so-called serenity offered by the new humanism?

If God is not real, then men will have to devise an equivalent, for all that we know within the realm of our five senses and the three dimensions has never yet been satisfying in itself. Man, from the beginning, has known God, and needs to know Him. If his sinfulness forces him to deny God, and refuse the knowledge of Him, then we may be certain that no gradual and evolutionary quest for the knowledge of God will ever produce anything satisfying and authentic. To pity Abraham as a spiritual primitive is not only showing our ignorance, but a pride and arrogance that is unbecoming to our humanity. The appearing of the God of glory to our father Abraham in Mesopotamia, was an experience that none of us has transcended, though countless numbers of us have equalled it.

The Psalmist spoke rightly when he said,

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place  
in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,

or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

When a man comes into contact with that God, he knows all a man needs to know, especially with regard to God, and with the knowledge of God comes knowledge of man. When we speak of Abel offering a true sacrifice, Noah and his family doing likewise, and Abraham and his descendants making altars and shrines, then why should we think them primitive and the understanding of the worshippers merely embryonic by comparison with our more sophisticated sanctuaries, and so-called developed ideas of God? When will we understand that knowing God is relational rather than cerebral, visceral rather than dryly rational? Knowing comes to us by God's word, and in worship and service according to His grace.

Israel was the nation of all nations which showed to man worship that came not by development so much as by revelation. It is notable in times of spiritual revival that worship is sharpened and heightened, and this is because revival is simply fresh revelation of God's revelation. A thousand years or two should not necessarily mean that the worship that is later transcends the former.

If we look at the giving of the law, and the giving of commandments and precepts for worship and godly living, then we see Israel was taught meticulously. The tabernacle was to be the place of God's dwelling, His dealings with His people, and the centre of the nation's worship. The making of the tent, its fabric and its furniture were not left to the initiative of a committee or an artisan, but all set out so that no place was left for human choice or innovation. The sanctifying of the tabernacle

and its furniture was likewise set out in detail. The recipe for worship—incense forbade the incense being used personally—under pain of dire punishment. The sacrifices were also to be carried out according to prescription, since there was significance in everything done. The study of all this requires much time, and is beyond the scope of this short essay.

In this way it was seen that God dwelt in Israel according to His own holiness. None dared subvert that. At the same time Israel was God's chosen people, and He dwelt with them for their good. His dwelling had to be according to the pattern shown to Moses in the Mount, but His dwelling brought great joy and security to the nation. How many Psalms there are that sing their joy of worship, their sense of security from being in the house of the Lord, and from knowing that God dwells in Zion. We can imagine the astonishment at the sight of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which led the people, and was a dynamic sign to all that He was present in their midst. When the pillar stopped, Israel stopped. Presence and guidance were of the one piece. We can also visualize the joy the nation knew in its worship at tabernacle and temple, in its union with the Covenant-God.

We can note here that David longed to build God's sanctuary. Part of Psalm 132 informs us of this. Called 'A Song of Ascents' it praises David's desire:

Remember, O LORD, in David's favour,  
all the hardships he endured;  
how he swore to the LORD  
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,  
'I will not enter my house  
or get into my bed;

I will not give sleep to my eyes  
or slumber to my eyelids,  
until I find a place for the LORD,  
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.'

Lo, we heard of it in Ephrathah,  
we found it in the fields of Jaar.  
'Let us go to his dwelling place;  
let us worship at his footstool!'

Arise, O LORD, and go to thy resting place,  
thou and the ark of thy might.  
Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness,  
and let thy saints shout for joy.  
For thy servant David's sake  
do not turn away the face of thy  
anointed one.

The Presence and the sanctuary were really the one. With both went the worship and the service. Knowing God being present could only be a thing of joy, although the Presence so often judged and punished, but then that chastisement served to renew the joy. Time and again the glad cry was 'God is with us!' He is the One who dwells on Mount Zion. In one sense the whole matter of God's dwelling amongst His people was simple and domestic, and in another way it had the understanding of the lofty Presence of God. It was all to do with God's Presence, the absence of which His people dread. To be cast out of the Presence was a dreadful matter.

Cain, we remember, had to go out of the Presence of the Lord, and dreaded the fact, even though the Presence was painful to him, but it was one of the fruits of his murder of Abel. Jonah, when told to go to Nineveh, deliberately 'rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord'.

It must have taken much anger for Jonah to refuse the commandments which sprang from the Presence of the Lord. This proved to be most painful, and the incident teaches us that when we go contrary to God's guidance, we are going away from His Presence. David was fearful when discovered in his sin, and cried, 'Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.' This cry must have been uttered with terror.

In the days of Jehoahaz, king of Israel, although they were oppressed by the king of Syria, 'the Lord was gracious to them [Israel] and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them; *nor has he cast them from his presence* until now'. Grace will keep us from losing the Presence. The last king of Judah was Zedekiah, 'and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord'. Then 'because of the anger of the Lord it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he [God] *cast them out from his presence*'. The finality of this is both saddening and frightening.

In Jeremiah chapter 7 there is a condensed 'salvation history', and in it God points to His covenantal care for Judah which was not received with gratitude. Because of their stubborn wickedness God tells them, 'I will *cast you out* of my sight, as I *cast out* all your kinsmen, all the off-spring of Ephraim.'

If God would cast them out because of the sin, then there were those who would cast God out of His sanctuary. God asked the prophet Ezekiel, 'Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from

my sanctuary?’ A close reading of the Book of Ezekiel—we saw—would seem to say that the glory of the Lord—i.e. His Presence—did not actually leave the temple, but made certain movements which appeared to mean a forsaking of the sanctuary.

On one occasion—a time of drought in Judah—Jeremiah pleaded with God not to leave His people:

Why shouldst thou be like a man confused,  
like a mighty man who cannot save?  
Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us,  
and we are called by thy name;  
*leave us not.*

When the people of Israel and Judah had sinned, God said, ‘*I will return again to my place*, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress they seek me.’ ‘My place’ here means God would depart from Jerusalem, and the effect of that would be to alarm them. They would feel His absence. In fact, in II Kings 17:22–23 something of this principle is shown:

The people of Israel walked in all the sins which Jeroboam did; they did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants, the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.

It would seem, then, that God had ceased to dwell with His exiled people. We know from certain Psalms that whilst many of the exiles worshipped God they deeply felt the absence from the temple. They remembered the joy they had had on days of worship. Some—like Daniel—worshipped towards Mount Zion, Jerusalem. Yet God had not wholly forsaken them. In Ezekiel 11:16 God informed the people through their prophet: ‘Though

I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet *I have been a sanctuary* to them for a while in the countries where they have gone’.

When He did bring them back and assist them to rebuild the temple, and to worship Him in the rebuilt sanctuary, He told them that His Spirit had always been with them, and now He was about to fill this second temple with glory, and that in fact ‘the latter splendour of the house shall be greater than the former.’

Our brief survey of the dwelling of God with His people in the former covenant shows us enough to approach His present dwelling with His New Covenant people. We have seen all the promises of God that He would dwell with His true community. Jesus delighted in being in the temple, and called it ‘My Father’s house’. He felt it right to purge the temple twice of its secular commercial traffic. He told those who defiled the temple in this way, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer”; but you make it a den of robbers’ (Matt. 21:13). ‘Den of robbers’ links this saying with that of Jeremiah 7:11, ‘Has this house which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?’ Mark directly links it with Isaiah 56:7, and reports Jesus as saying, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’.

If Christ felt so intensely the holiness of God’s sanctuary then does it not mean we should be sensitive about the present temple? The present temple of God is the people of God, the church, Christ’s community. We have seen in Ephesians 2:11–22 that God, through Christ and his Cross, has united Jew and Gentile in making one new man,

and that all are growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 'in whom you also [the Ephesian Christians] are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit'. We saw this was the covenant-sanctuary—'I will be your God, and you shall be my people,' and 'I will dwell in the midst of you'—as set out in the former covenant, and as promised for the New Covenant in the latter days, finally being fulfilled as set out in Ezekiel 37:26–28 and Revelation 21:1–4.

This temple of the last days is the community and not a visible material building. It is the temple we saw in Isaiah 56:1–8, 'the house of prayer for all nations'. It is to this house of prayer the tribes of the earth will come as we see in passages such as Isaiah 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–3; Isaiah 27:13; 45:14; 66:20; and Zechariah 8:20–23. For some this temple is the church, now, in present history, and for others it is more eschatological, i.e. in some time beyond this time, perhaps after Christ's return to his people.

Whatever our interpretations of some of these things, one fact is sure, namely that the church today is the temple of God. This is clear from Ephesians 2:21–22, I Corinthians 3:16–17 and 6:19. The statement in I Corinthians 3:16–17 is, 'Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.' If we think this is an empty warning then let us remember the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, the instructions regarding the incestuous man in I Corinthians 5:1–8, and the statement in I Corinthians 11:27–32 regarding proper discernment of the Lord's body, without which some become sick and some die—judgements upon those who despise the temple of God.

When we read this, then much of what we wrote in the early chapters of this book comes back to us. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit dwell in us, both personally and corporately. As in Ezekiel abominations were brought into the temple, so they can be brought into the temple today. If any one defiles the temple, God will judge him. Likewise in I Corinthians 6:19 it is written, 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?' We remember the statements in John chapter 14—and other places—where there is a personal indwelling of the Members of the Triune Godhead. It is obligatory on us to keep ourselves as pure as the Levites kept the temple in Israel.

We saw how meticulous were God's instructions for the worship in the Mosaic tabernacle and temple. They are just as meticulous for us. We are not to entertain novel ideas, or initiate patterns of life and worship which we think are good. The New Testament has enough advice and precepts to keep us on the right track. We must have great reverence for the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who dwell in us. We, too, dwell in them. We have the assurance of immediacy—i.e. direct relation-ship with the Persons.

We noticed that in the temple of the last days there will be an attraction towards it of people of all nations. This will be because the only defined place in which God dwells is the 'house of prayer for all nations'. When we think about this, it is rather strange and wonderful. It is strange because no other place is the shrine of God, and wonderful because any one may come and worship. That was what Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria. No location would be the only and correct location, but

because of the Spirit's coming and because of his revelation of the truth, men and women could now worship God without having to go to the temple at Jerusalem. The Father would seek them, and they would respond. In the Acts and the Epistles a new type of worship—one differing from the worship in the old temple—is indicated. It is worship by the Spirit.

What we need to realize is that just as God promised Israel that His presence would always be there in the temple, so we believe it is the principle for the new temple. II Chronicles 7:11–16 is a good example of this:

Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord and the king's house; all that Solomon had planned to do in the house of the Lord and in his own house he successfully accomplished. Then the Lord appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him, 'I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there for ever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time.'

If we apply these principles to the new temple we see how His indwelling will be warm, living and effective. If God's 'eyes and heart' were there in the former temple for all time, then no less in the new temple. We might ask whether the new temple—the church—should need such teaching. The truth is that it does. We have seen the

warnings against defiling the temple, and Paul tells us that things which happened in the past are recorded as warnings for us in this age (I Cor. 10:1–13). Perhaps the Epistle which is most apt in this discussion is the first one written by Peter. In 2:1–10 he tells us that we are the new 'spiritual house', i.e. the spiritual temple. We also are a priesthood, and we should offer up acceptable sacrifices to God. In 4:17 he says clearly, 'For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God.'

What does he mean by this saying, 'For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God'? He means that in spite of all God's love and grace, and all the incentives to living a life of holiness, the human spirit does not respond in continuous totality of surrender, continuous obedience, and continuous righteous action. As Israel was privileged under its covenant to know God, to have Him dwell in its midst, to know always that it dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, under the shadow of the Almighty, yet it was tempted to apply to the lesser deities—'the gods which were no gods'—and to live by them. The world, the flesh and the devil have always displayed their wares seductively, have always laughed at the pitiful minority—so they say—of believers who wrestle with the problems of human guilt, redemption and holy living, and have scorned them, until it seems the majority view rules the world, and men are fools to miss out on indescribable pleasures by being dedicated to the One True God.

Because of this, many in Israel followed the fascinating way of the idols, and dreamed their sensual dreams. Others scorned the simple approach to truth that their less intellectual brethren seemed to espouse. What was not

seen was that 'the way of the transgressor is hard', that the transgressor should realize 'Be sure your sin will find you out', and that ultimately 'the wages of sin is death'. The transitory pleasure—so-called—of sin, gives way to eternal lostness, darkness, and biting remorse of guilt that can bring no relief. More than that, the delights of God that are in His right hand, and His pleasures which are for evermore, are more than compensation for a life lived in surrender to the living God. The present indwelling of the holy temple of Christ's church, and the personal abiding of God in men's hearts, and the abiding of men's hearts in God bring joy and fullness unsurpassed in the full range of experiences which men and women have known down through the centuries. As the Psalmist said, 'Look to him and be radiant.'

Paul said, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' More than that could not be said. Samuel Rutherford's statement, 'He has caught my heart away to heaven,' is telling. So is Peter's word concerning Jesus Christ, 'Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy.' Again we look at the testimony of Blaise Pascal and say that it expresses all that is in our own hearts:

FIRE

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the  
philosophers and scientists.

Certainty, Certainty. Feeling. Joy. Peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

*Deum memum et Deum vestrum.*

Thy God shall be my God.

Forgetfulness of the world and all, except God.

He is to be found only by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Greatness of the human soul.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have  
known Thee.

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I separated myself from Him.

*Dereliquerunt me fontem aquæ vivæ.*

My God, wilt Thou forsake me?

May I never be separated from Him eternally.

'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God,  
and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.'

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ

I separated myself from Him; I fled Him, renounced Him, crucified  
Him.

May I never be separated from Him!

He is to be kept only by the ways taught in the Gospel:

Renunciation, entire and sweet.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

*Living  
in Immediacy*

It has often been said that theology is a map of the truth, but that only God Himself is the truth. Some of us can follow maps, and some cannot. Some pilots fly 'by the seat of their pants', and others need rigorous attention to the instruments and the scaled map. Some are glad of roads that have signs and can get to their destination by obedience to their directions. Others work on hunches which sometimes prove useful, and sometimes do not. There are people whose hobby is simply map-reading whether they go on tour or not.

If we say that the way of man is not in himself, and that it is not in a man to direct his own footsteps, then we will be glad to be given proper direction. If the word of God is—and can be—'a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path', then we will joyfully listen to that word. If, however, we insist that that word must prove itself to us,

become subject to our scrutiny, and satisfy our critical faculty, then we may not really hear what it is saying. The word is that which is from God's heart to ours. When the word becomes incarnate, living in our flesh, then it is no longer a map-guide but a guide that is intimately personal. It is 'Christ in us, the hope of glory'. He lives in us who have been through the crucible of the Cross, and his word is intimate and personal.

There are those who so desire objectivity that they scorn all experience as 'mere subjectivity'. That, of course, is a wrong estimate. Whilst Christ's indwelling is not a matter of 'feeling', or even mere 'experience', it is certainly not human subjectivity. It is not mere imagination, or emotional visualization, or devotional conceptualism. It is objective reality that is intimate and personal. There is a worship of so-called 'objectivity' which is as much an idolatry as is so-called 'subjectivity' since the latter is but a riotous imagination, a response to stimuli which comes to us from the suggestions of others, and our own emotional visualizations.

The so-called 'objectivist' loves his maps—the cartography of them is his delight. He pours over lines, symbols, contours and directions. No doubt he visualizes the realities of what he sees to some degree, but he does not undertake the actual trip. He gives opinions on the cartography of the map-maker, and is perhaps critical of the way in which the map has been set out. So is the theologian who prizes 'theology for theology's sake'. He is as a man who never undertakes a journey, who will not venture on adventure. He will not walk, or run, or ride into what has been mapped out—but mapped out only for the *action* of the reader. Thus whilst the map-reader may

be able to acquaint any one with the lie of the land, and the theologian may be able to speak at great length about God, yet the map-reader is void of the actual delights of journeying, and the theologian of the intimacy of the most Delectable Creator-Redeemer.

We have listened to great scholars and marvelled at their ability to sketch the action of God in history. We have listened to great religious orators who can move us with their impassioned preaching, but if they do not take us along the road they are not true proclaimers. They are inspired map-readers, promoters of holy travel, but they are not, themselves, pilgrims. They are informed members of a fine travel agency, but they have not yet been on the tours they so brilliantly visualize in their minds. There are others who have heated imaginations, and induce us into similar states of mind, but they take us nowhere. There are some who are experts in the history of cartography, and highly versed in that skill and art themselves, but all they can give us is maps—exciting maps though they may be.

Let us not despise the maps we are given, especially if they are reliable, but let us go on the journey that God has plotted for us.

When Abraham saw the glory of God it was not given to him for his enjoyment, or a later nostalgic recall of the great day. When God appeared to him—as to others—it was for *action*. We have seen that God is ‘the living God’, i.e. the God of action. Theophanies are not luxuries given for the enjoyment, and the later mulling over of their delights. Most trembled and swooned when God appeared, but they were told what they were to *do*. God

dwelt with them, not even for their personal security and enjoyment, but for their actions which He had given them to effect. A keen map-reader or map-maker may even go on tour, but his tour will always be for verification of the directions set out. He will have delight in the tour because it accords with the map, or—if he is of a critical bent of mind—he will discover that he can do better than the map. The map, however, is nothing. On the roads where the person travels there are other travellers, and each person is a rich entity in himself or herself. There are children, adults, people of great variety. There are shops and homes and factories. There are farmers and fields. There are forests and shorelines. There is a marvellous variety of everything. Useful as may be the map, the living is what matters.

So it is with us. We may be enriched by the idea of Emmanuel—‘God with us!’—but we may not see Emmanuel! We may be like Nathanael who saw only a preacher until his eyes were opened, and then he cried, ‘Thou art the Son of God! Thou art the King of Israel!’ We may be like Peter who walked on the road to Caesarea Philippi and liked the godly conversation of the thirteen until it was brilliantly borne in upon him with explosive understanding who this man from Nazareth really was. ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!’ he cried, even to his own amazement. We may be as quiet and gentle and patient as Mary of Bethany, sitting at his feet and listening, and slowly or suddenly realizing that this man’s death must be celebrated by the opening of an alabaster box of precious perfume for an anointing.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said, ‘It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive.’ This would seem to be a good

comment, but it is the old subterfuge of travelling, but towards nothing. The moment is good, but the end is confronting. Evading the reality is not properly travelling. Even the beautiful things on the way are not the goal themselves. The terrors of travels in a hostile environment may raise our adrenalin levels, but they are of no point in themselves. It is the Father who matters, the Son who is present in purposeful action, and the Spirit, who not only guides our footsteps, but informs us of 'things to come' and the glories of the inheritance that awaits us.

So then we need immediacy. We should desire immediacy. Earlier in our book we talked about the principles of the 'I ams', especially in their relationship—or non-relationship—to the true I AM. We said that man is not truly man until he is in union with God. That is, until man's 'I am' is one with God's I AM, man is not only in conflict with God but with his own true self. Now we see the value of intimacy with God, with dwelling in Him, dwelling in the Persons of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and knowing their intimacy in dwelling within each of us. It is not that both 'I ams', i.e. that of God and that of us, coalesce, or that the human 'I am' is absorbed into the great I AM—which is what the mystics seek—but in the human 'I am' becoming subject as the creature to the Creator, the son to the Father, the saved to the Redeemer, and the subject to the King. The human 'I am' is not destroyed or impaired when it is subject to God in personal union, but, rather, it develops towards its full measure and stature.

It should now be appropriate for us to go back to the Scriptures which speak of this union, this abiding and

indwelling. A good place to begin is Philippians 1:21 where Paul says, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' Whilst Paul did talk about imitating Christ (I Cor. 11:1), this would probably only be a small element in his claim. We could say that rather than speaking of imitation, he is speaking of habitation—Christ indwelling him, and he indwelling Christ.

This brings us again to the question of the indwelling. In Galatians 2:20 Paul said, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' Philippians 1:21—'For me to live is Christ' is explained by Galatians 2:20, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'. This habitation is not the parallel of a demon living in a person, for the person does not draw life from the demon. The demon is parasitic upon him, forcing his will. In Christ the person who is indwelt by Christ is a conscious choosing person. He is confronted with choices, and makes decisions, as himself. He is not overwhelmed by some divine afflatus. He is not a balloon filled with air. He is himself, but something has happened to him.

Let us go back to three passages in Ephesians at which we have looked. These are 2:1–10, 2:11–22 and 4:17–24. These three passages show the terrible state of man without God. This person was dead—really, genuinely *dead!* The things which demonstrated this moral–spiritual deathness were his being bound to the prince of darkness, doomed to espouse his patterns, energized by that spirit, disobedient to God, for ever having the dark cloud of God's active wrath upon him, and being the plaything of

his own thoughts, lusts and passions. He was separated from Christ, alienated from the true people of God, without the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. He was darkened in his understanding of the truth, wholly alienated from the life that would have been his in God, was morally calloused, having lost all sensitivity to true and holy living, and was 'greedy to practice every kind of licentiousness'.

This state should be enough to make any person shudder. To such a one came the great mercy of God in Christ. This one was crucified with Christ, i.e. all his sin and evil went through the crucible of the Cross and was destroyed. His guilt, enmity and anger were also destroyed. Suddenly the mercy of God came to the person and he was 'made alive together with Christ, and raised up with him, and made to sit in heavenly places *in* Christ Jesus'. He who had been so afar off was brought near by the blood of Christ. He was made to be part of the new holy temple. He was liberated from his moral callousness to be highly sensitive to all evil, as well as triumphant over it. This, then, is the first thing—his new life begins through the Cross and Tomb and Resurrection of Christ.

In Romans 5:10–11 Paul said:

*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.*

To *be saved by his life* does not mean that there is a work extra to the Cross, but that the crucified, risen and ascended Christ now brings all his powers to the new believer. This is much the same as the 'abiding' Christ

spoke about in John 15. It is much the same as Paul says when he speaks of the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in Christ, of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge being in him, and so saying, 'You are filled full in him.'

We need no more than Christ, but we do need *all* of Christ. He is the Vine and we are the branches. We do not get life from him and utilize it within ourselves. We either rest in him, and so are obedient to him, doing his will, or we try to be ourselves from ourselves, hoping to utilize Christ and his resources as we lay hold on them! The early disciples told the gaping crowd at the Gate Beautiful of the temple:

*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 [Jesus' 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.*

A little later the people, having learned, prayed:

*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.*

It is the power of Christ in a person which is effective.

Paul once equated this power with the grace of God. He said, 'I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.' The grace of God, and the grace of Christ are one. Christ in Paul caused him to say, 'It was not I.'

Some of the preachers of the English Evangelical Revival

used to say, 'I offered Christ to the people.' How does one *offer* Christ? In the same way as Paul said, 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.' The thought is, 'We proclaim Christ.'

How then, can we proclaim Christ if he is not in us? How can we *not* proclaim Christ if he is in us? We come back to our map and cartography illustration. I may be able to show persons places on a map. I may be a good travel agent and learn things about such places and communicate that information, but if I have not been there it will not be the same as if I have. I may know much about Christ and may be able to speak from my theological chart, but if Christ is not in me I will be only a 'chartist'. 'How then,' we ask again, 'do I offer Christ to the people, i.e. proclaim him in truth?'

If we answer, 'By the power of the Holy Spirit you can proclaim Christ,' the answer will be correct, but the Holy Spirit indwelling one is equivalent to Christ indwelling one. Indeed Christ dwells in our heart by faith *through* the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16). The generalization that we preach Christ through the Holy Spirit may just be cliché or an empty truism. Unless we understand what the apostles understood (that which we saw at the Gate Beautiful), i.e. that Christ is alive in us, and dynamically active, then we will be trying to summon up the powers of Christ in order to utilize them or to get Christ to act! No, it is our identification with Christ, and his with us—called 'indwelling', that is the way we proclaim Christ.

Let us look at it this way. Let us ask ourselves the question, 'Why is Christ living in me, and why am I living in him?' The answer must surely be, 'In order that the

will of God may be done.' We have seen—even if briefly—that God never appeared to a person without the purpose of getting that one *to do something*. Theophanies were not just for pleasure or memorable recall, but for action! God is the living God, the God who acts. Abel was to prophesy, as Enoch also. Noah was to build an ark and be a preacher of righteousness. Abraham was to be the covenant-patriarch. Moses was to lead the people. Others were to say this and that, and do this and that.

Paul—the utterer of Philippians 1:16 and Galatians 2:20—was met on the road to Damascus for a special purpose. 'God who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son *in* me that I might preach him among the nations.' He was converted in order to convert others—to offer them Christ by proclaiming Christ. Christ told Ananias to go to Paul in Damascus, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the sons of Israel.' Ananias told Paul, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard.' Paul told King Agrippa that Jesus had said to him, 'Rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.'

We can draw the following conclusion: 'Because God loves us He redeems us through His Son, Jesus Christ. He redeems us so that we may be renewed to true humanity and come to the destiny He has appointed for us—

the ultimate inheritance which will be ours. In this world in which He redeems us, He appoints us to proclaim Christ as Saviour and Lord. Christ lives in us in order that our redemption may be complete, and he lives in us in order that we may offer him to the world. He works in us—with the Father and the Holy Spirit—to fulfil these two goals, which are really the one.'

We note that Paul wrote the Letter to the Philippians from a Roman gaol. He wrote a letter of joy, and for joy. He commanded joy to his readers. 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, "Rejoice!"' He was a prisoner in chains whilst he wrote. He knew that he was 'offering Christ' as he wrote for he said, 'For me to live is Christ!'

When we see Paul's ministry we realize it was one which was filled with danger, persecution and suffering. II Corinthians 6:3–11 and 11:22–29 confirm this. Paul wants to know 'the fellowship of his sufferings' (Phil. 3:10) and to 'complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church' (Col. 1:24). It is not that he is obsessed with suffering, and wishes to make a cult of it. He seems fairly indifferent to suffering as a thing in itself, but he knows that *it is essential to the proclamation of Christ*.

If we carefully read II Corinthians 4:7–15 we see what it is to have Christ *in* us. Unless he is *in* us we cannot show him to the world. Speaking of Christ, the glory of Christ and the Gospel of Christ, Paul said:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not

destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you . . . For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

In this passage Paul is saying that we contain the whole treasure of Christ and the Gospel in ourselves and it breaks forth as we 'carry about in our body the *killing* of Jesus'. In Galatians 3:1 he claimed that he had 'set forth Christ as crucified among you', i.e. that he had shown them the Cross. So real was Christ living in him that he could take that Crucifixion and hold it forth before his hearers as though it were happening *at that very moment*. So possessed was he by 'the *killing* of the Lord Jesus' that they saw him killed before their eyes. It was as though they were at the Cross, at the very event of the Crucifixion, and their reactions were the same as those who cried 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'

This kind of proclamation was not by eloquence or a persuasive ability that Paul possessed. Indeed it was only by Christ crucified within him that the Cross could be shown. That showing was what brought affliction, perplexity, persecution and being struck down. It was the very opposition Jesus had known at the Cross. In this way, communication of the Gospel was immediate and full. Likewise, the 'life of the Lord Jesus' was made manifest in the 'mortal flesh' of the apostle-proclaimer. It is not fanciful to say that as hearers saw the Crucifixion, they also witnessed the Resurrection, as Christ in Paul brought through the truth of both through the body and life

of the apostle. In no sense was Paul's suffering redemptive, but it was identification with the redemptive suffering of the Lord, a suffering which could not have been communicated had something in Paul shrunk back from being one with Christ.

We see then that immediacy in life and proclamation is immediacy in relationships between the believer and the Christ who indwells him, as he indwells the Christ. We certainly must not by-pass the joys and delights of being in Christ, but these will only be vivid and real in the light of doing the will of God—offering Christ to the people. Paul—following Moses—put it so clearly,

*But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach).*

When 'the word is near you, on your lips and in your heart', then it is Christ who is near us, on our lips and in our hearts. It is 'Christ in us!'

In closing this chapter, it is worth observing that in Philippians 1:21 Paul had not only said, 'For me to live is Christ,' but also, 'and for me to die is gain.' He could have been on the edge of death when he wrote—near to execution by the Roman authorities, and he mused, 'I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.'

It is doubtful that Paul was tired with his labours and

wanted to be relieved of them. No: Christ in him compelled him to proclaim the Gospel whilst life lasted. Christ in him could not be static and quiescent. Christ had come to redeem men. This proclamation was Christ's life within him. Also, Paul knew that 'this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison'.

Paul truly knew what it meant, 'Christ in us, the hope of glory'. What we know is what we communicate with immediacy. What we do not know out of our relationship with Christ is better left unsaid. There is so much to say of what we do know, that what is left unsaid will not much matter.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

## *Presence— Penultimate and Ultimate*

‘The Presence that always was, is and will be’, this is how we could rightly describe God. Called ‘The Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End’, He says, ‘I am the Lord. I change not.’ He told Moses simply, ‘Tell them I AM has sent you.’

The revelation of God is not that He has existed in time as we know it, but that He has created us in time, and that time is a gift He has given us in, and for, our creatureliness. He himself is not bound by time, but He meets us in our time situation.

Time is highly significant for us. There has been a past in the history of this world, and we have a past; each of us has his past. We live in the present, but our ideas of the future are strongly affective for us, and effective in that

they condition much of our living. What the past is, and the way it has conditioned us, is likewise powerful. To have time with God outside of it would be unintelligible for us, but His presence to time, and His dealings with us in time, must vitally relate to what we call our past, present and future.

If amnesia were to strike us then a certain helplessness would also strike us. The present is strongly influenced by the past. If the future—for any reason—were a blank, then we would be ‘without hope’. The only hope would be one which we would visualize, and since Christ is our ‘hope of glory’, we would have to advert to him. The present—as we have said—is powerfully affected by the past and the future. It is essential, then, that we have a past which cannot affect us with disaster, and a future which is assured as an acceptable certainty.

We see then that terms ‘Alpha and Omega’, ‘First and Last’, ‘Beginning and End’ are not meaningless. The assurance that God is unchanging settles the mind and spirit of believing man. If God is the God of the past, then we can believe that He can actually alter our past by forgiveness and justification. If our whole life has been processed through the crucible of the Cross, then the removal of our guilt substantially alters our experience of the present and the future. If our ‘griefs and sorrows’ which he bore have been drained of their hurtful elements, and if our traumas (wounds) have been healed in his wounds, then we are integrated in our persons for the present and the future. That is, God is always present in our past, present and future and is the Lord of our time, and our time-experiences. He redeems them from the power of guilt and evil.

It is about the present and future that we are concerned in this chapter. Paul spoke of us as being those ‘upon whom the end [or, ends] of the ages has come.’ If he means that we are at the end of the present age or aeon, and yet belong to the new age over which Christ is Lord (cf. Eph. 1:21), and so live where these two ages inter-sect, then he is showing us that we live in the realm of two different situations. This ‘present evil age’ still obtains, and the ‘age to come’ can and does break into it (cf. Heb. 6:5), although it is to come fully by the death of this present aeon. Ephesians 1:21 shows us that Christ is Lord over both ages, so we do not need to worry, but the ‘god of this age’ seeks to assert himself within it. Because of these things obtaining, we live amid constant conflict. As we have said, it is the time of the two pres-ences.

Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would show them ‘things to come’. We have seen that ‘the testimony of Jesus’ has always been ‘the spirit [Spirit] of prophecy’. Luke 24:25–27, 45–47, Acts 26:22–23 and I Peter 1:10–12—among other references—show us that the Spirit had always brought prophecy to the people of God, prophecy whose substance was Christ. The future of the people of God would likewise be connected with the same Spirit.

The matter that confronts us is the variety of prophetic interpretations and systems. The prophecies that face us in the Scriptures are not our problem so much as they are the schools of interpretation which have arisen. They have arisen because many wish to know a system which will rationalize prophetic predictions. It is natural that our minds should require an orderly understanding of the

events which lie ahead. The trouble is that interpretative systems differ so much. Because they differ much does not mean we should ignore them, and remain agnostic on the matter. We are agnostic only with difficulty, and often from cynicism or despair. We may, of course, simply be lazy when we refuse to try to understand.

What is clear is that we are not all clear about prophecy, about eschatology, about the *telos*—the end of all things. That there is a climax to history, and that the climax is in the sovereign hand of God, all would agree. That this age is not the ultimate age, but the penultimate age, we also should agree, although there are those who seek to make this age perfect and to establish it as though it were itself ‘the age to come’. Apart from this idealistic, and rather dangerous endeavour, most Christians have a working idea of the present and the future.

If we could fully define this penultimate age in which we live, then we might feel competent to live within its parameters. It would seem that we can reasonably define the age to come, but in both cases there are difficulties. Take, for example, the term ‘eschatology’, which means ‘the doctrine of the last things’ and covers the *parousia* or coming appearance of Christ, the matters of the destruction of evil powers, the last judgement, and the things of resurrection, eternal life, hell and heaven, the glorification of man, the coming to earth of the Holy City and the making of the elect into ‘a kingdom of priests’. If we think about it, then from the time of the ‘proto-evangel’ (cf. Gen. 3:15) there has always been a future to which man looked, and so a consideration of things eschatological. The *eschaton* is the last age, and being so, when did it begin, and when does it end? We may say that from

the fall of man this age has always been ‘the present evil age’, and the *eschaton* is really the age to come.

In one way it does not matter. What concerns us is that we live in the present as citizens of this time, knowing that our ultimate citizenship is in eternity. Since all things that happen are under the sovereign hand of God, the present happenings—which are, of course, eschatological—will be experienced by us. We live in them, even though we cannot—perhaps—easily interpret them. This present chapter is not concerned with trying to fix a *schema* of eschatology, but is concerned with the Presence of God and the presence of Satan in the age in which we live, and the Presence of God in the age to come, when we shall ‘see him face to face’.

We have to admit that often our particular *schema* of eschatology determines how we view certain Scriptures, rather than allowing those Scriptures to determine our views, if indeed any view is essential. Some of us fear being left out in the cold if we do not espouse a certain system of interpretative prophecy. When Paul says that ‘we see through a glass darkly’ or ‘in a mirror dimly’, then no one should feel inadequate if he cannot comprehend all Scripture and comprehend it in perfection!

My own difficulty lies in not being able to separate wholly what lies prior to the *parousia* of Christ, and what lies beyond it. In other words, my understanding of the eschatological action of God in our present time does not always seem clear to me. I think I am reasonably clear as to what is evil, and what belongs to ‘this present evil age’, and what is truly moral and is not of the evil *ethos* of the age. I can distinguish reasonably between what

comes to me from the Lordship of Christ, and what Satan would require through seduction, deceit and coercion. What I find difficult to understand is the eschatological place of the church so far as the nations are concerned. Since the Abrahamic Covenant was—and is—linked with the destiny of nations, and since the nations ultimately come into the Holy City, is there some present expression of those elements, i.e. in this period of time even if utter perfection lies only in eternity? I believe there is.

First, let us look at the promises of the resurgence or renewal of the people of God—Israel—which are eschatological. Let us keep in mind that we will apply these to Israel as the historic people of God, or to the church, or to both, according as we understand their application. Let us, though, try to place the prophecies in their right context—a not too easy task. Some prophecies could apply to the second temple, the one rebuilt in the post-exilic period on the return of the exiles from Babylon. Some could apply to the future temple which we will call, at this point, ‘the eschatological temple’, whether that be an actual temple at Jerusalem on Mount Zion, or whether it be the temple which is the people of God (cf. Eph. 2:22; I Cor. 3:16; I Pet. 2:1–10). Some prophecies could apply to the second temple, but by extension also apply to the eschatological temple. Let us look at some of them.

It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the LORD  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
and all the nations shall flow to it,  
and many peoples shall come and say:

‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.’  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall decide for many peoples;  
and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

This passage of Isaiah 2:2–4 and repeated in Micah 4:1–3 is redolent of the entire chapter of Isaiah 11, when the branch of the root of Jesse—Messiah—will bring peace in his time, which will be linked with peace amongst the nations. In Isaiah 27:12–13 is a prophecy of the return of the true Israel to Jerusalem:

In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel. And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

There will not only be those of historic Israel who will worship in the future temple, as we have seen. The text of Isaiah 56:6–8 makes that clear:

‘And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants,  
every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it,  
and holds fast my covenant—  
these I will bring to my holy mountain,

and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.  
Thus says the Lord GOD,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather yet others to him  
besides those already gathered.’

Isaiah 45:14 appears to be a prophecy of similar nature:

Thus says the LORD:  
‘The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia,  
and the Sabeans, men of stature,  
shall come over to you and be yours,  
they shall follow you;  
they shall come over in chains and bow down to you.  
They will make supplication to you, saying:  
“God is with you only, and there is no other,  
no god besides him.” ’

Zechariah 2:10–11 indicates an eschatological triumph of Israel over the nations which opposed and persecuted it:

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of you, says the LORD. And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

Zechariah 8:22–23 describes this event:

Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the

nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'

Having seen these Scriptures we ask ourselves whether they could possibly have been fulfilled in the second temple, and the answer must be, 'No!' When we ask, 'In regard to what temple will they be fulfilled?' the answer must be that the new temple after the order of Ezekiel's temple may have to be built, and literally the nations will flow towards geographical Jerusalem—a view which many hold. The other alternatives are that the prophecy is partly fulfilled in the church, which is the new temple, and will be wholly fulfilled in the Holy City—the New Jerusalem.

We must keep in mind that we are not trying to rationalize these prophetic elements. We are primarily concerned with the Presence of God. If we visualize a literal temple in geographical Jerusalem then we will have to ask, 'What, then, of the new temple, the church, the true people of God?' We shall also have to ask whether all sacrificial systems were not outmoded by Christ himself, in accordance with the clear teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews. If the temple of which our prophecies above speak is the new temple, the church, then will the fulfilment of such prophecies be in this age, or in the age which is opened by the *parousia*?

The answer may be, 'Both. Partial fulfilment will come in this age, and part beyond the *parousia*'. In one sense it does not matter, but Romans 11:15 seems to refer to a point in time, 'If their [the Jews'] rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?' It would seem that there

will be a transition state in history when Israel will come to its Messiah and believe in him, a time when 'the Israel of God' will be completed, and that would seem to be the right point for the fulfilment of the New Temple–New Jerusalem–Holy City prophecies.

We need to read the whole of Revelation chapter 21. In the first few verses we see that there is the renewal of the heavens and the earth, and there is the Holy City of which we have just spoken. This City is seen descending from heaven to the earth. We do not quite know what this means, but certainly we see it has *heavenly* origin but *earthly* location. We do know it is real, but not necessarily a literal city. Even so, we are told much about it, one of the things being, 'By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it . . . they shall bring into it the glory and honour of the nations'. This sounds very much like the Isaiah and Micah passage we have quoted above:

It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the LORD  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
and all the nations shall flow to it,  
and many peoples shall come and say:  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall decide for many peoples;  
and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;  
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
 neither shall they learn war any more.

Indeed it sounds like the other quoted passages all put together. The idea of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the Jerusalem which is above, the Church being the Temple and the Bride of Christ, are all New Testament ideas which come together to form that situation where God is in the midst. It does not matter that we are unable to know where the line of disjunction lies between the Penultimate Age, i.e. the present age—and the Ultimate Age, i.e. ‘the age to come’. If there is a disjunction it may well be unseen, the one passing into the other, although the *parousia* defines the matter clearly enough.

Some readers will be quite bewildered by my musings above. I am simply saying that hard dogmatism is not fitting when it comes to prophetic interpretations, when we seek to set the parameters for eschatological action. What we are interested in at this point is the prophecy that the Lord would come suddenly to His temple (Mal. 3:1), and that He will be a lion roaring out of Zion, i.e. the temple (Amos 1:2) in which He has promised to dwell for ever (Ezek. 37:28; 43:7; cf. 48:35). We can say, then, whether in the Penultimate Age, or the Ultimate Age, God is with His people. His Presence—as we have seen time and again—is dynamic. Man is not man without it. God acts wherever He is, and He is present with intention to act. Our actions come from the living God who dwells within us. His temple cannot be on earth without itself being properly actional.

Now we are in a position to make some comparisons between life in the Penultimate Age and life in the Ultimate Age. In this age we are those who ‘see in a glass, darkly’. Nothing eye has seen, ear has heard, or mind imagined can convey ‘the things which God has prepared for them that love him’. Since conceptualized images have always been forbidden, and because there is nothing to which we can compare God, we must await better sight, i.e. seeing Him ‘face to face’. We do see Him by faith in this age. The Psalmist could say,

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,  
 be gracious to me and answer me!  
 Thou hast said, ‘Seek ye my face.’  
 My heart says to thee,  
 ‘Thy face, LORD, do I seek.’  
 Hide not thy face from me (Ps. 27:7–8).

The same Psalmist (David) is credited with saying,

I sought the LORD, and he answered me,  
 and delivered me from all my fears.  
 Look to him, and be radiant;  
 so your faces shall never be ashamed (Ps. 34:4–5).

Paul said,

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

So then, in this life we can have great sensings and experiences of His Presence. We can look to him who is the author and completer of our faith. It is true that this is by faith and not by sight, but for us such faith-sensings are most grateful. We know there is no absence of the

Presence, or presence of the Absence. Indeed if we understand worship and service, then we know the power of both to assure us of the Presence. When we see His actions in everything about us—especially if we can read the signs of the times—then we are sure of His Sovereign Presence.

We close our brief discussion of the Presence by thinking on what we shall see one day, the things which are beyond our present sensual sensings, or our conceptual imaginings. Where better to start this study than by quoting Psalm 24:3–10 since it applies to our worship now within the new temple, and there within the Holy City?

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
 And who shall stand in his holy place?  
 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
 who does not lift up his soul to what is false,  
 and does not swear deceitfully.  
 He will receive blessing from the LORD,  
 and vindication from the God of his salvation.  
 Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
 who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O gates!  
 and be lifted up, O ancient doors!  
 that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory?  
 The LORD, strong and mighty,  
 The LORD, mighty in battle!

Lift up your heads, O gates!  
 and be lifted up, O ancient doors!  
 that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?  
 The LORD of hosts,  
 He is the King of glory!

Such ascriptional songs voice the depths of our hearts. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Isaiah's sight of the purity of God turned to horror within, until he was purged by the live coals from the altar of propitiating sacrifice, and then the purity of God was for ever his unforgettable joy.

Revelation 21:22 tells us surprisingly that John saw no temple in the Holy City. Temple there is, but it is 'the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb'. Those who are 'participators in the divine nature', are now so one with it—though not absorbed into it—that the Presence is for ever present. John adds, 'And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb of God.'

Our minds are both enraptured and astonished by what we see of the Eternal City; the great throng of the redeemed—the endless caravan of men and women returning to their home, their eternal home. In it are many mansions. The people are gripped beyond measure, and gripped irreversibly by the Holy Presence. That history should climax in this *telos* is beyond the wildest dreams they may have once entertained. Nothing about this eternal metropolis is lacking. The Presence makes for the continuing dynamic action of God and of glorified man. Man views the eternal inheritance with wonder and gratitude.

What a glorious Presence then—the Eternal *Shekinah*—the Glory-Cloud and the Presence-Cloud in the light of which all the nations walk. The life of the Word was said to be 'the light of men', so in the Holy City all will walk by the Word, the Truth, the True Way. We could spend much time seeking to elaborate on the glories of the

Eternal City, but it is not poetic stimulus that we are seeking to use. The highest peak of human experience, as well as its highest delight, lies in the Word. The Covenant-Father has honoured His promises beyond even the greatest expectation of His worshippers. His Presence is what makes them whole, and keeps them in willing obedience, and inspires them to be a great, royal and holy priesthood for eternity.

Let us at this point not make comparisons with our experience of the Presence in this age, and the age to come. It has often been said, 'God is a domestic man,' meaning His interests are not in the supernatural realm, the grand, the wonder-operations—as such—but in the steady stream of our humanity. So Christ came amongst us as the loving Brother, one in our flesh, doing domestic things, setting relationships aright by reconciliation, providing for needs, healing family aberrations. What, then, we have known of the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwelling in us, and what we have known of dwelling and abiding with them, does not fade into some lesser thing because in the Ultimate Age we pass from Penultimate things. Penultimate things are precious, now. The residence of God in us reduces us to tears of joy and gratitude and love. We glory in being the Home of God, and glory in the fact that God is our home. It is from this vantage point that we look at things eschatological and love them too. They are but an extension of what is now.

The things promised—of universal reconciliation, of universal peace, and of universal joy—have been wonderfully fulfilled. The New Age is pure, and there is nothing to disturb the spirit of just men made perfect. They are one with their glorious Lord.

There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; *they shall see his face*, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Because we cannot wholly define the Penultimate and the Ultimate but often unwittingly merge the two, we can do no better than close with the words of Hebrews 12:18–29:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.' Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.' But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. His voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of what is shaken, as of what has been made, in order that what cannot be shaken may remain. 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; for our God is a consuming fire.

## The Presence

Here, where we are, there is nothing,  
 Nothing if the Presence is not here.  
 If the Presence is the Absence,  
 Then the absence of the Presence is  
 intolerable.  
 The agony of the Nothing—  
 The shadow of the Something—  
 Is the unbearable anguish.

The shadow of the Someone  
 Falls across the cold barrenness  
 Of the deserted human spirit.  
 Silently—in abstentia—  
 The effects come. The sterile horror  
 Drains the substantial,  
 Bleeds the arterial life  
 Into the whimpering nothingness  
 Of unending pointlessness.

Once there was the Presence,  
 The Divine Matrix, the Source,  
 The fecund Creator-Him  
 Out of Whom all that ever is  
 And ever will be, flowed.  
 The warm pulsing reality  
 Of true humanity lived  
 In the heart of the Presence,  
 In the ever-present Heart—Himself.

Came the temptation,  
 Came the delirious dream,  
 The suggested liberation,  
 The heady aspiration  
 Of autonomous godhead,  
 And the dazed spirit dreamed  
 Of man-beyond-man,  
 Man reaching up and becoming  
 As the Presence Himself.

With the temptation the belief,  
 The fierce assurance of the seductive—  
 The new demanding Presence  
 That was no authentic Presence—  
 Until the new, the false, *credo* was born,  
 'I am a Presence in myself,  
 From myself to myself,  
 And then to all that I will.'

With the new Presence  
 Came the Absence of the Presence.  
 The Presence was intolerable

To the new autonomous one;  
 But when the judgement came  
 It was the presence of the Presence  
 Which made the strong Sound—  
 The excruciating Voice—  
 Sound through the Edenic Paradise  
 To make that Garden Hell.

In the lonely shifts of the night,  
 Or the drear days of the deserted spirit,  
 There comes the yearning for the fullness—  
 The warm substantial reality—  
 To authenticate the deadly phantom,  
 The insistent ghost-being,  
 The violent wraith that must first die  
 Before it is resurrected.  
 Only crucified can it live,  
 Only destroyed can it come to life.

In the unbidden moments  
 There comes the Presence.  
 Sometimes it is in the anger  
 Of the violent mind.  
 Sometimes it is in the whistlings,  
 In the shrill indignation  
 At the neglectful Absence,  
 As though the endless protest  
 Is the divine right  
 Of the separated spirit.

In these unbidden moments  
 The Presence comes quietly.

First the agony, then the joy  
 Which spreads as a hot blanket  
 Pressed on the frozen heart.  
 It comes as reviving rain  
 Across the sterile sands,  
 The empty desert  
 Of the deserted mind.

In that ecstasy is the agony,  
 In that joy is the unbearable pain.  
 In that love is the horror of hate  
 Resisting the divine intervention.  
 There is the bitter protest,  
 The wailing vituperation  
 Resisting the inevitable death  
 Of the proud autonomous heart—  
 The lethal crucifixion  
 That brings the transforming resurrection.

In the presence of the Presence  
 The Absence dissolves.  
 The prodigal heart returns  
 To the invincible Father.  
 The Embrace is the Everlasting Presence  
 That makes the regeneration  
 Complete. The Abiding One  
 Abides for the abiding  
 Of the bidden one: the Glory  
 Returns to its human home  
 And is satisfied.

## *Postscript on The Presence*

One's thoughts on a theme do not cease with the completion of a book written on the subject. So my mind keeps on thinking about the matter of the Presence. Almost any Presence will do for man if it takes away the intolerable emptiness that comes when he seeks to live in and of himself/herself. Even the Absence of the Presence will be tolerable for it will assure the person that there is a Presence. He may then go out to seek it.

What has fascinated me is the history of the mystics, those who have sought God directly. We have observed that they are present in every religion, and probably in every culture. Human beings seek union with God, as though they know that it is essential, and may even be possible. Different methods are used to effect union, as though it is primarily man's task to seek God, and not God's nature to seek man and to effect the union through His love and grace.

To cover the whole field of mysticism would be a mammoth task and certainly one I am not competent to attempt.

What does intrigue me, however, are some of the elements I detect as linked with mysticism. One of these is dualism, that system of thinking which rejects the material world as an illusion, and as an impediment to union with God, although it may be thought necessary to test us out in regard to our surrender to God. This kind of thinking certainly rejects the Judaic and Christian views of God as 'a faithful Creator'. For Him to create a gross universe is unthinkable: matter must come from an evil source, and though apparently in existence must be treated as an illusion—an intrusion upon spiritual reality.

The second problem I face in regard to mysticism is the pride of the mystic. He thinks he is capable of coming to union with God. On the one hand he regards his ego with suspicion and wishes to be rid of its domination, but on the other hand he seems to have an ego which regards his self-assertive ego with cold dislike. The whimsical mystic is the one who attracts me. He seems almost amused by his own efforts to effect union with God, and is not dismayed by the effrontery of his ego. He is almost tolerant of it in an affectionate way. Does he have some kind of faith which tells him God will overcome his idiocy and Himself effect the union?

What intrigues me is the quest for 'spirituality'. I put the word in inverted commas because spirituality can be an all-embracing term, covering things both bad and good such as an anti-material approach, asceticism, intense religiosity, spiritual pilgrimage and the genuine life of faith. Certainly most religions would have seekers after spirituality. For the most part people like their religion to be practical. They want their gods to help them along in this life. What happens after death is to many mere conjecture.

They wish to live well in the here-and-now.

Even so, there are those who cannot live easily in the here-and-now without deep feelings of guilt. They believe they ought to be spiritual. Of course there must be a genuine spirituality, i.e. a life lived in God, but then that may be one of the most natural things of all, and not a matter of intense and calculated endeavour, in which case the idea of spirituality as a state achieved need not arise. I am thinking of those persons who have beliefs—even very personal beliefs—yet find themselves to be dry in living. Their own aridity appals them and they seek spiritual freshness. Unless careful, these persons will seek spirituality as a thing-in-itself, a state of being that can be attained by certain exercises. Is it that they seek the Presence of God, and believe this is how they should effect a consciousness of it? Such people may use the insights of many religions other than the biblical one they have once known, thinking that the mystics—whatever their religions—must be the true seekers. Of course their ‘biblical way’ may not have been truly biblical, which would account for their going elsewhere, seeking in eastern religions, historic mysticism, and certain cosmetic ‘Christian’ worship exercises.

It just seems to me that much of the present ‘spirituality quest’ comes out of an impatience of life that is secular, or if religious, then without obvious reality. This would help to account for the popularity of worship which encourages worshippers to believe that God is present and active. Of course no one should complain if that is the case, but the endeavour to *make* God present to sense—if not to sight—should not be of human manipulation. The richest worship will still be a matter of faith

and not of sight. If God should so move as to give a theophany, faith would still be required to understand and assimilate that action. Worship is in the Presence of God without doubt, but worship is ‘reasonable’, i.e. ‘logical’ and so ‘logical’ is ‘spiritual’. This is surely the thrust of Romans 12:1—*logiken latreian*—which is translatable in the terms we have used in the last sentence. Worship then, is never irrational, but is of the rationality of faith.

All of this leads me to ask the question, ‘Why do we strive after spirituality when we already have it in the life of faith in Christ?’ The answer may simply be that we do not recognize that we have it—that to be ‘in Christ’, ‘in the Father’, and ‘in the Spirit’ is indeed genuine spirituality. Christ’s own words were that ‘the altar sanctifies the gift,’ i.e. when we come to God He makes us holy, but then it was always He who drew us—‘The Father ever seeks such to worship him’. Sacrifice was His provision for us (Lev. 17:11). Thus His Presence is His matter of being present with us—as Creator, as Father, as Judge, as Redeemer, as Restorer, as King. All the time He is present—in one way or another, or in many ways.

In order to live in that Presence, to enjoy it, to respond to it, and to be enabled to live properly within it, is a matter of faith. Faith is trust in God and is primarily belief in what He has said and says. His word is the foundation of our understanding and the way of our living. Undoubtedly He speaks through many media and we must always be listening, but it is not the listening that comes from a tenuous relationship. In life we may fear others, be in agony when they do not speak to us, or filled with gratitude when they do, but His is the word which is

genuine life for us. The patriarchs carried it about in their memory and lived on it, for to have the word was to have the Speaker with them.

There will be many times when we lack a consciousness of His Presence, and there may be times when we feel conscious of His Absence, but our feelings are not of primary importance. The patriarchs had built their altars and even if distant from them, knew by faith that He was present to them—on this earth! True Israelites coveted the signs of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. Many had never looked upon the mercy seat, but they slept soundly at night—whether in tent or house—thinking in terms of Psalm 99,

The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble!

He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

The Lord is great in Zion;

he is exalted over all the peoples.

Let them praise thy great and terrible name!

Holy is he!

Christ's people worship Him by faith. There are murmurings, mutterings from the camp of evil, and there are foul suggestions and mockings concerning the Divine Presence, but the redeemed creature knows his Creator; the child of God, his Father; the young family member, his Elder Brother; and the weak believer, the quiet power of the Spirit. So we worship, insisting to ourselves—as to others—that God is with us. We sing with deliberation the great *Te Deum*, and it is both creed and worship as we affirm it. We are of 'a contrite and humble spirit' and 'tremble at his word', yet our trembling is not being sick at heart, floundering in spirit because of the accusations

that come to us from the powers of darkness. The shield of faith quenches those flaming darts, and having fought that battle of faith we stand, sure that we are not alone.

Knowing His Presence by faith does not mean we may never have seasons of sensing, but if they are genuine these will come of themselves. If we feed our minds and hearts and spirits in reading the Scriptures, hearing time and again the words which tell us of Him and feed us with promises and assurances, then our faith will be substantial. If we worship Him personally—whether in the privacy of our room or the heart-warming presence of His people—then rich seasons of sensing His Presence may come. Sudden understandings of His creation, uprisings within us of the stored word, rich and warm relationships with His people—all of these will give a sensing to our faith.

What we need to maintain to ourselves is the *fact* of His Presence, whether sensed or not. Yes, we abide in Him—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and He abides in us—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Whilst we yearn for sight of Him, nevertheless by faith we 'endure as seeing him who is invisible'. We insist that *now* we

have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

## about this book...

Loneliness and restlessness have always been part of human experience. Can there be a lasting and genuine solution to this problem? The author of this book thinks so. He is sure that the presence of God in the human heart can be a reality, and can lead to genuine intimacy with other human beings. In a day when the last bastion of human intimacy has been breached—i.e. the sexual one—men and women are discovering that true intimacy is vanishing.

Knowing the Presence of God is not a new thing in human history. The mystics have long sought this intimacy and have used the language of human sexuality to symbolize this deepest union of all—that between man and God. Whatever service has been rendered by the mystics has been outmoded and outclassed by the coming of God in the flesh, in Christ. He proved—and proves—to be the way to wholesome and eternal intimacy with God.

This book—which researches the union of God and man—should be read. It can lead into participation in The Everlasting Presence.

*Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, writer, missionary, and family man, as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live. Some have found his books life-changing.*