

***Who Was & Is
& Is To Come***

**PASTORS' SCHOOL 1994
Victoria & Western Australia**

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Introduction to the Theme of the Pastors' School

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

'WHO WAS, & IS & IS TO COME'

The theme of our School can be seen by the following Contents of Studies:

- Study 1 God's Eternity
- Study 2 'Who Was': God's 'Was-ness'
- Study 3 Covenant & the Living God
- Study 4 Immanuel: Alpha and Omega Enfleshed
- Study 5 Christ the Prophet & the Prophetic Community
- Study 6 Christ the Priest & the Priestly Community
- Study 7 Christ the King & the Royal Community
- Study 8 Forever Fathering: The Glorious Sonship
- Study 9 The Spirit—Who Was and Is and Is to Come
- Study 10 Brethren Teaching These Things—All Things

In a way the series constitutes a kind of 'salvation history'. It seeks to show that God is the Eternal One, the One who inhabits eternity, is eternal, immortal and invisible, yet is the Living God within His creation and not detached from it. That is, He is active, always doing those works which He has purposed from before time began, with the end (*telos*) in view that He has planned. This idea might not be new to any of us, and we may take it calmly having received this teaching of His sovereignty somewhere in our past.

The question we need to ask is whether His sovereignty is so much of a reality to us that it has determined much of our actions in life and ministry. By talking about God's eternity we do not so much wish to refurbish our understanding of God as eternal and sovereign, but to see how history has worked out—and will work out—according to His will and expressed plan, and understand something of that flow of history, its significance for us and our relatedness to it and our part in it.

If we interpret the creation of Man in the image of God, and Man's fall from his innocent relationship with God to a place of alienation from Him and the resultant, continuing human struggle with guilt and the kind of relationships which human beings have in the face of God and other human fellow-creatures, then we are naturally faced with many questions regarding Man and God. These questions have

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME OF THE PASTORS' SCHOOL

always been asked and probably questions would remain insoluble were there no revelation by God of Himself as 'the living God' and 'the God of covenant'.

When God reveals Himself He is showing Himself as He is towards His creation, including us who are made in His image, but yet are fallen. A passage such as Ephesians chapter 1 reveals His sovereign purposes for humanity in His Son Jesus Christ, and all of this planned before creation. Through our Studies we will seek to trace His covenant promises and actions, especially as the Word becomes flesh and reveals Him in the incarnation, life and ministry of Jesus—'the man from heaven'. The obedience of the Son, his salvific acts and his continuing work as Prophet, Priest and King, constitute the continuing revelation of God as Father and have great significance because Christ's Community is the expression of the Son in his acts in history, especially in his relationship with God as his Father and the Father of His redeemed Community. The Community is thus prophetic, priestly and royal (kingly) and knowing this identity and living according to it, is the People through whom God works His plan to its completion (*telos*). This last insight is, in practice, of enormous ecclesial and pastoral significance.

All of God's actions issue from His Triune Being, and although we are not pursuing that fact to any extent in this School, we see that the Three Persons work in their unity in creation, salvation and the final consummation of all things. Father, Son and Spirit are revealed in their constant working. Our hope and self-exhortation—as pastors and other servants in the Community of the Triune Godhead—is that these Studies will not only be living theology to us, but will refresh and renew us along the lines indicated in the titles. We believe that as the teaching unfolds we will be gripped anew by the Being of God Himself, and will be better equipped to live in Him and have ministry to, and with, our people. We must know and teach these things.

Study One

God's Eternity

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

INTRODUCTION: THE PASTORAL NEED FOR KNOWING GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE AND LIVING IN IT

Speaking of God's transcendence means speaking of His sovereignty, that is, His reign over all time and eternity. Isaiah 57:15 speaks of God's transcendence and His immanence—two things we need to know personally and pastorally.

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.

`Who inhabits eternity' signifies eternity (*ad*) is His nature. So in Isaiah 63:16 Israel says, `... thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name is from everlasting' (RV: *alam*). Isaiah 40:28 states, `The Lord is the everlasting (*alam*) God, the Creator of the end of the earth'. Thus in Romans 1:20 Paul speaks of God's `eternal (*aidios*) power and deity' and in I Timothy 1:17 he has in an ascription to `the King of ages [AV *aionon*, `eternal'], immortal, invisible'. In the Book of Revelation God is `the Alpha and the Omega who was and is and is to come', which is linked with Isaiah 41:4 (cf. 44:6; 48:12), `I, the Lord, the first and with the last: I am He.' `Who was and is and is to come' is a constant theme in Revelation.

Most of us would acknowledge that in this era of modernity the eternal dimensions shown in Scripture have given way to life lived mainly on the horizontal level. Theology is mainly anthropological. We seek solutions to problems through the empiric o-scientific approach. However weak we may consider the present `spirituality movement' to be, it does seek to direct us from the mundane to the transcendent. Often as pastors we are so pragmatic that God is busied out of our thinking. We really give weight to human reasoning, unconsciously ridiculing the transcendent. We need the antidote to this idolatrous approach of the horizontal by heeding the question asked time and again by God in Isaiah, `To whom, then will you compare me, that I should be like him?' (40:18, 25; 46:5).

Much of our church life, its organisation, its worship, its endeavours and even its

missionary involvement can be explained on the human level. We cannot satisfy the deepest desires of the human spirit. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, 'He has put eternity [NRSV: 'put a sense of past and future'] into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end'. We will never be satisfied with less than God's eternity, and we can never live at peace and in security without knowing His sovereignty in our living.

For this reason we are taking something of an excursion, in the first Study, into a survey of that sovereignty, sketchy and inadequate as it may be. I have taken the theme of God's throne-the symbol of His authority-and trust we can be caught up into its marvellous dimensions-the antidote to all secularity of spirit.¹

THE NATURE OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

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

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all (I Chron. 29:11-12).

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

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;
worship the Lord in holy array . . .
The Lord sits enthroned above the flood;
the Lord is enthroned as king for ever
(Ps. 29:1-2, 10).

Jude has it:

. . . to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 25).

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

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

¹ Much of the following material is taken from my *All Things Are Yours* (NCPI, 1991) chapter 3, pp. 11-14.

Again, in 11:17:

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

In 15:3 the conquerors of the beast sing:

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

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

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

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

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives for ever;
for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing;
and he does according to his will in the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, `What doest thou?' (Dan. 4:34-35).

GOD'S THRONE-THAT IS, HIS KINGDOM-SHOWS HIS AUTHORITY

The theme of God's Kingdom is a vast one in Scripture and unmistakable even to the casual reader.² We need to collate something of the various references to the throne in Scripture recognising that the word `throne' is a synonym for `kingdom', or `rule', or `authority'.

The Throne of God

(a) The throne of God is in the heavens (Ps. 11:4; 103:19), and the earth is therefore God's footstool. He is King over all the earth (Ps. 97:2; cf. Zech. 14:9). Both are linked in Isaiah 66:1.

² Here I would cite my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989), but articles in theological and bible dictionaries give sufficient coverage to convince us that He is the All-Supreme One.

GOD'S ETERNITY

- (b) It is a throne from eternity (Ps. 93:2).
- (c) It is a throne to all eternity (Lam. 5:19).
- (d) It is founded on righteousness, justice, steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps. 9:4; 89:14; 97:2).
- (e) God's throne is the place of action (I Kings 22:19; Isa 6:1; Ezek. 1:22-28; Dan. 7:9-10; cf. Job 1:6; 2:1).
- (f) It is a throne surrounded by the four living creatures, elders and angelic creatures, so that praise and worship are incessant in the presence of God (Rev. 4:2f.).
- (g) Although it is in heaven (Isa. 66:1) yet God is 'enthroned on the cherubim' (I Sam. 4:4), which is the same as being 'enthroned on the praises of Israel' (Ps. 22:3).
- (h) Ultimately it will be seen in the Holy City, the river of life issuing from it (Rev. 22: If-, Ezek. 47: 1ff.). In Ezekiel 43:7 it is in the new temple. In Revelation 21:22 the new temple is God and the Lamb, yet the throne, being in the Holy City, is also in the temple of God, i.e. in God Himself. Note that in Isaiah 6:1 the throne is seen in the temple.
- (i) In the Messianic age 'Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord' (Jer. 3:17; cf. Ezek. 43:7). Israel's throne was really God's (I Chron. 28:5), 'the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel'.
- (j) God's throne will always be 'the throne of grace' (Heb. 4:16), i.e. from it will flow the river of life to the needy. Ultimately it will prove to be the place of rewards (Matt. 25:31-40).
- (k) By contrast, God's throne will be the place of judgment, where punishment will be meted out to the unrighteous (Dan. 7:9-22; Matt. 25:31-32, 41-46; I Cor. 15:24-28; Rev. 20:11-15).
- (l) Generally known as the throne of God, it then becomes known as 'the throne of God and the Lamb' (Rev. 22:1), and as 'the throne of Christ', or 'his glorious throne' (Matt. 19:28; 25:31; cf. 26:64) to which there are many references such as those linked with the Kingdom of God, and Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34; I Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; etc.)-'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.'

The Throne In the Book of the Revelation

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

- (a) God is seated on the throne, i.e. He reigns and rules (4:2; 4:9; 5:13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5; cf. 22:1, 3), appearing in beautiful colours (4:3). The rainbow is around the throne-sign of peace and of covenant, and also very beautiful.
- (b) The throne has on its four sides the four living creatures, symbolising the things

they are and do, symbolising four great elements of creation-the lion-like, oxlike, eagle-like and man-like elements. These living creatures initiate worship.

- (c) The twenty-four elders of all creation have authority and surround the throne with it, delighted to worship incessantly (4:10; 5:11).
- (d) The glass-like sea, pure and serene, speaking peace (4:5) and it is mingled with fire (15:2), and also the seven spirits-the Sevenfold Spirit-who burn as torches, and disseminate grace and peace along with the Father and the Son (1:4-5) The golden altar of incense is before the throne (8:3-4) as an agent of worship.
- (e) The throne is ever actional: from it issue 'flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder' (4:5; 8:5; 11:19), i.e. actions of judgement. In 16:17 a loud voice 'came out of the temple, from the throne', and in 16:1 a loud voice comes from the temple, so that temple and throne are closely linked.
- (f) The Lamb has much to do with the throne. In 5:1 he is seated at the right hand of God the Father. In 5:6 he is standing 'between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders'. He holds this place in 7:9-10. In 2:26-28 the Lamb is given the place of authority, which in 3:21 is both the Father's throne, and 'my throne', i.e. the throne of the Lamb. In 5:8-14 worship is given at the throne to both God and the Lamb. In 6:16 God is the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb (in wrath) is linked with Him as also in 7:10 and 7:17 where the Lamb is 'in the midst of the throne'. In 12:5 the child born of the woman is caught to the throne of God, and he is to rule the nations. In 20:4 the martyrs reign with Christ, which must mean he is seated on a throne, and they on thrones, as perhaps in Daniel 7:9 where God is on his throne, and the saints also are on theirs. In 22:1, 3 the throne is called 'the throne of God and the Lamb'. Virtually, then, all that the Lamb does in regard to the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls, issues from the throne.
- (g) In 22:1 the river of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb, whereas in Ezekiel 47:1 the water flows 'from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar', which tends to identify the throne with the temple and then the altar with the throne.

The Throne of the Kingdom of Evil

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

- (a) The throne is spoken of as Satan's throne (Rev. 2:13), and it is in this world at the centre of human living, having a specified locality or localities (cf. Rev. 2:9, 24; 3:9), being linked with 'the synagogue of Satan'; which is possibly an anti-Christian Jewish synagogue practicing 'the deep things of Satan', as against 'the deep things of God' (I Cor. 2:10, AV). It is suggested that Pergamum was the locale for Satanic headquarters of the East as Rome was for the West, in that emperor worship and other pagan idol worship was intense and rife.
- (b) Just as the Kingdom of God has its throne of God and of the Lamb, so the Kingdom of darkness has its throne (Rev. 16:10; cf. Luke 11:18), which is called 'Satan's throne' (Rev. 2:13) and 'the throne of the beast' (Rev. 13:2; 16:10).

- (c) Satan claimed to have authority over the nations (Luke 4:5-7) and in Revelation 13:7 the beast is allowed to make war against the saints and have authority over the nations for a specified period of time (cf. Dan. 7:21). History is really the action-and account-of 'the clash of the kingdoms' as the dragon and his cohorts endeavour to subjugate man and the nations to the throne of darkness, and as God opposes Satan, finally destroying him and his powers.

**CONCLUSION: WE CANNOT LIVE TRULY AS CITIZENS OF TIME
OUTSIDE THE ETERNAL DIMENSIONS OF GOD**

In this series of Studies we need to be renewed in the sovereignty of God, to 'set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth'. We need to 'look at the things which are unseen' for they are eternal. We need to remember that 'our lives are hid with Christ in God'. This is our true spiritual habitat. As pastors and leaders we need to be hierophants of the eternities, to our people. It is salutary for us, also, to know there is another kingdom which seeks to usurp the sovereignty of God and that the modern secularising processes are part of the strategy of that kingdom.

Study Two

‘Who Was’: God’s ‘Was-ness’

(by Deane Meatheringham)

INTRODUCTION: THE BEAUTY OF GOD

The title of this study ‘Who Was’: God’s ‘Was-ness’ may seem somewhat ‘precious’ at first. Indeed if we begin with a metaphysical analysis of God’s attributes we may not vary in our approach so very much from abstract philosophy.

Our present study must be seen as flowing on from the previous session which expounded God as a trinity of love. It is the eternal relations within the Godhead which equate true being and holiness with beauty. It is the beauty of each person of the Godhead relating in harmony to each other. One alone as individual, or in solitude, cannot be beautiful.

Our knowledge of God’s eternal beauty is Christological. The communal God has exegeted himself to us in the Son and continues to do so through the Spirit. It is in the Son that we know the Lord God as ‘The Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’ (Rev. 1:8).

GOD’S WAS-NESS, IS-NESS, AND COMING

The was-ness of God is the cause of adoration in Revelation 4:7–11 as the four living creatures and twenty-four elders sing in sweet concord with the revealed loveliness of God as the holy, triune, almighty Creator. The *pantokrator* (which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew ‘Sabaoth of hosts’), is the one who holds all things together, and who sovereignly controls all things.

In Revelation 22:13 God is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega. Not that he is the first and last cause, but that God comprehends all that is between, from beginning to end. The Creator has always *been* acting in history, *is* acting in history and who *will* act in history. He is the living God and contrasts with the Beast in Revelation 17:8–11 who ‘was and *is not* and is to come’, i.e. who is not divine, and will never assume deity and whose actions are always temporary.

In Revelation 21:6 God’s was-ness is seen in the announcement ‘it is done’, he makes all things new so that what was in God, which he set in motion at the beginning, he has brought to its consummation.

With the Triune God who ‘was and is and is to come’ there is no *will* be. In the harmony of the Godhead there is nothing disproportional, or incomplete, so that the

God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ is not a developing, or evolving God. The 'situation' is never above God's being or character.

Pastorally we are not preaching a God who is fixed in a past era, nor a God who has to adjust to modernity, for the Triune God of Exodus 3:14 keeps manifesting his glory and will ultimately do so.

GOD'S ULTIMATE INTENTION

God set the destination for history in eternity (Eph. 1:3–14; Col. 1:19–22; II Tim. 1:9; I Cor. 2:6–10).

For us 'history' generally conjures up the idea of a steam of happenings, usually of the cause-and-effect kind. Everyone seems to believe in some form of predestination. In our humanistic age it is insisted that man is in control and man predestinates. The alternative is the assertion of the reign of total chance and meaninglessness.

In God's purpose, history does not have its plan *in* time, but in God and thus in eternity. The end that God has determines the beginning. Biblical predestination does not begin with an abstract God and his attributes—such as a self-determining will—but with the Triune God who is only known through the Son in his relation of love. We must be careful not to graft a metaphysical divine will onto the mystery of God's being Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures cited above speak of the end of history as being the ultimate revelation of *God's glory*. God, then, must have himself as his end in creating. 'The end of the creation of God was to provide a spouse for his Son Jesus Christ, that might enjoy him and on whom he might pour forth his love . . .' 'Heaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete with a spouse' (Jonathan Edwards 'Miscellaneous quotes in *America's Theologians*, Robert W. Jenson, Oxford, p. 42.). The church is, *with* Christ, the object in triune love which has to do with the purpose of creation.

We can say the Ultimate Intention of God is redemptive, is all of grace, is in his elect Son Jesus Christ, is that those in Christ might participate in the divine nature, that the whole creation might be regenerated, that God's glory might be revealed in his gloriously redeemed creatures.

GOD BRINGS HIS PLAN TO FULFILMENT

Just as it is impossible to think of the was-ness of God without thinking of him as the living God who plans, so too we cannot think of him without knowing that he is the acting One who brings his plan to its fulfillment (Isa. 46:8–10). Here I Corinthians 8:4–6 is axiomatic because with God as the creator, Paul emphasises the nothingness of all other beings that pass for divine. If we link this with Isaiah 48:3–8 we see that it is God who is moving forward to effect his plan. God does this when we do not know he is doing it, shutting the mouths of those who would use a technique to say they contributed towards it.

Revelation 10:5–7 reveals that the *mystery* of God's will is fulfilled by Christ who is also 'the first and the last . . . the living one', who died but lives for evermore, and who has the keys to Death and Hades (Rev. 1:18). The slain Lamb has the authority to open the seals of history because he is the only man qualified to bring history to its goal (Rev. 5:1ff.; cf. Eph. 1:9–10; Luke 24:25ff. , 44–47; II Cor. 1:20).

‘WHO WAS’: GOD’S ‘WAS-NESS’

With Christ as head over all history, we cannot think that we preach to unbelievers imprisoned in a world detached from the Alpha and Omega. God in Christ is bringing all the cultures to the ultimate. His judgments are in the earth, yet prior to our coming to unbelievers ‘the gospel . . . has been preached to every creature under heaven’ (Col. 1:6, 23; Rom. 10:18). Because this is true we can and must make the word of God fully known to unbelievers (Col. 1:25–29).

The point is that the Gospel of God encompasses the story of all reality. The gospel of the Alpha and Omega correlates with all peoples. We do not live in a mechanical cosmos of random history. The whole course of nature is subservient to the affairs of redemption. Every atom is managed by the Triune God so as to be to the advantage of God’s people. And what emerges is the discovery ‘not of God’s good in ours but of our good in God’s’.

Study Three

Covenant & the Living God

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

Various exhortations in the Scripture to come to know God, to go on knowing Him, and to increase in our knowledge of Him (Phil. 3:10), are intended to tell us that knowing God personally and intimately is the highest aim and goal that we can pursue (cf. Jer. 9:23–24; Hosea 4:1–3; 6:1–3, 6). John 17:3 (cf. 5:20–21) tells us that to know Him is eternal life. I John 4:7–10 says that we know Him through new birth, and we know Him as love, and all this via the Cross and its propitiating work. When we come to know Him as the Covenant God then we know Him in terms of Exodus 34:6–7 (cf. John 1:14), and we realise He is ‘the living God’, the God who acts. This is the way God has revealed Himself and this relational and theological knowledge becomes the mainspring of our actions.

THE GOD OF COVENANT

Here we cannot enter into the vast subject of biblical covenant. Much literature is available to us on that theme.¹ Human covenants—covenants made between persons such between Jacob and Laban, the Gibeonites and Israel, David and Jonathan, David and Abner—are called bilateral covenants, that is two or more working. In these the two parties make an agreement and seal it in a ritual, even invoking a curse should the agreement not be kept. God’s covenants are unilateral, that is He is the one who initiates the covenant and bestows the covenant promises and blessings. Such covenants in history began with Noah prior to the Flood, one with all humanity and the creation following the Flood, the covenant made with Abraham and the patriarchs from which issued (i) the covenant with Israel through Moses and which had what we might call sub-covenants such as the (so-called) covenant of Palestine and the (promised) Davidic covenant, and (ii) the New Covenant made prophetically to Israel

¹ For a succinct, yet comprehensive treatment of covenant see my LFS 37, ‘The Biblical Meaning of Covenant’ (NCPI, 1979). There is a vast body of literature on the theme, including articles in Bible and Theological Dictionaries.

but which was virtually the Abrahamic covenant come—so to speak—into full bloom (cf. Luke 1:68–79).

CREATION AND COVENANT

Most theologians—especially those called ‘covenant theologians’—hold to the idea that a covenant is implicit in creation. They maintain that creation was a work done in grace and that even so it was a covenant of works, an implicit contractual agreement.

Other theologians see creation as a gift, and reserve the idea of grace for God’s actions in restoration and gratuitous provision for redeemed mankind to be glorified and inherit the promises He has made, albeit mankind had forfeited such by the Fall. If creation is seen as a gift then God’s nature is shown as the Giver. If the idea of ‘unmerited action’ is entertained, then there is an element introduced into creation of being an undeserved gift, and this cancels its gratuitous nature.

COVENANT AND GRACE

Grace is certainly ‘God’s unmerited favour’ but the description is deficient since it may be taken to be a kind of ‘hand-out’ to undeserving sinners, thus obscuring the dimensionless love of God which is always going towards Man to do him good, no matter what his state of being is. The judgment of the Flood shows that ‘God will by no means acquit the [impenitent] guilty’. Following the Flood God acknowledges the fact that ‘the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth’, yet He makes a covenant of grace with Man and with the creation which is a promise not to disturb again the rhythm of creation and its seasons by a universal flood.

Our modern investigative (empirico-scientific) way of thinking seeks to understand *why* God made, and keeps covenant, but the answer must lie in the fact that He is ‘the God of all grace’. Exodus 34:6–7 remains the most powerful revelation of His nature and His glory and so of His covenant grace. In one sense covenant is a mystery even though its elements are spelled out. God’s unilateral covenants are not contractual. They do, however, carry the obligation of obedience as a response to the grace and love of the Covenant-making God.

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

Time and again Israel needed to remember this and act accordingly in both obedience and repentance for its idolatry and its disobedience. All who are within the covenant of God must keep His character in mind. In the New Testament the revelation of the Covenant God is by the Son who is the Mediator of the New Covenant. This is a ‘better covenant’, with better promises and the sacrifice of Christ the High Priest, which sets all forgiveness as total for all time, and thus sanctifies the covenant people. God’s actions in this covenant are never ceasing.

We can observe at this point, then, that God who could rightly have abandoned Man at the Fall, chose out of His love to redeem Man by His grace. Covenant is the

way the Holy God can relate to, and deal with, sinful humanity, remaining its Creator, Redeemer and ultimate Glorifier.

THE LIVING GOD

In the Old and New Testaments God is often called ‘the living God’² and the meaning in its context is really ‘the God who acts’. Israel believed God had acted in creation, and, indeed, was going on creating for creation was no self-perpetuating artefact once made by God. The term ‘living God’ should be followed in a concordance and its contexts noted. Some Old Testament references are, Joshua 3:7–13, I Samuel 17:24–27 and Daniel 6:19–22, where the ‘living God’ acts at points in Israel’s covenant history so that the waters of the Jordan part to let Israel move across into the promised land, David is vindicated by the act of God in his slaying of Goliath, and Daniel is saved from the mouth of the lions. These events illustrate Exodus 15:11 and context:

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

In the New Testament Matthew 16:16, 26:64; Romans 9:16; I Thessalonians 1:9; I Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:12; 10:31; and Revelation 7:2 all point to the same principle: God is the One who acts. These references need to be pondered.

GOD’S ACTS ARE COVENANTAL

Of this there can be no doubt. Once we see the universality of the Abrahamic and the New Covenants we see that God is working in history to effect His plan and purpose. He alone acts effectively in history. Satan and his kingdom seek to subvert, imitate and counterfeit God’s actions. A good example of this is Revelation 13 where there is a false trinity, aping God and seeking to dethrone him by fighting against Him and His people.

CONCLUSION TO ‘COVENANT AND THE LIVING GOD’

Our short Study is a simple introduction to the mighty theme of covenant and the God who acts. The pastoral significance of this is immeasurable. A test of this fact would be to ask whether our people understand covenant, see and believe they are in the covenant, understand God as their Covenant Father, as the One who is always acting in every element of their lives and the community of the church, and Christ as their Covenant Head. Does the church see itself as the Covenant People, and what does the term ‘eternal [everlasting] covenant’ mean to them? What does it mean to us. How do we understand God’s grace working in covenant? Covenant is what gives us intimate relationship with God and all His people and makes us an organic unity and a dynamic community.

² An excellent treatment of this subject is R. T. France’s book *The Living God* (IVP) at present out of print.

Study Four

Immanuel: Alpha & Omega Enfleshed

(by Deane Meatheringham)

INTRODUCTION: KEEPING TO THE STARK TRUTH OF THE INCARNATION

Matthew 1:18–24 speaks of the coming of Immanuel, God giving himself an earthly origin in being born of a woman. The grotesque impact of this upon cultured humankind—the very idea of Alpha and Omega entering the possibility of human existence—has been instrumental in transmogrifying the Gospel so that it can be more easily grafted onto culture.

To assist getting to the point as quickly as possible I inject the following quotation.:

Standard Western teaching . . . undoes the original point of trinitarianism. The trinity of God himself becomes sheerly the necessarily postulated presupposition in God of the triune character of God's work, and is not in itself to be further conceived. Thus insofar as God *is* conceived—and he will be somehow—the conception of God remains untouched by the triune gospel narrative. Our inability to think about God in a way appropriate to the gospel is then baptized by calling God's unthought trinity a 'mystery'; the pious are to recite 'God is one and three' but never to ask what this says. The trinity of God himself is thereby deprived of function in actual religious life; and it is unsurprising that trinitarian patterns of piety and interpretation gradually lost importance in medieval and most Reformation-era theology, finally to be explicitly renounced by the Enlightenment (Robert W. Jensen, *A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*, Oxford, 1988, p. 93).

The incarnation of God the Son proclaims a temporally participation of the active living God in historical times, activities and suffering. Our salvation is in God. The incarnation is our salvation. 'Reconciliation is not just a truth God has made known to us; it is what God has accomplished for us, the Truth of God who freely gives Himself to us in the Revelation' (T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy*, SJT, 39 (1986), pp. 461–82).

ALPHA AND OMEGA ENFLESHED

The text from Matthew 1:18–24 (cf. Isa. 7:14) concerning the conception and the birth of Jesus could give him no stronger name than 'God with us'. Immanuel is God's

settled and continuing presence with his people through his Son (II Sam. 7:14; Isa. 9:6–7; Hosea 11:1; Ps. 2; 89).

John 1:14 links well with Exodus 34:6–7 so that we see the glory of Yahweh has now pitched the tent of his presence amongst us in the flesh of the Son. It is in the face of the Son that we see the face of the Father (John 1:18; cf. Matt. 11:27). All of this is the indivisible work and concurrence of all the persons of the Triune Love (Gal. 4:4–6; II Cor. 5:19; I Tim. 3:16).

What we need to stress is that in Jesus Christ God assumed our human flesh. It was not God entering a human body but God becoming a complete man. Hebrews 2:10–18 tells us that Jesus is of the same stock as the human race, that we are his brothers and sisters, that he has become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Through the incarnation God is directly active and present in this man who is in Somatic Solidarity with us.

In contrast with the philosophical speculations of his day, Luther could eloquently say in a sermon from John 14:13f.:

He who teaches what it means that Christ is both true God and true man . . . can surely conclude and say: 'I will hear and know no other God but will look and listen solely to this Christ. And if I hear him I already know on what terms I am with God and I need no longer torment myself as I did before with anxiety about atonement and reconciliation with God . . . Now I can gain a real and genuine trust in God . . . For since Christ who is one individual person, God and man, speaks it is certain that God the Father and the Holy Spirit, that is the whole Divine Majesty is also present and speaking.'

The roles of Jesus and his Father and their Spirit in our history, and the roles of these three 'persons' in God's own communion, these intersect with each other to make but one divine history. All of God is with us.

THE VICARIOUS HUMANITY OF THE SON

This point is a development of the texts already quoted. Immanuel is the coming of the Son of God into the fraternity of the human race. As the man whom God has sent, Jesus is the second Adam, the true man and the new humanity. In the midst of the old sin-ridden, death-sodden, diseased and perverted humanity the new, whole, complete and entire humanity begins. As truly as humankind lives, breathes, eats, sleeps and suffers—God has entered into this unbroken union with us. As the utter self-giving of God *to* us, he lives *for* us and expends himself on *our behalf*.

The Biblical Word is that *only God can save, but he saves precisely as man* (Matt. 1:21; Titus 3:4–5; II Cor. 5:19). Our understanding of Jesus Christ should not be of God *in man*, but God *as man*. Jesus was not merely instrumental in the hands of God. The human life and activity of Jesus must be understood from beginning to end in a thoroughly personal and *vicarious* way. Salvation emanates from God, and is found in God. To take one example: Titus 2:11 tells of God giving and communicating himself to us in Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:14). Salvation, healing, wholeness is not attached to Christ, but is in him.

Immanuel lives for us, in our place and on our behalf. He is the true man. Our health is in him. Vicariously he assumes our sin and death, bearing the penalty of our sin in his cross. By his death Christ communicates the nearness of God and *in* his death we are reconciled to God. Reconciliation takes place within the Godhead (Col. 1:17–19; II Cor. 5:19, 21; John 17:1–5; Rom. 8:1–4; Col. 3:1ff.).

IMMANUEL: ALPHA & OMEGA ENFLESHED

In the present so much of our life is unfulfilled, distorted, broken off and, in the face of death, remains a fragment. In assuming our sin in his body, the abyss of human sin comes between the Father and the Son (Ps. 22), where it is suffered to extinction in the judgment of the Triune God. But in Christ we are new—and in Christ we are whole—for our eternal health is in Jesus Christ.

IMMANUEL FOR EVER

Philippians 2:5–9 shows that the Son was prepared to become man for all time. Christ's humanity does not, as it were, recede into his divinity subsequent to his resurrection and ascension. The glorified man is at the right hand of the Father and our Immanuel is continually with his people.

Believers have died in the death of Christ, and they have been raised to new life in Christ. They live as those whose lives are hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

What this means is that as members of the Body of Christ we participate in the whole of God. This eucharistic communion is enacted at the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 10:16–17; 11:23–26). The community tabernacles in God (John 1:14; Eph. 2:19–21) so that it has all of its good *of* him, and it has all *through* him and it has all *in* him.

Eschatology has to do with Christ who is the last man so that when he appears his people appear with him (I Thess. 4:14ff.; 5:9f.) and in the new world, the Holy City which is the Bride beautiful for her Immanuel, the Bridegroom. 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men' (Rev. 21:1–4).

Study Five

Christ the Prophet & the Prophetic Community

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

INTRODUCTION: THE AIM OF OUR STUDY

In seeing the dynamics of covenant we realise that history can only be interpreted properly in the light of God's unilateral act of grace, and that His community both of Israel and the church is the reason for His acts in history and the way He works His plan to its *telos*. The incarnation is a wholly remarkable event in human history, and the working of the New Covenant through Christ's ministry and atonement is the reason for, and the outcome of, the incarnation. His ministry as Prophet¹ must be understood, for that office is indispensable to effecting history's goal. Secondly it is part of the nature of the Community of Christ, the prophetic people working in the world today.

WHAT IS A PROPHET?

One of the best descriptions of a prophet is found in Exodus 6:28—7:2:

On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the LORD said to Moses, 'I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.' But Moses said to the LORD, 'Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me?' And the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.'

Moses will be as God to Pharaoh and Aaron will be Moses' prophet. A prophet is one whose word comes from God, and who is God's mouthpiece. He does not make the word, for it is not his, but he does deliver it. Numbers 12:6–7 gives us further light:

And he [God] said, 'Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech;

¹ There is a body of literature on Christ as Prophet. See my Monday Pastors' Study Group for 7/2/94 and also my *Christ's People in Today's World* (NCPI, 1985).

and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?'

Here we see that ordinarily prophets received their messages from God through dreams and visions (cf. Jer. 23:23–32; Acts 2:17–18). Moses is unique in that (i) he was entrusted with the whole of the house of Israel, and (ii) God spoke to him 'mouth to mouth'. Whilst, in this context Aaron and Miriam had had prophetic ministries, they were not of the same quality or in the same vein as that of Moses.

The prophets always cried, 'Thus saith the Lord!' and it was mandatory for Israel to hear. Whilst it is true that Jesus never said anything but what the Father told him, he was in a vastly different position to the prophets and even John the Baptist. He and the Father were one. He was the Word of God incarnate. He spoke *from* the Father because he was *with* the Father and they were *in* one another. The statement of Hebrews 1:1, 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,' does not mean that the ministry of prophecy has been abrogated, but as we observed above the Son spoke from the Father. Just as there was need for prophecy prior to his coming so there was after his ascension, 'you shall bear witness to me,' hence the need for prophets as well as apostles, evangelists and pastors and teachers. As in the former covenant, Israel was to be a witnessing people and so prophetic (Isa. 43:9–12), so in the new covenant of Christ his people are to be witnesses.

Traditional Exegesis of Christ as Prophet: Deuteronomy 18:15–22; Acts 3:17–26

The traditional way of showing Christ to be the unique Prophet is to take Deuteronomy 18:15–22 which speaks of God 'raising up' and thus appointing 'a prophet like me', and to prove that in the New Testament Christ is that one, especially by the use of Acts 3:17–26:

And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.

In this passage Peter was saying that this prophet has come, and not to listen to him, that is, not to obey him, is to be destroyed. This principle had never been spoken of any of the prophets, not even Moses. To be 'sons of the prophets' must mean, among other things, that those of Israel were part of the prophetic community and were liable to hear the prophets and that each member of Israel was not a prophet, just as to be 'a kingdom of priests' (Exod. 19:5–6) did not mean that each was an appointed priest, but that they were a community linked with the appointed priesthood, and therefore a people of worship. At this point we might ask whether,

pastorally, we teach and confront our congregations with the facts that they are ‘sons of the prophets’ and ‘sons of the covenant’ and should act in conformity with this identity—the prophetic and covenantal categories and their demands.

Traditional Exegesis: ‘More than More than a Prophet’

In John 1:19–23 the priests and Levites sent by the Jews from Jerusalem asked John—among other questions—‘Are you the prophet?’ He said, ‘No.’ Jesus said later of John, ‘What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and *more than a prophet*.’ He went on to show that John was—to that point in time—the greatest born of women. This would seem to be a testimony to John’s being ‘the prophet’ but it was not. In Matthew 16:13 in answer to Jesus asking them ‘Who do men say that the Son of man is,’ they replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ Jesus asked Peter directly what the apostles thought, and Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ thus raising Jesus above John the Baptist, Elijah and ‘one of the prophets’. He was unique. He was *more than more than a prophet!*

Jesus certainly referred to himself obliquely as a prophet when he said, ‘A prophet has no honour in his own country,’ though it could be argued that he was arguing generally for the fact that Israel had always rejected the one who came with the word of God. His apostrophe to Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37–39 could be interpreted in either of these two ways or especially as meaning he was the unique prophet about to be killed, especially as he says in the Lukan parallel, ‘I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’ This surely includes him in the prophets. In Luke 7:11–17 the raising of the son of the widow of Nain is reported, and Luke reports, ‘Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”’ What was meant by ‘a great prophet’? The woman at the well (John 4:19) said, ‘Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet,’ for he had told her all that she had ever done. Even more to the point was the conclusion people came to in John 6:1–14, following the feeding of the 5,000, ‘When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!”’ This was surely a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15–22. In Matthew 21:11 (cf. John 7:52), ‘the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.”’ Having said all this can we maintain that no less than being Priest and King, Jesus was—and is—Prophet? Calvin certainly spoke of him as Prophet. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (I, xv, i) he said, ‘the office enjoined upon Christ by the Father consists of three parts. For he was given to be prophet, king and priest.’ This, as also many of his similar statements, show that Calvin believed in this office. He then goes on to describe the office of prophet. Referring to Isaiah 61:1–2 ² (cf. Luke 4:18) he says, ‘We see that he was anointed by the Spirit to be herald and witness of the Father’s grace. And that not in the common way—for he is distinguished from other teachers with a similar office. On the other hand, we must note this: he received anointing, not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the

² It is often argued that in the Old Testament kings and priests were not necessarily actually anointed in a ritual of applied oil. In I Kings 19:16 Elijah was told to anoint Elisha in his place, but we hear of no anointing other than Elijah cast his mantle on Elisha. In Psalm 105:15, ‘Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!’ seems to be a parallelism. That Jesus was anointed is shown by his reference to Isaiah 61:1–2 and Peter’s statement in Acts 10:38.

continuing preaching of the gospel. This, however, remains certain; the perfect doctrine he has brought had made an end to all prophecies' (op. cit., p. 496). On the basis of Matthew 5:17 we would say, 'Has become their fulfilment and thus has established and confirmed them, rather than he had ended all prophecies'.

Other Reformed writers³ speak of the prophet as one who 'ousted ignorance', was 'bound to instruct by giving teaching anent salvation', by 'teaching the will of the Father and sealing his teaching by miracles', for 'It is by his *prophetia* that Christ has fully and plainly revealed God's will for our salvation shown directly to himself', 'It includes (i) "the outwards promulgation of divine truth" and (ii) "the internal illumination of the mind" '. These writers say that Christ as Prophet came to 'instruct his people in the truth of doctrine legal and evangelical' and he has that 'prophetic office by which he deigns to reveal to his own the will of God fully, and perfectly known to himself', and emphasise that unless Christ taught the nature of law and true righteousness, prophetically, then the hearers would not be prepared for the nature of his redemption. Prophetic preaching was thus a *prophetia evangelica* and in such preaching Christ was from eternity as essentially Prophet as he also was Priest and King. If it is a *prophetia evangelica* then it is difficult to see how it is not related to redemption.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS AS THE PROPHET

A key to the ministry of Jesus as a prophet is Matthew 5:17, 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.' The word 'fulfil' is interpreted variously in exegesis but the strongest case seems to be 'confirm' or 'establish'. The words 'the law and the prophets' would refer to the whole of the Old Testament writings. The ministry of priest and prophet were really complementary. Jeremiah constantly links the priest and the prophet, and his prophecy is a revealing study of both. The statement (Jer. 18:18), 'the law shall not perish from the priest . . . nor the word from the prophet', rightly understood, describes the ministries of the two. The priest was to teach the law, he was to be enquired of, and even to help in determining law cases. The prophet was to rebuke the nation when it departed from the law, was to bring God's immediate word to his people—'Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint'—and to recall them to obedience to the law. Thus Christ's words quoted above have deeper significance than we would discover by a superficial reading of them.

Our paragraphs below will fill out Christ's past and present ministry as *the* Prophet. Acts 1:1 speaks of what Jesus '*began* to do and teach', implying he went on 'doing' and 'teaching': teaching was part of the ministry of the prophet. If we add to this what we have said above relating to Deuteronomy 18:15ff. and Acts 3:17–26, and the statement of Revelation 19:10, 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy', then his significance as the Prophet is seen to be immense and always in operation.

CHRIST THE PROPHET: HIS PEOPLE THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY

'*The* Prophet' cannot be said to cease being Prophet because his prophetic ministry is said by some to have been fulfilled up to the time of the crucifixion. This would

³ From this I am giving the essence of Reformed writing, using Heinrich Heppes's *Reformed Dogmatics* (Allen and Unwin, 1950). pp. 452f.

be to say that Christ's Community would now be priestly and royal but not prophetic. What we will proceed to discuss below will show that that argument is fallacious. All prophetic activity in the Community would have to spring from itself and not its Head, which is unthinkable. Paul's statement 'prophecies shall cease' must mean they have not yet ceased. If prophetic ministry was intrinsic to Christ's earthly ministry it is intrinsic to his present ministry as it is exercised through his Body, the church.

It is clear from the day of Pentecost that the outpouring of the Spirit had to do with making the Community a prophetic one:

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

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

The 'last days' are from Pentecost to the Parousia, so that Peter's statement does not confine his explanation to Pentecost itself. Some exegetes have said that the prophetic element of Jesus' ministry was completed, and that the matter of prophecy was thus not extended to the church. Ephesians 4:11 includes 'prophets' in its description of the various ministries, and in I Corinthians 12:28 apostles and prophets are again mentioned together. Ephesians 2:19–20 speaks of the 'household of God'—the church, the 'holy temple' as being 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets' and whilst the meaning of this is debated, what must be conceded is that there was no doctrine or teaching which was not living, in that it was one with the teacher, through the Holy Spirit, under Christ. If we say the foundation of the house of God was the doctrine of the apostles and prophets then it was not just a block of doctrine as we would know it, nor was it apart from Christ, who alone is the foundation (I Cor. 3:11). In Ephesians 3:4–6 the 'mystery of Christ' 'has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit'. These are most significant observations.

In this sense, then, the church is the Community of the Prophet: His prophecy—so to speak—emanates through the church. The objection that all necessary teaching had been given by the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist and Christ as the Prophet until his ascension, does not hold water. The difference between Christ as Prophet and others as prophets is that the prophets came with a message, with a revelation from God, but this was not so of Christ. He did not so much as *bring* the word as he *was* the word: he did not so much *reveal* as he was, himself, *the revelation*. Surely this does not invalidate but enhance a continuing prophetic ministry, emanating through the church, from Christ.

PROPHECY THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

Acts 1:1–8 should be understood in the light of prophetic ministry. ‘You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses’. Witnessing and prophesying are intimately linked. In Revelation 19:10 ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit ?] of prophecy’. ‘To witness’ is ‘to testify’ and this is the essence of prophecy from the proto-evangel of Genesis 3:15 to the end of the *prophecy* of the Book of the Revelation. Throughout this Book the believers are in prophetic—that is, witnessing—mode. In Revelation 1:2, John is said to have borne ‘witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ’, and he is on the island of Patmos ‘on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’. In 6:9f. there are the saints ‘who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne’. In 12:17 the dragon is angry and goes to make war with ‘those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus’. In other words the teaching, exhorting and inspiring ministry of prophecy is never ended.

**CONCLUSION: CHRIST IS EVER THE PROPHET AND WE
ARE THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY**

Elsewhere I have claimed that ‘apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers’ are really a functional love-hierarchy, all members being in tandem and each necessary to the others. This principle certainly fits with the former covenant where king, priest and prophet were all necessary within the covenant system and in a sense a hierarchy for the Community’s sake. That former covenant was a prophetic, priestly and royal community whose source was God. Many claim that it was Christ who exercised his three offices in that covenant, but we do not have time to consider this concept. We will see how the new Community functions under the offices of Christ’s Priesthood and Kingship, but some elements are essential for us to understand in our pastoral situations and they are these:

- (a) Christ is still Prophet and his ministry pervades, directs and enables our prophetic ministry.
- (b) We are, by grace, obligated, all of us, to exercise prophetic ministry. This will be in and to the Community as well as to the world in the sense of our witnessing to Christ.
- (c) Such ministry is to teach, edify, exhort and encourage, as well as to keep alive in the minds and hearts of the Community the eschatological and teleological movement of ‘the last days’. We must recognise that as the Prophet all eschatology and teleology is Christ himself, and not just a procession of events which have been predicted. The Book of the Revelation makes no sense apart from such an understanding as this.
- (d) The word of God is of immense power, and so the Community must be the mouthpiece of the word of God, and not just a manufacturer of sermons, worship services, formal credal statements and cultural mores and demands. Each must voice the word of God by lip and by life. This is the true Community at its proper work.
- (e) All must be witnesses for this is the prophetic action of the Community. This is linked with the other four points just above.

CHRIST THE PROPHET & THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY

What we have to keep in mind is that just as Christ is perpetually active in his offices of Priest and King, so he is in his office of Prophet. This is at once an encouraging and confronting act. It encourages because it indicates that our churches do not have to be limp, pathetic and lethargic. Nor do they have to be frenetically active in self-justifying and self-extending works. The power of Christ through his Spirit is actively working. 'The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.' We can all be—and must be—alive to the prophetic vocation given to the churches. The cultic and cultural elements we have developed must give way to dynamic ministry of the witness and the word. Human efforts and techniques, borrowed from a world which does not know the Prophetic, Priestly and Kingly leadership and presence of Christ, must be abandoned and we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds and joined to the present action of Christ as our True Head.

Study Six

Christ the Priest & the Priestly Community

(by Deane Meatheringham)

The veracity of Jesus Christ's priesthood wonderfully brings cleansed sinners into communion with God. It is only as Christ's priestly ministry is reproduced in his people that they have anything to offer God.

THE PRIEST OF GOD IS THE HEAD OF THE RACE

As High Priest Jesus has been *appointed by God to represent Man* (Heb. 8:6; 4:14—5:6; 3:1ff.; I Tim. 2:5; John 17:1ff.).

This means that we must begin with God. We do not begin with human need, or from our self-understanding, or even our view of salvation, but with God. Only God can interpret himself. He has imparted himself in the incarnate Son. Hebrews 1:1ff. and John 1:1ff. tell us (in effect) that the only God we know is the babe who suckled on Mary's breast. The revelation of God which we have in the Son is identical with God himself. Therefore in Jesus the Son we have the revelation of the Father of grace whose will is to bring his prodigal family into communion with himself. We do not begin with a self-determining will which must get its sums correct. We begin with the Triune God whose nature and being is love.

The incarnate Son who comes from the bosom of the Father fully identifies with fallen humanity. The Son is God made flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones (John 1:14; Heb. 2:10–18; Matt. 1:16; Luke 22:37).

Jesus Christ becomes our brother because he assumes the nature of the whole human race. Yet he also relates to us as God who has a universal relationship to all human beings. He is the Second Adam, the true Man in whom all humanity holds together, and God has made this Man head of the human race (I Cor. 15: 22, 45; Eph. 1:10). The Second Adam, by his filial obedience to the Father, reverses the disobedience of the Fall. Christ is about remoulding human nature and standing it upon a new footing before God (Rom. 5:12ff.).

Jesus, our High Priest, is fully God and fully Man. His coming to the far country is to restore us in full communion with the Father. As our Elder Brother and our Head, Jesus is

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able to bring the prodigals home in himself.

THE PRIEST OF GOD OFFERS SACRIFICE

The principle is that as High Priest he must have something to offer as gift and sacrifice (Heb. 8:3). Christ offers himself as sacrifice for our sins, but before we come to this aspect it needs to be said that all offerings constitute the *worship or service of the offerer*. Prior to the Mosaic regulatory laws for worship, persons like Abel, Abraham, Melchizedek and heads of families offered sacrifice (Gen. 4:1ff.; 12:7; 13:4, 18; 22:9f.; etc.). With the establishing of the Aaronic priesthood the priest was to mediate God's provision of atonement for sin (Lev. 17:11).

Christ's offering is that of offering his body as a living sacrifice (Heb. 10:4–10). Our High Priest obeys the Father, worships, serves, intercedes, gives and loves as the sacrifice provided by God to act on our behalf. 'A body thou hast prepared for me . . . lo, I have come to do thy will.' Irenaeus puts it: 'As by the disobedience of the one man who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life; so it was necessary that, by the obedience of one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation.'

It is in solidarity with us that Jesus pushes sin back in refusing temptation, and in obedience to the Father, assumes our sin, sickness, guilt and death, taking us into the holocaust of the fire of judgment. Jesus offered his body as an oblation as he learned obedience through the things he suffered (Heb. 2:10–18; 3:1–2; 5:7–10).

Jesus made priestly intercession for the transgressors in bearing their sins, and so by his knowledge, sinners are bestowed with his righteousness (Isa. 53:10–12; II Cor. 5:21). Hebrews says that through the oblation of himself we are sanctified for all time (Heb. 10:9–14).

We should add that it is *in* Christ that every violation of the law is satisfied in the propitiatory sacrifice of the Cross, and it is *in* Christ that we are justified, just as it is *in* Christ that his true humanity is bestowed on us.

THE PRIEST OF GOD RECONCILES US TO GOD

Reconciliation has to do with a restoring of communion between persons previously estranged. By virtue of his shed blood Jesus enters the intimate presence of God (Heb. 9:11–12). Through his offering, our polluted consciences are cleansed (Heb. 9:14). But it is *on our behalf* that Christ comes before the face of God (Heb. 9:24). It is in Christ that we enter the sanctuary—to participate in the same intimacy with the Father as Jesus himself enjoys (Heb. 10:19ff.; 6:19ff.).

Significantly our participation in God through the priestly ministry of Christ all falls within the life and being of God himself.

THE PRIEST OF GOD MAKES US PRIESTS TOGETHER

Christ holds his priesthood permanently and continues as our Great High Priest (Heb. 7:24).

The intercession of Christ on our behalf has issued in our salvation (Heb. 4:14–16). He continues to intercede, or intervene, on our behalf (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34; I John 2:1–2). Through the Holy Spirit, whom the Son receives for us from the Father, we participate in Christ's intercessory ministry (I Cor. 12:12f.; John 17:20–26; Rom. 8:26f., 34). We are to pray in Christ's Name so that his intercessory prayer is

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reproduced in those who are in Christ (Rev. 5:8; 8:4; Acts 2:42; 3:2–6; 4:23–34; etc.).

Intercession is an integral part of worship. Jesus is the only true worshipper and he continues in his session to serve the Father through the Spirit. Christ is the Head of his Body the church which he has endowed with gifts for service. He continues as the leader of the worship (Heb. 8:2). Thus we are able to offer sacrifice to God in his Name because we have the true altar (Heb. 13:10, 15, 20f.). As we have been built into the true spiritual house, or into the temple of Christ's Body, we are a community of priestly service (I Pet. 2:4–10; Rev. 1:6; Rom. 12:1–3).

Christ's priesthood is of the same order as the mysterious Melchizedek (Heb. 5:5–10). This means that Jesus is High Priest not by legal descent but because of the indestructibility of his single, effectual priesthood (Heb. 7:15–19). One of the implications of this is that as Melchizedek had a priestly ministry amongst the nations, so then this would be the continuing work of Christ (cf. Ps. 2). The church, then, as the priestly community wedded to Christ, is the house of prayer for all the nations (Mark 11:17; Luke 2:49; Eph. 2:11–22). The worship and the word together confess the faith of Jesus to the world (Isa. 56:6–8; I Cor. 14:24f.; Eph. 3:7–13). Such worship is proclamation.

CONCLUSION

We can say that through Christ's priesthood we are brought into communion with the Father and our humanity has been lifted up from its fallen state to participate actively in doing the divine will.

Study Seven

Christ the King & the Royal Community

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

INTRODUCTION: THE AIM OF OUR STUDY

‘What think you of Christ? Whose Son is he?’ was the question Jesus asked his opponents, and he silenced them. He was asking concerning ‘great David’s greater Son’. His listeners dared not say he was Lord of all history and yet they dared not say he wasn’t, which was why they kept silence. The doctrine of Messiah, the Lord and King of all history, is one which should keep occupying our minds personally, corporately, as the people of the King, and pastorally as we realise that the Son of man reigns at the right hand of God: all history is in his hands, and his alone. Seeing ourselves as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’, and that we are ‘kings and priests unto our God’ should so fill out our identity in today’s world and tomorrow’s new age, that we will presently ‘reign in life by one Christ Jesus’ in the hope of our royal destiny. These things we must constantly teach.

BEHOLD YOUR KING!

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. From our vantage point of history we have the privilege of knowing this. ‘Jesus is Lord!’ was the message of the early church (Acts 2:36; 5:31; 10:36; Rom. 10:9; 14:7–9; II Cor. 4:4–5; Phil. 2:11; etc.). ‘Lord’ is the equivalent of ‘King’. The vision that opens the prophecy which is the Book of the Revelation (1:12–16) is deeply moving and is a fitting introduction to him who is known as King throughout the prophecy:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

In Revelation 17:14 it is announced, ‘They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings’. 19:15–16

describes him, 'From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords'.

For us, even in this 20th century, his Kingship is a *fait accompli*. We need to live by this reality, for it is no less than the Kingdom of God, and in Colossians 1:13 is called 'the kingdom of the Son of his love', and in Ephesians 5:5 it is called 'the kingdom of Christ and of God'. I Corinthians 15:24–28 helps to explicate this and show us that the action of the Kingdom is now proceeding:

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.

So clear is the fact of his Kingship that we could now proceed to make personal and pastoral applications of this matter, but we need to see how he became King and what its significance is for our age.

JESUS BECOMES MESSIAH-KING

Prophecies in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament God is King over all the nations. The innumerable references scarcely need to be noted: He is 'King over all the earth' and 'King of the nations'. At the same time another figure comes into view in prophecy. It is that of a Davidic king (II Sam. 7:12–14; Ps. 132:11–18; I Kings 8:25). In Genesis 49:10 (cf. Rev. 5:5) all the nations shall gather at the feet of the 'lion of Judah'. The temporal, anointed Davidic kings seem to give way to one who is greater even than they, and who has to do with the nations. Because of the limitation in time now we shall take a few of the most significant prophecies—those attested to in the New Testament—and examine them.

Psalm 2 is quoted many times in the New Testament, referring to Christ. It needs to be read in the light of this use of it. Briefly, the nations range themselves in rebellion against God who proclaims His Son now to be King. He commands the Son to request rulership over all the nations for all shall be his. The statement by God at Jesus' baptism is a collation of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, 'Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' This is virtually repeated at Jesus' transfiguration which, again, is attested in II Peter 1:16–21 where the writer adds, 'We have the prophetic word made more sure'.

Psalm 110 emerges in the New Testament as a King–Priest prophecy referring to Jesus in those two offices. The writer of Hebrews uses it liberally, and so do others. Part of it is used 27 times, and at least once by Jesus, 'The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool."' That it refers to God's Kingdom and Jesus as King can be seen in the I Corinthians 15:24–28 quote above.

Happenings in the New Testament

We could commence this section by remembering that both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God to be on the very doorstep.¹ Men and women, by repentance and baptism, could now enter it.

There are innumerable references to Jesus as King in the New Testament. Nathanael, surprised by Jesus, exclaims, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ The wise men ask, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?’ Jesus entry into Jerusalem on the final week is accompanied by cries that refer to Zechariah 9:9 of the King riding into the holy city of Jerusalem. They cried, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ At the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples that his Father had appointed to him a Kingdom. The question was asked by the high priest, ‘Are you the Son of God?’ The answer did not deny that fact but extended it to include the Son of man of Daniel 7:13ff. who is given the nations as his Kingdom.

When Pilate asked, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ Jesus agreed, but added, ‘My kingdom is not from this world.’ He had already told his disciples, ‘To you is given to understand the mystery [or, “the mysteries”] of the kingdom’. Now he was presenting this mystery to Pilate. Pilate was so affected that he commanded the inscription, traditionally placed above a cross, to be written, ‘This is Jesus the King of the Jews’, much to the anger of the leaders of the Jewish nation.

JESUS SECURES THE KINGDOM

Again time does not permit examining the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus as the one crowned King at his baptism. Where he went in his ministry, the Kingdom went in his person. Even when he delegated ministry to the disciples it was under his aegis or regime. He was the one ‘stronger than the strong man’, and he spoke of casting out the ruler of this world, relating this action to the Cross and resurrection. It was in that Cross he defeated the powers of darkness and secured the Kingdom for ever. The word ‘secured’ is inadequate for it was always secure, but we mean ‘the gospel of the kingdom’—‘thy God reigns’—is now also ‘the gospel of salvation’. John 12:31, Colossians 2:14–15 and Hebrews 2:14–15—amongst other references—show us Jesus defeated the kingdom of darkness through the Atonement. The apostolic gospel of the Kingdom contains Satan’s defeat, as also the defeat of death (cf. Acts 10:38; I Cor. 15:55–57; Heb 2:14–15; cf. I John 4:18)). Jesus, as man, has achieved the Kingship appointed to him. Crowned at his baptism, he is finally declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead through the spirit (Spirit) of holiness (Rom. 1:4–5).²

¹ The whole matter of the Kingdom of God and Jesus’ part in it as the King is a vast subject with which we cannot deal here. I suggest that in addition to the great body of literature available on the subject, reference be made to my *Christ the Conquering King!* (NCPI, 1985), *Christ’s People in Today’s World* (NCPI 1985), and LFS 14, ‘The King: the Kingdom of God: the Kingship’ as helpful on this theme. We cannot study the idea of Christ as King apart from the matter of the Kingdom of God.

² This essay does not allow us to cover Jesus’ teaching of the Kingdom as in the Sermon on the Mount and the many parables of the Kingdom. We simply observe that Jesus was teaching the mystery (or, mysteries) of the Kingdom. Certainly his enemies knew what he was about even if they did not receive his teaching personally to themselves.

THE KINGSHIP OF JESUS AND THE COMMUNITY OF THE KING

On the basic and viable thesis that the Community of Christ receives its life, character, identity and work from its Head as Prophet, Priest and King, the Community is, as we observed from the beginning, a 'kingdom of priests'. That is, a priestly Community. Just as in Exodus 19:5–6, so in I Peter 2:9–10:

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

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

In Israel not every one was a priest, but the nation was priestly, firstly in the sense that it was the priest nation to (among) all nations. Ideally it mediated between God and the nations, from God to the nations, for the nations to God. I Peter 2:9–10 throws back new meaning into Exodus 19:5–6 as that passage does into I Peter 2:9–10. Secondly the nation was priestly in that it had a worship which was other than that of the nations, and transcended what they knew (cf. Rom. 9:4 for the gifts of God which are the basis of priestly worship).

Just as in Israel the priest was to be enquired of, and taught the Law of God and ministered the sacrifices, so in the new priestly Community³ the new people are to declare 'the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light', so that proclamation now becomes a priestly act.

ELEMENTS OF PRIESTLY MINISTRY

- (a) The Community of Christ was constituted of those who had been delivered from the powers of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love: they were the Kingdom Community, although not wholly the Kingdom itself.
- (b) The proclamation stated immediately above came in the form of the *kerugma*, the announcement of salvation. In the Book of the Acts the apostles preach the Kingdom of God⁴ (1:3–8; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).
- (c) They were co-workers with the King and his Father in the ministry of the Kingdom. This is seen powerfully in Acts 14:22, II Corinthians 5:20, and II Thessalonians 1:4–6.
- (d) They were proleptically and actually partakers of the Kingdom, and as such already 'reigned in life through the one man Jesus Christ'. Whilst this statement of Romans 5:17 (cf. Eph. 2:5–6) has eschatological connotation it is not limited to the future *telos*.

³ Note that the Reformation doctrine of 'the priesthood of *all* believers' is not 'the priesthood of *every* believer', so the church is the priestly community only in Christ the great High Priest.

⁴ Note Jesus' followers became such from hearing the proclamation by John the Baptist of (i) the Kingdom of God at hand, and its gospel, (ii) the promise of the universal forgiveness of sins (John 1:29; etc.), and (iii) the promises of the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:8). Jesus encouraged his flagging disciples to believe they would receive the Kingdom (Luke 12:32; 22:28–30) and the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13; John chs 14–16; Acts 1:8).

- (e) They took part in the conflict with powers of darkness thus participating in the action set out in I Corinthians 15:24–28. This was through the royal power they knew in Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords. The Book of the Revelation opens up this matter on several fronts (cf. Eph. 6:10ff.; II Cor. 10:3–6).
- (f) The prophetic, priestly and royal elements of Christ’s Community are inseparable because they are so in the Head, Christ himself.

**CONCLUSION: THE PASTORAL POWER OF THE DOCTRINE
OF CHRIST THE KING**

This is apparent: Christ being King over all the universe, along with the Father-King, makes intelligible the Lord’s Prayer and the prayer for the Kingdom to come. The sanctions spelled out in the Epistles regarding entrance into the Kingdom—the inheriting of it—are powerful factors in present sanctification. We might ask ourselves whether we present Christ as King or as one whose works are contingent upon our gracious acceptance of him! The rejection in much modern theology of an ‘imperialistic tone’—so-called—renders the gospel concerning the nations impotent. Our present anthropological theology centres our emphasis upon the new sociological mores currently advocated. Whatever value the prevailing empirico-scientific researching may have—and it may have quite some value—we must see it from the point of view of the Kingdom, and not in reverse of this. The Kingdom is militant, even if this militancy is known as ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17).

Do our folk understand the King, the Kingdom, and the royal nature of the church of which they are members? Are we so ecclesiastically domesticated and theologically inept that we are spiritually ‘paper tigers’, toothless and impotent? Spiritual imperialism is not jingoistic but is powerful to the pulling down of many worldly strongholds. How are we going to be able to be ‘a kingdom of priests unto our God’, ‘to reign upon the earth’ and ‘to reign for ever’ if presently we fail to know our identity and the power of the Kingdom of the King?

Study Eight

Forever Fathering: The Glorious Sonship

(by Geoffrey Bingham)

INTRODUCTION: AIM OF THE STUDY

The doctrine of the Triune Godhead is, of course, the most important of all. To know God is to know Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Only when we have sufficient biblical knowledge of Him, which is at the same time relational, can we hope to understand the work of creation, redemption and the ultimate renewal of the heavens and the earth. Only then can we come to true knowledge of ourselves. Knowledge must never be utilitarian. We do not seek to know, for example, just in order to heighten the life and progress of our churches. That would be to put them before God and would be idolatry. At the same time we need to know of the Father¹ and the Son simply because we need to know. Such knowledge will shape true theology, anthropology and cosmology which themselves help to determine what we are. Yes, we do have a right and a duty to make application of this biblical, relational knowledge in our congregations for they are under their Head Christ, as also the church is ‘in the Father’ and ‘in the Holy Spirit’.

THE ‘FOREVER FATHERING’

We have to confess that the best use of analogy leaves us far short of understanding God, however helpful it may be along the way. Our similes and metaphors arise from the images we already have, and are also incapable of giving us a true picture of God. His question, ‘To whom shall you liken Me?’ tells us He is ineffable. If somehow we could start with him—‘get around the back of God’ as someone has said—then our understanding of the Fatherhood of God would be revolutionary and wonderfully powerful in its application to life as well as its outworking. Likewise our understanding of true Sonship would take us from the limits our humanity—especially our sinful humanity—sets for us. Paul’s stated that what is beyond our sight, our hearing,

¹ There is a vast literature on the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of the Son. I cite some of my books, *I Love the Father* (NCPI, 1990), *Oh, Father! Our Father!* (NCPI, 1985), *The God and Father of Us All* (NCPI, 1982) and LFS 11, ‘Fatherhood, Sonship and Family: Heavenly and Human’ (NCPI, 1977).

and our imagination, is what the Spirit can and does communicate to us. In him we are not limited in the way that we are when left to ourselves. Because the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20; Gal. 4:4–6; Rom. 8:14–17) and of the Son (Gal. 4:4–6; etc.), he can reveal both Persons to us (John 16:12–15). Rightly understood we have existential knowledge of God through the Spirit, yet such knowledge comes to us through the inscripturated word. What is not canonical is not trustworthy. This is not to say that God is locked into—or out of—the Bible, but is to say that our speculation in theology and our rationalisation of the Bible limit our authentic exposition of anything.

THE ETERNAL FATHER

This adjective ‘eternal’ applied to God is not explicit in the Scriptures. The ‘our Father, our Redeemer from of old [“from eternity”]’ (Isa. 63:16) certainly carries the idea. Trinitarian theology holds the concept of the Father as the *fons divinitatis* so that the Son is eternally generated by Him and the Spirit proceeds from Him—whether *through* or *with* the Son as theologians debate the matter.

God as Father in the Old Testament

Just about all references to His Fatherhood are in the context of covenant. He is Covenant-Father, although this, also, is not explicitly stated. Malachi 2:10 (cf. Isa. 64:8) is clear enough, ‘Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?’, though some see the first question as related to Jacob, or even Abraham. Even so, this may be a question asked within covenant and answered only for covenant people. Deuteronomy 14:2 says, ‘you are a people holy to the LORD your God’. In Jeremiah God addresses Israel as His children (3:14, 19, 22). In Hosea 1:10 it is said that Israel will one day be called ‘Sons of the living God’. Of course Israel is God’s son (Exod. 4:22; cf. Hosea 11:1).² Israel is the household of God and ‘household’ is the same as ‘family’, so that this line of examination may be an indication of God’s Fatherhood.³ The idea of ‘household’ in the New Testament is even more warm and relational than in the Old.

It is when we come to statements such as we find in Psalm 2:6–7 and 89:26–27 where God says, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’ and ‘He shall cry to me, “Thou art my Father”’, that we sense the idea of a king who is also the Son of God, whatever that term may mean.⁴

God as Father in the New Testament

Here the material is overwhelming. If we ask why this should be so the answers are

² The figurative use of the idea of God as a father is found in Psalm 103:13, but similar figures may be found of Him as a mother or a husband. What is figurative is not necessarily ontological.

³ Today there is confusion resulting from ascribing human gender concepts to God as a male Deity. What ontological Fatherhood means is beyond our limits of reasoning. What we know from the New Testament is that the Son reveals God as Father, but that Fatherhood is not explicated as an analogy or in gender terms which we supposedly understand.

⁴ We must keep in mind that the angels are known as ‘the sons of God’ (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). In Ephesians 3:15 Paul speaks of ‘every family in heaven and on earth’, which may refer to celestial and terrestrial families, but other translations are ‘fatherhood’ and ‘the whole family’, in which case Paul may be referring to God’s Fatherhood over all His creation.

at least two: (i) the idea of God being Father had certainly grown in the intertestamental period, and (ii) Jesus had come as the incarnate Son of the Father. The latter is the powerful reason for the idea of God as Father, firstly as ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’, and secondly as ‘our God and Father’. John’s statements in his Gospel, ‘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 . . . No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known’, make it clear that revelation of the Divine Fatherhood comes through the eternal Son. When we use ‘eternal’ of the Son we have vindication in chapter 17 where Jesus avers he was the Son with the Father before the foundation of the world, and looks to resuming that situation following his resurrection and ascension. In Hebrews 1:1–3 God creates by a Son, and this is supported in the passage of Colossians 1:13–20 where Jesus is mentioned as ‘Son’ in verse 13, and presumably as ‘Son’ likewise created the world and went on to his incarnation to effect redemption.

It has been said that Jews did not address God as ‘Father’ in the vocative. Jesus often did⁵ so in that sense he was unique, claiming an intimate, personal and ontological relationship with the Father as His Son. He may have been the first to speak of God as ‘my Father’, recommending as he did that his disciples should address God as ‘Our Father’. He opposed certain Jewish leaders when they claimed God was their Father. His statement was, ‘You are of your father the devil.’ In the Sermon on the Mount he speaks of the disciples having a relationship with their Father, God, and having reference to Him in all the actions of their lives. In this there seems to be no metaphorical reference to God’s Fatherhood. He came to reveal God as the Father, firstly his, but also theirs. He did this not only by teaching about God as Father, but by his personal revelation of the relationship he had with the Father. A powerful passage is John 5:17–24 where he shows he has always worked with the Father, and that the Father shows the Son all He is doing, so that the Son can do what the Father guides him to do. Other passages speak of his total dependency upon the Father. He can speak of the Father being greater than he, and yet of them being one, and in these statements, rightly understood, there is no contradiction. Theologically he is probably indicating the Father as *fons divinitatis*, whilst relationally that they are one since, ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in me’.⁶

THE CLIMACTIC REVELATION OF GOD AS FATHER

‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself’ must always be kept in mind when viewing the work of the Cross and the Resurrection. The Father was the Prime Mover in this work. In John 17:1–5 Jesus virtually says he cannot accomplish the work of the Cross unless the Father glorifies him in it, so that He, the Father, will be glorified by the Sonship of the Son doing the work of the Cross. I John 4:9–10 and Romans 3:24–25 indicate the action of the Father in setting Jesus forth as (to be) the

⁵ cf. Matthew 11:25–27; Mark 14:36; John 12:28; Luke 23:34, 46; John 17:1ff.

⁶ Some theologians see Jesus as the eternal Son being equal with God, but as the one incarnate being subordinate in and for the work of redemption. Doubtless this reasoning is against Arianism but if the order of the Trinity is that the father is *fons divinitatis* then in some sense the Son and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father. We must never think, of course, that subordination implies inferiority, otherwise he that serves is not greatest. The Three Persons are all involved in the work of salvation.

propitiation for sins. Romans 4:25 and 8:32 depict the Father as ‘delivering him up’ to sin and death and judgment. Hebrews 2:9–10 indicates that the Son tasted death for everyone, and that the Father made sure the Son was made perfect through suffering, that is, that he had a full suffering for the sins of the world, the Lord laying on him the iniquity of us all. In all this the Father was revealed. Through this ‘all the children scattered abroad’ were ‘brought together in one family’ (John 11:51–52: cf. Eph. 2:11–18).

This climactic revelation of God as Father was completed by, and in, the Resurrection. After it Jesus spoke of going to his Father and their Father and for the first time called them ‘my brethren’. Romans 1:4 says he was ‘designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead’, thus completing the work begun when God had certified him as His Son at the baptism and Transfiguration—the fulfilment of Psalm 2:6–7. The ascension was also an attestation of his Sonship as the writer of Hebrews shows in 1:5–13 where Psalms 2 and 110 are quoted of Jesus’ Sonship and Kingship. Jesus was the Pioneer of faith who blazed the trail to the Father (Heb. 2:10). Thus the passage of John 14:1–10 comes richly to life. ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me,’ and ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father.’

The sonship—gratuitous adoption—cannot be understood apart from the doctrine of our union with the Son. Only *in* him are we sons. In one sense we have no individual sonship for we partake of his Sonship. This gives true life to our sonship. Eschatologically we are all being conformed to the image of His Son so that he might be the firstborn of many brethren—the eschatological Family in which all will know ‘the liberty of the glory of the sons of God’.

THE GLORIOUS SONSHIP AND THE FAMILY OF THE FATHER

We have virtually seen the glorious Sonship in action in creation and redemption, especially through the incarnation. The Son was glorified by the Father who seated him at His right hand as King and eternal Intercessor. So the Son goes on working his works as the crucified, risen Lamb. His Sonship is ever active. The Holy Spirit goes on revealing the glory and works of the Father and the Son (John 16:12–15).

Now there is the Family, born—or as some would say ‘reborn’—at Pentecost. The doctrine of adoption or gratuitous sonship of the Father is one of the glories of the New Testament. It was not absent from the Old Testament (Rom. 9:4; Exod. 4:22; Hosea 11:1) but shines with glory in the New. Galatians 4:4–5 and Romans 8:14–17 speak of sonship coming to the people of faith by the Holy Spirit. They now address God as Father in the vocative. The predestining plan of the Father that His elect should be ‘his sons’ (Eph. 1:4ff.) is now in fulfilment. Revelation 21:7 shows the quality and character of God’s sons as those who overcome, and who inherit the world and the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

In the short compass of this paper we cannot open the vast subject of the Father’s Family. John’s three Letters tell us how the Family should live. So do other apostolic Letters, but it is the practical and historical fact of the Family which is described from the day of Pentecost onwards. They are the Family of love. They work with the Son in his overcoming of all enemies. The Book of Revelation pictures them as a vast multitude from all tribes, nations and cultures, and ultimately shows them entering into their home, the Holy City, and sharing in the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. All are holy and all see the Father, face to face.

CONCLUSION TO 'FOREVER FATHERING: THE GLORIOUS SONSHIP'

In all our Studies we seek to work out and apply the doctrines to the Community of Christ, the church, and in particular to our local churches. I would have liked to have shared many encounters I have had with clashing cultures and their resolution through coming to the Father through the Son and Spirit and so being the true Family of the Father. In our churches there are many who do not intimately and relationally know God as Father and the Son as the Son and Elder Brother. This lack of such knowledge is both reprehensible and dangerous. Where this knowledge exists we experience the true life of 'Family', which means all are brethren, as all are sons of God in the Son and by the Spirit. We must work to repair the ignorance to which much of our doctrine and ecclesial cultures have led us. What a difficult yet glorious task this will be.

Study Nine

The Spirit—Who Was & Is & Is to Come

(by Deane Meatheringham)

THE SEVENFOLD SPIRIT

We return to Revelation 1:4–5 which speaks of the living God who has always been in action and who is moving to bring his creation to its ultimate destination. This purpose is only known and accomplished through the victory of Jesus Christ. Intimately wedded in the action of the Father and the Son is the seven spirits of God who are always ‘before the throne’, i.e. where God and the Lamb are seated, the place of God’s authority, where the seven-sealed book is opened, from where the judgments are executed, before which prayers are presented, from which the river of life flows in the Holy City, and which is the place of worship.

Revelation 3:1, 4:5 and 5:6 speak of the sevenfold Spirit as ‘the seven torches of fire’ and the Lamb with ‘seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth’. The seven spirits of God are the complete Spirit of God spoken of in Isaiah 11:2–3. The sevenfold Spirit is the strength and authority of Christ, is one with Christ and is the source of God’s grace and peace (II Cor. 3:17–18; 13:14; Rom. 8:9–11).

The Holy Spirit is not outside the being of the Word or the Son but is inherent in him as he is in God the Father, and as the Father is in him and so through the Son the Spirit is inherent in the Father. Unlike the Arians we do not understand the Spirit from the limits of human reason. God interprets himself to man, and as we have no true knowledge of the Father apart from the Son, neither do we have true knowledge of the Holy Spirit apart from the Son. This is the ‘devout and accurate’ way to know God. The Holy Spirit characterises what God is in himself. Athanasius spoke of ‘the propriety’ of the Spirit by which he meant that we do not seek to understand the Spirit from his operations in creaturely existence, or in the world. Rather, our controlling point of reference comes from the divine side of the line dividing the Creator and the creature. We seek to understand the Spirit from the inner relation of the Son to the one being of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit does not bring any independent knowledge of God, or add any new content to our knowledge of God.

Through the Holy Spirit we participate in the incarnate Son’s intimate knowledge or communion with the Father. And the Holy Spirit is ‘the Lord who is the Spirit’, the sevenfold Spirit is ceaselessly and tirelessly working to bring the purpose of God to its fulfilment.

THE SPIRIT'S WORKING IN THE PLAN OF GOD

In the second Study we saw that God's purpose for history is salvific, to provide a spouse for his Son, so that through the incarnation redeemed humanity may enter the life of God. The specific work of the Spirit is the sovereign freedom of God to be present to his creation, and to bring to completion the creative purpose of God in which human beings are established in enduring relations in the holiness of God's Lordship.

The sevenfold Spirit who is before the throne of God, the seven torches of God, the seven eyes of the Lamb, are 'sent out into all the earth' (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; Job 33:4; Ps. 33:6; 104:29f.). All created life comes by the Spirit and is sustained by him.

Only the Spirit knows the mind of God and is intimately acquainted with the creation plan of God (I Cor. 2:11). God has always revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets (Amos 3:7) through the Spirit (I Pet. 1:10–12; II Pet. 1:20–21; Rev. 1:10–11; 19:10).

When Christ receives the Spirit from the Father and pours him out upon his redeemed people then through the Spirit they received the mystery of God and under the Spirit's power prophecy to the world (I Cor. 2:10ff.; Acts 1:8; Rev. 1:2, 9; 6:9; 12:11, 17; 20:4; John 15:26–27; 20:22–23; I John 5:7).

From this it is important to say that as the Father is actively working (John 5:17) so the Spirit is ceaselessly working and moving to bring creation to its *telos*, and giving the revelation of God's word and plan to his people.

THE SPIRIT OF JUDGMENT

As it was by the breath of his mouth that God created (Ps. 33:6, 9), it is by the breath of his mouth that he also judges (Isa. 11:4). In Isaiah 4:4 God says he will judge Israel by a spirit of burning (cf. Matt. 3:11–12) which ties in with Revelation 4:5, 'the seven torches of fire'.

The sword of Christ's mouth is the word of judgment (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15).

The Spirit is spoken of as the seven eyes which go out into all the earth (Rev. 5:6). Zechariah 6:1–8 apocalyptically shows the Spirit being symbolically carried by chariots which go out from God's dwelling. The chariots will carry the judgments from God's dwelling place. The chariots symbolise war, pestilence and hunger—and indicate the victory of these judgments. The Spirit of judgment destroys corruption, thus purifying a sinful world, but the Spirit also renews the world by his judgment.

As the Spirit brings the world to the climax of judgment, II Thessalonians 2:7 says that the lawless one will be destroyed by the breath of Christ's mouth and by his appearing. And the new, regenerated creation will be reprimed as evil and corruption is burned in the fire of judgment (II Pet. 3:7, 11–13; cf. Rev. 21–22; Isa. 65:17f.).

There is no doubt that the Spirit who is depicted as the seven eyes of the Lamb and the seven spirits of God, is the Spirit who effected Jesus' conception, anointed him with power at his baptism, was the eternal Spirit active in purification in Christ's sacrifice and the Spirit of holiness who raised Jesus from the dead (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:1, 18ff.; 10:21ff.; 11:20; Heb. 9:14; Rom. 1:4; Acts 1:2).

The Spirit's work in judgment and in severity is to save the creation and God's elect into the future of God.

THE SPIRIT WHO IS TO COME

The Old Testament promises of the Spirit to renew the covenant with God through

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regeneration, are asserted afresh by Christ, who said that the Spirit would come and lead into all the truth. Pentecost was the fulfilling of this promise which persistent believers enter into.

The Spirit who is sent out into all the earth, i.e. to its ends, brings Christ to the uttermost parts by his witness—prophecy (Acts 1:8; 2:1–2, 17–21). All witness comes by the Spirit.

The sevenfold church (Rev. 1:4, 16, 20) hears Christ's prophecy through the Spirit: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

The Spirit assures of the fruit of labour (Rev. 14:13) and from his habitation in the Bride of Christ evokes the church to cry with his cry to Christ: 'Come'.

As we are sanctified by the Spirit, we are also being changed from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit (II Cor. 3:17–18). We need not doubt that our final revelation of the glory comes from the Spirit who came crying 'Abba! Father!'. The fountain of living water which wells up to eternal life is the river of the water of life that flows from the throne in the new world (Rev. 22:1ff.; John 4:13f.; 6:35; 7:37f.).