

About the Book

The idea of searching out God is not new or strange to the human race. One of Job's friends asked him the question, "Can you **find out** the deep things of God?" Job was being asked whether a human being can fully understand God, and the inference was that he couldn't. While human thought may never encompass the entirety of God, nevertheless God enables man to

know all he needs to know of Him in relationship with Him. And He does this through His Creation and His Word. To **know God** we must have a revelation of Him.

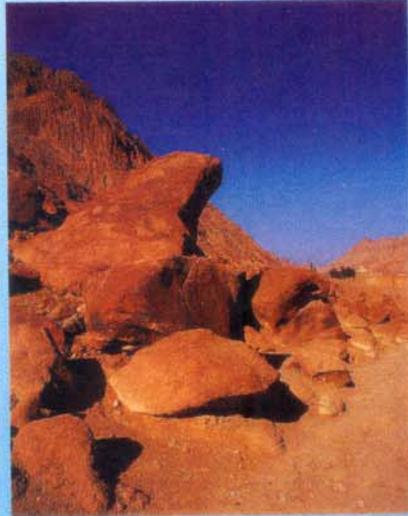
Where the members of an emerging younger generation genuinely seek God, they are promised that they will find Him and find themselves in a wonderful, promis-

ing and enriching world. **Rather than "finding out" God, they will have been found by Him Whom they sought.**

This anointing teaches us about everything that is true for as the Apostle John wrote, "You have been anointed by the Holy One and you know everything".

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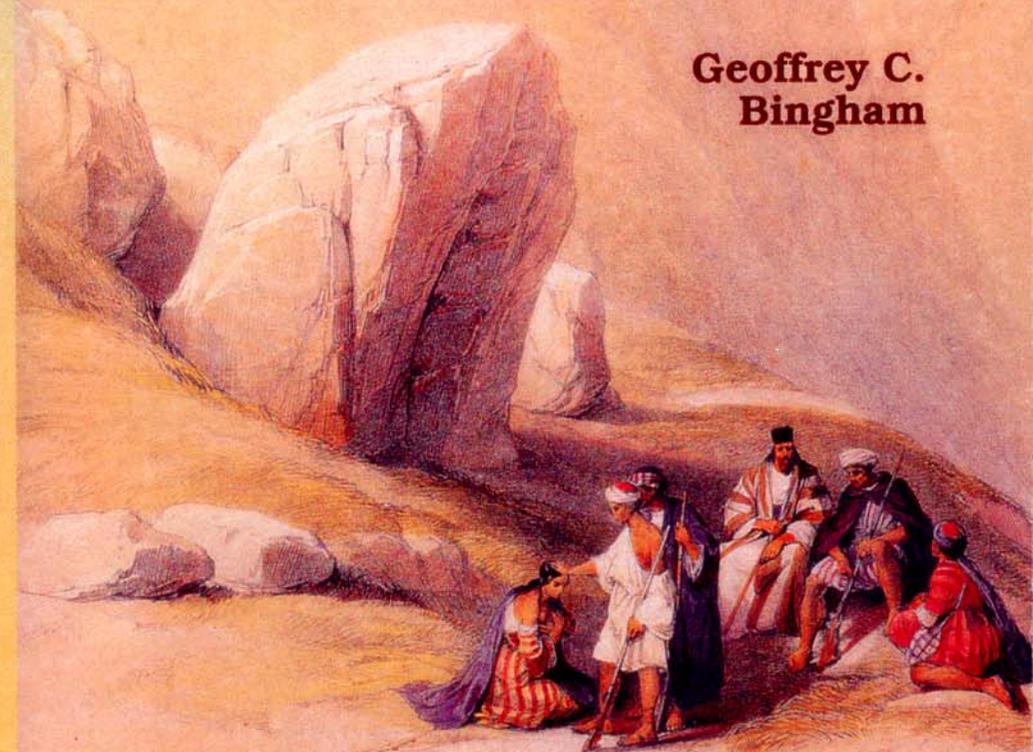
Redeemer Fellowship Studies

Searching For God

"Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink."

"Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Geoffrey C.
Bingham



Searching for God

by
Geoffrey Bingham

Redeemer Fellowship Studies

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Series Preface

John Stott writing in his recent publication, *“Evangelical Truth”*¹ spoke of what we might term a Trinity of evangelical essentials. It arises, he said, from our understanding of the origin of the gospel. Firstly, the gospel was not speculation but revelation. Secondly, its substance was not the world’s wisdom but Christ’s Cross. And thirdly, its efficacy was due not to rhetoric but to the Holy Spirit’s power. In summary, the gospel comes from God, centres on Christ and His Cross, and is confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

The first two of these are the province of every religion, namely the question of authority (by what authority do we believe?) and salvation (by what means can we be saved?). In evangelical terms they allude to Revelation and Redemption, the Bible and the Cross.

Again, both of these essentials are due to the gracious initiative of a God who speaks and acts. Both focus on Jesus Christ, in and through God who has spoken and acted. Moreover, both are what the theologians call *hapax* (once and for all), expressing the absolute finality in Christ of God’s revelation (His word has been spoken) and of God’s redemption (His work has been done). With regard to God’s revelation, Jude wrote, *“I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all [hapax] entrusted to the saints”* (Jude, verse 3).

With regard to God’s redemption, Paul used the same expression [*hapax*] to express its nature: *“The death He died, He died to sin once for all [hapax]”* (Romans 6:10).

In grasping the finality of what God has said and what God has done in Christ, we as evangelical people are determined to hold fast to both His words and His works. For it is inconceivable to us that any truth could be revealed that is higher than what God has revealed in His own incarnate Son. It is equally inconceivable that anything should be deemed necessary to our salvation in addition to Christ. To add any word of our own to God’s complete word in Christ or to add any work of our own to God’s finished work in Christ, would be gravely derogatory to the unique glory of Christ’s

¹ John Stott, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 1999

person and work. It would be implying that God's word and God's work are imperfect and that we need to supplement, improve, and even perfect them.

Proposing a series of studies in no way seeks to add to that which is complete. Yet to take just the ministry of the Holy Spirit who was given once and for all to be with us forever, does not set aside the truth that His ministry is continuous and alive and contemporary. In short, whilst we have the "**once and for all** [*hapax*]", we have what is called the *mallon*, the "more and more". For the Holy Spirit is constantly and indeed, increasingly showing Christ to us and forming Christ in us. It is the Holy Spirit who as "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" in our knowledge of Christ, opens our eyes to see ever more of what God has revealed in Him. And it is the same Spirit who enables us to inherit the full riches which are already ours through union with Christ.

In this way, we "grow in grace" receiving "*from the fullness of His grace*" "*one blessing after another*" (2 Peter 3:18; John 1:16). And the truth of a gradual transformation into the image of Christ is implied by the slow ripening in Paul's metaphor of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). So grows our Christian character, , "**more and more** [*mallon*]".

Again, "about brotherly love", said Paul, "we do not need to write to you for we ourselves have been taught by God to love each other. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so **more and more** [*mallon*]" (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Clearly there are two fundamental duties; that of blessing God and that of loving one another. In short, we are to be constantly growing.

It is this ongoing nature of the revelation that we seek to address in this Series of Studies, believing that as we fruitfully receive the ministering grace of the Holy Spirit by His revealed truth, we cannot receive it merely as an extension of "knowledge which possesses no zeal", but receive it as being under the Spirit's inspiration, having its own dynamic for growth and change. And having so received it in varied expressions at Conferences and as Occasional Addresses, we believe that we are called to responsibly share this truth in the production of our Series of Studies.

We pray that the same Spirit that initially both produced and delivered the word will enliven you in the reading.

Redeemer Fellowship Studies
The Editorial Committee
September 1999

Foreword

The idea of searching out God is not new or strange to the human race. One of Job's friends asked him the question, "*Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?*" Job was being asked whether a human being can fully understand God, and the inference was that he couldn't. Yet God has not only indicated that He is, but He has also always declared Himself as He is.

While human thought may never encompass the entirety of God, nevertheless God enables man to know all he needs to know of Him in relationship with Him. And He does this through His Creation and His Word-Scriptures, Prophecy, Law, Angelic Visitants, theophanies and His acts. Later, of course, would come His Son, the most powerful medium for God to communicate Himself. In short, God created humanity and wanted them to know Him as the God who is Lord and who practises "steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth" (Jeremiah 9:24).

Jesus enunciated a principle in His cry, "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matthew 11:15). All of this tells us that to know God we must have a revelation of Him. Paul spoke of this principle to indicate that no-one can know the mind of God and the deeps of God unless the Holy Spirit reveals such to him. For a person to find God is for that one to be given "the anointing which teaches everything and endows that person with truth". By this manner a person, in Job's comforter's words, "**finds out**" God.

Initially, ***Searching for God*** was compiled in order to bring to those who have emerged as a new and younger generation, the fundamentals of the faith of their fathers. We too readily assume that these fundamentals are already fully grasped by them. Geoffrey Bingham has sought to introduce this generation to different basic scriptural topics, initially at a certain level, in order to gain a foothold, and to return to each topic and extend its scope and our understanding.

Where the members of that emerging younger generation genuinely seek God, they are promised that they will find Him and find themselves in a wonderful, promising and enriching world. It

will deeply infect the hearts of them with further encouragement to know God. For those who are searching for God, this discovery is an unlimited revelation of the good things of the godly life. Corporately they are engaged in partnership in God's mission to the whole world. They are the ongoing Church, that miraculous Community of love, born of the Spirit. They will be Christ's people in tomorrow's world, able to proclaim afresh that, through Jesus Christ—the crucified and risen man—the Kingdom of God has triumphed and transformed sinful human beings into forgiven and justified humanity. Rather than “**finding out**” God, they will have been **found by Him** whom they sought. **For it is in that mysterious act of His seeking that we come to know Him.**

When we consider all that needs to be taught to the rising generation in order that they might come to know God, we can wonder whether we and they have the faculty to enable them to comprehend all this. But of one thing we are certain. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher. And He will bring to remembrance the all *things to come* which are necessary to bring them into all the truth whilst, at the same time, glorifying both the Father and the Son so that they might truly know Him.

Paul in I Corinthians 2:9-13 said:

But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,' God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

May those who are searching for God be led to understand that ahead is no bondage to a long and painful process in order to arrive at true knowledge. Rather, may we recognise that His anointing teaches us about everything that is true.

“We have been anointed by the Holy One and you know everything” as the Apostle John wrote. To be so anointed is to know Jesus Christ.

Noel Cannon
Castle Hill

September 2000

Chapter One

Coming to Know God

Introduction: Can a Man Know God?

The idea of searching out God is not new or strange to the human race. Who would not want to know whether God is or is not? Some would claim that it is against being human to deny the existence of God, that we all know God is. One of Job's friends asked him the question: 'Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?' (job 11:7). We notice he was not asking 'Can a man believe there is a God?'. He seems to assume that. He just asks whether a human being can fully understand God, and the inference is that he can't. The youngest of Job's friends listened for a long time to the discourse of Job and his friends and finally could not contain himself. He burst out with a torrent of ideas which Job must have found a relief. This young man spoke of a spirit burning within him which caused him to speak, and at times in such sayings as: 'For I am full of words, the spirit within me constrains me' (32:18); 'The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life' (33:4); 'Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable' (36:26); 'God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things which we cannot comprehend' (37:5); 'The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate' (37:23). He is saying on the one hand that God certainly is the living God, but on the other that we cannot know Him fully. He does, of course, indicate that we know much about God or he would not have made the comments he did. He really claimed to know the general mind of God.

In Israel a man who said 'There is no God' was considered to be an evil person. Psalm 14:1 has it: 'The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good'. A fool was not just a stupid person but one who desired to do his own evil thing. This may even be a clue to those who today call themselves atheists—they wish to do their own thing.

Can a Man Come to Know God?

We have now altered our question a little. We are not arguing about the existence of God, but about whether a human being can come to know Him. By using the verb ‘to know’ we do not mean ‘to know about’ Him, but ‘know’ in the relational sense, as a child may know its parents, a man come to know his wife, and friends to know one another. Paul, quoting from Psalms 14 and 53 concerning the atheist, says, ‘As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God”’ (Romans 3:10-11).

We may think that is not the case, that it is only the atheist who does not seek after God. On the surface it appears that millions are seeking after God, but the question is whether they are seeking after a god and not *the* God.

In seeking to answer our own question we will have to keep a number of things in mind. We have millions today who believe in the God of the Old Testament, the God of the Jews—called ‘Yahweh’ by them, along with other titles. We have millions of Christians who believe in the same Yahweh, but who speak of Him as ‘the Father’, as ‘the Son of God’ and as ‘the Spirit of God’. History shows that in the early age before the coming of Abraham there were those who believed in this Yahweh, sometimes by that name and sometimes by other names. On the whole, from the founding of Israel as a nation, Israel believed in Yahweh. But others knew their gods that they worshipped—they did not worship Yahweh. The Christians, as we have briefly seen, continued to worship Yahweh and came to know Him as Three Persons, but not as three gods making the one God.

How Did Human Beings Come to Know God?

If Paul and the Psalmists—along with others—are—correct, then Man could not know God. Paul’s contribution to this question is that:

Although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became

fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. (Romans 1:21-23)

This is somewhat jumping the gun in our narrative, but we mean that at some point in history human beings made a deliberate choice to refuse to know Yahweh, and worshipped idols of their own making.

What is relevant to our discussion is that although it was possible to know God, some did not wish to know Him. Here there arises the problem of ‘How can a person *unknow* God?’ We will not try to answer this here, but press on to indicate that God never ceased to communicate Himself to humanity—whether they were good or riot good. In a moment we will look at the media¹ God has always, unceasingly used.

Before we speak of these media we need to say that what God said through them not only indicates that He is² but that He has always declared Himself as *He is*, and whilst human thought may never compass the entirety of God, yet it is enabled to know all that it needs to know of Him *in relationship* with Him. Today anyone can take up the Judaic-Christian Scriptures and read all they wish about the God whom the Jews and Christians believe, whether they like what is written or not.

The Media God Uses to Speak to His Creation

The media God uses are, roughly speaking, Creation and His word which comes to us through the Scriptures, through Prophecy, through stated Law, through dreams and visions (generally given to the prophets), through Angelic Visitants (often known as theophanies or manifestations of God), and through the acts of God whereby He is known as ‘the living God’ or ‘the God who acts’. All of these communications constitute God’s movement and action in history and so history is in that sense a

¹ The media God uses as set out in the Bible are well known, and are talked about at some length in chapters 3 to 6 in *The Knowledge of God* by Geoffrey Bingham, New Creation Publications Inc., Coromandel East, South Australia, 1985.

² It is a strange thing to say that God exists, mainly because we see existence as something in itself. We say, better, that God subsists, and that He subsists in Himself, by Himself, from Himself.

medium. We could then go on to say that God revealed Himself through different human beings, and indeed through Israel as a nation representing God.

Strictly speaking it is all the media together which present a concerted revelation of God. Doubtless Israel came to know God through His law, His prophets, His acts, the worship which was two-way, and life which was lived before Him.

Rich as was all this communication it was still open-ended, for the prophets promised the coming of a special Person which would change not only the nature of Israel, but ultimately the whole world. In fact, the prophecies could well be seen to refer to various persons. It is doubtful whether at that time all the prophecies were understood as referring to one Person. The Persons referred to could be under the titles of 'God's Son', 'Righteous Branch', 'Stem of Jesse', 'Son of man', 'Seed of woman', 'Seed of Abraham', 'Ruler out of Judah', 'Davidic King', 'Messiah', 'Everlasting Father', 'Prince of Peace', 'Servant of the LORD' and 'Davidic Shepherd'—to name just a few.³ They do not here concern us except to say that the fact that they would be one Person is not necessarily indicated in the Old Testament.

If we take the One Who was to come as embracing all these titles and functions, then we have the most powerful medium for God communicating Himself. As we will later see the Son could—and did—communicate God as His Father in a way that the Old Testament was never able to do.

Human Problems in Coming to Know God

If we grant that all the media mentioned above have been in operation, nevertheless only those who have eyes to see and ears to hear will receive their message. Jesus recognised this principle when He cried, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!' (Matthew 11:15, AV). That one God alone exists may be the thought of many who have no desire to know Him. Doubtless they have

³ The whole matter of these names and their constituting the One Person—Christ—can be seen in a forthcoming book, *Christ—The Glory of the Triune God* by Geoffrey Bingham, from NCPI.

worked out the advantages and disadvantages of Him existing but they are not interested in knowing Him in the relational way.

Others will think their alternatives to God, their idols and eikons, are all they wish to know. Others in their pride may say that they have minds with which to think, and they can study God from the sources available and so come to know Him, but they reason wrongly. The best that they can come to is knowledge *about* God, but *knowing* Him must be by personal relationship.

We now repeat what Paul said about rejecting the knowledge of God in Romans chapter one, but we will enlarge on the previous quotation:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:18-25)

Paul is teaching us here that these refuse to know God and what (he) have done functionally prevents them coming to know God. They will never see Him or hear Him through the media which beat out the message of Him.

It is clear thinking that if God created humanity then He would want them to know Him and He has sought to bring them to knowledge of Him. Knowledge of God in the Old Testament is often spoken. All the theological discussion regarding God in the Book of Job was done because all speakers believed they knew God. In fact they did, but then they did not know Him well enough.

A principle of knowing God is enunciated in Jeremiah 9:23-24:

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

Notice the statement is not that man should glory in knowing God exists but in understanding and knowing God, that God is the LORD Who practices ‘steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth’, because in these things God delights.

Another picture of knowing God is shown to us in the prophet Hosea’s writings. In Hosea 4:1-3 the prophet shows that the level of iniquity and violence in the land is the equivalent of the people not knowing God. He says:

Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel;
for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or kindness,
and no knowledge of God in the land,
there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery;
they break all bounds and murder follows murder.
Therefore the land mourns,
and all who dwell in it languish,
and also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air;
and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

In 4:6 God says, ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you...’. The prophet, in showing that immorality issues out of not knowing God, cries to his people, ‘Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up ... *Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD*’ (Hosea 6:1, 3a; italics mine).

We see, then, that to know God is a matter of reverencing Him. It is the same thought as in Jeremiah 9:23. A proof of this is that when Moses wanted to see all the glory of God, the Lord told him

that this would be lethal for him. Nevertheless He would give him some sight of His glory, and He did. Whatever the outward glory may have been, it was the explanation of His glory which was the glory Moses came to know. Exodus 34:6-7 shows this:

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’.

We are told that Moses fell on His face before the Lord and worshipped Him. He had come to know Him in all His moral glory.

As we close off this section we must see that man does not think equally with God. Moses told the people what were the limits of knowledge that human beings would have in the words, ‘The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law’ (Deuteronomy 29:29). Again, we see that knowing God has to do with the willingness to live morally as God demands. We are not permitted to have knowledge from God about Himself just to see whether or not we will be obedient to Him.

There is a difference between Divine thinking and human thinking—even human thinking at its best. Isaiah 55:6-9 catches up this principle:

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts,
Let him return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

All of this tells us that to know God we must have a revelation of Him. How this revelation comes we will see in our next study, but Paul speaks of the principle—that no one can know the mind of God and the deeps of God unless the Holy Spirit reveal such to him. We close this chapter with a quote from one of Paul's letters:

For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

(I Corinthians 2:11-14)

This surely means that a human being cannot just determine in his mind, 'Oh, I will give some thought to God, and I am sure that with the use of the mind I will learn what I need to know concerning Him'. We would not appreciate a person seeking us carelessly and treating us only as a casual object of the mind. Time and again the message came through in the Old Testament, 'You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart' (Jeremiah 29:13).

Chapter Two

How Did We Come to Know God?

We are speaking now of those who believe they have come to know God. How he came to God will depend somewhat on the era in which he lived. We divide the times roughly into those of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament.

Knowing God in Old Testament Times

The first couple knew God just by being created by Him. In Eden—the beautiful park—like garden in which they lived—they knew God, especially as He walked with them in the cool of the day. Not being born of parents, they were dependent upon Him and had every reason to trust Him. That was, until the serpent disturbed them about the nature of God and they sought to be self—dependent and self—ruling.

Their children were born outside the garden and had no entrance to it. Being created to live in the garden, they would have felt the whole matter of their parents' sin. Yet one of them was a murderer and the other a prophet of God. The first brother did not know the true nature of God, and the second did know Him by a relationship with Him. If we take the eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews as a guide, we see there were those who knew God. Enoch is said to have walked with God, as indeed the first couple had done.

The terrible time came when corruption and violence spread through the human race who thereby drew the flood upon themselves. People who knew God—in the relational sense—were rare. Noah was one of these. It is interesting to trace Noah's descendants and especially those of his son Shem. Many of this stream knew God but idolatry was widespread and we are told that 'the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham' (Acts 7:2). Abraham was also an idolater, but he changed to being a man who knew God, and believed Him, especially for the promises He made. From that point onwards there was revealed what is called 'the Abrahamic Covenant'. This was a Covenant which God made with Abraham and all who followed him in their

belief in God. All such would know God. By being born into the Covenant they could know God.

When the Covenant resolved into one nation—that of Israel—then by the circumcision of all males the whole people called ‘Israel’ were privileged to know God. In a sense this seemed to be exclusive.¹ By being born into the nation they could know God. Indeed, it was taken for granted that they did know God though, of course, there were many rebels in the nation and within the Covenant. Whilst some in Israel had come to look upon themselves as the only folk truly knowing God, yet there were others—especially the prophets—who looked forward to a day when people of all races would know God and would also be within the Covenant of Abraham. They would be his spiritual children.

Knowing God in New Testament Times

We are thinking of the difference in knowing God which came about with the Son of God coming to earth, becoming a human being, and remaining so for ever. I am sure that we can safely say that the way in which people came to know God in the New Testament times is the same way in which they will come to know Him today.

Building on this idea we will soon realise that coming to God was not a stereotyped pattern of action. Those of us reading these words will give varied descriptions of the way in which we have come to know God. Of course, there will be those who think they know God, but in reality they do not know Him. They just know about Him.

Let us take some of the descriptions people might use in explaining how they came to know God. ‘Oh, I heard a preacher speaking about Jesus Christ and what Christ had done and I came to believe in Him, and to know Him, and so to know God.’ ‘I grew up in the church, was taught in Sunday School and church

services and through all that I found that I knew God. I certainly know God.’ ‘I was a church person and thought I knew God but then one day I realised I only knew about Him. Through the gospel that was preached I believed on Christ as the Saviour of the world and I came to know God.’ ‘I don’t know why people have to have a conversion at a particular time, or anytime for that matter. I have always known God and had simple faith in Him.’ ‘I was a rebel. I opposed what I learned as a child in the church. I drifted into ways of living that were not good. My conscience troubled me. By certain circumstances I came to realise the gospel is true, that God loves me, and so I was converted and knew God.’ ‘I never went to church as a child. When I was older I was faced with life’s circumstances and they made me think. I was helped by friends who brought me to hear the gospel and I was changed, so that now I know God.’

We could go on describing the various experiences of people who have come to know God. It may be that some claims to know God could not be verified. How, then, did coming to know God actually happen in New Testament times? We will try to work this through.

There are many who listened to Jesus of Nazareth in His preaching and saw the acts which He did and came to believe in Him as God’s messenger. His disciples also saw and heard what He was saying and doing and for the most part believed, although they were bewildered when He spoke of His coming death at the hands of the Jewish leaders. On the night before the crucifixion He sought to encourage them. He told them of the Holy Spirit Who would come and give them understanding of Who He was, of all He had done, and of His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven to reign in glory.

This was virtually just so many words to them until He rose from the dead. That was a big enough thing to tell the world, but they had to know more. What they did not know was that Jesus’ becoming man, His life, ministry, death and resurrection were all elements of what the early Church called ‘the gospel’, or ‘the good news’—the proclamation of God.

¹ In fact, there were others who knew God who were not named as being in the Abrahamic Covenant, such as Melchizedek the high-priest of Salem, and, later, Jethro, who was the priest of Midian. Doubtless there were many others.

It may sound simplistic—that is, making the matter too simple—to say that with all the revelations God had given of Himself in previous eras, yet He had never revealed Himself as He had now done in His Son. Jesus said, ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9).

We would need many chapters to cover the meaning and significance of all that has happened in history—from creation to the time when the resurrected Christ began to reign over all Creation from the right hand of the Father with whom He was seated. We cannot do this here.

What we can say is that when the Holy Spirit fell upon some one hundred and twenty followers of Christ, then they began to praise God for His wonderful works. They preached the gospel and thousands began to know God. These thousands were all Jews, but when the new Christian folk began to spread out into Samaria and the other nations, then Samaritans and Gentiles also came to know God.

The New Preaching and Its Nature

If you claim to know God and you are sure that you do, and you can recall some of the happenings in your life which brought you to what is often called ‘conversion’ or ‘new birth’ or ‘salvation’, then see if it tallies with what happened in the days of the Apostles—what we call ‘the apostolic times’. In one way or another it ought to tally with what happened in those days.

Take, for example, the first sermon or proclamation which was given by Peter on the day of Pentecost—the day when the Holy Spirit was poured on mankind, for from then onwards He would continue to be poured out.

Peter’s sermon is interesting but we will not spend much time on it. Peter first explained that his friends who believed in Christ were filled with the Spirit. He then went on to say that Jesus had been both crucified and raised from the dead. Had Christ only been crucified, and still dead, then Peter would have no message to give. The resurrection of Jesus vindicated the death of the Cross. The resurrection also presented those who had killed Christ with

the fact that God was with Jesus, that He had intended the Cross, and that Peter’s audience were the ones who had killed Christ.

They interrupted his sermon to show their horror at what they had done, and to ask what they could do in the light of their great sin. Peter’s answer was: ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).

Some three thousand believed on Christ and were baptised. Look at the substance of Peter’s demand: (i) repentance was required of them; (ii) they were to be baptised into the faith of Christ; (iii) they would receive the forgiveness of sins, not only of their crucifying Christ, but also the sins of their lives; and (iv) they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, presumably to know what Christ’s followers had come to know, and to live as they lived. Without doubt, this was to be the way they would come to know God.

We should therefore ask ourselves whether this is what has happened in our lives. The primary powerful factor in Peter’s preaching was that Christ had risen from the dead: ‘Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified’ (Acts 2:36). Jesus was not just a religious preacher but was now ‘both Lord and Christ’—the Ruler over all Creation, the Redeemer of the world.

This kind of preaching went on throughout the apostolic era. The I proclamation’ (Greek: *kerugma*) or ‘good news’ (Greek: *euangelion*) was much the same in its shape, no matter who preached it. A few other words are used now and then, but the main words and phrases are repentance, repentance towards God, faith (believing on Christ), conversion, forgiveness of sins or sins blotted out, justification, and the Kingdom of God. They make sense when the sermons are seen as a whole.

In order that we may be able to be certain we have come to know God, it will be helpful to see the meaning of these words and phrases. Much of what is called ‘Christian’ or ‘the gospel’ today is not so at all. What is called ‘Christian teaching’ and ‘Christian practice’ is not what we find in the apostolic era.

The Nature of the Gospel

When Jesus appeared in Galilee preaching about the Kingdom of God, His words were: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel' (Mark 1:15). He was saying that in the light of the fact that the Kingdom of God was coming in His Person, the hearers should repent and believe the gospel. In fact, there was no saving gospel as such. Jesus had to create that by His incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension. By rights, then, we should examine these six things and understand them in depth. In saying 'repent, and believe in the gospel', did Jesus mean 'the gospel that will be'? Probably, but He was also quoting from Isaiah 52:7: 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns"'. Later, Christ's coming in the power of the Kingdom was seen to be 'the good news'. When Christ's 'salvation work' was completed by His ascension then He was the King of the Kingdom in relationship with His Father, the eternal King. In that sense, we can talk of 'the gospel of the Kingdom' also being 'the gospel of redemption or salvation'. It is this good news which can bring a person to know God.

(i) The Gospel Brings Us to Know God

Knowing God is salvation. In John 17:3 Jesus said: 'And this is eternal life, *that they know thee* the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent' (italics mine). John the Apostle later wrote: 'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life' (I John 5:20). Jesus had told His disciples, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). It is at this point we can test whether or not we know God, and if we do then the gospel has changed us from people who, at the best, only knew *about* God, to those who *know* God.

(ii) The Elements by Which the Gospel Brings Us to God

Before we discuss the elements involved in the conversion of human beings, we need to look at one element which is to be seen in the New Testament, which is really the action of God that brings hearers to repentance and faith. It is called 'the conviction of sin'. Sin cannot be explained. In one sense, no one but God really knows the nature of sin for it is an anti-ontological wild-card. Of itself, it opposes true rationality. We will leave it at that. The Holy Spirit works to bring conviction of sin and not to try to explain sin. The convicted person will then be brought into the operation of grace, which is to open up the gospel to the hearer and so cause him/her to come to repentance, faith, the forgiveness of sins, freedom and new life. Keeping this indispensable factor in mind, we can now proceed to see the elements involved in the conversion of a sinner.

(a) Repentance

As we know, both John the Baptist and Jesus called for repentance in Israel. This was the word, too, which Peter used on the day of Pentecost. It is a Greek word (*metanoia*) meaning 'change of mind', or change of attitude and understanding. It must not be mistaken for 'to convert' (*epistrepho*). Peter used the word 'repent' in Acts 2:38 at Pentecost, and in Acts 3:19 where he also used the command to Israel to convert. In Acts 5:31 repentance is a gift to Israel from Christ's throne—'God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins'. And in Acts 11:18 Peter said God had given the gift of repentance to the Gentiles: 'When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life"'. In 11 Timothy 2:25 repentance is referred to as a gift, 'God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth'. It is clear, then, that repentance does not come primarily on our initiative but is a gift from God, which, through grace, we use.

(b) To Convert

We now deal with the verb ‘to turn’ (*epistrepho*). As we have indicated, converting—one primarily converts and is not converted—is commanded in Acts 3:19: ‘Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord’. The idea is to turn from the object to which we have been relating to another, which is now the object to which we relate. The Thessalonians turned to God from idols, ‘to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven’ (I Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Why does one convert? Because in repentance the sight has come of something far more worthy of allegiance than the object one has been concentrating upon. Repentance has changed the mind, and so turning is natural. The thief on the Cross had evil as his prime object. He was converted by what he both saw and heard of Jesus on the Cross, especially His prayer for His persecutors: ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34). The turn is one of 180 degrees.

(c) Faith

The verb ‘to believe’ (*pisteuo*)—which means to trust, to have faith, to rely upon—is used much in all four Gospels. People who believed in Christ were healed and pardoned. In John’s Gospel, to believe in the Father (John 5:24) and in Christ (many references) was to be saved. It was the verb used for all who turned from Judaism or a pagan life and believed the gospel, or believed in Christ. Those who gathered for the day of Pentecost were understood as ‘all those who believed’, and the three thousand who were baptised on that day were called ‘all that believed’. Later, when thousands more were converted, they were given the same description. When Peter preached to the Gentiles, he told them, ‘To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name’ (Acts 10:43). When Paul preached at Antioch the outcome was powerful. Paul spoke firmly against those who refused to believe, saying to them that they thrust the gospel from them and judged themselves to be unworthy of eternal life. As for those who did

believe: ‘They were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed’ (Acts 13:48).

We could go on into the Epistles and the Book of Revelation to speak about faith, but again, *faith is a gift*, ‘For *it has been granted to you* that for the sake of Christ you should *not only believe in him* but also suffer for his sake’ (Philippians 1:29, italics mine). And in the passage of Ephesians 2:8, ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God’. Where repentance and faith are gifts then a person’s salvation necessarily comes through grace, so that one comes to know God when that one repents, converts and has faith.²

(d) The Forgiveness of Sins

When we trace this word ‘forgiveness’ (*aphesis* and the verbs *aphiemi* and *charizomai*), we see it is used in the Gospels, the Acts and Epistles, but not to any great extent. We saw that the forgiveness of sins was offered on the day of Pentecost and in the following apostolic preaching. It is, of course, connected with repentance and faith but it appears that one act of forgiveness embraced all—the sins of a person and a people. Acts 5:31 speaks of forgiveness as a gift. Forgiveness was always *given*, as also it was *received*, which, of course, is what one does when a gift is *given*. If it were not a gift then it could never come to a person.

(e) justification

The direct idea of justification, God’s act of justifying (*dikaioo*), is little referred to in Acts. In fact, it is used only twice, and this in the one verse: ‘and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed [justified] by the law of Moses’ (Acts 13:39). This does not mean it is not important, for the doctrine of justification is worked out powerfully by Paul in Romans and Galatians. The verse above was spoken to a primarily Jewish congregation and was meaningful for

² The Reformers differed on what comes first repentance or faith. The Lutherans said faith comes first and Calvinists that repentance came first. In fact, the subject was a bit more complicated, because Calvin saw the whole of the Christian life as lived in repentance, and the Lutherans did not. Even so, they are closer to one another in essence than this footnote would appear to grant them.

them. Nevertheless, justification was always implied in the idea of forgiveness. Only Jews would need to be justified from their transgression against their law, but the message is for all, since all offend whatever law they follow, the offence being primarily against God Who gives the mighty Law.

At this point we need to see that in the apostolic preaching in Acts certain material is not preached which is taught in the Epistles. The reason is that such teaching was not appropriate at the first proclamation of the gospel, but was to be indispensable to those who came to know God by the gospel.

(f) The Gift of the Holy Spirit

We will later see that the Holy Spirit is the only One Who can ensure that the gospel is the power of God. We saw in Acts 2:38 that He is given, gift-wise, to the one who repents and is baptised and receives the forgiveness of sins. Even to realise the magnitude of our sins being forgiven is impossible without the Spirit being within us and helping us to realise 'all things'. To live the new life—sometimes called 'the regenerated life'—would be impossible without Him. Christ as a true human being could not carry out the work which had been given Him unless the Holy Spirit had been with Him. All of the elements we have set out above would not have true meaning or effect without the Holy Spirit.

Do I Know God? Have I Been Converted?

The description given above of the elements of the gospel that work in the life of a person who is a sinner by reason of being in Adam, and by reason of the sins he/she has committed personally, are not limited to those elements we have named. For example, a person is transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit Who brings to the human mind 'the word of the Cross'. Paul says this word of the Cross is both a scandal to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek (I Corinthians 1:22-23). Neither Jew nor Greek sees any wisdom in it, but Paul says that the word of the Cross is 'the power of God and the wisdom of God' (I Corinthians 1:24).

One, then, could understand about the elements of the gospel proclamation but yet only have a (fallen) human view of it. Certainly anyone reading these lines should ask himself/ herself, 'Have I believed truly, repented of my sins, turned from my former way of life, received the forgiveness of sins, been justified, and received the gift of the Spirit?'. Indeed, one could ask other questions which are linked with conversion, such as: 'Have I been born again of the Spirit of God (John 3:6); become a child or son of God (John 1:12-13; Galatians 4:4-7); have I been purified from sins and sanctified, ie. declared holy (Hebrews 9:14; 10:10-14; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Peter 1:2-3); and do I show the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)?'. Other questions could be raised but we see that the conversion of a person involves very special and wonderful elements.

Even so, the act of a person being made into a new Creation (11 Corinthians 5:16-17) is a simple one. What we need to know at this point is the whole matter of the grace of God. We shall concentrate on this in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three

The Dynamics of the Early Church

‘The Dynamics of the Early Church’ may seem a strange title to use. Also, we might ask why our subject is confined to the early Church. This is because in our last chapter we traced the ways in which human beings down through the ages have come to know God. Whilst we have shown that there has always been a faithful people, yet we have not set out the fact of what we will call ‘community’. Virtually all people live in a community, a culture, a special grouping for the business of life.

Although the following may seem strange to the reader, yet we will set it forth. The first couple really contained within themselves the whole community of mankind. As it is sometimes put, ‘The whole race was within the loins of Adam’. Adam named Eve ‘the mother of all living’. Abraham and Sarah, in a somewhat different way, were to be the Father and Mother of all the faithful.

Behind the idea of community is the principle of ‘covenant’. We will not introduce this in detail lest it confuse the idea of community. It is simply that before creation, God set up for the whole Creation—not confined to mankind—a Covenant for the life and development of the world community. His Covenant was not a contract but a relational way of life of which He—God as Father—was the living Head.

Paul taught the Greeks at Athens of God’s purposes for the community of Man. We will look at a portion of his teaching:

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, “To an unknown god.” What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one

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*of LIS, for "In him we live and move and have our being",
as even some of your poets have said,*

'For we are indeed his offspring. (Acts 17:22-28)

Paul was saying that the world community came from one person, the one whom Paul would know as Adam. He then spoke of the nations—both their history and their geography—and said that all things were so ordered that there was a thrust upon them to seek God 'in the hope that they might feel after him and find him'. This is a valuable insight into the idea of community and of communities. He went on to show that communities unfortunately had not come to know God. Instead, they set between themselves and God—Who was their Father—their gods, substitutes for God, and most of them surrogates for God. He warned that they must alter this situation, since the coming of Christ had shown up their futility. They needed to repent in the face of a coming judgement of God.

Much as we are tempted to go into the details of this, we must just draw upon what is necessary to speak on the matter of community. God had told Abraham that the destiny of nations would be decided by their relationship to him—Abraham. They would come into God's blessing or God's cursing according to the way they related to Abraham. Paul the Apostle taught later that all people who have faith in God are the true children of Abraham. They are a community, whatever their differences in ethnic and cultural background.

We have seen there was always a people of faith (cf. Hebrews chapter 11), and a people opposed to God. We have seen that the people of Israel were a special people who were called to live to God, but at the same time to witness to the nations regarding the God of heaven Who is over all the nations and has a plan for them to become one community, namely, 'the Holy City'.

We have now come to our special point. The people who came together and received the Spirit at Pentecost and all who joined them on that day and the days following—not only in Palestine but in the whole world—are *the Community of God*. This is an extraordinary statement and claim. In the sense that God created us all and put us in one Covenant, then the whole of mankind is

the Community of God, but in the sense that many have rejected God, rejected the Creation as coming from Him and refuse to relate to Him, then such are not part of the true Community of God.

It means, then, that not only was there a gospel which saved them from the judgement on sin and impurity, but a gospel which included as its object and aim *the whole world*. Such an idea is not by all means foreign to today's thinking. We have a wider outlook today than just a cultural one. There are great multinational companies. They look to profiting from the whole world and seek to build themselves into power systems which will run the world. So having one world community is an idea which has been around for some time. The development of the League of Nations, the United Nations Organisation and the various War Trials are also evidence of this. However, there has never been the idea that there is to be one community—the Community of Christ, the Church over which He is Head and to which He supplies out of His own riches the wealth which will maintain it and keep it going as an indestructible Community, finally containing all God's people.

When we said above that there has never been an idea of one community, we must qualify that statement. Utopian ideologies have been with us for some time. Marxism claimed that there is a dialectic proceeding in history by which the world will become one community. Other totalitarian systems have claimed the same, but we have to go to the grace of God in order to see a people purified by God, for Himself, and 'who are zealous for good deeds' (Titus 2:4). We shall discuss this further in our section on grace.

This idea may seem, and indeed is, radical. We are not going to talk too much about what is called the political action of the Church, but about its living nature as the Community of grace.¹

¹ For the moment we are not seeking to distinguish between the Church as the holy Community of Christ and the Church, in its outward, observable actions. These actions have so often been a contradiction of all its teaching on love, forgiveness of enemies, and nonparticipation in the cunning schemes of nations and their leaders. The latter we call 'political', that use of power in all its forms to expand the Church and make it a great power unit in all the world, often causing unspeakable pain, suffering and horror in the affairs of the human race.

The Community of Grace

For a while we will set aside the amazing concept of the world Community of Covenant and we will look into what happens when people come to know God and are part of the Community of the Covenant Father. In other words, we are going back into the way in which people came to know God in the first Christian century, which is in fact the same way in which people become members of the Father's Community today. To put it in actional language, we are going to look at the elements of grace with which human beings are confronted when they come to the Community of grace.

We have said before that the proclamation (*kerugma*) or gospel (good news—euangelion) confronts sinners with the word of God—the word of Christ—which is 'the word of the Cross', and by means of the conviction of sin brings them to the fullness of salvation. We see this in two passages from Paul's letter to his friend and fellow-worker, Titus:

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

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all men. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:1-7)

In the first quotation we see that there was a point in history when salvation came in its own special way to the whole world—the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men. The outcome of this unique happening was to change the behaviour of the new grace-Community. This was because God had as His aim 'Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds'. The aim, then, was a Community which was purified and zealous for good deeds.

The second passage shows a community on the island of Crete in which folk, culturally, were quarrelsome and 'liars and slow bellies', as Paul once commented (Titus 1:12). Paul was urging Titus to so move with God's grace—the 'goodness and loving kindness of God'—that these Cretans, having genuinely received salvation, would become that holy Community spoken of in the first quotation, no matter what their habitual and cultural nature seemed to be.

The Way We Were in the Grace of God

We are going to try to apply what we have learned to the situation in which we were when we were brought to know God and so to have eternal life. We are not saying that today's Church is not apostolic, though that is a criticism which can probably be aimed at even large parts of the Church. Rather, we are going to look at how the early members of the Church lived in the grace of God, and then see whether we have lost that way of living. In the exercise we may recover much of the freedom and life in Christ which is ours by the action of grace.

God's grace has been described as 'God's unmerited favour'. The word 'favour' today seems to indicate partiality. 'Unmerited' seems to indicate unworthiness and in our culture may be said to have an element of patronage. These ideas are far from the truth of grace. Grace means that God looks at our situation—that of sinfulness, wilfulness, selfishness and similar elements—and in His love sets about to deliver us from the state we are in. He also seeks to save us from the dire consequences of all sin and wrong

that we have done. Grace is therefore described as ‘God always going towards us to do us good’.

All of us, without exception, when we were met by the gospel and whether we knew it or not, were in a state of bondage to certain kinds of tyrannical forces. Let us state them forthrightly. We were in bondage: to Satan and his evil powers and his system called ‘the world’; to the idols we have devised; to sin and its terrible tyranny, its power, pollution and penalty; to death as a fearful enemy; to our own selfish egos, called ‘the flesh’ in the New Testament; to the law of God; and to our consciences by reason of God’s wrath and judgement.

We could further fine-tune our descriptions of these enemies but this is the state of fallen Man. Of course, fallen Man goes about rationalising his situation. He is always seeking to justify himself. He certainly denies the state he is in as we have described it in our last paragraph. Such a person rejects the assessment we have given of his bondage. He claims that he keeps God’s law; that although he sins from time to time yet he is not primarily a sinner. Moreover, he does what he calls ‘good deeds’. He pacifies his conscience with these good works and the disparagement of those not as righteous as he. In spite of his protestations, he is the bond-slave of these dominating enemies.

God’s Grace to the Rescue

We saw in the Titus chapter three quotation above that ‘the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men’, and that ‘when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared’, He—God—‘saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy’. We needed God’s mercy—which is His loving, delivering action—when we were in dire straits. How then did this ‘grace’ or ‘loving kindness’ work? It worked ‘by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life’. What do the terms ‘the washing of regeneration’ and ‘the renewal of the Holy Spirit’ mean?

‘The washing of regeneration’ means that the entire sinful and moral pollution of Man—all his forms of evil that the Bible depicts as unclean—were utterly sanitised, utterly borne by Christ as He suffered this horrible sludge and moral filth on the Cross and purified Man from it.

‘The renewal of the Holy Spirit’ is virtually the same as ‘regeneration’. The cleansing of a person regenerates him/her, purifies the conscience, enlightens the mind so that the person is ‘born anew’. This is all accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the heart of a repentant person who believes in Christ. The washing is total.

In the last chapter and partly in this one, we have been pursuing the thought of how it was that we were brought to know God. What was *the action* which brought us to know God in this Christian era, this era of the New Testament? We said it was as simple as this—the proclamation of the gospel was made and it confronted us. How did that gospel become effective? Christ became the grace of God in this world, lived, ministered, died, rose, ascended on high and poured out the Spirit so that He could do the work in our lives, the work which is the action of the gospel.

Somewhat later in this book we will look at Christ as God’s grace come into this world, and what He did which changed our lives.

Chapter Four

The Grace of God**Grace Is Personal**

We saw in the previous chapter that ‘the grace of God has appeared’, that ‘the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared’. These two statements made, as it were, in the one breath, speak of a specific act in history. Indeed, we could talk about history being divided into ‘before grace came’ and ‘when and after grace came’.¹ That is how important grace is.

That grace appeared—that is, that grace came into the world—with Jesus Christ is clear. John 1:17 says, ‘For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’. John 1:14 states, ‘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’ (italics mine). A number of the New Testament letters talk about ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and 11 Corinthians 8:9 says, ‘For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor—, so that by his poverty you might become rich’. That is clear enough. By His coming and in His person, Jesus Christ enacted grace.

For some people grace is like a substance, or a thing in itself, whereas grace is the *action* of God. Grace is never exercised apart from God. It is, then, God’s working in a certain kind of way.

Grace Is Basically Restorative—if Not More!

Here we need to take a little time to do a short word-study in order to know the meaning of the word ‘grace’ in both Old and New Testaments. Some readers may wish to by-pass a description which would seem to be somewhat technical.

¹ Of course grace has always been in the world; hence the prophecy of Genesis 3:15. This utterance by God was judgement for the serpent, but grace for the human race. Grace has always been working for the whole human race, notwithstanding human rejections of it. ‘Law’ and ‘grace’ are not opposites. There was the expression of grace in so many ways. Grace, as Titus 2:11-14 teaches us, is the teacher of godliness and discipline.

Grace in the Old Testament

The Greek Old Testament (known as the LXX, or Septuagint) has translated the two Hebrew words *chen* and *chesed* into the New Testament Greek word *charis*, which is also the word used in the New Testament for 'grace'. *Chen* carries with it the idea of something undeserved. For example, Moses says to God, 'Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I might know thee, that I might find grace in thy sight' (Exodus 33:13, AV). In human affairs it is used for the weaker appealing to the stronger for favour. In Genesis 32:5 Jacob appeals to Esau as one who is stronger, 'that I may find favour in your sight'. So, too, Ruth appeals to Boaz (Ruth 2:2, 10, 13), and Hannah to Eli (I Samuel 1:18). Job admits he cannot argue his own righteousness with God. He says: 'Though I am innocent, I can not answer him; I must appeal for *mercy* to my accuser' (job 9:15, italics mine).

The second word—*chesed*—was translated in the LXX by the Greek word for 'mercy', that is, *eleos*. In the English translations of the Old Testament, it is often 'loving-kindness' or 'mercy'. God says: 'Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love [*aheb*]: therefore with *lovingkindness* have I drawn thee' (Jeremiah 31:3, AV, italics mine). In Isaiah 54:8 God says, 'In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have *compassion* on you' (italics mine).

Man, too, must exercise *chesed*. Micah the prophet cries, 'He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love *kindness*, and to walk humbly with your God?' (6:8, italics mine). We conclude that the words *chen* and *chesed* speak of something which is undeserved by the recipient, without which that person or nation cannot proceed or subsist in a useful and good way. Grace, then, is exercised towards the weak and the sinful, and involves loving-kindness and compassion. On this foundation the New Testament word 'grace' (*charis*) builds powerfully.

Grace in the New Testament

The word *charis* had its own history in Greek usage, and included a range of meanings. These contained the ideas of 'gracefulness', 'beauty', 'a pleasant way of doing things', 'a favour', and this latter meaning included also the idea of 'gratitude' for the favour. The fact that grace could be used for both favour and responsive gratitude shows that the full Christian idea of grace had not yet been reached. The New Testament writers took the word *charis* and gave it meaning that it had not formerly possessed. It was enriched beyond measure. Yet such a meaning could not have been invented. It naturally flowed from the fact of God's grace, and that grace demanded a word which would encompass its meaning. *Charis* was the word chosen to fulfil this function.

Grace in the Christian community meant that God was always going out to sinful, needy, and undeserving Man to do him good, and that that good was something Man could not do for himself. We must, then, see grace as God's good action which He does. When we say 'does', we mean that grace is not an abstract element, not some power which can be detached from God. *Grace is God working, and nothing else*. Thus the 'grace of God' and the 'grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' are the actions of God and Christ, in concert with the Holy Spirit, to effect restoration in Man, and sustain him in the battle to live in faith in the face of evil's unremitting attacks upon him. Only this understanding of grace can make sense of its uses in the New Testament. We say then that grace is God acting to do Man good, and good because he has fallen and lost the true way of life, and the true use of the gifts God has given him.²

We used a description of grace as 'God going towards Man to do him good'. The fact is that God has created Man and, quaint though these words may be, Man's creation, and indeed the whole Creation, were a gift to Man. God blessed him to start him into action, as Genesis 1:28-29 indicates. The whole Creation was created in love. In that sense it needed no grace. But when Man fell in Eden he then needed something to restore him. This

² This word study is taken from my book *Great and Glorious Grace*, NCPi, 1988, pp. 17-18. I did not see much point in rephrasing this word study, seeing as I had spent time working on it before.

gracious, restorative power of God we are here calling ‘grace’. Grace may well be said to be ‘God’s love in action’, but this is not deserved or merited by the sinning human race. All God’s actions in bringing Man to acquittal from his fall we call ‘grace’, or I grace-actions’. Consider, ‘Where sin abounds there grace, much more grace, abounds’.³

I think it can also be shown that God predestined Man to be more than he was at creation. God had planned for Man to mature into such sonship that, as the Bride of Christ, he would be ultimately inducted into the mystery of the fellowship of the Triune God.⁴ Also, Man will inherit the new heaven and the new earth at the climax of present history when the glorified nations shall enter and inhabit the Holy City. All of this is something of wonder which is away ahead of where we are now in the development of this book. However, it is worth mentioning it now. Some readers of the Bible and theology think that the best grace does for Man is to restore him to what he was. But whilst grace, that is, God, does this, yet grace does far more than this. Meanwhile, we must not minimise the extent to which grace works or it will not be ‘amazing’ grace. What is required to be done to restore a fallen human being is of gigantic proportions.

The Grace of God in History—A Sketch

From Genesis to Malachi

For our own information and understanding we need to see God’s grace in action down through history. This bird’s-eye view should show us that from the moment of Man’s original sinning, the grace of God has been in action. We mean simply, ‘God has been in action for Man out of His great love’.

This was so in Eden but has continued ever since. When in Exodus 33 Moses asked God to show him His ways so that he

³ I am aware that many theologians will not agree with me. I argue that if we received creation—ie. were created by grace—then we were never created fully in the image of God, but as weak persons not competent to fulfil the commission of Genesis 1:28-29. I believe that this statement, that God created Man in love and gave him the Creation, is of great significance.

⁴ For more on this see my *Love’s Most Glorious Covenant*, Redeemer Baptist Press, 1997.

could lead the people of Israel to the promised land of Canaan, God agreed to grant that request, and promised that His presence would always be with Moses. Moses then went on to ask, ‘Show me thy glory’. God told him that He could only show such glory in a limited way in order to protect Moses from death. He said: ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name “The LORD”; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy’ (Exodus 33:19). By this God meant that He would give sufficient revelation to Moses concerning Himself. When, then, the event happened, it was described as follows:

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.’ And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, ‘If now I have found favour in thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thy inheritance.’ (Exodus 34:6-9)

The term ‘steadfast love’, so often found in the Old Testament, is the word *chesed* which we saw above to be one of the two words for grace: *chesed* and *chen*. Even so, the whole self-description of God can be understood as grace. Yahweh is the God of grace. Moses stood before God as one who had found favour (*chen*: grace) in the eyes of the Lord. Now, in the passage we have quoted, Moses was seeing God’s grace (*chen* and *chesed*) and comprehending it. If we go back to the Garden of Eden and look on God, He was as He declared Himself to Moses.

We must therefore see His plan and its acts in the Old Testament as issuing from this grace. It is too vast a story to grasp within this chapter, but we must see that stream of those who loved God and had faith in Him throughout the account of the Old Testament.

Grace is shown to Cain in that God did not destroy him for his murder of Abel. Grace was shown to Abel to shape him from a natural son of Adam into the first prophet. By grace others walked

and worked with God.⁵ Noah found grace (*chen*) in the eyes of the Lord, and the outcome of the Flood and Noah's obedience was that God renewed the Everlasting Covenant which had been present in Creation and was now reiterated to Man. Likewise, this Covenant took on a new form when God granted Abraham to be covenant head of the Covenant of Grace, which was to be with him and all the nations.

This Covenant of Grace embraced Isaac and then Jacob, and then was specially formulated for Israel at Mount Sinai where the whole care of Israel came under their Father, God. Although we class it as a Covenant of Law, yet those very laws were meant to bring grace to the people of the Covenant, especially the laws of the sacrifices.⁶ Involved in this was the coming Covenant of David which was linked also with the Kingdom of David. With the coming of Christ this Davidic Covenant came into being and was known as 'the New Covenant'.

From Matthew to Revelation

We have seen already in Titus chapters two and three that 'the grace of God has appeared' and 'the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared'. It is interesting that 'I goodness and loving kindness' were shown by God to Moses in Genesis. It is also interesting to see that when 'the Word became flesh' it was 'full of grace and truth', that is, the grace and truth that God showed to Moses in the revelation of His glory.

Scripture says, 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (11 Corinthians 8:9). Even so, the questions arise in our minds: 'In what way was He the grace of God?'; 'How did grace appear?'; 'How did it work out?'; and 'How does it now work out?'

⁵ Hebrews 11 constantly states that the saints of the Old Testament walked by faith, but it may rightly be said that they walked by grace. God's grace is His action of love which convinces the persons involved that He is the God of grace. Faith arises in the experience of grace (cf. Romans 3:24-26). As we might say, 'Faith is inspired by grace'. The action of God shows His faithfulness, which thus inspires faith in Him.

⁶ It is difficult to encourage people to see the law of God as a glorious revelation of Himself, and a rich life to be lived. See my *Sweeter than Honey, More Precious than Gold*, NCPI, 1995, for a presentation of the beauty of the law.

There were a number of brief summaries given by Christ's followers. Peter in Acts told much of the story of Christ's ministry and acts and said: 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him' (Acts 10:38). We could take the quotation in the last paragraph to be another brief summary: 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich'. Paul refers to the outcome of Jesus' work in Acts 13:38-39: 'Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses'. All these descriptions are of grace and at least partly answer our questions.

Until we see the horror of Adam's rejection of God, and the consequent state of both humanity and Creation, we will never think truly in terms of grace. One way to do this would be to look at the states of 'all that were oppressed of the devil', and see what Christ did in their lives by healing them outwardly and inwardly. The cavalcade of these oppressed men and women is the strong case for grace, but yet it is very little when compared with the action of the Cross—that cavalcade at Calvary—when the whole world of human evil was taken up into the Cross and borne by the crucified Saviour.

We suggest that the reader who has been wondering whether or not he knows God must now have come to see that to know God is to see Him as 'the God of all grace', as Peter once described Him. If He is the God of all grace, then He is also the God of all love. Yes, and better even than that, the God Who is love.

At this point in our description of grace we link up again with the description of how human beings come to know God in these 'Christian' times, and it is clear that human beings come to know God by hearing 'the word of his grace'. This phrase is mentioned twice in the Book of Acts (Acts 14:3; 20:32), along with many references to 'the grace of God' and 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

If we take the Book of Acts and the Epistles for our guide, then Christians have always lived in the grace of God. Indeed, one statement from the Book of Acts is an apt description, ‘and great grace was upon them all’ (Acts 4:33). Grace is illimitable and enormous in its power. We will have reasons to examine its dimensions, for this is reassuring to the person who says he knows God and yet, everyday by sight, sees so much which seems to contradict the grace of God. Of course, by faith he sees the whole picture, especially the picture which is unseen to the faithless person—the one who depends upon his sight alone.

Much of what is unseen is described for us in portions of the New Testament and certainly in the last book of the Bible—the Book of the Revelation. Here in prophetic description the whole story of grace is unfolded, for that which comes to the people of God at the end-time is thrilling. None of it is ‘merited’, yet it is given freely by the God *of* all grace. It is, as we have said, the time of redeemed Man being inducted into the mystery *of* the great Triune God, the time when Man is not only redeemed but sanctified, glorified and perfected. How great, then, is grace! How helpful too, to see its shape and form, and to know what it accomplishes in just one human life. Also, to see this is to see God in action.

Chapter Five

Yearning After God

In previous chapters we have spoken about coming to know God. We were introduced to the history of this subject of coming to know God through the Bible. We see the biblical ways or—we may say—*the way* to get to know Him. We now see that just to know God is life eternal (John 17:3).

My intention is to leave for a time the material previously under discussion and to turn to the subject of a human being wanting to know God and yet, knowing Him, wanting to ‘search him out’. The first of these objectives seems to me very wonderful. As a modest reader of classical literature, and a reasonable writer of fiction and poetry, it seems that wonderful essays could be written on the subject. How one could luxuriate in researching this age-long pursuit of Man! The second of these two objectives—to search God out—seems almost arrogant in its assumption that a human being can search out the Divine Being. Nevertheless, it can be seen from another angle. God is so wonderful that ‘searching Him out’ can be an intention in which one can glory, for that would be to know more and more of God.

In all this we need to keep in mind Francis Thompson’s ‘The Hound of Heaven’. There Thompson depicts Christ as the Hound of Heaven, relentlessly but lovingly pursuing the poet down through the years until at last:

Halts by me that footfall:
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
‘Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee,
Who dravest Me.’

The Psalmist’s words, recorded by Paul, are insistent, ‘No one understands, no one seeks for God’ (Romans 3:11). Is this true? Is the idea of a person seeking God merely a poetic one, or even a prideful thing on the part of that person? Is it not an insult to the God who ceaselessly, day and night, through His many media, beats out the message of Himself—is it not an insult to say we will

seek Him when He is ever the Seeker after the one who thinks he seeks God?

Psalm 53:2 says, 'God looks down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any that are wise, that seek after God'. This is the verse Paul translated as, 'No one understands, no one seeks for God'. We are left wondering whether it is a principle that none seek after God. Yet God did not look down knowing that none could or would seek after Him. His demand is that those who do not know Him should seek Him. 'When you seek me with all your heart' (Jeremiah 29:13) seems to be a principle by which we may—and should—work. God says after the words just quoted, 'I will be found by you'. What an exciting promise!

The problem with all this discussion is that it is all within the experience of Israel, and God is speaking to those who are His people, many of whom have gone astray. He is addressing those whom He knows, and so those who should know Him. If they have strayed from Him then they should return, for they are His Covenant people.

What, then, are we to say about the matter of people seeking God? The answer to that question must be that by creation and by the Everlasting Covenant all people are known of God, and that is the basis for their knowing Him. Yes, seek they may well have to do, but the ancient relationship is still that of God knowing His people, and so, in that mysterious act of His seeking, we come to know Him.

Look at Paul's words in Galatians 4:8-9:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods, but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? (emphasis mine)

He is addressing people, most of whom had been pagans and idolaters. He is saying they did not know Him, but they have come to know Him, yet the truth is that they only know Him because He

first knew them. That is why Paul said, in another place, 'But if one loves God, one is known by him' (I Corinthians 8:3).¹

The Apostle John makes it clear that only the person born of God knows God: 'Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love' (I John 4:7-8). John does not mean that by loving God we are born anew, but being born anew we love God.

So then, although God knows all human beings, yet He looks out to see whether from among them there are those who are seeking after Him. He is ever on the watch to see the outcome of His moving in the hearts of people. So out of all this weaving in and out of biblical statements we can distil a principle: *those who will seek after God are those who desire Him, but then they will not have desired Him unless He had so known them that they could not but seek Him. He is the Initiator of the seeking, as also He is the Completer of the seeking.*

A World of Seekers!

Against the statement 'No one seeks after God', we are faced with the picture that 'Everyone, everywhere is seeking after God'. Well, maybe not all, but many, very many. This view is so often voiced today midst the medley of religions, the mystics, the New Age seekers and those who have cried 'Foul!' of the Church. There can be no **doubt** that many people are seeking. That is self-evident, but then what are they seeking? Whom are they seeking? Some seem very choosy. They seek one thing after another. They also drop one thing after another. They choose warily. That is, they do not seek God as He is, but God as they think He ought to be. They are

¹ Paul as an Israelite understood that God's Covenant people could not but know Him in the sense that they believed He existed, and existed as the Covenant Father. At the same time they could—and often did—leave God for the idols. In this case God was against them. He did not know them in the sense that their relationship with Him was broken. Paul—as John also—believed Christ came to reconcile humanity to Himself. In that sense they were called to know Him and to receive from Him eternal life. This was—and is—the way human beings come to God, through His Son whom He has sent into the world.

not above refashioning Him until there is nothing specially moral in Him—no moral law, no moral demands.

In this there is much refashioning of God. Some in all honesty dread to seek God. They have an eikon—or eikons—of Him that terrify, or are grim and dark. Somewhere, somehow, something has gone wrong in their lives. They have become part of that large seeking coterie described in our last paragraph. They are not to be ridiculed, scorned and written off. The search may not always be undertaken in the hope of finding God, but in the hope of writing off the score and being able to say, 'There is no God'. Among the confused there are also the sincere.

And what are we to think of all these things, we who believe we know God, who believe that the just shall live by faith before an exalted yet loving God? I think we shall say that we pray and hope for men and women, young people, children and babes everywhere to 'seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him' (Acts 17:27).

The Human Matter of Worship and Our Idols

If we think about it, most human beings are worshippers. One of the meanings of the word 'worship' in English is 'to give worth to'. We say to a judge, 'Your worship', meaning, 'You are a worthy person to be holding this high honour of an office'. At wedding services the man will say, 'With my body I thee worship'. He honours and adores.

Giving worth to things goes on all the time whether we sleep or are awake. We are, in fact, evaluating the worth of a thing, especially with a view to using it or enjoying it in our lives. In this sense we worship money, power, security, case and some of the many things which could go with such a life.

We rarely come out with the word 'idolatry' to describe it, yet every human knows the excitement and pleasure he/she can derive out of the thing worshipped. For honesty's sake call it an idol, even if a particular idol may be temporary and we then pass on to other elements we worship. When we see blatant worship of

money, power, or the sexual we can immediately recognise it for what it is—an idol.

What, then, is an idol? It is something upon which we pour our attention, our devotion, our time and labour. We are gripped by it rather than we grip it. We expect good returns for our worship of it. What we do not realise is that it is a substitute or surrogate god. It is the god who is in place of God. By creation we expect the best of God, such as love, joy, pleasure, fulfilment, a place in the sun, a development towards being partakers of the very Godhead.² Because God created us and we love the life He has given to us, we are expected to love Him with all our being, much in the same way as we love our spouse—with passion and delight. The whole law in its beauty has been summed up as loving God with all our being and loving all others as we would rightly love ourselves. To take all of that love away from God and give it to an idol—whatever its shape, form or being may be—is to blaspheme the One Who created us and sustains us in life.

It is interesting to note that the materialist mind is in us from the beginning of life. We seek love from our carers from birth. We demand attention. We taste pleasure and hunger for more. We give much worth to objects as well as people. In one sense all of this is natural, but in us, in our innermost core, we demand love, and we bargain for it with our own love. It would seem to be that we are born idolaters.

The person who is absorbed in idolatry can keep his life for himself and to himself so long as the idols do not let him down. We need to remember that the outward idol is linked with an inner eikon or image of the ideal idol. No idol, by nature of the case, can satisfy a human being, no matter how depraved that person is. The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes once wrote: 'He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end' (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

² In 11 Peter 1:3-4 the Apostle says that God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, and through these we may come to the place where we share in the Godhead. He is not thinking of us progressing beyond being human, but reaching the maturity of being truly human. As such, we can share in the glories of the Godhead—by God's intention and through His grace.

It is 'eternity into man's mind' which brings the problems as well as the exquisite joys. Musicians, artists, sculptors, painters, authors and poets all live by that dimension of 'eternity in the heart' (AV). It lifts humanity out of a simple, three-dimensional world and the life of the five senses. It does not allow a human to be satisfied with what is about him. It makes philosophers and religionists into dualists. It seduces the mystics and the art folk. The fact is that the eternal dimension in a person is what drives that one to idolatry, or to God.

The gods and lords of this world are seducers. They promise what they cannot deliver. The great leader of Israel warned against idols. They were to him anathema. He had seen the power of idols in Egypt. He had been told by God of the orgy in the desert by emerging Israel. It was a horrible memory to the godly and a delight aborted to the innately idolatrous.

One Psalmist wrote:

Our God is in the heavens;
 he does whatever he pleases.
 Their idols are silver and gold,
 the work of mens hands.
 They have mouths, but do not speak;
 eyes, but do not see.
 They have ears, but do not hear;
 noses, but do not smell.
 They have hands, but do not feel;
 feet, but do not walk;
 and they do not make a sound in their throat.
 Those who make them are like them;
 so are all who trust in them. (Psalm 115:3-8)

How the prophets delighted in mocking the idols. Elijah did it at Mount Carmel when Baal could not answer the screaming entreaties of the apostates of Israel who worshipped him. We could fill a ream of paper filing the warnings, scorning, and taunting of the idols by the prophets, by the Psalmists, and, yes, by Yahweh Himself. The contrast lay in the heart worship of the faithful Israelites. Even now we can hear the solemn, measured and yet confident singing of Israel in the Song of Moses when they asked:

Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods?
 Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,
 terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Exodus 15:11)

The idols have never accomplished anything of eternal note. Even so they keep millions in thrall. This is because all have to be busy when united with idols. There is no time to stand aside and consider the matter. Consider what? Consider that Man is not a creator, however creative he may prove to be. Consider that that which is devised has never been created. Consider that the love of idols is for selfish advantage. Consider that idols even at their most brilliant zenith cannot supply the honour and glory and majesty and power and wisdom that is in God.

God is really the one worthy object of worship, and as a person worships so is he or she. We can never rise higher than our worship. But in God there are marvellous heights to which we rise, marvellous dimensions in which we live, and brilliance of knowledge and beauty of wisdom. When a person really knows God then nothing compares with Him.

How, Then, Did the Idols Come?

We saw that in Romans 1:18-25 Paul has an exposition on how idols came:

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

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and

worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

We know that God made Man to be the living image of His living Self. That image could not be alive unless in union with the Creator. Union means communion. Communion means utter oneness with God, with the Three Persons in their own communion. Man is made to be in communion with the living God. This is demanding! And the primal couple found themselves presented with an alternative—that alternative being self-ruling and self-discovery. This was a delirious moment for them. They chose themselves over and against God.

To reject the immeasurable God in favour of measurable Man was a disastrous choice. The 'first, fine, careless rapture' of ego-worship was succeeded by a dreadful sense of loss. God did not change following their choice of self, but it seemed He had. How can so great a God now fellowship with Man who is 'curved in upon himself, as Luther once put it.

Notice the words and phrases Paul uses: 'who by their wickedness suppress the truth'; 'they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him'; 'they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles'; 'they exchanged the truth about God for a lie'; and they 'served the creature rather than the Creator'.

That is how idolatry always happens. The eternity in our hearts can only cater for the Eternal Himself, not for lesser deities. How lonely and empty is the life of idolatry when the chips are down, when it is evident that the idols have produced nothing. When the passion of idols is emptied into vain nothingness, then the waste of a life is seen and the heart wheels slowly towards a new heaven and a new God.

Take Abraham: he was a wandering Aramean. He was an idolater. One day the God of glory appeared unto him (Genesis 12:7), and Abraham was a transformed man. Only the glory of God can make the glory of an idol look empty and pathetic. There is the hot worship of idols with such degrading practices as sexual orgies when love has fled from God. But the mystery of the idols cannot hold the spirit forever. The day of reckoning comes, and it is

frightening if the grace of God does not come to the aid of the disillusioned idolater.

Year in and year out the sin of Eden was played out again and again, and the heart of the nation went rotten from lack of life in its worship. Things ecclesiastical became dead. Morals withered, society was disturbed, hearts were uneasy, the land became 'without form and a void'. This was the time for turning to God, where Israel's spirit could be renewed and knowing God could be a new experience for a tired nation. Hence, the prophet's cry in Hosea 6:1-3:

Come, let us return to the LORD,
for he has torn, that he may heal us;
he has stricken, and he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.
Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD,
his going forth is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.

Formerly the prophet had said:

Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel;
for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the
land.
There is no faithfulness or kindness,
and no knowledge of God in the land,
there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing
adultery;
they break all bounds and murder follows murder.
Therefore the land mourns,
and all who dwell in it languish,
and also the beasts of the field,
and the birds of the air;
and even the fish of the sea are taken away. (Hosea 4:1-3)

The judgement built into the practice of idolatry comes to deflate the worshipper and to trouble his conscience. Say not, then, that an idolater has it easy, or that his conscience does not lie uneasy. Rejection of the living God is written into every heart as the greatest sin. What, however, is the deepest tragedy with the life of

the idolater is that he has carried out the wrong will, the will of his idol, instead of the will of God. Doing the will of God is what this world was created for. Man was to build for eternity with the golden blocks of God's law, with His design for eternity. The law is not the wearisome, moralistic demand of a legalistic deity, but the opportunity given to build the Holy City according to the mind of its Maker. No act of life is lost in this wonderful action. That is where there is no idolatry and only joy in doing the will of the God Who is about creating a New Heaven and a New Earth.

No wonder that disillusioned idolaters feel the constraint of God to know Him. In their ears they hear what hitherto they had not heard, namely, the footsteps and the panting of the Hound of Heaven:

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, Who betrayest Me.'

Chapter Six

The Preventers

Introduction: Access to God

Searching after God may seem to be a pleasant vocation or experiment. We may visualise a person having time enough to do this. He or she may set about it with a certain pleasurable anticipation. Plenty of reading from the sages, a searching out of wisdom, discussion galore, and, finally, finding God! In practice it is certainly not quite like that. Who is to say there is access to God? Who is to opine that God will be waiting, and that He will give warm welcome? In such a search nothing should be taken for granted. It is a high and holy venture we are on, and who dare presume it will end in victory? Is access open to all?

One of the wonders for Israel was the access they had to God. As a nation they had been parcelled off from the other nations by God with His non-contractual Covenant. They were God's special people, and not because of anything special about them. They were a grace-people, chosen by God because He loved them. Not that He did not love all others, but He told this people He had special business for them in the world. Moses built the tabernacle, the worship shrine for Israel. It was compartmented into three areas: (i) the courtyard of sacrifice and worship, which had a great altar; (ii) the Holy Place where the priests had their equipment for worship—none other but priests and Levites could go beyond the altar; and (iii) the Holy of Holies where God's Presence remained at the mercy seat which was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant with cherubim overshadowing. Only the high priest would venture in, and even he once only in the year. He would be carrying the blood of atonement, which he offered for the sins of the whole nation.

This was considered to be 'access'. That great and wonderful Creator of all the universe deigned—nay, loved—to dwell in this manner amongst His people. They knew the symbolism of the mercy seat and that it could not contain the Most High God, Yahweh. Even so, He dwelt among His people in a way He did not dwell among other nations.

One of the glories of the New Testament is that it speaks clearly of the true worshipper's access to God. It also speaks of those of all races having access, together, to God's presence. Not only this: the New Testament speaks of ultimate access into Paradise where God's people will have personal access to Him—forever! It also stresses the day-by-day and moment-by-moment access that is now there for those who know God.

The Coming of the First Preventer

In the Garden the primal couple had access to God. He came to them in the cool of the day and they communed together. In that Garden there was the serpent. In the Genesis account he is said to be clever, subtle and shrewd above all animals. He was the king of all preventers. By preventers we mean that the serpent intended to make division between Man and God, and this he certainly did.

Our point in taking up the subject of the preventers is that they are to be taken into consideration when looking at the history of the human race. It is universally accepted that there are two elements working in cosmic affairs: good and evil. This is the subject of most art, music, fiction, philosophy and religion. Eikons of good and evil are firmly fixed in the human mind. Even so, much discussion about these two elements is abstract. We are supposed to think of these as two forces engaged in battle. In fact, good is something that is acted out by personalities. Likewise, evil is something that human and celestial creatures do.

It is not difficult to understand why the existence of evil creatures is pooh-poohed. The presence and action of evil beings are laughed off as superstitious. But such a reading of the situation is optimistic and superficial. The appearance of a snake in Eden is the butt of many jokes. But the brilliance of this preventer is that he firstly beguiled the woman and then by her cleverly caught the man.

We can trace the biblical history of this infamous creature. He appears in sign form in the twelfth chapter of the Book of the Revelation. He is a crimson dragon, crimson meaning something alarming and dangerous. Here he is called 'the great dragon ...

that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world' (Revelation 12:9).

We can gather much of his character from this description, but there is little need to dwell on him, for he always seeks the attention of the human race in his prideful ways. Also in the twelfth chapter of Revelation we see that the dragon is seeking to destroy the Messiah when He comes. He persecutes the Church. He draws down into his following 'a third of the stars of heaven' (Revelation 12:4) which means a third of the angelic forces.

Satan intends to make a big impression in history, coveting God's place as Creator and Sustainer of all Creation. He is jealous of God and certainly all seekers after God will meet him on the way. That is to say, they will be met by him on the way and he will try to prevent them from travelling. The misery he has brought and wrought by reason of having a large part of the human race in thrall helps to explain that history is not just a matter of causes and effects, but that the serpent fights the people of God all the way. That he deceives all the nations needs to be recognised and taken into account.

As Paul states: 'For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12). He is warning us against a vast conspiracy of evil to defeat God and His Kingdom and establish its own authority. Some scholars treat this very evident vein of personal evil in Scripture as mythic. They suggest that there certainly are movements of evil under the metaphors and figures of creatures doing evil, but that no personal devil or demonic creatures exist. They are figments of our imagination they say, but convenient to rationalise sweeping movements of history that are patently horrible and inexplicable any other way.

But observe the evil states of men and women in history who can be described as little less than depraved. 'Demonic' means fiendish. Millions upon millions have been 'liquidated' in the regimes of Hitler and Stalin in our time, and just when we think these are dreadful things of the past and the War Criminal Trials

have prevented repetition of such atrocities, we find massive degradation breaking out like huge sores all over the world. However grateful we may be for the United Nations Organisation, we are conscious that it cannot rein in the dynamics of evil. We have witnessed its failures.

More to the point, we see the evils of selfishness, greed, oppression and cruelty. The manipulative use of narcotics and other drugs, the machinations of innumerable mafias, deceit, nepotism, corruption and mayhem (thinly disguised) are everywhere. We face depravity in its many forms even within our own breasts. How shamed we are by our low designs, our propensity for lust and crime. It is as though, sometimes, the faith we have can barely hold back the tide of sin and temptation.

If we were honest, if we were to face the depravity of the human heart, then we would have to admit that personal powers of evil are in the midst of all humanity, including the so-called primitive dwellers in Arcadian forests as well as the most crime-sodden inhabitants of our concrete jungles.

Of course—on the whole—there seems to be reasonable decency in the world. We do make laws against corruption; we do fight evil by legislation and police forces. We are all against evil. Even criminals have some laws of decency. We try to ferret out the lusts and indecencies of pornography and the corruption in our governing bodies. We live in a world of horrors and terrors invading our homes by reason of the technology of the various media. We sense the invasions which would destroy morals and we oppose them. Sometimes our opposition to what is baneful rises to a great ground swell and a new age of decency seems to have arrived.

What we cannot do, however, is deny the palpable presence of Satan and his hosts—his fallen angels, demons, and depraved human beings in thrall to him.

More the miracle then, that in all the evil which seems to prevail, there are still men and women, children and young people who seek after God. And there are folk who have come through the experience of their own personal evil to find liberation in the grace of the Eternal God. There are those innumerable societies and

fellowships in which God is worshipped 'in Spirit and in truth'. The miracles of God can be seen in transformed lives. Evil powers are being confronted by the people of the Truth who, though battling, yet do not yield to the deceit of the serpent.

What Is at the Heart of Personal Evil?

Eden tells it all. God created Man of the dust of the earth. Man, of himself, was no living creature until God breathed out of Himself into Man. Man thus became a person, a living creature—a concourse of living creatures-shaped as the living image of God. Alive, he was unable to give life to others as God did and does. But to live was to be a great adventure. He was made to be a moral creature, one able to make choices, and especially choices which would show the glory of God.

There was more, even, than that. Each moral choice would mean a moral act, and the moral creatures, known as humans, would form a network across the world of living creatures. All acts would combine to build a human race of truth, integrity and love, and the created world itself would be the home of the Family of God. It was with this in mind that God gave a commission to the whole human race, secure as it was in the Covenant of love and relationality He had made with it. The commission was:

And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food'. (Genesis 1:28-29)

This commission was not a contract made with humanity which was to be in the employment of the Creator. It was the plan God had made to bring all His Creation to glory, to an eternity of holiness and perfection. As we have hinted in various places, it was to make the New Heaven and the New Earth so that they would be the Eternal Home to all who would be His Family and have, each one of them, the gift of immortality.

This was the plan of God, and it is the plan hated by the serpent—hence his interference in Eden and the proliferation of evil as he desperately tries to beat back the inevitable triumph and fulfilment of the plan. At the beginning God called Man to be partner with Him in this great endeavour, this great adventure. There is a thrilling participation with God in fulfilling His will for His Creation.

We have seen that ‘that ancient serpent, the Devil’ goes out to thwart the plan of God. He goes out to devise means by which he can force humanity to participate with him in his own, wild intention to overthrow God and His powers, and to create what could only be a dark chaos (for love and true morality are essential and indispensable to all government).

These are the forces which would bar the way of a person or a nation searching after God. It is anathema in the eyes of the dark forces to watch a person bursting into the light of God. It is known to them that when this happens to a human being he is never the same again. He is intoxicated with God and will not give up that relationship. No wonder Paul said, ‘In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God’ (11 Corinthians 4:4). How the powers of darkness dread the gospel!

Strong and evil and debarring as these forces of darkness are, they are pitifully weak against the power of love, which is the essential power of God. Nothing of lasting reality has ever been accomplished apart from love. Much has been devised by personal evil, but in the ultimate not one scrap of it remains. Doom is the outcome of personal evil, and sheeted home to the evil—doer it shall destroy that one and, likewise, all his hosts.

Idols That Host the Demons

I have been writing books on Christian themes for many years and I am aware that some of the material in them must sound both crazy and irrational to some who read them, including some church-goers. When one deals with the occult then one is

accounted ‘spooky’. Yet, as we have already pointed out, the person who has truly faced the horror of human history surely cannot believe that such evil begins and ends with Man. Had there been no serpent in Eden, then world history would have been different.

We have said that the serpent was deceitful, and as Jesus later said of him:

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. (John 8:43-45)

They are strong words, and they sound quite unreal or primitive to our cultured ears. So much the worse for us! Many who have lived in Third World countries have seen spirit-worship and spirit-possession in the raw, and cannot be talked out of the phenomena they have witnessed. In many Western countries, Christianisation has partly destroyed their demonic influence, though never entirely. For that reason we scoff at occultic phenomena as being imagined and unreal. But the demonic is cruelly real to many who suffer under its domination.

Is the West, then, cultured out of the demonic? Not really. Paul and his contemporaries warned against idolatry. Paul, discussing the matter in his First Letter to the church at Corinth agreed that ‘an idol has no real existence’ (I Corinthians 8:4). It could only have such existence if created by God. Yet he said:

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (I Corinthians 8:5-6)

Paul was not saying that idols don’t exist. But, rather, He is saying that idols have no real, no ontological existence. They are perversions of the real, of the truly ontological. As we have suggested, only that which has been created is ontological

(has real being). All that is devised is that which has been shaped out of what is already existent. God, through Moses, warned His people against giving Him a 'shape', which would be to make Him into an eikon. Moses told the people, 'When God spoke to you on the mountain—Mount Sinai—you saw no form' (see Deuteronomy 4:15). God is incomparable and must not be imaged other than by the Man who is His living image.

Paul has more to say about the idols in the same Corinthians letter. He says:

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

Paul's argument is that in the Old Testament those who offered sacrifices were in fellowship with God by reason of the altar. Just so, those who were in Christ offered up the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving at the time of the Lord's Supper, and by this they had fellowship with God. Around them in that pagan society there were heathen who offered sacrifices to the idols. Thus they had fellowship not simply with the idol—who can fellowship with an idol which is a thing, an object?—but with the demon or demons to which the idol was a host. He was suggesting that those Christians who ate meat offered to idols were sharing in the table of demons.

Whatever significance meat offered to idols had in Paul's day, it would be a rare case today. What has not changed is the principle. We naturally enough have special meals to celebrate good happenings in our lives. When something becomes an idol to us are we not having demons in the circle of our lives? Does not the

idol hold us back from coming to know God, or tempt us to leave God and give our devotion to the idol?

In our materialistic age there are innumerable idols. Paul is right: a beautiful car, mansion, person or possession are not evil in themselves. In fact, nothing God has created is evil in itself. But we make it evil when we make it into an idol. That is the opportunity for (lemons and they rush the opportunity).

We think of demons as evil creatures of the occult and spurn even the idea of them. What then when we have become idolaters in the modern culture? How many idols are there in the West? How great are the impediments blocking our way to God? What was Paul aiming at when he said, 'Love of money is a root of all kinds of evil' (I Timothy 6:10, ASV)? These questions are important in our search for God.

Chapter Seven

Knowing God as Love**Introduction: The Mystery of Love**

So much has been written, said and sung about love that we wonder whether more ought to be added to it. But one does not even have to be romantic to know that love is a most important subject, especially for one who is searching for God. Even so, we ought to make it clear that love is not always a matter of feeling. Without doubt, emotion often attends experiences of love. But we also have to be objective about our subject.

I propose that first we look at God as love in Himself, then the ways He has loved and shown His love, especially in this world, and to us. Then, because a royal principle is, 'We love because He first loved us', we will try to get a view of both God's love and our own, if such a thing is possible.

There is a song which commences with 'Ah, sweet mystery of love' and, doubtless lovers find it quite a mystery. The biblical idea of mystery is *living in that secret which can only be known when it is revealed by God, and which is not a puzzle to be solved. Human reasoning will not open a mystery: it is a gift of God.* This surely means that everyone is able, if willing, to come to love.

The Reality of the Statement, 'God Is Love'

Rightly understood, the statement 'God is love'—especially where it is made twice in the one context in the Bible (I John 4)—means not simply that God loves, but that He is essentially love. That is, as Charles Wesley once put it, 'Your nature and your name is love'. Further, it means that love is not only a quality of God's being but that God is uniquely, in Himself, love.

If we would read the passage in which it is twice said that God is love—this is the only place in the Bible where the statement is made—then, having understood the reasoning of the Apostle John in this passage, it would seem natural to go back to the first book of the Bible and from there make our way through the whole

Bible, seeing evidences of the principle 'God is love' as we make our way to the last book. We would be looking at all the instances and happenings which would appear to show that God is love. This sounds to me to be a reasonable method, but with our kind of thinking we might find as much evidence against the idea of God being love.

I see the value of this method, but since human beings are incurably theological in their thinking we would soon be theologising the materials we were gathering. Before the entire Scriptures were written, in order to get the full picture, by necessity we would have had to await their completion. But we have the complete Bible. It is a unity. Almost anywhere we read we have indications of the principle of love. I suggest we look at John's explanation of love and proceed from there to other relevant passages. John's special statement on God being love is found in I John 4:7-21:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God, if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is Love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us. If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.

If we loosely paraphrase John's statement, then it goes something like this:

Beloved friends, it is time for us to get into action. just let us love one another. Only the person who loves has been born of God—that remarkable new birth from above. The person who does not love does not know God, for God is love. That is remarkable—that God is love. God has shown that He is love by what He has done, that is, He has sent His only Son into the world so that we who did not have immortality might now possess it. Immortality is the life of love. Love is this way: we never loved Him but He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. He became that which was an offering in a sacrificial death so that the judgement on our sins might be borne by Him and not by LIS.

Now if God loved us in that way and in that measure, then it is reasonable that we love others and that they love us. The fact is that no man has ever seen God. If, then, we love one another, then God's love will have come to its full maturity in us.

When this happens we know that we live in Him and that He lives in us, and the understanding of this comes to us because He has given us the Holy Spirit. Now, then, we have seen what has happened and we testify to the reality that God has sent His only Son to be the Saviour of the whole world. Whoever confesses that this sent One, Jesus, is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he dwells in God. So out of all this I have written we have come to know and to believe the love God has for us. Yes, God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God and God lives in him.

This love is perfected in us, as we said, and this is done so in regard to the day of judgement which we would otherwise fear. Why! we have confidence for that judgement. Anyone who fears that judgement, its punishment, he it is who is not Yet perfected in love. Thus we love, because He first loved us. We not only love Him but we love all humanity. Where God's love is, there is no fear—fear of death, fear of judgement.

If anyone says that he loves God and yet hates his brother then he is a liar. If a person cannot love his brother whom he sees with his eyes, how can he rise to love God whom he cannot see? God's command always stands, that he who loves God should love his brother.

This teaching of John is simple: (i) God is essentially love; (ii) He loves the whole world and has shown that love both by sending His Son into the world to give us life, and by sending Him to be the true sacrifice for our sins; and (iii) when we come to love through new birth, then He will live in us and we in Him. From henceforth we have confidence which will make us stand in the day of judgement, because His love has taken away the fear of judgement. In the matter of living with others we are commanded to love, and in obeying that command we will know the life of love. Hatred of another is finished.

The Love of the Triune God

A heading such as ours may seem to switch us off the Bible and on to theology. What is this talk about 'the Triune God'? The reply we give is that all we will say is really from the source of the Bible. John has said 'God is love', and he is speaking particularly of God as Father, for it is the Father Who sends the Son into the world and makes Him to be the propitiation for our sins. It is the Son Who goes at His bidding. In John *14:30-31* He had told His disciples: 'I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, *so that the world may know that I love the Father*' (italics mine). That is why, in another place, Jesus is called 'the Son of his love' (Colossians *1:13*).

We notice in our quotation above that the Holy Spirit helps us to know that we are actually living in God and He is living in us. John has said this in I John *3:24*. So then, elsewhere, he often emphasises that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father in an intimate way, and that He is the Spirit of love. John is not trying to work up a doctrine of the Trinity here. He is simply saying that when he asserts that God is Love, then he is insisting that the Father is love. The Father is, so to speak, the fountain of the love possessed both by the Son and the Spirit.

I suggest that if we have absorbed and received this marvellous teaching of John the Apostle, then we know in our heart and in our bones that *God is love!* Yes, this is the point where we come to know God. And the means by which we have come to know Him is

by the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, Who, as the Divine Wind Who 'blows where he willeth', no human being commanding Him, the love of God guiding Him to the person who thereby seeks God with all his heart and finds Him!

Love from the Beginning and Even before the Beginning

If we have grasped God's love through this last section of writing, then we are indeed fortunate. The miracle of knowing God has happened. John has words at the end of his letter which are for us: 'And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols' (I John *5:20*). John is saying that 'the understanding a human person needs has been given to you: now you know Him'. He adds the warning, 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols'. The sight of the word 'idols' sends our mind back to what we have already read about an idol usurping our love for the eternal Father, for the Son and for His Spirit.

Equipped with this transforming love, our further quest for more knowledge and experience of it will lead us back to the beginning, and even beyond the beginning! Whatever the time and place of love, the wonder of it will unfold more and more as we love Him and are loved by Him.

(i) Love before Time

To know God is to know He is love, and to know He is love is to have His love flowing to us and then through us to others. For others, too, we love. Some of us have curious ideas about Christ, the Son of God. One idea is that He did not exist before He was born to Mary at the first Christmas. But this is not the case. He was ever the Son of God but became a human being at that first Christmas. Before that He was always with the Father. On the night that He was betrayed—the night before the day of His crucifixion—He prayed what has been called His High-Priestly

prayer. It can be read in John chapter seventeen. In this prayer Jesus said a number of things to His Father. One was, 'And now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made' (John 17:5). Another was, 'Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold *my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world*' (John 17:24, italics mine).

From this quotation we see that He was with the Father before creation, that the Father gave Him glory, and that the Father loved Him in that 'time' before Time. Love for Him did not begin with His becoming Man. That love, of course, would have been mutual. It is a beautiful relationship to contemplate. But whilst its beauty is wonderful to think upon, it was a relationship which first of all was to issue in the creation of the world, and then in that world's redemption, and finally in its entire sanctification, glorification and perfection.

(ii) The Interpersonal Love of the Three Persons of the Trinity

Another picture related to this is that of the Three Persons of the Trinity. Going on a few things we have said above, particularly that God is love, we can here have the luxury of revelling in a bit of theology concerning the Triune God. This theology is no theory about God, but an invitation to drink at the vast ocean of God Himself Who is love.

We say first of all that the Father is the centre of love from which the Son and the Holy Spirit issue—so to speak. We have to add 'so to speak' for it is difficult to find language to speak correctly and exactly about the Trinity, the One John Donne called 'three-personed God'. He spoke of being ravished by the love of this God:

Batter my heart, three-personed God, for, you As yet but knock, breathe, shine,
and seek to mend, Take me to you, imprison me, for I Except you enthrall me,
never shall be free, Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

In this Trinity of love we understand the Father to have a prius—as prior place—though no prior being nor higher being. He is the fount of Godhead, the Son forever generated by Him, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from Him and the Son. The Father is love and the Son is the Son of His love. The Spirit is the Spirit—it of the Father, the Spirit of the Son and the Spirit of love. All Three live as One God, and that we cannot know since no three persons who are human have done what cannot be done except they abide in One Another.

Jesus had said, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30), and had confessed, 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14:28). But He also said, 'The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand' (John 3:35). No devised god or idol has ever made such fatuous claims. An idol would not make itself out to be so absurd. Jesus said 'I am in the Father and the Father in me' (John 14:11). He claimed that He is the essence of love and of glory. He said He had given the glory to His disciples, the glory which the Father had given Him, and He had done so 'that they may be one' (John 17:22).

The Spirit serves both the Father and the Son, having the unique quality of being able to reveal them and glorify them, even to human minds and hearts. It is the Spirit alone who delves into the deep things of God. Not even He could do that unless He were in the Father and in the Son and was One with them. The arithmetic of the Three confounds the bare unity of 'one', for if 'one' were not One—if it were not plural—then it were only a monolithic 'one'. In arithmetic 'one' cannot be 'three', but the arithmetic of the eternal 'three-personed God' is One Who is Three by reason only of love.

How the theologians have loved this mystery. This is not as an exercise in dull scholasticism but in the living tissue of the works of the Trinity. The 'economic' or 'evangelical' Trinity is a term used to describe these works of the Three Persons of the Trinity toward Man and Creation. This Three cannot—nor would not—contain Their love in and for Themselves, for then it would die. But Their great acts of creation, redemption, sanctification, glorification and perfection of all things are works which issue from love alone.

Our theology would fain deliver itself of these mighty things of love, but it will never be able to do that in fullness, for, when discussing love—and only love—Paul said:

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away, as for tongues, they will cease, as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love. (I Corinthians 13:8-13)

We are, however, at liberty to contemplate love. As we do so by the Holy Spirit then there arises an understanding in us which defies normal comprehension. It is true that our minds are fully at work, but more than the mind only. It is the Spirit in our spirits. We looked at Elihu in the first paragraph of this book, and saw what he said. Let us repeat the stunning state of his heart, for it has something of the mind of Paul about knowing love:

This young man spoke of a spirit burning within him which caused him to speak, and at times in such sayings as: 'For I am full of words, the spirit within me constrains me' (32:18); 'The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life' (33:4); 'Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable' (36:26); 'God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things which we cannot comprehend' (37:5); 'The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate' (37:23). He is saying on the one hand that God certainly is the living God, but on the other that we cannot know Him fully. He does, of course, indicate that we know much about God or he would not have made the comments he did. He really claimed to know the general mind of God.

With the coming of the Son into the world, a revelation took place. It was not a dramatic demonstration, mooted to the sky from the earth and to the four winds which race to the four corners of all the earth. It was just a simple drama worked out in a little country called 'Palestine'. It was a simple tradesman who was at its centre, but He was revealing the eternal love of the Father. He was taking

humanity beyond what even Elihu knew and sensed. He was revealing love, the same love that Israel knew, but He revealed it beyond the measure in which Israel knew it. He died to show that love and rose again to confirm it, and ascended to His Father that They together might send the Spirit to reveal it to all the nations of the earth. The love of the Three had come into a new, universal hour.

Then the Holy Spirit came to flood Himself across the whole world, and where hearts were ready, He flooded that love into those hearts. Those who were flooded were truly intoxicated with God. Since then they have ever tramped the world to share what is so precious to them—not only the love that redeemed them and continues to work in them until the day of dazzling perfection, but also the love that has made them one with God, and is directed at making them one in God, eternally. This is what Paul means by saying, 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love' (I Corinthians 13:12-13).

Chapter Eight

The Love That Transforms—1**Introduction: Searching Out the God of Love**

By this heading we mean ‘not searching out the love of God but searching out the God of love’. It is one thing to search for love for its own sake. It is conceivable that one might find love apart from God. But God is love, and he who finds God finds love. He who finds love as ‘a thing in itself does not find love. Nor does he find God. He has been searching in the wrong way and in the wrong direction. In fact, there is no love apart from God. Of course there is love of a kind, but the heart of it is selfish, though so often it appears not to be. This love is called *eros*—a Greek word for love which is unmistakable. When boiled down, theologically, *eros* is love which looks for returns. It gives in order to get. If it does not get its returns it may turn nasty, hurt and angry—even homicidal—for at this point *eros* ‘love’ has been cheated of what it wanted. We should not look for *eros*.¹ God is not *eros* but *agape*. *Agape* is a Greek word which did not contain the content the Christians poured into it—so to speak. ‘God is *agape*’ is the message we heard from John and the other Apostles.

We have already seen that when God searches out Man, then He is searching them out in His love. When a seeker has the desire in the heart to know God, then that one will find himself/herself searching out God. It is generally the case that a seeker has an intuitive trust that God is love, and so is not frantic whilst the searching is proceeding.

¹ *Eros* in English is thought of, often, as having to do with the love between man and woman, and as such has always been held in highest regard. The word has become somewhat tainted when we use ‘erotic’ to indicate highly passionate and even perverse forms of sexual activity. We could contend that love which is *eros* does not last, and relationships built on it are doomed, and of course this is often the case. However, where God in His grace is at work in His universe, the mystery of relationships is beyond our analysis. Certainly, passion of the erotic kind does not help a marriage. But at the same time those who live in God’s *agape* are not denied a passion that is as intense as it is beautiful.

God's Love in the Old Testament

There is a myth that the God of the Old Testament is not the One that we should be seeking. Eikons of Him are sombre and grim, dark and judgmental. There is fear of the Creation He has created for many see it almost as their enemy. They cannot trust the Creation. They cannot trust God. Yet to read the Old Testament with understanding is to know that God created out of love, for love. To read those ancient pages is to know within its marvellous script the God of love. Not love without justice, of course, nor justice without love. God will not shirk His character to win a following. He leaves that to the gods and idols. God has no fear for His reputation, but the gods and the idols have to establish theirs because they came from nowhere and inevitably return there.

Only those pressed to find God's love will ponder the pages of the Old Testament, and those who have found it cannot desist from reading 'the old, old, story'. To those who seek Him with all their heart He says, 'I will be found of thee'.

Love in the Patriarchs

We have seen before that Cain and Abel, the first set of brothers, differed in their hearts. One hated and the other loved. Abel could not have loved unless he had known that God is love. We do not need to delve into these relationships, much less psychologise them. Abel is held up in the New Testament as a man of faith and love. Cain did not know God, for he certainly did not know love.

One of the most beautiful descriptions of the relationship between God and a man is the story of God and Enoch:

When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. (Genesis 5:21-24)

It would not be a difficult task to trace the lives of Noah, the patriarchs and their families in order to see that they were people of love. I believe it is reasonable to say that in Hebrews chapter

eleven—known as 'the roll-call of the saints'—that whilst these men and women of God were called people of faith, they were also people of love. One who is certainly worthy of this claim is Abraham. He came to the point where he was prepared to sacrifice his own son in order to do the will of God. God's word to him was: 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you' (Genesis 22:2, italics mine). Abraham loved his son, and he also loved God, for he obeyed Him to the point where he was about to kill his son. Then God made Abraham desist, saying: 'Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me' (Genesis 22:12).

Many have seen in this incident that Abraham, against normal human reasoning, comprehended God's love; Somehow he saw the day of Christ—the day of His sacrificial death—and so understood God's love as Father for His people in giving His Son for them. Jesus said: 'Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad' (John 8:56).

Love in Israel

We could spend many rich hours digging into the ancient text in order to see God's love, and the patience of that love in bringing His people into the Covenant. This Covenant was for them, and is 'Everlasting'. The Covenant, of course, is God's way of including His people in His love, and nurturing them in that love so that they may be a Community of love, as is the Trinity in its Community of love. In choosing Israel, God claimed that nothing but His love decided His choice. He set the whole matter of His choice of Israel before them in the following words:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out Of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the

oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day. (Deuteronomy 7:6-11)

What is clear in the Old Testament is that Israel knew God's love by what He had done for them, continued to do for them, and the promise of the full blooming of that love in the great inheritance of the world. In times of difficulty there is always reference back to what God had done in His Covenant love; how He had delivered them from Egypt, cared for them in the wilderness, caused them to defeat their enemies, and brought them into virtual Eden. So many of their Psalms refer back to those times. We saw in I John 4:9-10 that God showed His love by sending His Son into the world, and by causing Him to be the propitiation for our sins. Israel, like us, needed to have such proofs of His love. They lived by them.

No less did they know God's love by His gift of Creation. Solidly rooted in the earth, they watched the beauty of the land, the movements of its creatures, and the fruit of its soil in order to know the loving-kindness of their Creator. Just as all Creation lived by functional laws, so they were grateful to God for a law which surpassed that of all neighbouring lands. There was no law like unto their law! So they became lovers of law, for it was to do with their love for God and their fellow-creatures. Indeed, the law had to do with everything. There was the law of sacrifice and the power of sacrifice to bring peace to the human spirit by the cleansing away of pollution and guilt. The law made possible the founding of a healthy nation in its moral being.

All of these came together as though there were many strands to one cord of love. No wonder God is highly affronted when His people forget the abundance of gifts and blessing and cease to love

Him. And the curse filters in to make the land desolate, the sacrifices unreal, and the law a fearful enemy!

Love in the Prophets

God's love is expressed to Israel in the figures of Him being Israel's Husband and she being His Bride, His wife. It is language which is contrasted with the illicit love that Israel could have for the idols. So intense was this erotic fusion with the idols by Israel that God exclaimed: 'Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone' (Hosea 4:17). Once someone is caught up in such erotic passion it is hopeless to try to end the relationship. It must run its course. Yet, the presentation of this theme of the Marriage of Yahweh with His people is a very moving story to follow, and we may trace it through the first chapters of Hosea, the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel, the fifty-fourth chapter of Isaiah and other places.

Then there is God's love for Ephraim, fugal to the prophecy of Hosea. We saw that in Hosea 4:17 God said that Ephraim was joined to his idols, yet He had much more to say. In Hosea 11:3-4 He proclaims His age-old love for Ephraim:

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.
I led them with cords of compassion,
with the bands of love,
and I became to them as one,
who eases the yoke on their jaws,
and I bent down to them and fed them.

Even so, Israel went after idols and God must punish them. Will He, however, destroy them? No, He will not, for He cries in words that have become famous in revealing God as love:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over, O Israel!
How can I make you like Admah!
How can I treat you like Zeboiim!
My heart recoils within me,
my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my fierce anger,
I will not again destroy Ephraim;

for I am God and not man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come to destroy. (Hosea 11:8-9)

We would not understand God's love as passionate unless we were to realise the never-ending love of God for His people. Israel is not a passing phase in the great plan He has for His beloved Creation. So in Jeremiah 31:3 we read: 'The LORD appeared to him from afar. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you'. It was no light thing, then, that Christ should be the one to come and fulfil all the law and prophecy. What a massive body of written material, but how much more massive is the eternal truth of God, the truth that He is love.

Love in the Psalms

No less powerful is the theme of God's love in the Psalms. Again, it would take endless hours to discover and study God's love in these beautiful and powerful songs and chants. The treatment is unique in all literature. No matter how deeply Israel erred in idolatry, the Psalms have a hatred of this misplaced love. How deep and moving are the many laments. They tell of people into whom God had penetrated deeply. No matter the evils of some, sometimes most of the congregation being involved in them, yet Israel at heart was a loving people. How deep, too, was the guilt of those who espoused other lovers. How rich the Psalms of praise and adoration, the Psalms which tell of their love of God's house, their gratitude for the sacrifices and the festivals. Such love knows the blessing of God and when they call for the cursing of God on their enemies, it is not the way in which we hate our enemies today. It is all for the sake of the name of Yahweh and for His glory.

Those who think the New Covenant is unique in the beauty of forgiveness of sins and justification should also quarry in the Psalms. The Psalms tell much of the story we will find in the New Testament of redeeming love. Take Psalm 130, titled in the Prayer Book as *de profundis*:

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O LORD!
Lord, hear my voice!
Let thy ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

If thou, O LORD, shouldst mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the LORD
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

If I were to intrude my memories and experiences into the text I would have stories beyond telling of people's coming to the love of God in so many and different ways. That is one of the joys of an evangelist who has been empowered to proclaim Christ to those who do not know God. One such story is about a young woman sitting near the front when I began reading this Psalm. I had not finished it when she began weeping. I read on, aware of her deep feelings. When I had given the address she continued weeping. It was a women's Bible Class and I was the only man present. The women tried to comfort her, but were unable. Finally I went to her. She looked up through her tears and smiled. 'Oh, Mr Bingham,' she said, 'I am not weeping because I'm sad. I'm weeping because I'm glad. *I never knew He loved me like that!*' She was not by temperament a person who wept. That night was the crisis of love in her life. I followed her life for some time before circumstances took me away. But as far as I know she pressed on in love for her Lord.

There are Psalms which have become beloved to us. What of Psalm 32 and its exposition of the sinner who would not repent or confess his sin. It links with Psalm 51, the so-called Penitential

Psalm. Again, it is the love of God which is shown. The relief of personal confession and God's forgiveness are indescribable. For the rest, the Psalms are a treasure-house of love and the attributes of God.

The Church was born in the theology of the Psalms. Christ pointed out to His disciples references to Himself in the Psalms. No other faith or religion or philosophy has literature like this. Just take a few examples of the heartfelt passion for God, and the yearning of the Psalmists for Yahweh, their Covenant Father.

One need not quote Psalm 23, for it is probably the most read and sung portion of Scripture in all history. We use this Psalm for worship, in weddings, in times of illness and dying, and at funerals. This Psalm has done more to banish the fears and dreads of God than almost anything else written or sung. Yet, there are other songs with the same trust in God. Psalm 13 1, for example:

0 LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
 my eyes are not raised too high;
 I do not occupy myself with things
 too great and too marvellous for me.
 But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
 like a child quieted at its mother's breast,
 like a child that is quieted is my soul.
 0 Israel, hope in the LORD
 from this time forth and for evermore.

Psalms 42 and 43 belong together. They are fugal with their parallel laments to be in the heart of God. It is as though the Psalmist was in a strange land and longs for the old familiar signs and places:

Why are you cast down, 0 my soul,
 and why are you disquieted within me?
 Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
 my help and my God. (Psalms 42:11; 43:5)

The opening stanza of Psalm 42 has long been the expression of the man who yearns after God:

As a hart longs
 for flowing streams,

so longs my soul
 for thee, 0 God.
 My soul thirsts for God,
 for the living God.
 When shall I come and behold
 the face of God?
 My tears have been my food
 day and night,
 while men say to me continually,
 "Where is your God?" (Psalms 42:1-3)

There are many such Psalms, but we shall content ourselves with one last quote, namely, Psalm 63:1-8:

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

Why Do God's People Love Him?

Well, why do God's people love Him? Ask them, and they will tell you. Even if you do not ask them they will tell you. The true theologian will tell you quickly. He will say: 'It is natural for a human being to love God because God created that one in love. God is love and what He creates must be for love. It is unnatural for man to hate God. It is awkward for a woman not to love God. A child takes pleasure in loving God. This is the proper creational order'. The true theologian will go on to say: 'Man has been made

in the image of God, so in reflecting God he will declare a love-image to the world. He will feel it deeply in his conscience if he does not love. She who has lost love will be troubled until she finds it again'.

If you should press the true theologian further he or she will say: 'If a person's life consists in love—and to live in love is true living—then it will be a delight and it will be satisfying to love God, to love all in this world and to love oneself. God delights in Himself. He delights in all that He is and He delights in the fact that His love lightens all creatures. In His love He has covenanted with them—not only men and women, but all creatures. He has covenanted that He will banish the blight that sin brought into the world, and that His glory shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Therefore He has given the gifts of faith, hope and love, that Man and all Creation should live in them and expect the best, the most glorious outcome to all history'.

But there have been horrors and terrors and deadly fears, and wars and murders and rapes and appalling destruction in Man's world, so why should he so love God? This is the question that many would ask the theologian.

The theologian will reply: 'God Himself by virtue of His Son becoming a man, has been steeped in all evil and in every particular detail of it in His most infamous death on the Cross. He has borne the sins of many, for His Father laid on Him the sins of us all. He bore the sins of many and made intercession for sinners. All of this, when understood in the powerful telling by the Spirit, is the full revelation of God's love. A person loves God because He is love and that one can live in His love and be comfortable. He can know the fruit of the travail of Christ's very soul and be satisfied as Christ Himself is satisfied.

'What is more, such a person does not have to live to himself, for that is a lonely and a precarious life. So he loves God because God has raised the Community of love. This was His intention before time when He, as the Triune God, subsisted in love. Through His own love He would raise the new Community of love. All would have to be through the Cross, be buried in His tomb, and raised from it to eternal life by a resurrection in the Spirit. Then the

Community would know what love is, Who is love, and thereby the Community would live in love. This is why sinful men and women and children and young people come to love God—and you will notice that they glory in this reality and want to share it with the rest of mankind and all Creation'.

There is much more that could be said, but in what has been said there is plenty to go on. One could be convinced by what has been said. The one who is convinced will long, indeed decide, to join the love throng.

In closing off our short section about love in the Old Testament, we need to apply what we have read above. When in Psalm 116:1 the Psalmist says simply, 'I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications', then we know this one has been captivated by the attendance of God upon him. What he had cried was, 'O Lord I beseech thee, save my life!' (verse 4) and the Lord had saved his life. He then asks a question and answers it in the same breath: 'What shall I render to the LORD for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD' (Psalm 116:12-13).

This is how people know that God loves them. They might say correctly that He loves them because He has created them and provides for them and causes them to enjoy the life that is theirs—even in the midst of terrible events. It is salvation which evokes gratitude in a person and for this he will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

When we listen to the pathos—filled Psalm 130 we hear the voice cry: 'Out of the depths I cry to thee, O LORD! Lord, hear my voice! Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!'. And we hear the pleader say with confidence 'If thou, O LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared'. We know, then, why a person who is a sinner loves God. We look at Abel as the lover both of God and of Cain, at Enoch who walks daily with God, at Noah who labours incessantly to the tune of God's Covenant, and at Abraham who is transformed by the glory of God. And we can observe the whole heritage of Abraham and Sarah down to the

coming of Christ. From these we know why men and women love God.

As we have said, there is massive evidence and proof that human creatures in all their weakness and moral frailty cling to His love, though the winds against them are cyclonic and the tornadoes and storms of evil burst around them. They will be found still clinging when the riot of evil has passed. You cannot prise away from God the one who loves God, if indeed God would ever let that lover go. Love is union, and is in essence communion. The constant fruit of this communion is love to all.

Chapter Nine

The Love That Transforms—2

Introduction: The Song of Solomon and the Love of God

This book, sometimes called ‘Canticle’, has been understood in many different ways. Primarily it has been understood as an allegory of God’s love to His Bride, Israel. Many Jewish commentators have seen it as that, and many Christian commentators have seen it as an allegory of Christ and His Bride. Perhaps what may be a little puzzling is how Yahweh could be Husband in the Old Testament to Israel, and Christ Husband in the New Testament to the Church. Of course, in the mystery of the Trinity we might soon find a reconciliation, especially as Christ in Isaiah 9:6 is called the ‘Everlasting Father’. It is probably fitting at this point that I quote Geoffrey Bromily in his excellent book, ‘God and Marriage’:¹

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

I think the resolution in the midst of metaphorical writing is that God’s people have always been looked upon by God as His Bride. The love that God has is not *like* the love of a spouse for his bride,

¹ *God and Marriage* by Geoffrey Bromily, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1980, pp. 77-78.

but is *the* love that the true Husband has for His true Bride. Human loves may to some degree be *like* God's espousal love, but never as it is.

The Song of Solomon is a collection of love songs between a man and his beloved. These were called *epithalamium—songs sung* to the marriage couple in honour of love, in honour of them, and as a moving preparation for their own love event. There can be no doubt that the Song can well act as an allegory in the Old Testament for Yahweh and His Bride, and in the New Testament for Christ and His Bride. By nature of the case, the Divine-Human union is archetypal; the human—human union is ectypal.

The reason I have introduced the Song of Solomon is that marital love is the most intense and most potent of all loves, for it comes from utter union and full communion. It would not be wrong to introduce the word 'passion', or even *eros*, for it would seem that in its pure form *eros is agape*. In fallen humanity, *eros is* also fallen. *Agape is* never fallen. In the fall of Man in Eden, the division which arose between the man and the woman—a division which has been perpetuated—has meant that *eros* apart from grace is different from *eros* in its creational nature. Passion in marriage is fitting. In trying to speak of the love God has for us, we naturally seek this area for some figure of comparison. Unfortunately, this figure can be an indicator of love, but passion differs so much in its various forms that we must be careful when we use the term.

God's Love in the New Testament

When we discuss the love of God, we automatically draw into our talk the love of Man for God and the love of Man for his fellow-creatures. The Apostle John in his presentation of the love of God is really wishing to deal with Man's love for God, and Man's brotherly love. He states: 'Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard' (I John 2:7). This commandment to love, he says, was with them from the beginning. 'Beginning' here can mean either the beginning of the gospel (cf. Mark 1:1), or the beginning of Creation. In any case, the commandment to love was present at

the creation. He follows this in I John 3:11 by repeating the case, 'For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another'. In I John 4:7 he approaches the matter with the thought that to love one another is to know the love of God: 'Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God'. Our thesis, then, must be: (i) God commands all humanity to love one another (love is commanded); and (ii) we love only when we know God is love (that He loves us).

We need, then, to know that God is love. Knowing that He is love, we too will love. 'We love because he first loved us'. We saw in Chapter Seven how God has shown His love for us, showing that He is love. There is no call for us to repeat this demonstration. What we should do now is see the human response to God's revelation of His love.

The Fact of the Human Response to God's Love

There is some difficulty in seeing how a human being can respond to God's love coming to him. John has told us that 'We love because He first loved us' (I John 4:19). That love does not come by reason of a theological definition—'God is love'—but by the action of that love upon us. God's love is shown to a person when the Spirit gives revelation of that love to the point where the love acts upon the person. We say that God's love is manifested by His sending His Son into the world that we might live. We say that Christ is the propitiation or sins, and in this propitiation God's love is manifested. So the object of God's love has been given life and has had his/her sins propitiated. That is an action of God to which we respond with belief. However much the will is impaired by sin, it is made free at the point where the gospel meets it. 'The word of the cross' (I Corinthians 1:18) is not simply a proposition—though it may also be deemed to be that—but it is an action upon the human spirit. This is, if you will, irresistible grace: the mystery of the truth acting upon a person is evidenced by the flow of love into that person. This inflow of love itself becomes manifest in love toward God.

This brings us to the heart of the love of God. We cannot love if He does not love us. If He does love us then, through the proclamation of the gospel we respond, and His love floods our heart by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also comes as a gift to us, and so maintains the tides of love within us.

We meet this very powerfully in I Peter 1:8: 'Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy'. The subject here—without having seen Christ—loves Him, believes in Him and rejoices with joy unutterable and full of glory. This reveals the powerful impact upon the believer of the love of Christ, which in turn is the love of God.

This passage was the one used by Jonathan Edwards as the heart of his large volume, *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*, first published in 1746.

Jonathan Edwards was faced with phenomena which occurred in revivals that took place under his and others', ministries. These phenomena were severely criticised. His Treatise was to provide the answer to those criticisms. We need not here trouble ourselves with those answers, but the nub of it all is that Edwards knew that the gospel of Jesus Christ should have a powerful impact upon the minds and hearts of men and women, and he made no apologies for the phenomena. His assertion was that Man has affections which are natural to him. By the word 'affections' he does not mean emotions and passions. He speaks of two faculties we have, the first being the cognitive one and the second the affective one. The cognitive relates to the mind, the affective to the heart. Here there is no division, for both constitute the full Man. When the Spirit of God opens the gospel to mind and heart then the action takes place which affects a person in his whole being. We might say that the affections leap to life, though they are by no means divorced from the mind.

Edwards' Treatise, I believe, ought to be read by all. He is saying that there is no true religion which is not affectional, and he means affectional in the good way. One can be stirred in the affections in a way which is quite evil. But, evil or not, Man has this affectional capacity or faculty and nothing is alive in a person unless it is

moved. So Edwards points out that throughout the Bible we see men and women in affectional states, having been deeply moved. There are the Psalms which seem almost totally affectional, yet without being irrational. So the gamut of 'affections' is described, including what we call the states of emotion such as joy, delight, pleasure, love, peace along with sorrow, anxiety, fear and suffering. All are affections. In addition, there are the affections such as hatred, jealousy, fury, cruelty—and so on. The following quote is long, but it helps us to see what Edwards understood by the affections. He draws from the verse we have quoted above (I Peter 1:8):

Here it may be inquired, what the affections of the mind are?—I answer, The affections are no other, than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.

God has endued the soul with two principal faculties: The one, that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns and judges of things; which is called the understanding. The other, that by which the soul is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers: or it is the faculty by which the soul beholds things—not as an indifferent unaffected spectator, but—either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names: it is sometimes called the inclination; and, as it respects the actions determined and governed by it, the will: and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart.

The exercises of this last faculty are of two sorts; either, those by which the soul is carried out towards the things in view in approving them, being pleased with and inclined to them; or, those in which the soul opposes the things in view, in disapproving them; and in being displeased with, averse from, and rejecting them. And as the exercises of the inclination are various in their kinds, so they are much more various in their degrees. There are some exercises of pleasedness or displeasement, inclination or disinclination, wherein the soul is carried but a little beyond a state of perfect indifference. And there are other degrees, wherein the approbation or dislike, pleasedness or aversion, are stronger; wherein we may rise higher and higher, till the soul comes to act vigorously and sensibly, and its actings are with that strength, that (through the laws of union which the Creator has fixed between soul and body) the motion of the blood

and animal spirits begins to be sensibly altered: whence oftentimes arises some bodily sensation, especially about the heart and vitals, which are the fountain of the fluids of the body. Whence it comes to pass, that the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, perhaps in all nations and ages, is called the heart. And it is to be noted, that they are these more vigorous and sensible exercises of this faculty, that are called the affections.²

If we use the idea of the affections, not neglecting the cognitive elements of the mind, then in the time of Christ's incarnation—and especially His ministry, death and resurrection—we certainly see the affective impression which He wrought upon the Palestinian community. Jesus has a deep affect on us when we read the Gospels. All the events of His baptism, His temptation, and His ministry can certainly be seen to be unusual to any reader, but without the revelation of Who Jesus really is, the chain of events will scarcely touch anybody. Once we are effectively informed as to Who He is and the significance of His words and actions, then we are in a world of wonder. When we are taken up into the event of His crucifixion—which by all intelligent criteria of assessment should seem to be a bloody failure and a horrible miscarriage of justice—then we are faced with the deepest and most profound issues concerning the human race. His resurrection is not only a vindication of His death, but it is the opening, universally, of life. The human race, when it understands, must be deeply moved both in mind and heart.

On the personal level, a person has an encounter with God because God has moved in his or her life. This person will be brought to a place where the affections which have been evil are spurned and these affections are stirred by the gospel. The affections are rarely—if ever—stirred by the gospel. But when the affections are stirred, they will most likely break out in certain manifestations. Such 'break outs' are generally more intense and clearly phenomenal during times of revival. This would be expected when the Community of love is alert to the reality of Christ, as the Spirit works in such an environment and atmosphere.

² The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 1, rev. Edward Hickman, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974 (1834), p. 237.

It should be noted that what Paul calls 'the natural man' or 'the unspiritual man' will look askance at such phenomena, for he would look only cognitively at the teaching which roused the human spirit. He would be tempted to react and to criticise for it would go against his natural way of life. To understand that we ought to go again to the second chapter of I Corinthians and give it thoughtful reading.

Love Breaks Out in the Human Community

Was there a time in history when love broke out clearly in the human community? The answer must be, 'Yes: it broke out in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost'. It could be described as 'an initial, principal break out'. The event of that day was the coming of the Holy Spirit who had been poured out by God the Father and the Son from the throne in heaven—whatever that may mean. By 'initial' we mean that such an event had not previously happened. By 'principal' we mean that it was now established by its very happening. There would be such an outpouring upon the Gentiles—the nations—as we read in Acts chapters ten and eleven. Again, according to the same principle, there would be an outpouring in Samaria when the Spirit came to this formerly disenfranchised people. We can also say that in whatever situation the Spirit comes to a person or a group of like-minded, people then love will be poured out. This was the case in Acts chapter four when the church prayed for the beleaguered Apostles, persecuted as they were by the Sanhedrin.

Now what do we mean by saying 'Love was poured out'? We mean that, as Romans 5:5 tells us, the love of God was poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. So when the Spirit came to the world in this initial, principal way, He poured God's love into all willing hearts.

If we ask ourselves what evidence we have of that claim, the answer is the 3,000 people who were affected by Peter's sermon and cried out, 'What shall we do?'. They responded and were baptised, and there began a community such as had not been before, but which has been seen innumerable times since. Acts 2:44-47 and Acts 4:3 1-35 describe the life of the community:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

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

We do not know what the 120 followers of Christ who awaited the coming of the Spirit that day were expecting. What they experienced under the revelation of the Spirit must have gratified them, but then what they saw take place in their new community must have delighted them beyond description. All Christ's teaching on love and His command to love must have come alive to them. The reality of I Peter 1:8 must have lived with them. Not only would that event have been remembered, but it would be seminal for the life of the new and growing community. It was this kind of glory which was to cover the earth as the water covers the sea. Love was no ideology for them, just the new way of life. Hence, the apostolic teaching as we find it in the Epistles is always trying to provoke 'to love and to good works' (Hebrews 10:24).

Coming to Know God in the Context of Christ's Community

A Jew of our days who is a faithful Jew may be expected to take issue with me in using words about the Christian community as though it were unique in history. He might be pardoned for taking

exception because of the community of Israel which, in history, certainly has been exemplary to all the nations of the world. He could rightly say, 'God in Covenant love loved us of all the nations of the earth and He transformed us from a slave people in Egypt to become the most unusual community in history'. We would have to agree. This Jewish friend could point to the law and all its precepts for true social living—loving living. And we would have to agree. It was, and is, a magnificent body of law. The law made practical provisions to live in the way of love. First, Israel was to love God with all its heart, soul, mind and strength. Then it was to love its neighbour as each one loved himself. It was to provide for the poor, the maimed, the orphans and widows, as also the aliens living in its land. Did the Church ever do better than that?

The first thing we might tell our Jewish friend is that it takes true heart to do all that he had spoken. It takes love at the core. Ideally this was how Israel should have lived. But its history tells us that Israel fought a battle between loving God and loving the idols. Its history is blotted with those exiled for the sin of not loving God. There is no need to quote these against Israel. Our friend knows about them.

The only answer for our friend is that the Messiah has come and that we have come to see God as our Father in a way not possible before. We have come to see that Christ is our High Priest and that He offered Himself as victim. What we hoped might bring salvation has been superseded by Christ as our Covenant and our salvation. So we could go on, but what we want to cry out is, 'Love has come in a way it did not even come at Sinai or in the temple at Jerusalem. We are the Community of love under the promised New Covenant, and the law of love is written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and we are constrained to love. Weak and imperfect as we are we know that we are loved and that it is life to us to love. Wherever we meet, whatever be the differences of race and culture and colour, we are the Community of love'.

Doubtless, in all this we dare not claim that we love in perfection, but among ourselves—as also from God—there is forgiveness for our failures. Grace restores love in an instant, and not just as a cover-up. It would be high pride to gather together the love achievements of the Church down through the ages as though that

would justify us in making special claims for our Community. We dare not make special claims. We only dare witness to the love that has been poured into our hearts, knowing that if we deny this affection, then we will suffer most from consciences made tender by forgiveness.

The One Truly Searching for God

It has been a long way around, these first nine chapters of this book, for all the time we have in mind the man or the woman, the child or the young person who is searching to find God and to know Him. There has been no guile in shaping the studies the way we have. We have had to cover the material in order to show that in creation God created Man to worship and love Him, and to be partner with Him. We have had to show the failure of Man, the presence of opposing evil, the division in mankind so that a seeker may see, even if dimly, that the Creator is loving and not cruel and indifferent to Man in his most awful plight. We had to try to teach that God is love, and this can be seen by the deeds He has done and purposes to do. We had, somehow, to come to the Community of love, Christ's people in today's world.

I trust that we have found that a seeker and searcher after God is not to feel that he is a single individual. Should he come to know God, he would not have to battle out a lonely, individual life. Perhaps he may have anticipated that just to know God would be enough, and that a community would therefore not be essential. But it could not be like that. As John Donne once put it, 'No man is an Island, entire of it self'. We are all part of a continent: we are one in community. Better still, we are one in communion. We are—so to speak—more in God when we are more in one another; more in one another when we are in God. One day we will be wholly in God—'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4) though still human and more than ever 'participating in the human nature'.

I am not urging the God-searcher simply to close on the matter, to have faith in God and be open to His love. It is not a nettle to be grasped, there is no terrifying decision to be made. But in the end it is just trusting God for His own being, believing that through

Christ's Cross he is forgiven and justified for ever, and that his conscience will applaud the decision. Then all of his cognition and affection will say 'Amen!' and be glad of the new life. Of course, I would urge anyone to do this. I have spent just about all my life doing such urging. I think that urging is more valid because of the new Community of love into which a person born of the Spirit finds himself. So, respond when the heart is warm, the mind convinced and the spirit willing. This is the best, ever, that a person can do.

Chapter Ten

Finding Out God

The Truth We Know and Come to Know

We proceed in this chapter with the thought in mind that we may now have those with us who are still searching for God. There will also be many who have come to know Him, or as Paul put it, 'have been known of God' and so know Him. There will be those who are 'finding out God', the description we found in the Book of Job: 'Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?' (Job 11:7). That is, they have been found by God, but now want to know everything possible about God. I think it is commendable. So, then, we will proceed with this in mind, that we have searchers, and we have finders, and what we say we trust will benefit both.

The Gift of Knowledge to Those Who Have Come to Know God

Those who know God are in a good position. In the first Letter of John the Apostle he tells us something to our advantage. We will quote the relevant passage and then scan it:

Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.

I write this to you about those who would deceive you; but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him. (I John 2:18-27)

The situation is that the Church lives in the last days, and these are the days when Antichrist will come to seek to destroy the flock of Christ. Some have already left the Church, but then if they had been genuine believers they would have remained and their going gives us a realistic understanding of who believes. It is here that John makes the strong point that those in the Church know that those who have left are wrong. How? Because, John says, 'You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know'.¹ He could mean all of you know what you needed to know, or you know all things—not only those that pertain to the matter of Antichrist. I believe it means the latter, so that He does not write in order to tell them the truth, which as yet they do not know, but to remind them of what they do know. They know the truth and they will see the falsity of those who have left. Those ones who are false deny the Father and the Son and so it means they have no relationship with the Father and the Son. John urges them plainly, 'Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father'. He goes on further to say, 'You have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him'.

This means that those who have newly come to know God do not have to think they must now learn by a long and perhaps painful process. They may think that their older brethren are far ahead of them in true knowledge. This is not the case. 'But you have been anointed by the Holy One' can possibly mean that God, or Christ, has anointed them with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit has brought true knowledge to them. Some would differ with me on that exegesis, but the principle I have stated is true, nevertheless,

¹ Note the differences in translation. The NRSV says, 'But you have been anointed by the Holy One and all of you have knowledge'. NIV has, 'But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth'. NASB has, 'But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know'. NKJV has, 'But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things'. The weight of these translations appears to confirm my interpretation that follows.

even if here I am shaping it to my idea. To say, as John said, 'His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie', surely indicates that 'the anointing' is not just a chrism, but a person, the Person of the Holy Spirit.

A close study of John chapters fourteen, fifteen and sixteen reveals what the coming of the Holy Spirit was to mean to the Apostles, namely that He would be their Teacher. He would bring all things that Christ had taught into their remembrance and then teach all these things to them so that they would know them. He would lead them into all the truth, so then they would know 'all things', the very term used by John in his First Letter (NKJV). He would glorify both the Father and the Son so that they would know God—the point John makes in our present passage. Through them the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. He would also tell them of 'things to come'.

Now all of this adds up to something wholly substantial. They would know all the truth. Those who came to Christ on the day of Pentecost were promised 'the gift of the Holy Spirit'. With His coming, then, they too would be anointed and all of them would know all things. This is because the Spirit, having flooded them with love and revelation of God, would ever teach them all things. This reminds us of what Paul said in I Corinthians 2:9-16:

But, as it is written,

'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him,'

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 'For who has

known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.

This passage is surely saying that the natural Man—the Man who does not know God—will look on what is taught as not understandable. In the previous chapter of I Corinthians, Paul pointed out that the Jew would find the Cross to be a scandal, and the intellectual Greek would find it to be foolishness: ‘But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (I Corinthians 1:24, NKJV). So then, we come to the wonderful conclusion that all who have come to know God, to be found of God, to have been known of God, have the whole body of truth. When they are taught by appointed teachers they will—so to speak—recognise that which is being taught. If it is true, they will know, and if it is not true, they will know.

We might then ask why there should be teachers. The answer is that John taught those whom he knew to have the truth. The teacher has various tasks in teaching those who are taught by the Holy Spirit. One of their tasks is to bring out to their conscious understanding that which they know, that they may know it in practice and in situations such as John was speaking about—the coming of Antichrist into their midst with lying and deceit.

Our special point is that there are so many things which need to be taught, so many depths of God to be plumbed, and we do not have the faculty to be able to do this. The Holy Spirit does this. If we look at our long quote above and consider verses 9 and 10 we will see what the Spirit teaches: ‘But, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,” God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God’. Paul has said that we have never seen, never heard, nor ever imagined, what God has revealed to us by His Spirit. What could these things possibly be? Well, Paul has just been talking about the future things of glorification, so they would include these coming things. In any case, they are things of ‘the deeps of God’, things we could never reason out because they are well out of our reach.

What We Have Come to Know Is the Truth

That we have come to know the truth is important. At the end of the quote from I John 2, verse 27 stands out in regard to being taught what is ‘the truth’: ‘But the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing *teaches you about everything, and is true*, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him’ (italics mine). John is writing about ‘those who would deceive’ them (2:26), ‘the liar ... the antichrist’ (2:22). The Antichrist is everything that is false—for he is the ancient serpent come in a new guise. Then how shall the believer counter his deceit, so clever it is? The answer given by John is that the Holy Spirit, who came into the world at Pentecost for these last days before the climax of the end-time, will bring pure truth to the believer and the whole Church. In the same letter John wrote: ‘This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. *And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth*’ (I John 5:6-7, italics mine). We need to take some time off to look at the whole matter of ‘the truth’.

When speaking about grace we quoted John 1:14,17: ‘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. ... For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’. We have previously observed in Exodus 34:6-7 that ‘grace and truth’ fairly covered God’s glory as He revealed it to Moses. In this reference the word ‘faithfulness’ equals ‘truth’ or trustworthiness. Truth in the Old Testament is *emeth* and has two aspects, that of factuality and that of faithfulness. Faithfulness is adherence to what is so—ontologically so—in accordance with the nature of God and His good Creation.

At this point we see that the truth came through Jesus Christ. Elsewhere we have talked about grace coming with Jesus Christ. But here we see that Christ is the truth. If we could sum up Jesus’ incarnation from one point of view it would be in the words Jesus spoke to Pilate. Pilate said to Him, ‘So you are a king?’. Jesus answered: ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for

this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice'. Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?' (John 18:37-38). And well may he have done so for he lived in the halls of power where chicanery, deceit and lying were very much the order of political life.

Christ's claim that He had come to witness to the truth was an extraordinary statement, not limited to those brief hours of judgement in Jerusalem but for the future of the whole world. It was cosmic in its significance. Truth, it would be seen, is not merely a body of ideas that are true, or even an ideology that will capture mankind. Truth is the very Person of God incarnate Who, with the Father of truth² and the Spirit of truth, will work out truth to its triumphant climax in history.

The fact is that the truth is God Himself, His Triune Being both immanent and outworking in things *ad intra* and *ad extra*.³ Jesus' statement that He had come into the world to bear witness to the truth seemed to infer that until Christ came in person, the truth was not in the world—not, anyway, as it had come to be in the person of Christ. Without doubt truth has always been in the world which God has created and which He upholds by the word of His Son (Hebrews 1:3). Truth has always been there as God communicates with the human race. But with the incursion of the serpent into the realm of Creation, not all that is in the world is truth. There is the conflict of truth and falsehood.

God's Counsel Is the Truth

In our next chapter we will discuss what is the truth that is being worked out in history. For the counsel of God is the truth

² In John 8:43-44 Jesus told the Jewish leaders: 'Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies'. If the devil is the father of lies then God is the Father of the truth.

³ Theologians have held that God in His Triune Being—God immanent—is sufficient in Himself, not needing to be other than He is, within Himself. When He creates this is His act of pure love. He is not contingent on Creation to be Himself. He does not therefore create out of necessity but out of pure love.

declared, the truth being established over and against the lie. The lie is the deceit of Satan and 'this present evil age'. That declaration of truth was what Christ was about. What began in Palestine in the incarnation of the Son was, and is, to work its way through history to the ultimate defeat of the lie. Looked at on the cosmic dimension, this declaration of truth would involve principalities and powers both good and evil and all creatures celestial and terrestrial. Pilate could scarcely have understood the answer to his question, 'What is truth?', for he was concerned with the power of Rome and not the power of God. He would have had his fill of political deceptions, ambitions, maneuvering and deadly enmity. The word 'truth' must have seemed like adolescent idealism.

We see something of the battle for truth that Jesus had with the leaders of the Jews. This began early in His ministry but broke open on the occasion described in John chapter eight. That occasion was primarily about the truth. We are told that as He spoke many believed on Him: 'Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."' (John 8:31-32). He was saying that knowing the truth—the truth as He taught it—makes a person free. This was an extraordinary statement, but not outside certain teachings in Israel.

Those to whom Jesus spoke⁴ protested that they were not in bondage to anyone. He then told them, in effect, that He, Himself was the truth. To know the truth was to be freed from sin's bondage. Thus, to know Jesus was to be freed from sin's bondage. To know Him—the truth—would be liberating. Such high claims enraged them. Jesus said, 'But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God' (John 8:40). So simple were His words: He had heard the truth from God and was telling them! They further argued with Him and He asked them:

⁴ There is a problem that we face in verse 31 ff. Did Jesus speak only to those who professed to believe in Him, or to the Jews who represented a hostile audience? One solution is that at the point of verse 31 it was directly to the Jews who professed belief, but that they reneged on that belief and were again one with the hostile audience.

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do Your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. (John 8:43-47)

Jesus was splitting the situation wide open. He was saying that He had come into the world to tell the truth, and that what faced Him was not a company of godly Jews but the very children of the devil—so far gone were they from the truth. What enraged them was that they believed themselves to be in the truth of God. This takes us back to what we discussed in Chapter Six. We saw what happened in the Garden of Eden, where the first couple listened to the word of the serpent rather than the word of the very God Who created them. The serpent was the first 'spin doctor', making the truth seem to be lie and the lie seem to be the truth. Later, the woman claimed she had been beguiled. But Adam, Paul tells us, was not deceived. He had deliberately gone for the lie—hence the enormity of his sin.⁵

Was truth then abandoned? Of course not. It was the beginning of the war between truth and deceit. That 'ancient serpent the devil' was 'the father of lies' and from the beginning set out to deceive the whole world. Such a conflict is not confined to the people of God but—as we keep saying—was cosmic in its dimensions. Personal evil powers have always fought to subvert Man from a true understanding of God and His Creation. They have sought to usurp His government, and to distort the truth in all its forms. So much so men preferred 'to exchange the truth for a lie and to worship and serve the creation rather than the Creator' (Romans 1:25).

⁵ See Genesis 3:8-13 and I Timothy 2:13-15.

The Destroyer of the Liar and the Lie

As we have repeatedly said, all history is a battle between the truth (God Himself) and the liar (the serpent himself). God has exposed the lie and come upon the 'father of lies' and unhanded him. The Apostle John spoke of one of the main reasons for the incarnation: 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil' (I John 3:8). What a task! Could the entirety of the works of the devil be destroyed? Had He not destroyed the works of the devil then the lie of the serpent would have triumphed and the world would have been doomed to chaos. We will see, shortly, that Christ destroyed the devil at the Cross and the tomb.

So we see that all Christ's ministry was a battle between Himself and the devil. The Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. But He answered every lying temptation with Scripture, that is, the truth. The devil was defeated by the truth—the uttered truth of God. Peter also, convinced at the time of his finest hour with Christ that the Cross was not to be for Christ, said so to deter Him from it. He was rebuked by Christ saying: 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men' (Matthew 16:23). Satan later used Judas Iscariot to betray Christ. We are told that at the Last Supper Satan 'put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him' (John 13:2).

Jesus referred to His coming conflict with Satan a number of times. On one occasion He likened Satan to 'the strong man', but said he would be defeated. He also used the terms 'cast down' and 'I cast out'.

All of this had to do with the truth. Until the truth was revealed the lie would prevail. Jesus was the truth which came into the world. He told men and women the truth as God had told Him. He lived the truth out before them. They said of Him, 'No man ever spoke like this man!' (John 7:46). On the night of His betrayal He told them, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me' (John 14:6). Jesus was saying that He was: (i) the way to the Father; (ii) the truth of the Father; and (iii) the

life of the Father. He came to bear witness to the Father, whom He called, that very night, ‘the only true God’ (John 17:3). Earlier in His discourse on the true vine He had told His disciples, ‘You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you’ (John 15:13), and a little later, in His High-Priestly prayer of John 17 He prayed to the Father, ‘Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth’ (verse 17).

So much is spoken of the truth that if we did not take it all quietly and piece by piece—so to speak—then we would be overwhelmed by it all. The fact is that He did witness to the truth by coming with the truth and as the truth, and it is that truth which makes sinners in bondage able to become free. To say that the Cross was the place where God’s truth—which is His faithfulness—is wholly at work may sound strange, but it is the fact. If we can talk about the factuality of God, then it was displayed at the Cross. If we can talk about the work of His moral glory, then that too was outworked on the Cross.

What we have been saying in this chapter is related to the fact that we have an anointing from the Holy One and we know it all. That is, we can ‘find out God’ because God has given us the gift of the knowledge of Himself. This is living knowledge, because it is knowledge that comes from being in relationship with God. In our heart of hearts we know it all—we know God, and know Him enough to know we know Him little, yet that little requires all our faculties to comprehend and to live out the knowledge. We have come to know the truth, and the truth has made us free. We can now live freely in the truth. There is no other way to live freely.

Chapter Eleven

The Whole Counsel of God

Introduction: What, Then, Shall We Learn?

We have just come from seeing that when a person finds God then to him or her is given ‘the anointing’ which ‘teaches everything’, that is, that which endows the person with the truth. We have said that this is the way a person ‘finds out’ God. We have seen that God is the truth. Being ‘the only true God’—as against the false gods and lords—the one coming to know God is furnished with the understanding of Who He is and what He does, and what He is about in His purposes for His Creation in history. This is the truth which God has taught down through the ages by prophet and priest, by His elect people, and by His Son Who became incarnate in order to bring the gospel into being. This is the truth which the Spirit of truth has brought to the heart of redeemed Man. The gift to us of this apostolic gospel is the gift of truth.

If this truth were just a theology which one could reason through from beginning to end—given certain premises—then the most intelligent of us would be better placed to know the mystery of God than those less equipped cognitively. Of course, the truth which is the apostolic gospel is not like this at all. As we have just said, God is a mystery and He is known through revelatory teaching. By ‘mystery’ we mean ‘secret’. By using the term ‘revelatory’ we do not mean that God is known through some mystical means, or through visions which visit a person. We mean that God reveals Himself by mysteries¹ and each mystery is a secret hitherto undisclosed until God opens it to us. It is only when God reveals that we come to experience and comprehend the mysteries. There are, too, certain conditions before the truth opens up to us. A certain attitude of mind and heart is essential for our reception and understanding of the mystery.

What, then, shall we learn? We could answer in the simplest term ‘the gospel’ and we would be correct. This would compass ‘all the truth’ into which the disciples would be led by the Holy Spirit as

¹ For an expansion of the theme of ‘the mystery’ and ‘mysteries’ see my book, *The Glory of the Mystery and the Mystery of the Glory*, NCPI, 1998.

Christ had promised. Today we often distinguish between 'law' and 'gospel' and from one angle they are different. 'Law' covers the Old Testament, and 'gospel' the New Testament. More clearly defined, 'law' is to do with the way Israel lived before God, and 'I gospel' with the redemption offered to all mankind through Christ. So 'law' and 'grace' are opposites. Undoubtedly, this is one way of dealing with these two elements. But it is not satisfactory, for Christ came not to obliterate the law and the prophets but to be their fulfilment, their establishment. Christ was always the goal of the law and the prophets. We do not have time, here, to enter into this very complex matter. But we do take the opportunity to point out that 'gospel' really covers everything from Genesis to Revelation. In one way of speaking, it is 'the whole counsel of God'. When we ask again, 'What, then, shall we learn?', our answer should therefore be, 'The whole counsel of God'.

That is the term we take up now: 'the whole counsel of God'. This is found in Paul's address to the elders of the Ephesian church when they met him at Miletus. The whole text of the address is found in Acts 20:18-35. Paul claims he has preached exhaustively 'the gospel of the grace of God'. We break into his address at verse 25:

And now, behold, I know that all you among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. (Verses 25 to 27)

Note the statement, 'I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God'. 'The whole counsel of God' has been variously translated as 'the will of God', 'all the will of God', 'the whole purpose of God', 'the whole will of God', 'the gospel in all its fullness', and 'all the contents of the divine plan'.² The word counsel (*boule*) means 'purpose', 'intention', 'degree', 'resolution', 'decision'. In Ephesians 1:9-10 we read:

² The word *boule* for 'counsel' in the New Testament comes from the verb *boulomai* which is: 'to will deliberately'; to 'have a purpose'; to 'be minded'. It is used in Acts 5:33 and has the idea of 'to consult together'. In the Old Testament the main noun for 'counsel' is *etsah*. It has numerous meanings but the general idea is 'advice'. Counsellors often work by advice, or give it, or share it together for good or for bad purposes. In the New Testament, the verb *bouleuo* is used with similar meaning. But nowhere is counsel (*boule*) concerned with sharing or seeking Wisdom regarding a specified event.

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

God's will is a mystery, and it is according to His purpose and that purpose is fulfilled in Christ. The purpose is to head up all things in Christ. In Revelation 10:7 it is called 'the mystery' again: 'But that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled'. This mystery is the whole plan of God that has been being worked out in the Book of the Revelation by the agency of the Son, the Slain Lamb. So we see that the mystery of God's will is only opened to those to whom God reveals the secret of that will. To those who would desire to know it, God gives 'all wisdom and insight'.

In Ephesians 1:11 Paul again talks about the will of God: 'In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will...'. 'The purpose of His will' here is the same as 'the whole counsel [purpose] of God', which we have discussed, above. 'Will', 'counsel', 'purpose' are really one in their meaning. In Ephesians 3:7-11 Paul, talking about 'the plan of the mystery', surely means 'what God has planned and purposed'. This is important. The celestial principalities and powers watch the life and movement of the Church in order to know God's will and purpose.

Things which would seem to be against God's purpose are included in it because they, too, have been purposed with the plan. Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28 are examples of this:

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

For truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.

This principle of God's purpose and the execution of it is stated by Paul in Romans chapter eight:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom He justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30, emphasis mine)

Coming to Know the Plan and Purpose of God

To know the plan and purpose of God really means to know the will of God. In the Lord's Prayer we pray to the, Father Who is in heaven. We pray that His name may be holy to us. We live in the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. We pray, 'Thy Kingdom come', as though we know that that is God's will. We pray, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. We are thus asking that all heaven and earth combine with the Holy Father to **work out His plan in** history. Did we know that it was that for which we were praying? Did we know—as Jesus taught us—that all we are about in our living is to know and do the will of God? If we know the will and plan of God—for they are the one—then this is what we are learning day by day. It is for this will and plan of God that we are praying.

We will not here enter into the matter of knowing the will of God, for that would constitute a subject on its own and much has been written about it. One key to the matter of God's will is in John 7:16-17: 'So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." '. We could adapt it to say that if we seek to do God's will we will know what is truth and what is not. To pray,

'Thy will be done' is sufficient.³ For God reveals His will to those willing to do His will. Willingness to know the will is the way to knowing the will. 'As you go you know, and as you know you go.'

One example of refusing to know God's will—God's sovereignty—and then coming to know it again is the story of the rise, fall and rising again of King Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel. This is a story which is well worth the time given to a close study. In the fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel, we read of Nebuchadnezzar. Briefly, the prophet Daniel is called in to interpret a dream which the king had, the meaning of which had been hidden from the king. It was of a great tree which was to be hewn down and only its stump was allowed to remain. A severe fate was prophesied for the stump, which turns out to be the king. The outcome of this fate was 'to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men'. Daniel interpreted the dream and warned the King against pride in his own achievements. Let him be humble or let him become insane. The King did not heed the warning. Overcome with the brilliance of himself and his accomplishments he became proud and God sent him mad. When the prescribed judgement was fulfilled, Nebuchadnezzar was restored to sanity. He certainly came to understand the will of God in history and the foolishness of a human being pitting himself against the God of heaven. The story concludes as quoted below from Daniel 4:34-37:

At the end of the days 1, 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

³ As we have noted, knowing God's will is a subject which could take a lot of time in discussion and perhaps to no great result. In Ephesians 5:17 we read, 'Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is'. The context may give us some help, which is all about being 'Filled with the Spirit', but we do not press that. Often Jesus disclosed elements of God's will to His listeners. He Himself said He delighted in the Father's will (cf. Hebrews 10:5-9).

or say to him, “What doest thou?”

At the same time my reason returned to me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendour returned to me. My counsellors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase.

The Whole Counsel of God: God’s Will, Purpose and Plan

Innumerable thinkers, philosophers and religionists have pondered the idea of the Creation and what it is all about. Some ponder the ‘how?’ of Creation’s genesis, hoping that that will answer the ‘why?’ of it. Others study the nature of the Creation, hoping to understand its functional being and operation and so obtain something of the ‘why?’ or ‘wherefore?’ of it. As a result there are many world views which have been developed, and such views determine the attitudes and acts of those who hold them. Religionists find some meaning in theism, in imputing powers to gods, spirits and idols.

The biblical view is that of God Who created all things, and that He is concerned for the Creation. He sustains the Creation with life. Deists believe that there is a God but that He does not relate to Creation in this personal way and has arranged it so that it continues to its end by itself, assuming that there is an ‘end’. This is not a biblical view. The biblical view is that before God created He had planned for the operation of Creation from beginning to end, and that ‘the end’ would be ‘the beginning’ of a new heaven and a new earth.

The Bible is not a textbook. It is not a blueprint for history. It does not set out history beforehand and speak of God’s goals in anticipation of them being fulfilled. Not, anyway, in the manner that textbooks would set forth such principles. At the same time, by searching the text of the Bible, we can see the intentions of God for His Creation—which He set even before creating the universe. We can discover His goals. We can also have a good

understanding of history and where it is going and what its end will be. This is what we intend to briefly cover in this and other chapters.

God’s Story

There are many headings we could use to indicate God’s intentions, the history from beginning to end. The first to set out the idea in some form was Jonathan Edwards who wrote his ‘History of Redemption’. Following him we have ‘Salvation History’ (*Veilsgeschichte*), of which there are many forms. A good title could be ‘From Creation to Creation’, which is to say from the primal creation to the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. ‘From Eden to Eden’ would be another descriptive title. Other names used are ‘His Story’, ‘The Story of God’, and ‘The Story of the Acts of God’.

The value of this method of studying Scripture is that it is in conformity with the Bible itself. Far from being a theological tome, the Bible is a storybook. The Bible is ‘The Story’—the story of God, Man and Creation. When we read the Bible as a story, and are helped along by one or more folk who have succeeded in seeing it to be a story, then we derive much enjoyment from it. Our understanding is no longer just that of a book which many of us have considered to be quite dull. When we read the Bible as the story of God, Man and Creation, we realise that this is our story—that we are in the story. We can be deeply moved as we begin to read the Bible in this way.

As a student and a writer of fiction, I know that people love a story. Children love a story because they believe it is their story as they identify with characters and situations. There are those who are impatient with fiction because it is not real. I myself dislike science fiction for the same reason, but I recognise that the business of persons, relationships and human life are worked out as much in this type of fiction as any other. Those who reject fiction do so because they think it is fanciful, but almost all fiction has been born of fact. We even have a category of writing called ‘faction’, which is a melding of fiction and fact. Whether we like or dislike fiction, we love a story, and the Bible has been called by Fulton

Oursler, 'The greatest story ever told'. With that introduction we will set out on our story which is 'The Whole Counsel of God', alias 'From Eden to Eden', 'Salvation History', and so on.

Eden the Home of Humanity

'Eden' is really a word for encapsulating the idea of Creation, the creation of nature and of Man in particular, and the reason for Man being in this world. In the wider sense we will see its meaning in the future will pertain to a new Creation which is redeemed, sanctified, glorified and perfected. Our story will be moved from a beautiful Eden, and then be transcended by an Eden which is God's Holy City and His Paradise for His people. Eden will be—as we have just said—redeemed, sanctified, glorified and perfected. This is what makes the story of the first Eden so marvellous. It also makes history so rich with meaning as God's plan unfolds, millennium after millennium, until it climaxes in the victory of history through Christ the Lord, His Father and the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 2:7 speaks of God forming Man of dust from the ground and breathing into him 'the breath of life'. In this way, Man becomes a living being, an intelligent creature with a personality. God makes him from what we might call 'the general dust' of the earth. He also creates a special, park—like garden called Eden and He places the man in it. The creation of his wife follows. Man has the responsibility of the garden as well as the freedom of it. All he receives is caution regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He is not to eat the fruit of this under pain of death. His wife is created from his side by God, and is designated as a helpmeet' or 'helpmate'. The coming together of the Man and the Woman in marriage is called 'one flesh'. It is a state in which they understand themselves to be one.

The couple is then given a mandate or commission which explains why they were created, for what function and purpose:

And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. "And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all

the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit, you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. (Genesis 1:28-30)

There have been many explanations of this commission but it must be understood that Man stood in Covenant relationship with God, and God we have seen is Father to the human race. It is as partners to God in Covenant that they receive the commission. In essence, it is that they are to be fruitful through children, that they are to take what is the special life in Eden and take it to the whole world. We would call it 'Edenising the whole world'. They are to subdue dynamic forces within the Creation. As God is King, Man is to be His under-king over the whole world, God's vice-regent, so to speak. If this interpretation is correct, then Man is to work toward a great time or day when the whole earth will be filled with the glory of God.

In our studies we have seen that the serpent was present in Eden and tempted the couple to disobey God. Eve, being deceived, then disobeyed. But Adam knew what he was doing. God ejected them from the garden because the tree of life was in the garden and if they were to eat of it they would perpetuate their present fallen condition forever. The two humans left the garden knowing that God had promised He would destroy the serpent who had tempted them. His destruction would be by a child of their humanity.

The rest of the Story is about Man and his descendants being outside Eden but always longing to have Eden again, though not always wanting God to be in there with them. Eden was a place, rightly understood, in which there was peace, plenty, serenity in the glorious presence of God, communion with God, elevating worship, and the incredible commission to Edenise all of this world. We find vestiges of this eikon of Eden in many minds.

The development of the Story from the time of their ejection until the end begins with the first of humanity, our most ancient forbears, and their behaviour, until a flood was necessary to judge humanity because it had grown violent and corrupt. This is called the pre-flood time of human history. The post-flood era is the

story of Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. In Genesis chapter ten we have what we call 'the roll-call of the nations'. God is interested in nations, and not just individual persons.

When God visited a Shemmite—a descendant of Shem in Mesopotamia—whose name was Abram, then what we might call the covenantal history of mankind entered into a new and wonderful phase and era. We have said that God's interest was in the nations of the world. Indeed, chapter ten of Genesis was about nations and leads on to chapter eleven which introduces Abram ('exalted father'), who was renamed by God as 'father of a multitude' (Genesis 17:5). Nations were to have blessing or cursing from God according to their right or wrong relationship with Abraham and his people.

The promise of God in His Covenant, that He will be with His people and be for them no matter what their adversities, is brought into action with the people Israel when they are enslaved in Egypt. He brings them out of Egypt and through the wilderness to a land which is a veritable Eden. The people understood it was to be their Eden for it was to be a land flowing with milk and honey, a veritable paradise. God laid down principles for their continued blessing when they would reach the land and inhabit it. He also set down warnings of cursing which would overtake them were they to break the Covenant. He gave to them a law, the likeness of which no other people or culture had ever seen. He gave them gifts which Paul later nominates:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the Promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen (Romans 9:4-5)

The history of Israel is not just a matter *of* events, of good and bad kings, times *of* blessing and cursing—though it is not less than that—but it is a history through which the events on the horizon of human history which we call 'eschatological' and 'the telos' come increasingly into view. Teaching about God and His plans for Israel widens, as it were, the lens of the projector. Prophetic teaching of a wonderful nature lifts the gaze of the faithful in Israel to the coming days. In those days there will be the coming of

Messiah—'God with us'—and the great sacrifice which will be universal in its scope of redeeming. A new Israel will arise and proclaim the mercy of God to the four corners of the earth. The nations will come to the centre of the universe, the new—or renewed—Israel, and there, in the new Israel, the nations will learn of God. There will be great tribulation and a cosmic battle between God and Satan. All rebellious forces will be destroyed and the people of God will be the Bride to His Son in the great marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb. This has sometimes been called 'the climax of the Covenant'.

The climax of the Covenant will be known as the great Sabbath into which all Creation will enter. For there will be a new heaven and a new earth. All will be sanctified, glorified and perfected. All things and creatures within it will share in it. It will also be known as 'the inheritance', an inheritance fit for the sons of God. Certainly it will be the new, true Eden. Its inhabitants will be those who have conquered by the blood of the Lamb. These also constitute the Bride of the Lamb. The river of life will flow through the Holy City and on both sides of the river will be the tree of life. It will be perpetually fruitful and its leaves will have been for the healing of the nations.

This Eden is guaranteed proof against any serpent. All those evil creatures will have been vanquished in the lake of fire, as also all elements rebellious to the Creator-Redeemer. The glory of the Lord will be in and over all things.

Much more could be said and we will yet see a further opening up of what we have indicated in this bird's-eye view of God's Story. just as little children taste afresh the joy of a story when it is retold, and just as they mouth the parts which delight and excite them, so we will have occasion to do this.

At the beginning of this chapter, we emphasised that, having come to know God—or He having been gracious to know us—we now have all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We handle, treasure, meditate on and contemplate this wisdom and knowledge. It is no wonder that Jeremiah exhorted us with these words:

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Chapter Twelve

The Community of Those Who Know God

Introduction: The Community Beloved of God

We have looked at the nature of the Community of those who have come to know God. To know God, we saw, means to know the truth, for God is the true God. Who He is and what He does constitutes the truth. We saw the scope of truth, so far as His Community is concerned, is the story of creation, and of what God has done and will do in what we are pleased to call 'God's Story', 'Salvation History', 'From Eden to Eden', and so on.

We have also seen that the Community has existed at least from the time of Abel, who was the first nominated prophet and the first named in the roll-call of faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The Community of the true sons of God has always existed and with the coming of the unique Son of God—Jesus of Nazareth—that Community was greatly enlarged. The impetus to its growth came with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The love of God was then flooded into the hearts of thousands, and this process has gone on happening over the past two millenniums.

This Community which we call 'the Church' is unique. It is not just an organisation which has been planned and wrought of people who follow the teaching of their Master—as in Islam and Buddhism—but it is an organism, a living Body, a Community in which the Master, Jesus Christ, is present and is the Head. The Community has been given the fullness of its Head, which means it is empowered to fulfil the work it has been given by Him to accomplish. Not only is the pattern of the Community that they love God for forgiving them their sins and making them his own children, but they love one another with a strangely beautiful love. For them to refuse to love a brother is counted as an act of hatred and is seen even as murder in the heart. So deep is their

Community love!¹ Their love is not just for the Community but for all who have not as yet come to know God. Some of these are bitter enemies of God and the Community, but the members of that Community have a deep and genuine love for them.

The Community is unique because every true member of it is one who knows God, that is, has been known of Him and brought to salvation and baptised into the Head. Each one is a member of His living Body. This kind of language is not used in other religions and faiths. This is what makes the Community distinctive. At this point we are not concentrating so much on descriptions of the Community as on the ways in which it came into being and continues to live and work in the world. To those who have not yet found God—or been found by God—this discussion of the Church can be of great interest and value.

The Beloved Community Comes into Being

Someone has said that the Church is *the* modern miracle. The Church could be described as the followers of Jesus Christ banding themselves into a group of men and women faithful to the memory of their crucified Master. But this description would only be partially true, for the fact is that this group believed that their Master had risen from the dead on the Sunday following His Friday crucifixion. That belief had obviously changed them from being a frightened band of followers into a confident company of believers. Even so, something more than belief in Jesus' resurrection was needed to weld them into a society which would face the world without fear, proclaiming that through this crucified and risen Man the Kingdom of God had triumphed. Now, they proclaimed, sinful human beings could be forgiven and justified from guilt.

That something which transformed these believers from a wavering group to a strong society was not just a proposition

¹ 'But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes' (I John 2:11). 'We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death' (I John 3:14). 'if any one says, I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen' (I John 4:20).

regarding Jesus and His Cross and Resurrection. There was the very sight of Him as a risen person. There was His forty days of constant teaching after the resurrection, and His ascension into heaven which had been confirmed by angelic witnesses in white raiment, They believed that their physical parting from Him was no great loss, for He had stated He would go in this way. He had also promised them that He would come and be present with them always through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit would give them power to proclaim their message which they called 'the gospel' or 'the proclamation'.

If we are somewhat puzzled as to how a Community such as we describe could suddenly—instantaneously, so to speak—come into being, then we must look at the facts. On the day of Pentecost some one hundred and twenty of Jesus' followers gathered together in a certain place. Jesus told them to expect to be baptised in the Holy Spirit. From this baptism, He had told them, they would receive power to witness to Him first at Jerusalem, then in Judea, then in Samaria, and following that, in all the world.

We could ask: 'Why would they need to do that? Was it simply to enlarge the movement they were in and gather more adherents? What was the purpose of "witnessing to Jesus"?'. The believers would have said, 'There is no other name under heaven by which humanity can be saved' (Acts 4:12). 'Saved from what?' you might ask. They would have answered somewhat after this manner: 'From the judgement of God on sin; from the power and penalty of sin; from the power of Satan. This saving would bring peace and joy. This saving would be the means of entering God's Kingdom, of knowing God and becoming His people. The one who believes the proclamation is saved from death and given the gift of eternal life'. They would have said these things and many more besides. They would have pointed out that Jesus of Nazareth was, in reality, the Son of God, and that by His suffering on the Cross and by His rising from the grave, He had been exalted by God to the highest place of government and power in the whole universe.

Some of those answers might sound strange to us today, but they were the elements that would have been used by that first

Christian Community. They are answers that we still need to understand.

Those assembled on the day of Pentecost who knew Christ were so astonished when the truth of their Master broke through by the power of the Holy Spirit. They had not understood the purpose of the Cross; they had not dreamed He would rise again, even though He had told them that He would do so. Now they understood how God could forgive their sin, and how the Man who rose from the dead could give them eternal life.

The Loving Community

In Chapter Three we began a discussion on 'The Dynamics of the Early Church' and we picked it up again in Chapter Eight under the title of 'The Love That Transforms'. We saw how love flooded the new Community without any prescribed teaching or coaxing. It broke out spontaneously and every member of the Community loved and was loved. So much so that members sold possessions and even houses and land and gave the proceeds so that the impoverished, the orphans, widows and other needy ones could be supplied at the point of their need. Not only did that happen within the new church at Jerusalem, but the nearest, newest church in Antioch in Syria sent supplies to the church at Jerusalem when a famine was about to break across Palestine. Churches in Greece and Macedonia were quick, also, with their support.

The secret of being loved and loving was hidden within the gospel, or what we have called 'the whole counsel of God'. Put simply, we could say that a human being knows God's love when he/she is forgiven. Coming to know that love, he/she loves others and, of course, where necessary, forgives others. That love flows throughout the Community and beyond it to the world.

At this point we are going to look at the birth and growth of the church at Jerusalem and then look out into the world and see the whole Church today. The early Church was composed of human beings who were as faulty and imperfect as any reader of this book. Yet such members had a love which was recognised wherever they went—into whatever community and culture. I

freely admit that the Church is not perfect. It has been responsible for some terrible—some would say horrific—happenings. Even so, overall, the record of the Church is extraordinary. Ideologies or sectarianism may hold together, fiercely united for a time. But eventually the cracks begin to show and the splits widen and the cause is lost. Not so with the Church. Those who persist in their divisive efforts are eventually outfaced. Those who love belong to the heart of the love Community.

For a moment let us suppose we are analysing—from a purely objective perspective—how the early Church came into being. Suppose we wanted to create such a church as being a useful relational community, a kind of paradigm for other such communities. How then would we go about it? The slave proletariat in Egypt called 'Israel' had one thing going for it: it was already a community which was formed out of one race. It had a history of unity. It was a people under a Covenant created by God. Ideally it worshipped one God. It was enslaved but resilient. It is difficult to imagine that it could have ever fought its own way out of the slavery which had come upon it. But it was a community. Also, it is conceivable that it may have escaped from Egypt if it had developed a strong leadership. But the point is that before it did anything, it was a community.

But it was on one day, the day of Pentecost, that the new Community sprang into life. At first all members were Jews, but they never saw themselves as a community who had renounced their Jewish membership. They were one with Israel. Soon, nevertheless, the community called Samaritans became a church, or—if you like—one with the church at Jerusalem and Judea. Then Gentiles were converted as a group, and soon there were churches composed of Jews and Greeks. The Church was composed of both men and women, slaves and freemen, and those out of a myriad of ethnic backgrounds. They may have had their difficulties with cultural, gender, and ethnic elements, but even so they were 'all one in Christ Jesus'. This was the miracle of those early days of the Church.

The purpose of the 'objective analysis' of the early Church above was to visualise how we could create such a love Community. What would be the formula? What methodology? How would we

stimulate the love essential to the nature and survival of the Community? How would we create a message which would answer the deepest spiritual and theological needs of such a diverse group? How could we train leaders who were not power people, leaders who were not despots, hungry to rule and fulfil the ambitions that we all deplore?

There are some who deem themselves qualified to produce a clone of the early Church. But this is not our task. Rather, it is the examination of the factors which brought churches to birth. These factors are still present in the amazing continuance of the love Communities formed by the gospel.

The Way of the Church: Pastoral Dynamics

We will now observe the day-to-day life of the early Church. What was its societal nature? What did it do? How did it worship? How did it see itself in the counsel of God—in His plan and purpose for the Community, as well as the whole of Creation?

We saw that the occasion of the Church's coming to birth was the day of Pentecost. We commented that the Church had genuine continuity with Israel as the elect people of God. There was also discontinuity with Israel, as the Church was now the elect people of God. The Church came to realise the nature of that continuity and discontinuity, though its ultimate relinquishing of its ties with Judaism took time.

At Pentecost, Peter spoke in exhortation to those who desired to act in belief of his message:

'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.' And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, *'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.'* (Acts 2:38-40)

To whom was this promise addressed? 'To you and your children', these repentant ones, some 3,000 in number. Then who were 'this crooked generation'? They were those—including the

3,000—who had opposed Messiah all the way until they had eventually seized, judged and crucified Him. The outcome of Peter's exhortation is expressed as follows: 'So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:41-42).

So then, the Church was given visible expression in the response of the 3,000 Jews who had now joined the followers of Christ. This was the band to whom He had once said, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12:32). God's Kingdom had triumphed through Messiah. The Church had been built, as Christ said He would build it, however much it was yet to grow. The Bride of Christ had been, as God once said, 'born crucified', being as one with its Lord to work with Him in the counsel of God. It is this action of the Church that we now examine as we seek to discover the driving power that was never to diminish.

(i) The Church Forever on Mission

Just to review a little concerning Christ and the Church: we remember that Christ did not create an organisation. Paul tells us later that it was the Church, His Bride, that He had in view in His incarnation. He was to give His life for her on the Cross. And He did. After His resurrection Jesus taught His disciples to go into all the world to preach the gospel to every human being, and to bring nations to the feet of Christ. The Church sprang into being on the day of Pentecost. Its eyes were set on the whole world. In one sense the Church existed for the purpose of bringing human beings to salvation. The Church did not exist to build buildings, to accumulate wealth, to be a political force—it was there to preach Christ, and Him crucified.

The Church has had a life of its own but that was in order to have health to proclaim Christ to the nations. Wherever the Church has become overlaid with ecclesiastical trappings, wherever it has become worldly in the political sense, wherever it cares for itself as against having compassion for the whole lost world—it is then

that the drive of the Church dwindles. Its reason for being dies away. The Church's reason for being is the mission on which the Church is daily at work: the redemption of the world; and the building of the City of God in the unseen realm of the heavenlies. But where the Church recedes in any way from its apostolic nature, practice and message, the way for it to be revived is quite simple. The Church must go back to its beginnings and become a Spirit—empowered body of men, women and children. It is as simple as that. To say it is simple will positively enrage some folk, for they will think we mean putting the clock back culturally and socially in order to do exactly what the early Church did within its various cultures. But that is not what we mean. Rather, the Church must come again to the same apostolic truth, the same apostolic power of the Word and the Spirit, and—wrought upon by Word and Spirit—the Church becomes the same Community of love, and the same Community of missionary activity. The Church will also now have the same anticipation of the things of the *telos*, that is, of the climax of history.

This is not to say that elements of these things cannot be found in today's churches. But we would say that this Community of love, mission and anticipation is the way all of our churches should be. Reformation and revival have such ends in view.

**(ii) The Matter of the Pastoral Life
of the Love Community**

If we examine the beginnings of the Church we discover that there was a pattern that emerged on the day of Pentecost. Firstly, the *kerugma* had been proclaimed. Secondly, they were baptised, receiving the gifts of forgiveness of sins and of the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, they were warned against the crooked generation of Jews who had crucified Christ. Fourthly, they attended to four things: the Apostles' doctrine; the fellowship; the breaking of bread; and the prayers. Fifthly, 'fear came upon every soul', and many signs and wonders were done by the Apostles. And, sixthly, they began the daily distribution of aid to those in need in the new Community.

Keeping in mind that all were empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit and all had the salvation of the human race in mind, what

was it that kept the Church in continuous action? The continuous action was as a result of having come to God and eternal life. They now had God's compassion in their hearts, and this was kept alive by a remarkable apostolic ministry and a wide range of gifts which ministered to the Community. In this way they were maintained in moral power and kept active in proclaiming the gospel. We constantly refer to this proclamation for we have in mind those folk who have come to know God, and those who are still seeking. Both will have an interest in the early Christian Community.

Firstly, we will speak about 'the remarkable apostolic ministry'. This ministry is included in Ephesians 4:11-13 as one of 'the gifts of Christ':

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This grouping of ministry—'apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers'—was essential to the life of the early Church. These men were not individualists who ministered apart but they ministered in tandem. They were all essential to one another for the combined work of ministry. Their kind of ministry is obscured today because at best we think of grades of pastoral ministry (bishops, presbyters and deacons), and, at worst, we conceive of the pastors doing all the pastoral ministry. Because this kind of ministry is embedded in our thinking and church organisation, we have failed to realise the indispensability of 'the ministry gifts' as set out in Ephesians 4:11. There are other gifts we need to take into account, generally known as 'the charismata'—but for the moment we confine ourselves to the ministry gifts.

Whilst the ministry gifts are in operation, there the apostolic message is alive and effective. With the possible exception of the pastoral gift, all the gifts are found to be mobile. The apostle, prophet, evangelist and teacher are shown in the Book of Acts to

itinerate.² Roughly speaking, the apostle opens up new territory preaching the gospel and founding churches. Work spreads out from these churches by means of evangelists. The members need to be taught well to expand the ministry of the apostles and evangelists. This is the ministry of the pastors and teachers. Prophets mainly exhort the churches, and are helpful to the other ministries. There seems to be no doubt as to this type of 'tandem' ministry. The original Apostles died and were never replaced, but we find what we might call 'a second order' of apostles. There were men who continued to penetrate into virgin territory and do the work of an apostle. Even though they could not claim that their doctrine was from Christ in a way unique to the first Apostles, they nevertheless preached exactly the same word.

So then, the churches were vibrant through the Spirit, through the Headship of Christ, and through the Spirit-given and Spirit-enabled ministries. Of course, the whole Community lived in the love of its Lord, and saw itself as the Family of God their Father.

(iii) The Foundation and Operation of Pastoral Dynamics

We use the term 'pastoral dynamics' to indicate that the life of the churches was most powerful. By contrast with many of our churches today—many of which are primarily organisational—the early Church did not have the burden of ecclesiastical properties, fabric, possessions and equipment, to say nothing of the financing of clergy. They met anywhere they could find a suitable situation. Mostly this was in homes. That fact is discernible from the Book of Acts and the Epistles. Whilst Paul taught in the school (*schole*) or hall of Tyrannus, this does not mean it was used as a church building. It was a building which was owned by Tyrannus, of whom we know nothing.

² Whilst it is clear that apostles, prophets and evangelists are itinerate teachers, some commentators consider others to be localised. 'Pastor and teacher' in Ephesians 4:11 is seen to be the one gift or office. But teaching is an aspect of all the ministry gifts. In Acts 13:1 we find that there are 'prophets and teachers' at Antioch. In Acts 15:32 we find itinerant prophets.

By 'pastoral dynamics', then, we mean that the local Community of Christians lived out a pastoral life. There would be exhortation, preaching and teaching to cover many situations, the sort of teaching which we find in the Epistles. We have talked about the amazing character of a church. Today we are aware of the problems which confront us all as we face a rapidly changing world. There is the new information that modern mass media ring to us, the ills and spills of the age in which we live. Without doubt, life was in its own way as demanding an changing under the rule of the Roman Empire. So in any age a church community needs to be well led. Could it be that in our own time we are not as well covered by persons who are equipped by the Spirit as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers? Our Church leaders must rediscover that same apostolic understanding and zeal, and be prepared for the same kind of work.

Whilst looking to elements of reformation and revival, let us say that no one should complain that we lack competent men, women and young people in today's churches. We have what we call 'clergy and laity' who are most active in planting, founding and even 'replanting' churches at 'home' and 'abroad'. Probably we have never had such an educated clergy and laity as we have in this generation. Certainly, no generation has been so equipped when it comes to the availability of communications technology and even of the communicators themselves within the churches. Whether this is in line with things 'apostolic' we must certainly enquire. It might be difficult to ascertain whether or not the natural advantages we have in this twenty-first century have given us greater understanding of God, the Creation and ourselves. It would be unfortunate if we were working so very hard at what we call 'the Church' and 'pastoral ministry', and yet be so far removed from its essential being. It is not that we wish to ape the Church of the first century or of the Reformation era, but we do wish to discover how God would have His Church today. A visit to the apostolic period and a discovery of its life and power will, in any case, not be a burden too great bear.

Chapter Thirteen

Pastoral Dynamics in the Apostolic Church—I**Four Leading Realities in the Early Church**

There have been many reasons for researching the nature, practice and pastoral being of the early Church. Such research would help to explain the phenomenon that began at Pentecost and has continued ever since. There is no paucity of materials when we set out to investigate the apostolic Church. We should also note that there are plenty of materials for doing similar research into the phenomenon of Israel. We need to know Israel that we may better know the Church. We need to know the early Church because this enables us to have both a reference point and a point for comparison between the early Church and the Church of today.

I believe that the Church can be known under four headings: I proclamation' (*kerugma*), which is the preaching of the gospel; 'fellowship' (*koinonia*), which is the unity and relationships of the Community; 'teaching' (*didache*), which is that which is essential to be known of the mind of Christ by His people; and 'exhortation' (*paraklesis*), which corrects misunderstandings and false teaching, and counters life-styles or cultures which are at variance with apostolic Christianity.

Before we can outline these four elements we need to look at the structure of the Church as we perceive it today. If we think of the Church only in terms of bishops, presbyters and deacons then we are thinking of the authority structure of the Church and the division between what we call 'clergy' and 'laity'. So many think of the clergy as the ones to do everything. The Church is divided into two layers. As to 'clergy' and 'laity', in our churches we have a distinction unknown in the early Church. The Greek word *laos* means 'people', or 'the people', but they are not 'people' in contradistinction to those 'higher up' who hold some clerical rank. All in the Church are gifted in some way or another. The Church operates by reason of those gifts.

This does not mean that there are not elders and deacons, and perhaps bishops.¹ There are, and they are important in the whole operation of the Church. But proclamation, fellowship, teaching and exhortation are of first consideration. This will be seen as we discuss them. The Church was alive from tip to toe so to speak, because, as we have seen, the ministerial gifts were 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4:12). All were ministers, serving the whole Body. The Body, in turn, was occupied with the outgoing ministry of *kerugma*.

Reality One: the Proclamation, or *Kerugma*

The gospel was spoken into various situations and was necessarily relevant to them. Peter was the first to utter the *kerugma*—the 'proclamation'—or the 'good news' (*euangelion*). Since it was preached to Jews it had to make sense to them. It was all about the fulfilment of their history. It had to be relevant, by nature of the case. Peter himself, like his companions, was of no special importance in Israel. This tells us that *kerugma* (*proclamation*) had to have power and authority to be of any affect and effect. Peter's proclamation had both power and authority because of his appointment as an Apostle of Jesus the Messiah, as well as, especially, his being baptised in the Holy Spirit. The word *kerugma* derives from *kerux*—a trumpet blast, in effect. *Kerussein* is 'to proclaim'. The Emperor's officer would blow the trumpet in the market place, and then proclaim the authoritative message of the Emperor and expect it to be obeyed—under fear of death. There was, then, the content of the message, and the proclamatory power of it. The two elements effected the response required by the message.

A setting out of the *kerugma* in the Acts and the Epistles takes, roughly speaking, the pattern set out below. We need to

¹ It seems from Titus 1:5-9 that the term bishop (*episcopos*) and the term elder (*presbuteros*) are interchangeable. Likewise in Acts 20:18-32 the term elder (*presbuteros*, verse 17) is interchangeable with guardians (*episcopous*, verse 28). In Philippians 1:1 we have 'bishops [plural] and deacons' but no elders. This must mean that the term 'bishops' is used for 'elders'. The idea of monarchical bishops is entirely missing. At most, a bishop might be a presiding elder, but this is by no means certain.

distinguish between the form of the *kerugma/gospel* and the *effects* of its proclamation. The effects of the preaching include both the conversion of some hearers, as well as the rejection of the message by others.

Firstly, there is the whole body of Israel's history and thinking, the law and the prophets, the unfolding story of God and His Covenant people.

Secondly, there is the prophetic forecast of the good news of the Kingdom of God to come. Isaiah speaks of 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns. "' (52:7); there is also the prophets' forecast of the Covenant: 'You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant' (Acts 3:25). And through the prophets we see that there is to be the blessing for all nations.

Thirdly, there is the prediction of Messiah—His work and His rule—fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, there is the meaning and purpose of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The Apostles were witnesses to Christ in all His work.

Fifthly, there is the command to believe on Him for salvation since He has been made 'both Lord and Christ' and that primarily because of His resurrection. Acts 2:36 says: 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified'. See also Acts 4:33: 'And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all'. Romans 10:9 calls for faith in Christ as Lord on the score of His resurrection: 'Because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'.

Sixthly, there is belief in Christ. This belief, accompanied with baptism in the name of Jesus, would bring the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, those who had been baptised would belong to the new Community of Christ, the true Israel of God.²

² There are other verbs than *kerusso*, 'to proclaim' (*kerussein*, present, active, infinitive, eg. Matthew 4:17, 'From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."'), which have similar meanings. The verb *kerusso* is used some 61 times in the New Testament as well as many times in the Old Testament (LXX). The verb *euangelizomai* is 'to preach the good news', and is used most often in Lukan and Pauline writings. *Kerugma* is the noun 'message' or 'proclamation'.

Quite an amount of research has been done on the meaning and significance of *kerugma*. One of the leaders in this research has been the late C. H. Dodd. It is worth including his findings. According to Dodd, the *kerugma* includes the following:

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

He was born of the seed of David.

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

He was buried.

He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.

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

He will come again as Judge and Saviour of men.

The age of fulfillment has dawned.

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

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

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

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

There is an appeal for repentance.³

³ Both formulations are in C. H. Dodd's *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1944, p. 17 and pp. 21-24 respectively, and are quoted from *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* by R. H. Mounce, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1960, p. 5, and pp. 60f.

The Immediacy of the Kerugma

By 'immediacy' we mean that the *kerugma* preached would have had its impact upon those who really listened 'as many as were ordained to eternal life' (Acts 13:48). The power of the gospel flowed into the hearts of believing listeners. They were not thinking in terms of a number of points in the *kerugma*, but they felt the personal impact of the truth on their hearts. They were immediately transformed.

We have seen that the words 'gospel' (*euangelion*), and 'proclamation' (*kerugma*), are virtually the same. When we ponder the fact of their great power to awaken people to God and to transform their lives, we want to know about that power. Paul said, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek' (Romans 1:16). He was convinced that when he preached *the* gospel it would be powerful and, of course we know that in his case it proved to be so. Of course, the gospel proved to be powerful whenever, and wherever, it was preached by those who were filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul continued in Romans 1:17 telling how the gospel is the power of God: 'For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."' Further, Paul explains: 'They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation [propitiation] by his blood, to be received by faith' (Romans 3:24-25). We will have reason to look at these words again but, simply put, they mean that God's grace brings justification to those personally who believe that Christ died for them.

Paul also spoke of 'the word (*logos*) of the cross'. He said, 'For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (I Corinthians 1:18). Again Paul is speaking about 'the power of God'. In a previous chapter we spoke about God's love being shown by sending His Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins so that we might live (I John 4:9-10). This word 'propitiation' is in other places, one of them being Romans 3:24-25. It would be good for us to look at

the biblical idea of propitiation for it is at the heart of ‘gospel’ and ‘proclamation’.

The Fact and Power of Propitiation

If we go straight to a story told by Jesus we can get some practical idea of what propitiation is. This story is in Luke 18:9-14, and it was told by Jesus for those ‘who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others’. There were two men, one being a Pharisee who was self-righteousness and the other a tax gatherer, a sinner. The Pharisee congratulated himself before God that he was not like others. He felt himself to be a good man and he believed that, because of this goodness, he was accepted by God. The tax gatherer was classified as a ‘sinner’ by all. The tax gatherer was not even allowed to go to the court of sacrifice and make an offering to clear his guilt. He was now in a terrible agony of guilt and he prayed, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner’. The verb ‘be merciful’ (*hilastheti* from *hilaskomai*) is better translated ‘be propitious to me a sinner’ for its root is likened with ‘making propitiation’, ‘making atonement’, ‘being merciful’, and ‘pardoning’.

To understand this matter of propitiation, we should return to the case of Cain and Abel in Genesis chapter four. There the two brothers offer up sacrifices to God. We do not know a lot about their sacrifices but we know Cain’s offering was rejected and Abel’s was accepted. Cain was furious about this and God said to him, in effect, ‘Why are you angry? If you do well in offering your sacrifice, shall you not be accepted?’ One translation is, ‘Shall you not be forgiven?’ A genuine sacrifice—a sacrifice that is given in the right spirit, trusting God to accept—would be one to propitiate God for the sin that had been done. In faith a man would believe himself to be a sinner and yet, via the sacrifice, to have been made right before God. The tax gatherer in Jesus’ story, and Abel in the older story would both feel themselves to be right before God through His grace of accepting their offering for their sins (their sins being their violation of God’s law and God’s holy character).

It might be difficult for one *searching after* God, or one who is trying to find *out* God to understand the meaning of propitiation.

One bit of information will help us all. In Leviticus 17:11, where God has been giving instruction about reverence for blood, He says: ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life’. Here God reveals that it is He who makes the provision of blood so that by the shedding of blood the sins of the offerer can be atoned. This is a propitiatory sacrifice. If God had not made that provision of atonement through the shedding of blood, then no sacrifice would be effective.

When we understand that Christ’s sacrifice of the Cross was through His own blood, then we know it was effective for all sinners—past, present and future. They can all be justified. To be ‘justified’ means to ‘be reckoned righteous before the law’, to ‘be accepted as righteous’, as was the tax gatherer in our story. A self-righteous person cannot be justified as self-justification is invalid, for self-justification is based upon human values. Propitiation is what we call ‘a wonderful work of God’s grace’, for we do not deserve it. More than this, we must recognise that the suffering of Christ upon the Cross was primarily that of bearing the judgment of God upon all human creatures, since ‘all have sinned’. God’s wrath upon sin—His wrath upon sinners—is not just exasperation. God is not merely angrily punishing us via Christ. The Son is actually bearing all the guilt that we have accumulated throughout our life, and suffering it out to its exhaustion and extinction, until nothing evil is left. This has to be seen on the basis that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (11 Corinthians 5:19, NASB). The just punishment that the law demands, and the destruction of guilt by the grace of God in Christ, now frees us to walk as justified. We are grateful to God—so grateful that we love Him wholly.

I am sure that the early proclaimers did not go into the details that I have gone into here. But the sacrifice words and terms would have been known to them, and they would have seen God’s love in terms of His sending His Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. The reason I have tried to give a detailed explanation for the term ‘propitiation’ is that the ideas of sacrifice which most of us have today do not include the idea of ‘propitiation’ as such.

For this reason, the teaching of the Cross is not really known. For example we compare Jesus laying down His life to a soldier laying down his life for his friends. But Jesus bore our punishment and extinguished our guilt. When we understand propitiation and receive its authentic gift of forgiveness and justification, then we know the love of God in our hearts. When we know this love, we know God.

It is certain that the language of sacrifice was known to audiences in apostolic days. But propitiation may have seemed to some to be like a bribe to God. The Holy Spirit gave new content to the word 'propitiation' as described above. It would have struck home to both Jewish and pagan hearts.

How the Kerugma Brought People To Be Part of the Church and Keeps Them in It

One beauty of the *kerugma* was that it linked the gospel with history; the history of Man and of Israel. *Kerugma* was not a theory or a philosophy or even a theology. It was in history that God had created and the people Israel had eventually been formed. And now out of Israel came this person, Jesus of Nazareth, who was also God. His incarnation, life, ministry, Cross, resurrection and ascension had all been prophesied. He had worked according to God's plan. Now listeners who believed in Him could be saved from their sins. On being baptised in Christ's name—that is, baptised into Christ—believers could become members of the new people of God, the Church.

The fact that believers became members of the new people of God was amazing. This was a transforming experience. No other community had ever been like this one—nor would there be another community like it. It is not difficult to realise though, that if the gospel which brought them into the Community was somehow forgotten by a person of the Community, then the love, the vital life and the compassion for the world would diminish. Gradually the church in which this was happening would become meaningless and empty.

We can see then that the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion was one barrier against a person or a Community forgetting 'that we

were purged from our old sins' (cf. 11 Peter 1:9). Such forgetting would be disastrous, for Peter tells us that when 'these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ' (11 Peter 1:8). The church, therefore, which fails to preach the *kerugma* to the world, and fails to teach it continuously to its own community, will wither and die. By human means it may continue to exist, but it will be dead.

A good test is to ask: 'Do I still remember with great joy and gratitude what happened to me when I heard the gospel, or when I saw that all my sins were forgiven and realised that I had entered the Kingdom of God and had been made a member of Christ's Body? Do I remember the first love I had for God my Father who had sent His Son, and for Christ who had died for me? Do I remember the joy, peace and love that the Holy Spirit had brought to me?' Cowper's hymn asks some of these questions:

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Mere is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

Such a forgetfulness can come. The Apostles and other apostolic writers were always reminding their people of the gospel in their writings and oral teaching. We will look at this in more detail under the heading of '*paraklesis*'. The problem is that in becoming more mature believers we may even come to despise the simple gospel which transformed us as we received forgiveness and regeneration. May it never be so! Constant awareness of the redeeming gospel keeps us obligated to proclaim it to others, and to live in the new ways of Christ, and not as the world around us. So when others see the Cross as a 'scandal' or 'foolishness', then in wishing to keep the friendship of others, we may fail to be lovers of Christ and the Father. It is not that our failure to remember the gospel is from some creeping amnesia. Forgetting is deliberate. We forget so that we will not have to be confronted by the obligation of sharing the truth.

**‘God Forbid That I Should Glory
Except in the Cross of Christ my Lord’**

The heart of the *kerugma* is the Cross. Paul said, ‘For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures’ (I Corinthians 15:3-4). ‘Of first importance’ was the Cross and the Resurrection. He told the church at Corinth:

When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (I Corinthians 2:1-5)

Paul was proclaiming the *kerugma* to the Corinthian church which grew up in a community of immorality, known abroad as ‘a sink of iniquity’. The gospel cut through it all, at least for those who became ‘the Church’ in that place. But Paul knew that some of the believers had forgotten what they had been because of their satisfaction at what they had eventually become. Paul reminds them of their beginnings in the Christian life—how they had been ‘nobodies’ but had become ‘somebodies’. Some of them he marked out as being ‘carnal’ or stunted, immature folk who would not grow in the truth. Insofar as the Lord’s Supper was concerned, some could even bring their own bread and wine to the ‘Love Feast’.⁴ He knew he must keep bringing to them both reminders and fresh insights of the gospel, and keep them aware of ‘the whole counsel of God’. Only then would they be kept fresh in love and in compassion for the whole world.

If the development of the Church does not constantly spring out of *kerugma* then it will deteriorate. It may become large in ‘good

works’ and fulfilling the social needs of the world, and yet it forgets what its main commission is. The Church commission is to take the *kerugma* to the world in the power of the Holy Spirit. Certainly the Church is still to do what its early forebears did. This great message is its chief ministry. There can be no pastoral dynamics apart from *kerugma*.

⁴ The ‘Agape’ or ‘Love Feast’, which was probably the time at Corinth when they celebrated the Lord’s Supper, had deteriorated into a meal when the rich ate well and the poor not at all! ‘Discerning the Lord’s body’ seems not so much thinking of His crucified body when they ate the bread, but realising the needs of the hungry at the meal, and sharing with them in love.

Chapter Fourteen

Pastoral Dynamics in the Apostolic Church—2**Reality Two: The Fellowship, or *Koinonia***

One thing is clear as we study the history of Israel—it was a unique fellowship or congregation. The Hebrew word for congregation is *qahal*. In Acts 7:38 Stephen describes Israel as ‘the *congregation* in the wilderness’. In the New Testament the Greek word used for ‘church’ is *ekklesia* (congregation). The Hebrew *qahal* and the Greek *ekklesia* are virtually synonymous. The ‘church’ in the New Testament fits the idea of Israel as a ‘congregation’. In Greek, *ekklesia* really means ‘called out’, but this is not the way it is used in the New Testament. The members of the church which formed at Jerusalem, when they used the word *ekklesia*, were thinking more of a theological than an organisational grouping. In 11 Corinthians 13:14 another Greek term is employed for the communion (*koinonia*: fellowship) of the Holy Spirit. This, really refers to the community which has participation one with another through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

The term *ekklesia* for the New Testament ‘church’ does not appear until Acts 5:11: ‘And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things’. Prior to that it is ‘all those that believed’, ‘their number’, ‘their friends’, ‘the *company* of those who believed’. Company is ‘multitude’ (*plethous*) and not church (*ekklesia*), so the idea of the believers being a separate community from their nation Israel is not present initially. In fact, it comes as a shock to them that Stephen is killed and persecution begins against them.

The Greek term *ekklesia* is used for the Hebrew term *qahal* in Acts 7:38. *Oahal* (*ekklesia*) describes the unity of this nation such as is not recorded of other nations (although culture in every nation brings an ethnic unity). It is clear—not only from Stephen’s use of the word, but throughout the New Testament—that the people who were called Christians had a

strong Jewish beginning and the Hebrew word *qahal* could have been applied to them. The strange circumstances which caused people to fear this new people (the Church) and its relationship with God, tell us that there was among them a wonderful unity.

The fact of this unity is demonstrated in Acts 2:42, 'And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and the prayers'. There are four actions here: (i) Apostles' teaching; (ii) fellowship; (iii) breaking of bread; and (iv) the prayers. The word 'fellowship' here is *koinonia* and the church is the Church because it has fellowship. It is a fellowship of a remarkable order, as shown by the other three elements described in Acts 2:42. The teaching of the Apostles is primarily the *kerugma*—but *kerugma* is also 'the whole *counsel [boule]* of God'. So then, the new Community is the *koinonia* (fellowship), and thus is the Church (*ekklesia*).

It would take considerable time here to go into the noun *koinonia*, the verb *koinoneo*, the adjective *koinonos*, and other related uses of this group of words. The ideas are primarily 'fellowship', 'I sharing', 'participation', 'common', 'partner', 'partnership', and so on. These terms speak of a Community of people who were 'I sharers of the divine nature' (*theias koinonoi phuseos*) (1 Peter 1:4). They were also sharers or participators in the one loaf (I Corinthians 10:16).

These fine ideas and concepts concerning human fellowship and community are not unknown in the history of the world. All kinds of pressures, principles and circumstances cause remarkable relationships to come into being. Many are the fellowship groups which can be found in history. It seems most natural for human beings to group together for various reasons. But the *koinonia*, as described here in all its richness, seems to be unique firstly to Israel, and then to those who came to constitute the Christian Church. One thing is quite clear; the early Church was *koinonia* par excellence.

The Power of Fellowship

The word 'fellowship' literally means 'communion'. Communion is at the heart of the Being of the triune God. In that Fellowship each Person is 'other Person centred. This is the origin and root of all human fellowship. As Man is made in the image of God, we could say that fellowship is ontological within the body of created humanity. We recognise that the serpent desired beyond all things to break the fellowship between Man and God, and between all partnership situations in the human situation. We do not mean that fellowship is primarily between two, for its origin is 'between three', so that three becomes the truth and proof of pure fellowship—not, or course, to exclude other numbers.

The Godhead is the archetype of genuine fellowship. God's *boule*—His *counsel*, mark and goal—is to take up into the Godhead His elect people as the Bride of His Son. The Church is the place where the *koinonia* of the Godhead outworks itself in the Community of love. The Father is love, and as Father He heads up the great Family. They are Family by the Cross, and so through adoption and regeneration. There is 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all' (Ephesians 4:6). Christ is 'that great Shepherd of the sheep' (Hebrews 13:20), and He is the Bridegroom of the Church, His Bride. He is the true Vine and His people are the branches. So many figures of unity are present before us in Him. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love, unity, fellowship and worship. So the *koinonia* of the Three set the unity of the Church, which is to 'maintain the unity' (Ephesians 4:3). It is the unity of the Godhead which becomes the *koinonia* of the people.

When we speak of Pastoral Dynamics we can draw on an evaluation of the apostolic *koinonia* to help us evaluate the *koinonia* present in church life today. We have indicated that the apostolic *koinonia* issued from the apostolic *kerugma*, *didache* and *paraklesis*, since all of these came simultaneously into operation. We should not mistake learned socialisation for spontaneous apostolic *koinonia*. Unity, love and fellowship (*koinonia*) are the work of the Spirit and the Word, and are not mere sociality. And we cannot correct division within the churches

except by a special work of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of true fellowship. Education alone is not the answer. The life of love within and between the churches is the heart of their witness. Where *koinonia* is lacking, there the motivation to proclaim *kerugma* is also lacking.

Koinonia is the context in which proclamation, teaching and exhortation have their power. But *koinonia* cannot be organised into living operation, any more than the *kerugma* can be organised as a set of points in doctrine and delivery. Delivery of a set of doctrinal points as such cannot be expected to be dynamic in its effects. But there is, through the Holy Spirit, the power of the proclaimed and taught word (*kerugma*). This is what gives the community the sense of its identity as God's Community in the Kingdom of God. As the people of God who are part of His Salvation History, the Church proceeds to the appointed goal, the *telos*. This knowledge (the proclaimed and taught word) is quite dynamic and is the only setting for true exhortation. It is also the only setting for the total life of the community.¹

So then, where *koinonia* is present and not perverted—where it is genuinely in God and not in Man, even 'ecclesiastical Man'—then it is not a fragile set of relationships in the midst of a system of political correctness which is nervous of making mistakes and I rocking the boat'. *Koinonia* is the very fellowship of the Trinity working out in the Community of love. Such a Community may even scare some who come close. But to the person who wishes to know God and to explore the vast expanses of His Being as they relate to the human scene and situation, to that person *koinonia* is recognised for what it is. In a world which has an horrific record of wars and disputations, of culture loyalties and conflicts with others, of cruelty and immorality and selfishness—the sight and sound of true *koinonia* is what gladdens the heart of the one who recognises it. This true *koinonia* is at the heart of all pastoral living and dynamics.

The human *koinonia* in the Community of love is intended to help transform us in heart and spirit and fit us for the ultimate *koinonia*, the life as it is in the Community of love which is the

¹ From my article, *An Introduction to Pastoral Dynamics* (A), NCPI, Monday Pastors Series, 4th March 2000.

Godhead. As the Bride of Christ, we shall be inducted into the communion of the Three Persons. He will conduct us to that Society and we shall be Family, 'the children given to Christ', and the filial Community of the Father.

Reality Three: Teaching, or *Didache*

It is clear from even a light glance at the text of the New Testament that it is a book of teaching. What is more, it is teaching which purports to follow the teaching of the Old Testament faithfully in the new Community of love. The Old Testament people of God—Israel—were certainly well taught. When we take the history of that people, their voluminous law and their vast body of prophetic declaration, then it does not astonish us that today among the Jewish people there are many places of learning. The learning is such that there are groups who have different perspectives on much of what was taught.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 is the classic command to teach:

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

Israel was to learn wisdom at the lip of the priest. It had its wisdom literature, its law and its prophesy—a great volume for learning. It was learning which gave them knowledge of God and by which they lived in their *koinonia*, or *qahal*. They, too, had their hortatory teaching (*paraklesis*) through the priest, the prophet and the family.

Jesus the Teacher

Israel was a place of learning and of teaching. Jesus, too, we remember, was called 'the teacher'.² John records the scene when

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

Jesus returned to Bethany after Lazarus' death: 'When she [Martha] had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The teacher [Jesus] is here and is calling for you."' (John 11:28). Matthew 7:28-29 describes the impression given by His preaching, 'And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes'.

Teaching was certainly part of Jesus' vocation: nothing was intelligible apart from it. But He had many critics. They scrutinised what He was saying. They checked it out against what they considered to be the authentic teaching in Israel. What we have to note is that not only was He imparting useful information, but His teaching was also astonishing. It was with power and authority, startling listeners. It was dynamic with signs and wonders. They knew that Jesus' teaching arose from some source that they knew to be a witness to Him. What He said seemed to be new teaching, yet it was in keeping with 'the law and the prophets'. It was in keeping with that body of Old Testament teaching which was considered to be canonical and therefore constituted for them the truth.

Jesus' pedagogy was in 'the way' and of 'the wisdom'—its action was in the Old Testament. This requires our attention if we are to fully understand the significance of Jesus' teaching in the New Testament. His pedagogy is just as fresh today as a way of teaching as it was then. Unfortunately though, it is a method too rarely used. In the New Testament, as we have noted briefly, Jesus' teaching amazed the crowds who heard Him: 'And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."' (Mark 1:27). He took authority in all His teaching as we have seen at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: 'He taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes' (Matthew 7:28-29). In John 7:45-52 there is the incident of the temple officers being sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to apprehend Jesus. When they hear Him they are unable to arrest Him. They report to the temple hierarchy, 'No man ever spoke like this man'.

The Apostles, the Teachers

It is obvious that Jesus expected the Apostles, by reason of their being baptised in the Spirit, to teach as He had taught. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus had told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and teach them all things, lead them into all the truth, and cause them to witness to the truth. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus commissioned the disciples to teach: 'Go therefore and make disciples³ of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'. In Acts 4:1 Luke talks of what Jesus had 'begun both to do and to teach' in His lifetime, inferring that He would go on doing these two things, presumably through the apostolic ministry.

We have seen the transformation which came to the Apostles and friends. All declared 'the wonderful works of God'. They had no paucity of truth to teach. They now had a body of truth, for the Holy Spirit had led them 'into all the truth'. The Holy Spirit had caused them to understand all things Christ had said and done. That is why the *didache* became prominent and important. This *didache* was the 'all things' which the Spirit was teaching them as He was 'leading them into all the truth'. It was certainly teaching that gripped the newly inaugurated Church.

When in Acts 2:42 we read that 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching', we must not read into their situation one which we have today. Their use of *didache* was a living one. The apostolic teaching must have aroused a rising tide of astonishment, delight and excitement. Their mode of teaching was like that of Jesus. At the same time as they were teaching, they were doing signs and wonders. The signs and wonders were a demonstration of what they were saying. Indeed, the signs and wonders formed the substance of the teaching. It was not a matter of imparting information which, perhaps, had to be learned through effort. No! Christ was teaching through His living

³ 'Make disciples' (*matheteusate*) really means 'make pupils', and 'teaching' (*didaskontes*) was the teaching of those who declared their adherence to the new teacher by being baptised into Him (Christ) and His system (the Church).

servants. He had promised He would do that, and it was happening.

The emphasis on teaching is there throughout the New Testament. Injunctions to teach are both explicit and implicit. The Church lived in the midst of dynamic societies in which the cultures of religion and the ethics of behaviour were often attractive and seductive. Members of the Church needed to be taught so that they were warned and so that they would walk only by 'the truth which is in Jesus'. The Church was, just like Israel, one people which had to maintain its moral and spiritual integrity in the midst of all the nations. The early Church was served well by its various teachers and mentors.

The Content of the Didache

It is not easy for us today to grasp what the teaching of the Apostles was. Of course, scholars who give themselves to the text are capable of examining the details of the teaching. But we need to go back to what we said very early in this book. When referring to I John 2:18-26 we saw that at baptism believers had been 'anointed by the Holy One'. The 'Holy One' may have been Jesus baptising them in the Holy Spirit (Who was their teacher), or it may have meant that the Holy Spirit was 'the anointing'. Whatever the case, the body of the truth was given to them. They could now recognise what was false. Even so, this did not remove the need for teaching. Teachers were there, so to speak, to teach them so that they would know that they knew what they knew!

Whatever the case, Paul claimed that he taught the whole counsel (*boule*) of God. This meant that he taught the purpose or the plan of God for the end time, the fulfilment of which proceeded as did the various eras in the world's history. Teaching that counsel of God would involve all of Salvation History. It would need the *kerugma* to be taught, and the way of the people of the true Israel of God. It would require the teaching which we call 'exhortation'. It would need to lead people's minds to the *telos*, the ultimate accomplishing of the goal of God and the inheritance God has stored up for His people. All of this teaching would be concentrated in Christ as the Lord of history being crowned by His Father, and working as the Fulfiller of the Father's plan.

So the people who were, and are, taught become living partners with God in His Covenant and plan for His Creation. Those who are taught share at the end in 'the fruit of the travail of his soul' (Isaiah 53:11)—the new Heaven and the new Earth, the Holy City, the paradise of God.

Reality Four: Exhortations to True Living, or Paraklesis

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

Today we have a fair idea of what is 'Christian teaching' along these lines. Hundreds of years have conditioned us to recognise what is moral and ethical action which springs from a spiritual basis. This can be tested by looking at *paraklesis* in non-Christian religions. We see this most starkly when paganism is studied. Because moral and ethical action springs from a spiritual base—which is to say that every religion produces the culture of the devotee people—then the Apostolic Church had to teach the differences in moral and ethical practice between Christianity and those cultures or societies from which the believers had come.

Old Testament Paraklesis

In the Old Testament we see that there was a widespread sense of morality when the Pharaoh and Abimelech of Abraham's day were going to take Sarah into their respective harems.

At this point we might take up the vast subject of Natural Law, for it is important in any consideration of a general *paraklesis*. Much in Jewish law which was moral was practised before the law was

given at Sinai. But the nature of Yahweh as against the pagan gods determined a morality different from that of the gods of pagan culture. Israel's high order of morality was known to those outside Judaism even if it was not always followed. Deuteronomy 4:5-8 shows this to be the case as Moses exhorts Israel:

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

The Wisdom books in the Old Testament—especially Proverbs—project a high morality and a lot of wise commonsense. At this point we will take a cursory look at what has been called 'Natural Law'.

Natural Law

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary describes natural law as, 'Of law and justice. Based upon the innate moral feelings of mankind; instinctively felt to be right and fair'. This definition would seem to cover a humanity which has a general knowledge of law, whether it be called 'God's law' or simply 'universal law'. But the burning question is not whether humanity has a sense of law, but whether it obeys the law it senses. *Knowing* law and *obeying* law constitutes being reasonably good. But do we obey what we believe we know? We remember Paul's conflict in Romans 7:15 when he said: 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate'. He discovered that *of himself* he could not obey the law or desist from doing wrong. This is a shock to the man who thinks he is essentially good.

Martin Luther was sure that there is such a thing as 'natural law'. He wrote in his lectures on the Book of Galatians:

Therefore, there is one law which runs through all ages, is known to all men, is written in the hearts of all people, and leaves no one

from beginning to end with an excuse, although for the Jews ceremonies were added and the other nations had their laws, which were not binding upon the whole world, but only this one, which the Holy Spirit dictates unceasingly in the hearts of all.

It is an interesting fact that when the Nuremberg War Trials took place, there had to be some kind of resolution of the varying views of law by the many nations and cultures taking part in the Trials. The Chief Prosecutor for the French Republic, M. Francois de Menthon, said:

There can be no well-balanced and enduring nation without a common consent in the essential rules of social living, without a general standard of behaviour before the claims of conscience, without the adherence of all citizens to identical concepts of good and evil.⁴

It is especially interesting in this case that the fact and value of conscience is taken for granted, as indeed is the idea of 'identical concepts of good and evil'.

Another view of natural law would be that cultures and tribes do not so much come to their laws by observing and reasoning—though that may be so in some cases—as that there is an inner ontological pressure on them to observe the law of God. This ontological pressure would be innate in Man from creation, so that their laws—whatever the matter of their formation—seem to take the shape of what we call 'moral law'.

The Christian Gospel, Ethics and Paraklesis

All cultures can permit practices which would be offensive to Judaism and Christianity. Whilst we may think of each religion as having its own ethics, yet where there are large cities we often have a society which operates with certain distinct mores pertaining to the culture of the day. In Paul's Hellenic culture, homosexuality was not looked upon with disfavour. The view of families differed from culture to culture, as is often the case today.

So we have Paul teaching against paganism, and exhorting his converts and readers to different standards of life. He especially

⁴ Quoted in Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics, Volume 1: Foundations*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1966, p. 386.

urges them to practise sexual chastity in regard to both fornication and adultery. Passages to be studied in this regard are Ephesians 4:17-32, Colossians 3:1-23, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7 and 11 Thessalonians 3:6-13. Whilst these passages are obvious enough to us today, they were not so then. Romans chapter six and other passages emphasising practical holy living should also be included in our study of *paraklesis*.

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

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

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

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

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

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

An Evaluation of Paraklesis with Associated Actions Both in Apostolic Times and Today

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

Exhortation is becoming increasingly unpopular in an age when human autonomy seeks to be the order of the day. When the democratisation of the Church is increasingly sought, exhortation is looked upon as a moralism. It is interesting, nevertheless, to see the forms of 'correctness' which are being legislated secularly. 'Human rights' are in the fore and human responsibility is little

emphasised except in its duty to preserve human rights and to correct the wider order of international behaviour. But in spite of the varying fortunes of ethics as a discipline for studying, the New Testament *paraklesis* has not changed.

It is helpful to know that it is by motivation that exhortation is applied. Thus in Romans 12:1, 'I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...'; Romans 15:30, '...by our Lord Jesus Christ'; I Corinthians 1:10, '...by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'; 11 Corinthians 10:1, '...by the meekness and gentleness of Christ'. In Philippians 2:1-4 there is really a long and powerful exhortation. We note the basis of it:

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

In Philippians 4:2-3 Paul directly exhorts Euodia and Syntyche to agree, and on the basis of their former ministry with him. Also he exhorts help for these women from his brethren:

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have laboured side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

In Philemon 8-10 Paul indicates that he could command Philemon but he prefers to appeal to him on Onesimus' behalf: 'I appeal to you for my child...'

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

There has been an interesting turn-around today in what is known as exhortation. Christian values are quite deeply seated where the gospel has captured society. As we have pointed out, the *kerugma* causes a transformation of the person and so *didache* and *paraklesis* are accepted as parts of the whole of the counsel of God. It is often the case that the children of converted parents do not come to conversion. However, the ethical nature of Christian teaching is absorbed by them and somehow becomes Natural Law, or a law higher and better than general Natural Law. This 'Christian' ethic is taken by a society that is affected by Christian *paraklesis* and it is turned into what we might call 'political correctness'. Conscience has been taught its law by the Christian mind, but the redemptive core is ignored and so we have a society with a high standard of ethics but with a legal motivation which lacks the sweetness of the love-ethic and the warmth and beauty of *koinonia*.

But there is an 'upside'. The Christian Community formed by *kerugma*, *koinonia*, *didache* and *paraklesis* is the most dynamic situation of yesterday and today, and will be tomorrow. The person who is genuinely seeking God will find himself or herself in a wonderful, promising and enriching world—one which will deeply affect the heart and encourage it to know God. For the one who is 'finding out God', there is an unlimited treasury of good things.

Chapter Fifteen

The Community of the Free People

Introduction: All People Desire Freedom

There are people who believe themselves to be wholly free, so they are content to live in that state. There are some who are aware they live in bondage, and they have adapted to that state and have a certain sense of contentment in accepting it. Even so, their state of bondage is unnatural. Others are in bondage and hate it, and try to get free. Then there are those who are free and are glad to be in that condition.

There are many kinds of bondage and freedom from them. What we have in mind is the Community of Christ. It is meant to be the Community of human beings once enslaved to certain tyrants. But these humans have been set at liberty from those tyrants by God. To such Paul once wrote, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Galatians 5:1). From that sentence we realise that Paul's readers were once in bondage, but were set free by Christ because freedom was the state of living which He intended for them.

When we ask, 'What is human freedom?' then we are in the realm of anthropology and therefore of metaphysics. For our purpose human freedom is the state of human living where we are free to be truly human. In practice, this means that we are in union with God, and thus have communion with Him. We are able both to know and to do His will, so that in mind and in heart we are now truly living. We are not in bondage to evil forces which seek to impede our knowing the will of God and in doing it. It is clear to us that this state of freedom—of union and communion with God—is contested by anti-God forces. These are always seeking to destroy our liberty and to curtail it wherever God is protecting that relationship of liberty which we have with Him. Freedom is being as God created us, and relying upon Him to maintain us in the outworking of His plan and purpose.

Conscience and Enslavement

We can rightly ask, 'What, then, is this state of living in freedom? Are not all persons as free as they wish to be, as is proper for them? Can they not attain to this state by their own abilities?' We could go immediately to the human conscience and suggest that all human beings are subjected to their consciences for they will never *feel* free unless their consciences have left off dominating them. We all know what it is to have a conscience accusing us. Some persons have learned how to subject the conscience to their wills and then believe that they are thereby free from the conscience. Shakespeare said, 'Conscience does make cowards of us all', and there is no knowing what may happen to the human psyche if we suppress it. We may well be subjecting ourselves to an even greater bondage than that which the conscience appears to wield.

We can start our discussion of conscience—freedom with some words Jesus spoke to His listeners:

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one." How is it that you say, "You will be made free?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever, the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:31-36)

Jesus was making the point here that if the Jews continued to hear His word and act on it then they would become free. But they believed that as Jews—children of Abraham—they were already free. Jesus then made a statement which is absolute, 'Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin'. In his Letter to the Roman church, Paul took almost three chapters to show that everyone who has ever lived commits sin. Jews are not excepted. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul indicates a regular Jewish attitude towards Gentiles, 'We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile

sinners' (Galatians 2:15). He then proceeded to show the fallacy of that claim.

This absolute claim of Jesus, that 'Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin', points to the fact that Jesus saw human bondage coming from sin committed. Whoever sins becomes the slave of sin. It is certain that a statement like this irritates many. Most would say, 'Certainly I sin, but why make such a huge fuss about it? Why go on about the necessity of a Cross in order to liberate us from such a piffling thing as sin? Apart from an occasional sin committed we live reasonably good lives. Why then get into such a state about sin, exaggerating its power as you do? We can handle that little matter ourselves'.

This was virtually what the Jews were saying to Jesus. It was then that Jesus pulled the curtains on the matter of sin. His argument, somewhat paraphrased, went something like this:

As Jews you are the children of Abraham, and so are not 'sinners of the Gentiles'. It was not Abraham's habit to kill one like me, one who has told you the truth which I heard from God. So you are not in fact acting like Abraham. So do not use that argument. If Abraham were your Father you would love me. However, your real father is the devil. And just as I am glad to do the will of my Father, so your desire is to do the devil's will. The devil is a liar and murderer from the beginning, capable only of lying. He does not have even an inkling of the truth. The reason you have no desire to hear my words is that you do not belong to God even though you are Jews. (John 8:39-47)

Sin, Satan and Enslavement

What Jesus said was strong talk. He revealed that all who sin are the slaves of sin, and so at the same time are slaves of Satan. In Chapter Six of this book we saw the vast organisation of 'the preventers'. That system of preventers was inaugurated by 'the serpent' who, in Revelation 12:9, is described as 'that ancient serpent':

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he

was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

So we see that Adam's sin in Eden brought him under the power of the serpent.¹ This is the primal case of the one who sins becoming the slave of sin, and at the same time the slave of Satan. Another clear example of this would be Cain, Adam's son, who sinned and became the slave of Satan. In Genesis 4:6-7 God spoke to Cain. Cain was greatly displeased at the rejection of his sacrifice:

The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.'

What does it mean for sin to be 'crouching at the door; its desire is for you'? This means that sin, like a crouched lion, is waiting to spring on you, but you must master it by not giving sin an opportunity. Cain did not deny sin. He did not refuse to kill Abel. And so he came under the power of the lion—sin.

The majority of people would deny their case was as acute as Cain's and in that denial they would be wrong. Just as understanding love must come from God opening up this mystery, so the mystery of sin requires a revelation. No human being can really understand the nature of sin, for all sin is primarily against God and is the horrific and arrogant violation of His Being. It is a dreadful entity as we shall soon see.

A humorous person, reading my last sentence, could rightfully say, 'There you go! Blasting off about us not being able to know sin, and yet making your own explanation of it!' Obviously enough he is right. My answer would be, 'Can you really see and understand what I have written? Does it come just as so many words, or does it come as a revelation which tallies with your own

¹ Some readers of Scripture would claim that Adam did not come under the power of the serpent. But Romans 5:12-21 shows how deadly the sin of Adam was. Adam's sin brought sin and death into the world, spreading through all humanity. The Scripture is silent about the first couple after they are ejected from the Garden, except to speak of their 'generation'. In the New Testament, however, the contrast of the first Adam and the last Adam gives us some indication of the corruption of the first Adam. His humanity is 'the old humanity' (*palaion anthropon*) and Christ's is 'the new humanity' (*kainon anthropon*) (Ephesians 4:22-24).

revelation of sin? I can quickly give you verses to justify what I have said, but do you really understand what I have said?'

When it comes to the active power of sin it must be seen that sin is that which keeps us from fellowship with God. We have already seen that man was created for *koinonia* with God and his fellow-creatures. A sinner cannot know God apart from grace, and sin is as a monstrous creature keeping us from knowing Him. When we fail to know God we must also fail to know our fellow humans. The bondage then becomes a relational one. Perhaps we should say our state of bondage is one of being unable to have true relationships. We are created to be dependent on relational living. So when we are in relational bondage, we are enormously deprived of true living.

The Tyrants of Sin, Satan, and Death—the Cruel Trio

In Hebrews 2:14-15 the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that Satan has humanity in thrall because of its fear of death:

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

We see that his power is 'the power [might: *kratos*] of death'. Elsewhere Paul tells us the power (*dunamis*) of sin is the law. In the same breath he tells us that the sting of death is sin.

What, then, are we to make of all this? Man has sinned and therefore come under the power of sin, a matter that we shall take up soon. Because death is the 'wages of sin' (Romans 6:23)—that is, because we die as a result of our sinning—Satan can take hold of our dread of death and keep us in torment by his constant reference to it. Satan persistently accuses us of being worthy of death. John said something like this in his First Letter: 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love' (I John 4:18). If a person were not guilty he would not be under

the power of Satan, he would not be living in fear of death and judgement. Romans 8:1 states, 'There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'. This is really saying that fear of death has no place for the one who has gone through the waters of baptism. There is no substance to the fear of death for the person of faith.

What, then, do we mean by saying that 'He who commits sin is the slave of sin'? The answer is that sin is shown in the Bible to have power by habituation in a human life. It was said by someone, 'Sow a thought and you reap an action. Sow an action and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny'. This applies to sin as much as it applies to goodness. Sin becomes entrenched. Having once given way to it, our actions grow into habits and these habits affect our character, until what is apparent is that we have set a tragic destiny.

Sin is pollution. It is personal, moral pollution. Human beings suffer guilt for having broken the laws of righteousness. They suffer shame for the very defilement and developing putrefaction of sin. Sin makes its own environment, and often the feeling is, 'Might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb'. Despair at wrong habits is the climate for their developing further.

The dread of the future—about which Satan accuses us—makes us further despair until hardness of heart develops and we become cynical of goodness. We also become careless of what lies in the future. Gradually, sin completes its domination by suppressing the conscience and drawing out hatred of things that are good and righteous.

This description itself sounds hard and cynical. But that is not the case. Such a description is written in sadness for what Man can and does become. We have just passed from the twentieth century into the twenty-first. The last century has been described as the bloodiest and cruellest of all centuries. This is possible, but we have no way of recording cruelty. Cruelty is obvious when it is enacted by a Hitler or a Stalin, but it is not so evident in homes where vicious spouses and parents wreak terror. We are discovering today how much abuse has been wrought in families

by family members. Evil not only deceives those pursuing the truth, but disguises itself so that its evil is difficult to recognise.

We have all the evil of Man which has been demonstrated by the plethora of human laws. The depravity is no less in one particular son or daughter of Adam than in any other son or daughter. Divine grace holds back the full expression of such depravity, and redemptive grace saves us from falling into the pit of evil, but in one way or another we all at some time become aware of our own inner evil. The forces of Satan are there to energise and stimulate us into further evil. So then it can be said that we who have sinned are under the bondage of sin, and therefore under the bondage also of the fear of death. Because of this we are also under bondage to Satan and his personal powers—those who are fallen angels and demonic creatures.

Other Dominating Powers

The Conscience: A Tyrant

Some of the 'powers' we will now consider are not evil in themselves. For example, the conscience.² Conscience can be cruel in its demands and keep us in states of unhappiness and pain because of our sins and failures. But our consciences are by no means reliable when they accuse us, because it is a fact that conscience seems to work in close association with our cultural laws and ethics—the things of every day for which we have to make decisions.

The word for conscience in Greek is *syneidesis*. 'Co-awareness' is a good description. An old English word for conscience was 'in wit'. A person is aware along with the conscience. This can be the case either when the situation is good or evil. The Oxford Dictionary defines conscience as 'The faculty or principle which pronounces upon the moral quality of one's actions or motives, approving the right and condemning the wrong'. Paul speaks of his conscience bearing witness (11 Corinthians 1:12 and Romans

² See my booklet on the conscience: *The Conscience—Conquering or Conquered?*, NCPI, 1987.

9:1), but speaks of it doing this ‘in the Holy Spirit’. The conscience is not to be trusted apart from the Holy Spirit.

We have descriptions of conscience such as ‘an evil conscience’, which really means ‘a consciousness of evil’. Richard Sibbes, one of the great Puritans, describes conscience as ‘knowledge ... along with God’. Sibbes wrote, ‘Conscience is not one power, but conscience is in all the powers of the soul ... it is in the understanding ... in the will ... in the affections ... and so it runs through the whole Soul’.³

In the Old Testament the term conscience is not used. Its closest parallel is ‘heart’: ‘David’s heart smote him’ (11 Samuel 24:10). This is a good description of the way the conscience works. There can be no doubt that the heart and conscience are one, especially when working in freedom. When trained in the word of God, especially by revelatory teaching, conscience does its true work. But taught in Natural Law, and subjected to societal departures from the truth—such as in brainwashing and special conditioning—conscience can be weakened. ‘It seems that at rock-bottom conscience is linked with the law of God. At that level conscience will not let Man off from the highest demands.

In the experience of life the conscience can be come ‘evil’. It is not a ‘clear’ or a ‘good’ or a ‘pure’ conscience anymore. Titus 1:15 is relevant here: ‘To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted’. A person who hardens his heart hardens his conscience so that it can be called ‘a seared conscience’. Such a conscience is no longer ethically sensitive. Conscience betrays the sinner.

From our point of view only, one who has a pure and good conscience is free from the bondage of conscience. Conscience, when clear, is linked with the will and law of God and serves the person well. Such a conscience needs to be held in faith, for then the law does not trouble it. Conscience is then a guide in matters relating to the law. But the obstinate or self-righteous person will be visited with terrors by the conscience. We remember that Martin Luther trembled at even the rustling of a dry leaf. Human

beings do not share with others the darkness and fears which visit their souls. Conscience via the law is a tyrant, as we shall further discover when we speak of law.

The Law with Its Curse Is a Tyrant and Is One with the Wrath of God

The law, for the sinner, is ruthless. In Romans 7:7-12 Paul says:

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

This analysis and interpretation of law is brilliant. Wherever law is it causes conflict in a fallen human being for it sets forth what a person should do. But the human heart desires to be autonomous and make its own law, to go its own way. Israel had this problem every moment of every day. It felt forced to obey the disclosed law, but that was in conflict with its own will, for the law demanded obedience to the will of God. In the passage quoted above, the law is seen to be that which kills Man. Sin is no problem where there is no law for ‘it lies dead’. But when law ‘comes’, it then demands obedience. It is then that the conflict begins. Law is ruthless: it kills where there is disobedience. Even so, Paul is clear in saying that it is not the law that is at fault for, ‘the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good’.

The conscience which is taught by the law—as it was in the act of creation—is for the law and against the sinner. Law and conscience combine to accuse the sinner and threaten with death—eternal death. Even God is not permitted to be forgiving or merciful, for to do so will make a nonsense of the law, indicating that God is unholy. The terrors of the law—of which Paul spoke, and on which Martin Luther enlarged—are ever with

³ R. Sibbes, Works, Vol. 3, James Nichol, Edinburgh, 1862, p. 29.

the unredeemed sinner. Whilst sinful Man rationalises his sin as a little thing, almost a nothing, yet the law actually causes sin to ‘revive’, to blaze into life, to become a thing hideous to the sinner.

When the law is properly known by the person in union with God and sharing communion with Him, it is beautiful. Psalms one, nineteen and one hundred and nineteen all show the glory of the law in a remarkable way. Not until the sinner is freed from the penalty of the law and cleansed from the sin which pollutes the lawless person, does the law appear to be what it really is—the written preceptual image of God’.

The law is the means by which man is cursed: ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them’ (Galatians 3:10). There is no way out of this curse if a man persists in lawlessness. Thus sin retains him in the way of the curse. And conscience torments him, because he has refused to abide by it.

The wrath of God—the curse of the law—is, ever against the transgressor and will ensure that he is punished for his disobedience. Romans 1:18 states the matter clearly: ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth’. Of course God’s wrath is not like human wrath which springs from volatile human anger, from frustration, envy and a thousand other things, and rarely from a pure heart and conscience. God’s wrath is His hostility to sin and His determination to destroy it. All evil comes under that wrath, which is pure and wholesome. This wrath shows what a dreadful thing we have done in violating God’s holiness. Evil deserves the destruction which is coming to it. In Psalm 7:11 (AV) we have the statement: ‘God is angry with the wicked every day’.

The Psalmist in Psalm ten discusses the deceived sinner: ‘Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thy hand; forget not the afflicted. Why does the wicked renounce God, and say in his heart, “Thou wilt not call to account?”’ (Psalms 10:12-13). The writer of Ecclesiastes also pondered the matter and came to his conclusion:

Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil. Though a sinner

does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him; but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God. (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13)

In the New Testament John the Baptist warns the Pharisees to ‘flee from the wrath to come’ (Matthew 3:7). Christ talks much about God’s wrath on evil in the Sermon on the Mount. In Romans 2:1-5 Paul warns his Jewish readers in regard to the wrath of God:

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another, for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

Paul also warns the Jews against thinking that law—observance *per se* will bring them to redemption. He says, ‘For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression’ (Romans 4:15). In Galatians 3:10 Paul shows that the law brings human beings under the curse, which is another word for God’s wrath: ‘For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.”’. In Galatians 3:19 Paul links the law and sin, saying the law ‘was added because of transgressions’, that is, to incite the sinner to sin and show up the transgressions of the person.

In I Thessalonians 1:10 Paul writes that it is ‘Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come’, and in this he distinguishes between the wrath that is now being poured out on all who are presently suppressing the truth in acts of wickedness and unrighteousness, and the wrath which will come at the *telos* on those who have

subverted His most holy law and thereby violated His holiness of Being.

The Flesh: A Tyrant

What is 'the flesh'? Many are the answers, such as 'the lower self', 'the autonomous self', 'the old man—Adam', 'fleshliness as manifest in lusts', 'the ego'—and so on. Doubtless all of these are elements of the flesh. The Greek word *sarx* in the New Testament can be used in a good sense, such as 'the body' or 'humanity in general', but 'flesh' in the bad sense is really Man for himself, against God and going to any lengths to assert that self. Although the word *eros* is not directly used in the New Testament, the word could be used of a fleshly person in his so-called 'love'. *Agape* is not fleshly. We have 'the works of the flesh' and 'the fruit of the Spirit' contrasted in Galatians 5:19-23.

Paul gives a clear picture of 'the flesh' in Romans 8:1-11. He says, in essence, that 'those who are in the flesh cannot please God'. Paul also comments that to set the mind on the flesh is death. He describes the flesh as follows: 'For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God' (Romans 8:7-8). As human beings we can have either 'the mind of the flesh' or 'the mind of the Spirit'. Paul tells us that 'the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like'. He then admonishes us, 'I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God' (Galatians 5:19-21).

We will never understand just what the flesh is unless we see it as us going our own way, doing our own thing and being in opposition to God's will and His holy law. We do not here speak of the loneliness and fear, along with anger and opposition to God, which invades the fleshly person. This fleshly Man is in terrible bondage and unbearable emptiness. He cannot escape the prison bars that have closed about him. The flesh as a principle of living is deathly.

We begin to see, then, that the serpent has developed his own system, the system we sometimes call 'the world' or 'this age'—'this present evil age'—and all who go his way are fleshly. We will have occasion to open this more in our next chapter. But if we look back through this chapter we will realise that all these enemies—sin, Satan, the world, death, idols and the flesh—are seeking to defeat God, destroy His Kingdom, subvert His counsel and replace Him with their own devised system. They seek to use the conscience, the law, and the wrath of God to their advantage. They have no love for God's Creation, nor His creatures. In particular, they have no love for Man.

We will go on to look at the defeat of all these enemies, and the consequent rich freedom to which we were introduced at the beginning of this chapter.

Chapter Sixteen

The Liberator of Creation

Introduction: Man in Need of Liberation

In the last chapter we saw the many enemies of fallen Man. We could have come to the conclusion that it is impossible for man to extricate himself from the enemies and the doom to which they are pushing him. Of course we might have come to the conclusion that Man is free—whatever! But of course the matter is not as simple as that and the idea that he is free is a delusion. We will press on with the idea that he is in bondage to various enemies, and that he cannot escape from the chains of his captivity. So he needs someone to deliver him.

Whilst this is Man's state, we also need to see that not only is Man bound but so also is the whole Creation (we may not have perceived that, but then perception is no great guide to anything—it is influenced by so many factors not consciously known to us). Up to this point we have not given a great deal of attention to the matter of Creation. But we must see the immense significance of Creation. If we examine the first chapter of Genesis we see that God patiently developed it from chaos—*tohu wa bohu* ('without form and void')—into a beautiful world with vegetation, fish, other sea creatures, animals and Man. In fact, it was a unit, a fellowship (*koinonia*) that was, and is, functional. It was seen by God to be 'very good', and it was given the setting of a never-ending Sabbath rest.

On the sixth day—whatever 'day' may mean—Man was created. The Creator then made Eden. Man, who He had already created, was then placed in this Garden Paradise and in that situation the woman was created from a rib of the man. Their unity was likened to 'one flesh'. They were given rule or kingship over the whole Creation. In some way all that was created other than Man was made dependent upon Man for its true being and function.

So with the fall of Man, the Creation was 'subjected to futility' (Roman 8:20), as Paul later described. Thus we can see that the Creation was once different from what it is now. It may not be

possible to precisely define the differences, but there are hints given that when Creation is rehabilitated from this subjection to futility, then it will be as it once was. Indeed, it is said, it will be more than it was. Apparently, Man's glorification will open the way for the Creation itself to be glorified. Romans 8:18-21 gives us a picture of what will be:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope, because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Paul was saying that Creation is in 'its bondage to decay'. Again we cannot say fully what this is, although some passages of Scripture point to an idyllic situation when such 'bondage to decay' will have been removed. See, for example, Isaiah 11:6-9:

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

*The cow and the bear shall feed;
their young shall lie down together,
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

*The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.*

*They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;*

*for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*

This may be a literal change or the terms used here may be figures for a transformation of Creation. It does not matter. We can understand the principle of what will happen when Messiah works in this world. The key to understanding is seeing that Creation belongs to God. When He subjects it to futility this is not a judgement upon Creation or punishment of it, but a judgement on Man and some form of punishment for his rebellion in Eden.

What we are working towards in the introductory section to this chapter is showing that the Creation matters much in God's eyes.

Creation is not just a backdrop to Man's activity. It is not the decor on a stage where Man walks to and fro and works out his destiny. Creation has a destiny no less than that of Man. In fact, its destiny and Man's are really the one. There is a hymn inspired from the quote from Isaiah above which gives us a key to that destiny: 'For the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea'. This means, on the one hand, that the glory of God shall be revealed. On the other hand, we also understand that all Creation—and this includes Man, for he is part of Creation—will be glorified.

What we are seeking to show under the heading of this present chapter—'The Liberator of Creation'—is that Christ's incarnation was with a view to redeeming all Creation and not only Man who is but part of it. There is this we call 'cosmic redemption'—all that God has created will be freed from whatever bondage it has been in. The whole Creation will know 'the liberty of the glory of the sons of God'. The Apostle Peter once wrote, 'You can trust yourself to a faithful Creator' (I Peter 4:19), and by this He meant that what God has intended to do with His Creation He will surely do. He has a great love for His Creation.

Christ, the World's Redeemer and Perfecter

The Nature of God's Creation

The passages John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-3 and I Corinthians 8:6 have one thing in common: through Christ as both 'Son' and 'Word' the world was created, and is now upheld and held together. The Old Testament tells us that creation was carried out by God, also telling us that the Holy Spirit was present in the act (Psalm 104:29-30; Job 33:4). From our point of view then, we can see that the act of creation was Trinitarian. The term 'all things' is plentifully used in the New Testament. Christ will bring 'all things' into a unity by the time the Creation is perfected. Before that ultimate perfection must come the redemption of all things, and it is this which happens at the Cross and by the Resurrection.

Man was given the commission of Genesis 1:28-29 to 'Edenise' the whole earth. That is, he was to take the elements of Eden in which he dwelled and shape all of Creation on Eden's principles. Those principles constituted a place of beauty and perfection: the home of mankind; the garden with its fruitage and its river of life—the one intended to 'water the whole earth'; the sanctuary, especially the 'holy mountain'; the place of royal leadership; the site of true Marriage; and the context of God's Sabbath Rest—the seventh day rest. The whole earth was to be Edenic in character and living.

When Man sinned and Eden was closed against him it did not mean that the commission given to him by God was revoked. It did not mean that all the 'good things' of Eden were locked away for ever. The true pattern and 'shape' of Creation was still Eden. Creation would have come to full realisation when it exhibited Eden's perfection. In a later chapter, we will see that God's blessing on His Creation (Genesis 1:22, 28; cf. 9:1) is in order that it might reach perfection, and His cursing is an action against those who would disturb that which is already blessed (Genesis 3:14, 17; 4:11 ff.). This principle of blessing and cursing is in action to the end of history.

The First Adam was commissioned to effect world Edenisation. For that task he was made to be Prophet, Priest and King. But he failed his commission. The Second Adam was the true Prophet, Priest and King. He will Edenise the whole Creation. There was the redemption of the Creation at the Cross and by the Resurrection. Its Edenisation is presently in process, and will be wholly accomplished.

Satan's Grip on God's Creation

'Satan's Grip on God's Creation' is a vast subject if we were to trace it through all the Scriptures. But it is enough to state the Satanic principle which sets about to destroy the blessing. The Creation would then be wholly cursed, under the control of 'the ruler [prince] of this world'. The Creation would be subjugated to 'the prince of the power of the air'.¹

¹ For this matter of conflict between Christ and Satan see my *The Clash of the Kingdoms*, NCPI, 1999; *Jesus the World's Perfecter* by Karl Heim, Oliver and Boyd Edinburgh, 1959; *Christ the Conqueror* by Ragnar Leivestad, SPCK, London, 1954; *Christus Victor* by Gustaf Aulen, SPCK, London, 1961.

While he is in Satan's grip, Man is to be made to *follow* the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience' (Ephesians 2:2). Satan will set his throne 'above the stars of God' for he wills that he be 'like the Most High' (Isaiah 14:13, 14). In one sense every time a curse is pronounced and is in action, Satan profits by the command of God. The system that Satan has devised is called 'the world [kosmos]' or 'the present evil age [*aeon*]'. John puts it most poignantly in his First Letter: 'We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one' (I John 5:18-19). In the same letter he had also written:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever. (I John 2:15-17)

If we look at John's teaching closely we will see that his 'world' is not to be understood as the created world. Rather, in John, the 'I world' is to be interpreted in the way that Satan and his minions see it. Of Satan, the devil, John has this to say: 'He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil' (I John 3:8-9).

We have not unmasked the whole of the evil system of the devil, his perversion of God and of all Creation. It is important that we understand Paul's statement: 'For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12). To understand this statement is to begin to understand the massive struggle that Satan has fought in order to have control over God's Creation. When we understand this we

will also realise how indispensable the battle of the Cross was, not only for the liberation of Man but also for the liberation of the whole Creation.

Christ and the Liberation of All Things in Bondage

The action of Christ in liberating all things in bondage is His major work. Satan has what we might call a brilliant system composed of high celestial creatures which the Red Dragon drew down from heaven (Revelation 12:4) and which have been called fallen angels. He has a system which apes all that God is and does. He comes to the Cross to destroy Christ and His work. Did not Jesus say: 'I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father' (John 14:30-31)? Did he not also say: 'Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (John 12:31-32)? Again, did he not say, '... concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged' (John 16:11)? It is recorded that when the soldiers and others came to take Jesus as Judas betrayed Him, that Jesus then said: 'When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness' (Luke 22:53).

Whilst the vast opposition to Him from the powers of darkness was in His mind, He had much more on which to ponder at the time of 'the beginning of sorrows'. This world had been invaded by Satan and his hosts, but the world belonged not to Satan but to God. And 'God so loved the world' (John 3:16). Christ so loved the world that He was laying down His life for it. Christ had become a man for Adam and all his race, and now was the hour of darkness and its strange authority. Only love could take Jesus to that Cross. Only love would help Him to bear the outrageous devilry which would come upon Him from Satan and his demons. Only love would help Him to bear the arrogant rebellion and blasphemy that Man had wrought against the Holy Father.

The powers ranged against Him could not even begin to comprehend the power of His love, or the mighty resources within Him which would operate in the darkest hour the world had ever

known, the darkest hour that the world would ever know. Hatefully as evil powers struck at Him and bitter as were their accusation and horrible as was their scorn and vituperation, none of this was beyond the capacity of His love and the sheer purity of His being. He had never sinned, nor had He even contemplated sinning.

Paul's View of the Cross in His Letter to the Galatians

One could not find a better presentation on the work of the Cross than in Paul's Letter to the Galatians. It is true that other Letters have very powerful statements regarding the work of the Cross and we will have reason to use these, but Galatians commences in hot haste and with the strong words:

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5)

This is the first disclosure of Christ's work—'who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age'. The verb 'to give' or, 'give up to' (paradidomi) is used many times regarding Jesus death. The Father gave Him 'up to'; and the Son gave Himself 'up to'—everything lies in what the 'up to' means. He was given 'up to' death; 'up to' the machinations of the evil forces; 'up to' the terrible suffering which is the wrath of God. The point is clear, for when He gave Himself up to death it was 'for our sins'. That is, God 'made him to be sin for us' (11 Corinthians 5:21, AV). He 'suffered for sins, the just for the unjust' (1 Peter 3:18, AV). He I was once offered to bear the sins of many' (Hebrews 9:28, AV), 'to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:26, AV). He had 'offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins' (Hebrews 10:12), for 'the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53:6). And 'he bore the sin of many and, made intercession for the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12).

And for what purpose was this offering of Himself? It was 'to deliver us from the present evil age' (Galatians 1:4). In that act of suffering our sins and guilt, Christ for ever silenced the whole world of evil. Henceforth it would have no place of accusation

against those who hide in the Cross. Satan, evil powers and even such 'good enemies that were'—the law, conscience, and the wrath of God—have nought to say against the forgiven person.

Now the Cross has dissolved all guilt of all sinners. It must be this way or nothing has been accomplished. Paul could proclaim:

Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38-39)

So then both the devil and his principalities and powers have been put to shame. The weapon they used so brutally against the spirits of sinners has been wrested from them. Colossians 2:14-15 needs to be read closely:

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

Likewise, Hebrews 2:14-15 bears the same message. The 'fear of death' has been wholly dissolved and the grip of Satan broken. The perfect love of the Cross has cast out all fear of punishment:

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

We are now in a position to understand the work of His Cross more fully: 'he gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age'. The cosmic powers of evil have lost their hold on this world created by God. If this is not enough to cheer us, then we should read Galatians 6:14: 'But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world'. This is saying that the world, that system which is Satanic and therefore anti-God, has received its death knell. The dynamics of the Cross have set me free from that system. We cannot compass in our minds the staggering victory wrought on the Cross against all evil.

We now pass on to the second work of the Cross:

For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose. (Galatians 2:19-21)

This second work of the Cross relates firstly to the law, and then to the crucifixion of the human person. It is not often that readers have linked together 'law' and 'death'. Paul is saying that the law kills me because I have transgressed it. This is true. But in this case Paul—and we also—was killed at the Cross when Christ faced the law with the train of Man's transgressions on His belt. On the Cross He was all Mankind. All Mankind were transgressors. So Jesus became the transgressor for all of them. His death was their death—our death—to the law (see 11 Corinthians 5:21). No longer can the law demand its right of our death. That is why there is no condemnation (no judgement) to those who are in Christ Jesus, that is, those who by faith are one with Christ, those who are in union with Him.

To be crucified with Christ is not mere, figurative statement. The reality can be seen in the statement of a sinner like Paul: 'The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners' (I Timothy 1:15). If a person does not die to his sins in Christ, then because 'the wages of sin is death', then he/she will yet have to die outside of Christ.² That death in Christ, by grace, has happened for the believer. And the erstwhile sinner can, and does, live life in Christ, by faith in Christ, or—as the translation can possibly be—'by the faith of Christ'.

² What do we mean by the terms 'in Christ' and 'outside of Christ'? We mean that the work of the Cross was wrought by Christ for all mankind and for Creation's liberation. To believe in Christ and His work means that we become His people, and are united to Him. This union is by baptism. 'By baptism' means we take Christian baptism and are henceforth known as Christ's people. We are in union with Him, and have communion with Him. Whatever happened on the Cross to crucify us with Him is a mystery. Whilst it is true to say that all human beings were crucified with Him, in that He died for them, yet only faith in Him can bring us the benefits of His work on the Cross. In one sense, what Christ did for every sinner has been done in vain if that work is rejected or neglected.

All of this, Paul points out, is the grace of God in action.

The next text in Galatians that we consider is 3:10-14:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them. 'Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for 'He who through faith is righteous shall live'; but the law does not rest on faith, for 'He who does them shall live by them.' Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree'—that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Paul knows that his readers have had people come among them who, though Christian in name, are teaching that Christians should rely on their ability to keep the law. Paul says that if anyone attempts to be justified before God by the law, that one is in danger of coming under the curse of the law for the reason that it is impossible to keep the law, as such. He who does not keep it is cursed. Paul explains that Christ redeemed them from the law by Himself becoming a curse, a curse for them. That He was cursed—or, 'the curse'—is shown by His hanging on a tree. Deuteronomy 21:23 said that anyone hanged on a tree was cursed. In Christ's case, we should see that He was not a curse because He had been hanged on a tree, but that He was *accounted* a curse and so hanged on a tree, that is, on the Cross. Of course the curse was believed to be the wrath of God. So we can see that Paul was claiming that the matter of God's wrath upon sin had been completed on the Cross. Believers were now free from the threat of wrath of God.

It is clear that, especially for the Jews, Paul is saying that all the curse that Israel had known, was now taken away. Christ Jesus had become the curse. All under the curse of law were now redeemed from that curse. Because of this death of Christ, the blessing of Abraham would come upon all who believed in Christ. That blessing which was for all the nations was justification by faith. This had been the way in which Abraham had been blessed (Genesis 15:6). Along with that blessing was the gift of the Holy Spirit. All this, then, was the fruit of the Cross.

The next reference relating to Christ's work of the Cross is Galatians 5:24. It is a simple statement: 'And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires'. Paul is making an important statement here. He is saying that the believer has done something: 'He crucified the flesh'. The verb 'crucified' in the Greek text is in the *aorist* tense. This indicates that the flesh has been crucified in the past. Something has been done about it already. It is probably best to take it as a parallel with Galatians 2:20 and 6:14 and see the act happening in Christ's action within crucifixion, whereby the one participating in that death is consenting to his death and actually desiring it. No one can crucify his flesh outside of the action of Christ.

'Flesh' here is that which we described elsewhere as self-centred ego. But note also that the flesh has also been crucified 'with its passions and desires'. This should be placed alongside 'the works of the flesh' in 5:19-21. It really is a parallel to the 'old self' of Romans 6:6. Because of the work of Christ's crucifixion, the flesh has no place in the new life of the believer. It is interesting to trace it in the eighth chapter of Romans. In verses 12 to 13 Paul wrote, 'So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live'.

The mention of debtors takes us back to the idea of guilt. Only he who is guilty is obligated to the deadly enemies. At the Cross Christ has effectively remitted the debt, and so the flesh is in no position to serve a summons on the believer. He cannot be made to face up in the court of the law. To the contrary, 'he who has died [with Christ in the Cross] *is justified* from sin' (Romans 6:7, ASV). This is the thought that runs through all Paul's references to the Cross, and his understanding of the forgiveness of sins and justification from guilt.

Paul does say however, that we are debtors to the Spirit, to live after the Spirit. We can link this thought with Galatians 5:1: 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery'. In both Romans and Galatians the Spirit is seen as the Spirit of liberty, for it is the Holy Spirit who brings 'the word of the cross' to be actively present in the

human heart. Then all the work of the Cross makes its impact upon a person, and that one understands that Christ has redeemed the whole being of the person.

The Liberator of the Whole Creation

Although we have covered a great deal of the work of the Cross, there is still much that has not been said. We remember that Christ said, 'Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin ... so if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed' (John 8:34,36). We also remember that he said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

Indeed, we see that throughout His ministry in Palestine that He had a liberating ministry which Peter later summed up in the words of Acts 10:38: 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power ... he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him'.

'All that were oppressed by the devil' reminds us of our chapter on 'The Preventers' and Chapter Fifteen where we dealt with the act of the serpent to prevent the grand plan of God to bring the world to its ultimate sanctification, glorification and perfection. It reminds us, too, that that whole system of 'the world'—Satan's aggressive and deceitful system—was defeated at the Cross when Jesus bore the sin and guilt of the world and so destroyed 'the fear of death', thus rendering Satan unable to harm those who have been crucified with Christ.

What, then, Christ set out to do, He has done. Satan has been cast down. The works of the devil have been destroyed. By the Resurrection death has been shown to be powerless, and the fear of death has been further defeated. By the Resurrection Christ has been made Lord over all principalities and powers, both good and

evil. He is now King of the triumphant Kingdom of God, and He is displacing every enemy Man has known.

It may be true that here on earth we can rarely hear the triumphant worship in heaven, but one day we will do so. In 'the heaventies' there is no doubt as to who is Lord over all things. We have our own songs to celebrate and tell abroad the news that He is the Liberator of the universe.

His Seal Upon Us

But here and now, where are we left in our searching for God? John records the following words uttered by Christ to His disciples before the crucifixion:

I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me, concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:7-11)

Jesus is talking here of the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit. How do we know that we know God? Just as He promised, Jesus has given 'us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee' (I Corinthians 1:22). Our spirits do bear witness with the Spirit of God 'when we cry, "Abba! Father!"'.

The Spirit is the surety given to us to convince us that 'the whole counsel of God' will be fulfilled. He is the surety that one day the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.