

The Fullness of the Blessing of Christ

(Evening Sessions)

PASTORS' SCHOOL 1996

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STUDY ONE

The Triune God, Source of Blessing

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF BLESSING

We must first ask ourselves, ‘What is the nature of blessing?’ Leaving aside the difficulty in trying to establish linguistic origins of the word and idea, a quote from K. H. Richards is most helpful:

Bless/blessing has been most frequently understood in terms of benefits conveyed—prosperity, power, and especially fertility. The focus on the content of the benefit is now being viewed as secondary. The primary factor of blessing is the statement of relationship between parties. God blesses with a benefit on the basis of the relationship. The blessing makes known the positive relationship between the parties, whether a single individual (Gen 12:1–3) or a group (Deut 7:14–16). The recipient and others become aware of the value of the relationship and hence its desirability (Job 42:12). Human blessings portray the good will between parties and find their basis in the human-divine relationship. Just as with God’s blessing, they may either convey benediction (Num 6:24–26) or benefaction (Gen 33:11).¹

If we take the basis for blessing as a relational one, then that leads us immediately to the Triune God, that is, the Trinity which is essentially relational, the social Godhead which is not monolithically monotheistic, but socially One. We are really saying the Three Persons constitute one God who has unity in diversity. Only such a God can give blessing as further Studies will show.

¹ K. H. Richards’s article ‘Bless/Blessing’ in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (Doubleday, New York, 1992), p. 754.

THE GODHEAD OF BLESSING

In this Study we seek to see God as the Source of all blessing, because innately he is the Fount of blessing. We mean that the relationships between the Persons of the Godhead are such that they bless one another. So we speak of works of the ontological Trinity—the *opera ad intra*, and the works of the economic Trinity—the *opera ad extra*.² Many theologians have pointed out that this old division of two sets of works is an artificial one. God is One and his works are one. For God to have his works and relationships within the Trinity means that they will not terminate there, but by virtue of the fact that God is Creator–Redeemer, the *opera ad extra* will flow from the *ad intra* unity of love and holiness. Even so, we will use the two categories as convenient pegs on which to hang our ideas of God being the resource for blessing.

The Ontological Trinity and the *opera ad intra*

Accepting the fact that God is ineffable, that is, we cannot know him unless he reveals himself (cf. Exod 15:11; Isa. 40:18; 44:7), and accepting the fact that we *will not* know him, anyhow (Ps. 14:1–3), since we are sinners who have rejected the knowledge of God (Rom. 1:28), yet he has revealed himself to humanity. What we need to see here is the reality of the communion of the Three, the coinherence of the Persons and the dynamics of *perichoresis* in which they subsist. That is, ‘the permanent interpenetration, the eternal co-relatedness, the self-surrender of each Person to the others form the Trinitarian union, the union of Persons . . . In the Trinity all is perichoretic: union, love, hypostatic relationships’.³

Within the Godhead, in the action of *perichoresis*, we need to see that each Person is ‘other-Persons centred’.⁴ The age-long debate of whether the Trinity is monarchical or equalitarian we will bypass for the moment,⁵ simply saying that the Father is *fons divinitatis*, that is, the Source from which the Son is eternally generated, the Spirit proceeding from both Father and Son. The reality that the Father is in the Son and the Spirit, the Son in the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit in the Father and the Son, substantiates perichoretic unity.

This revealed notion of God has vast implications for humanity which is made in the image of God; great implications for humans in being, doing and having relationships—both with God and among themselves. We will note these more in looking at the *opera ad extra*.

² Herman Hoeksema in his book *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Pub., 1976), p. 154, says:

Theologians have always distinguished between the works of God which are purely immanent, in Himself, and the works of God which have reference to the creature, the *opera ad intra* and the *opera ad extra*; or, according to others, the *opera immanentia* and the *opera exeuntia*. The *opera immanentia* are distinguished between the *opera immanentia per se* and the *opera immanentia donec exeunt*. The former are the *opera personalia*, which include the generation of the Son by the Father, the being generated of the Son by the Father, and the procession of the Holy Spirit; while the latter are the *opera essentialia*, that is, the works of the Triune God which are immanent in God, but are destined to be revealed and to be realized in the works of creation and providence and redemption. To these works of God *immanentia donec exeunt* belongs the counsel of God. Although this council is revealed in the outgoing works of God, the counsel as such is nevertheless immanent in God Himself.

³ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Bums and Oates, Tunbridge Wells, 1988), p. 5. For further Bibliography see my *All Things Are Yours* (NCPI, 1996) and *NCTM Pastors’ School*, 1991.

⁴ This is the phrase Dr David Broughton Knox uses in his book *The Everlasting God* (Evangelical Pr., 1988).

⁵ This will be partly dealt with in our Study ‘The Blessing of the Hierarchy of Love’.

The Triune God, Source of Blessing

What is indispensable for us in seeing God as the Source of blessing, is the nature and place of each of the Three Persons as they constitute the Trinity. What we are saying is that God's Fatherhood, his Sonship and his Spirithood are the source of their equivalent relationships as they are expressed in the image of God.

- (a) ***God's Fatherhood.*** God is Father first of all of his Son. This is the ontological relationship which carries so much significance in the *opera ad extra* for his being Father to all human beings. Eternally the Father has been the Father, and the Son the Son. As much as is revealed to us of this Father–Son relationship is what we will know for human Father–son and father–son relationships.⁶ This will also include the ideas of 'family'. Well is he called 'the Father of love'.⁷
- (b) ***God's Sonship.*** The Son is the Son of the Father within the Trinity. We say this rather than refer to him as the Son of God. The term 'Son of God' more appertains to him in his incarnation. His Sonship for us as humans is significant for us as sons—sons of the Father and sons of our fathers. Again, God the Father gives 'the children' to the Son (Heb. 2:11–17). Well is he called 'the Son of his love'.
- (c) ***God's Holy Spirithood.*** The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. It is thought by some that the Spirit 'links' the Father and the Son, but such linking is unnecessary by nature of the case. It is better to think of the Spirit as being in the midst of the Father–Son relationship, and so being the communicator of this part of the mystery of God. Well is he called 'the Spirit of love'.

We may sum up this section by saying that the blessing the Three Persons receive from one another in their inter-serving, their inter-honouring, their inter-giving and their inter-receiving, is the essential nature of the blessing of the Godhead. Man, as the image of God, has these elements inherent in him, and their true operations are a blessing to Man.

The Economic Trinity and the *opera ad extra*

God's ineffability does not hide the mystery of God.⁸ God is revelator of himself. The reception of his revelation is summed up in the words of Jesus to his disciples, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given'. In the context of this saying, he shows that willing hearers will hear and understand, but others will not. It is interesting to note that all that we know of God comes to us from the Scriptures. This includes the *opera ad intra*.

- (a) ***The Works of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*** are Creation, Redemption and the Sanctification of all things.⁹ By this we mean all works—the *opera ad extra*—to do with creation are Trinitarian.

⁶ We, then, speak of Divine archetypes and human ectypes when speaking of Man relating to and drawing from the Divine realities of the Persons.

⁷ In I John 4:7–16 it is clear that the Father is spoken of as love. God is love virtually means 'the Father is love'. In Colossians 1:13, the Son is spoken of as 'the Son of his love'. In Romans 5:5, 15:30, and Colossians 1:8, we see the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love. This must be so, seeing he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

⁸ See the Study 'Knowing the Mystery and Mysteries of God' in the series of Monday Pastors' Studies, 6/2/95.

⁹ By 'sanctification of all things' we mean the things of the *telos*, all of which are holy, having been made holy by the Trinity.

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- (b) ***The Blessing of Fatherhood***—the Father’s Fatherhood, from which all fatherhood or familyhood is derived (Eph. 3:15), is seen in the act of the Father sending His Son. This is a great event. With the Son and all his obedient endeavours, he—the Father—deliberately abandons him up, after having glorified him on earth. He glorifies the Son in abandoning him up. This shows the love of the Father for the Son—he sets him to obtain glory by *kenosis*; incarnation, obedient activity (his obedience, vis-a-vis Rom. 5), and glory by the Cross and his activity there; followed by the power of the Resurrection: Christ is thus glorified in his humanity. The blessing of this Fatherhood is in that Father’s action to bring ‘many sons to glory’, and in perfecting them for ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’. So we see Fatherhood in the glorification and sanctification of the elect family.
- (c) ***The Blessing of the Son and His Sonship***. The blessing of the Son is in the acknowledgment of the Father, the doing of his will via *kenosis*, incarnational living, and the baptism of suffering. He reveals the Father in the incarnational actions, and then at the Cross. Here we see true Sonship of the Father. It is at once Sonship for us,¹⁰ and Elder Brotherhood, drawing the family to himself and thus to the Father (Heb. 2:10–17). His being High Priest to the Family, and Priest obedient to the Father, reveals his intercessory love for his brethren.
- (d) ***The Blessing of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and the Son***. The Spirit, who has lived in the communion of the Three—in the Son and the Father—is the one who reveals the Father and the Son and himself in the Trinitarian works both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In this he reveals to us the mystery of God.¹¹ Through the revelation of the mystery of God, he brings all into the communion which is known within the Godhead. He thus brings the essence of the mystery of Fatherhood, and the mystery of Sonship, and the mystery of familyhood, by his actions as the Spirit of love, unity and worship. He is in all the works of creation, redemption, sanctification and glorification, and is truly the Spirit of the *eschata*, the holy things of the *telos*.

CONCLUSION

If we were to sum up the operations of God which bring blessing in their action, then we could invent a set of terms. ‘Salvation history’ is a well-known one, but what about ‘Covenant history’, ‘Kingdom of God history’, ‘Edenic history’, ‘Sabbath Rest history’, ‘Sanctification history’, ‘Marriage history’? All these elements are the expression of the Triune God—the *opera ad extra*.

Thus we see the plenitude of blessing *in* the Trinity *ad intra*, and *from* the Trinity *ad extra*, the whole relational matter of the entire Godhead being the ‘God of all grace’, ‘the God of peace’, the God who is ‘the Holy One’ and not just ‘the Holy’,¹² the God who is love. God will not keep himself to himself, and his glory is that all things are the fullness of his glory, and so the revelation of his holiness. He is love, and so it is

¹⁰ Passages such as Galatians 4:4–7, Romans 8:14–25, John 14:1–10, and the Sermon on the Mount, show us the reality of Divine Fatherhood, which in the Son, and by the Spirit embraces us as sons of God.

¹¹ It would be good to see from John 16:12–15, I Corinthians 2:7–13, and I Corinthians 14:2, that the Spirit reveals, beyond normal human comprehension and articulation, the mystery of God, and the mysteries contained within that mystery.

¹² See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford University Press, London, 1977).

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out of the treasury of his love—‘according to his riches in glory’—that he creates and provides and covenants, and saves and resurrects and glorifies and inducts, his elect into the mystery of himself for ever, making them kings and priests unto Him—their God. Blessed be God forever!

Final Note: Perhaps we should also have included the fact that God is also the God of the cursing, but that will be dealt with in a later Study.

STUDY TWO

The Blessing of Worship in the Father

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



ALWAYS THE FATHER

In the Triune Godhead there was always the Father, the fountain of all Godhead. Likewise there was always the Son, generated from the Father, and with these Two the Holy Spirit, always the Spirit of the Father and the Son. It is through the works *ad extra* that we understand the inner life of the Trinity. In the Old Testament there are enough references to God being the Father of his people for that fact to be known. Paul's sermon at Athens stretches back to creation—'We are indeed his offspring', that is, 'In him we live and move and have our being'. The New Testament abounds with references to the Father. There can be no doubt that this fact is central to the New Testament writers.

GOD, SANCTIFICATION & WORSHIP

Blessing, Sanctification and Worship

God is the Holy One. He alone in all heaven and earth is intrinsically holy. No other being or thing is such. God is pleased to sanctify celestial beings so that they are holy. He also sanctifies certain human creatures, places and things, but all of these are linked with worship of him, and working in his service. So we have the seventh day both blessed and sanctified. 'Blessed' conveys the idea of being imbued with power for the fulfilment of God's purpose (cf. Gen. 1:22, 28; 5:2; 9:1). He also gives power to certain creatures to invoke, and so impart, such blessing. As to sanctification, the seventh day becomes holy. A creational ordinance is inferred in Genesis 2:1–3, supported by Exodus 20:8–11, 23:12, and other references. It is also referred to as a

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sign to Israel forever between her and God who rested on the seventh day. In Exodus 35:2 it is to be ‘a holy sabbath of a solemn rest to the LORD’.¹

Our main point in mentioning the seventh day rest is that it is still proceeding, and only those who are God’s people will fully participate in it. Without doubt Eden, among other things, was a holy place, a sanctuary where God was present and worshipped. Inherent in creation was the holy covenant of God, a covenant which as yet had not had to call upon redemptive grace. Doubtless there was, in Eden, participation in the seventh day rest.

Worship Outside of Eden

We are not told anything regarding the worship of the primal couple outside of Eden, but we assume they knew what it was in perfection, when it was Edenic. We do know about the worship of Cain and Abel. Cain’s worship was faulty and led, ultimately, to cursing. Abel’s worship was ‘by faith’ and found acceptable. John the Apostle comments that Abel was a child of God, so in this sense he must have known the Fatherhood of God.² Paul’s argument in Galatians chapter 3 is this: all persons of faith are the children of Abraham, and persons of faith are sons of God ‘in Christ Jesus’.

Paul, in Acts 17:22–31, has as his main subject the worship of God. Arguing that God cannot be confined to ‘shrines made by man’, he progresses to show that worship of idols is unacceptable to God. Almost certainly he is quoting from Jeremiah 2:26–27, ‘As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed; they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, “You are my father,” and to a stone, “You gave me birth”’. This quote tells us of idols being regarded as spawning children, that is, worshippers.³

We cannot here describe the history and nature of idols, but we take it from Romans 1:19–25 that the Gentile nations were soaked in idolatry. Abraham was an idolater to whom God showed himself, thus purging him from his idols. Stephen, in Acts 7, said idolatry was always resident in Israel.

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL EXCLUSIVELY HOLY & POSSESSING THE ONLY TRUE WORSHIP

In Romans 9:4, Paul speaks of God’s gift of worship to Israel. This was in the setting of other gifts, such as the sonship, the glory, the law, the covenants and the promises. Given the sinfulness of Man, worship could not obtain in any other setting. Jesus told the woman at the well that the place where worship was authentic was Jerusalem, for ‘salvation is from the Jews’. It is interesting that Jesus connects genuine and acceptable worship with God’s salvation.

We need not here go into the whole question of Israel being God’s holy people and nation, as set out in the Old Testament. Such worship is linked with tabernacle,

¹ Of course there are other references which relate redemption from Egypt to be signified by the sabbath, e.g. Deuteronomy 5:12–15.

² See I John 3:10ff. Jesus called him a prophet, and the writer of Hebrews indicated that he was a man of faith.

³ Jeremiah 2:26–27 may be referring to the male and female deities that were worshipped by the Gentiles.

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and later, the temple, but it is only because they are a holy nation and a holy people⁴ that they are eligible and called to worship God in purity.⁵ Deuteronomy 14:1–2 links pure worship and being sons of God (the Father) together.

You are the sons of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the people that are on the face of the earth.

This injunction refuses Israel any mixing of idolatrous worship and the pure worship of the Lord.

By Jesus' time exclusiveness of Israel's worship is strongly established. Paul faced this fact in his proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Ephesians 2:11–22 shows the exclusiveness and then the breaking down of it through the work of Christ, bringing all peoples under the Fatherhood of God.

THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD & TRUE WORSHIP

Jesus certainly comes as the Son of the Father. Paul later speaks of 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. It is 'the Son who is in the bosom of the Father' who reveals God—as Father. He himself, as a young worshipper, was 'in my Father's house', which he links with Isaiah 56:7 as 'a house of prayer for all nations'. He constantly revealed his relation, as Son, with the Father.⁶ At the same time he wanted his hearers to know—particularly as Israelites—that God was their Father. Many times in the Sermon on the Mount he speaks of 'your Father' and in his given prayer they were to say, 'Our Father'. John 14:1–10 is a powerful exposition of his revelation of God as his Father uniquely, and theirs as a consequence. Jesus' ministry was to show the Father, and perhaps his High-Priestly prayer of John 17, when he cried, 'Holy Father!', is one of the most dynamic communications of the Holy Father. His first and last cries on the Cross were similarly dynamic in articulating his Father's Fatherhood.⁷ Later the Pauline and Johannine epistles bring home powerfully the fact that all who believe on Christ—the way, the truth and the life of the Father—are indeed sons of God by adoption, children of God by regeneration.⁸

Jesus and the New Worship

Investigation here of new worship is necessarily a wide one, involving the destruction of the temple of Herod in Jerusalem; Christ's resurrection resulting in him being the new temple; along with Christ's statement that the temple of Herod would

⁴ See Deuteronomy 7:6; Exodus 19:5–6.

⁵ The whole of the cultus is set out particularly in the books Exodus to Deuteronomy.

⁶ We could easily gain the impression, especially from John's Gospel, that Jesus desired that he be seen as the Son of the Father, rather than, say, simply the Son of God. Whilst these two ideas are by no means mutually exclusive, it seemed that he wanted his listeners to know that he was one with the Father.

⁷ John 1:18; 10:29, 30, 37, 38; 17:1–5, 20–26; Hebrews 2:9–10, all speak of the Fatherhood in action in Jesus, even to the death of the Cross.

⁸ It is clear that Paul in Romans 8:14–30 speaks of 'sons of God' and 'children of God' more or less interchangeably. John, in the Gospel and his Epistles, speaks rather of the children of God and links becoming children with the new birth.

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be totally destroyed. Again there is the teaching that the people of God in Christ are particularly temples of the Holy Spirit and corporately the new temple of God.⁹

What is deeply significant for us is the passage of John 4:16–26:

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'

If we ask what is the key to this discussion it must surely lie in the use of the term 'Father'. Jesus has made it clear that true worship is not rendered on Mount Gerizim. Technically it is rendered on Mount Sion, although Jesus had reason to be critical of some of its aspects of worship. With all its weaknesses it was 'my Father's house', and 'the house of prayer for all nations'. To say 'salvation is from the Jews', meant it was the only place of worship. Something is happening, and is also about to happen, whereby the Jewish and Samaritan places and forms of worship will be outmoded. The Samaritans espoused only the law—the Pentateuch—whilst the Jews espoused 'the law and the prophets'—the whole body of truth and practice.

The new worship was to be of the Father, Jesus' Father. It was not only not to be limited to Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim, but it was to be universal. To the Jews this teaching would be shockingly radical. Whenever they thought of God as Father, he was nevertheless the one who dwelt in the Holy of Holies, and appropriate worship had to be given him through the cultus. To speak of God 'seeking such to worship him' was also radical. Only the Jews had that privilege and they neglected it to their peril. Now God's temple was everywhere, and the only criteria for worship was that the worshippers worshipped in Spirit and in truth, the worship being of the Father. The time was 'coming and now is', looked to the Cross, whereby, as the writer of Hebrews later said, was 'to bring many sons to glory'. The same writer was to speak of the blood of Christ purifying the conscience of believers 'to worship the living God'. The living God, of course, was the Father.

What we have to realise about these words of Jesus is that they forever cut the ground from under the feet of every cultus and its corresponding culture. The magnitude of its implications and outworking can never be assessed.

THE TRIUNE GOD AND THE NEW WORSHIP: WORSHIPPING THE FATHER

- (a) *The initiative for worshipping the Father comes from the Father.* 'He ever seeketh such to worship him', that is, those who are now moved powerfully through the Father's redemption and sanctification to worship him. In fact this worship is all

⁹ For the new temple see I Corinthians 6:19; 3:16–17; Ephesians 2:19–22; I Peter 2:4–10.

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their life, so that in Romans 12:1–2 Paul is able to exhort the Roman readers to become living sacrifices¹⁰ in their worship of the Father. What follows in Romans 12:3ff. is, in fact, their practical worship. It is God who redeems through his Son, sending him to the cross, and who thus reveals his love for us (Rom. 5:5–11; I John 4:7–10), so that our response is worship and adoration in gratitude and loving union with him.

- (b) *Through the shedding of his blood the Son has purified our consciences so that we can—and do—worship the living God.* In the context of Hebrews 9:14, ‘the living God’ is the Father. It is through the Son that the Father brings many sons into glory, and it is through the same holy High Priest that we are admitted into the Holy of Holies in the true sanctuary, and there come face-to-face with him who initiated our salvation and has sanctified us, made us fit to worship him. This Son is ‘the minister in the sanctuary’ and so leads us in worship. We livingly know our sonship in the Sonship of the Son, and so our worship is an amazing reality and experience.¹¹
- (c) *With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the work which Jesus had predicted of the Spirit then commenced.* It was of a vastly different mode from the old Jewish cultus. In John 16:7–15, Jesus had said the Spirit would bring conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment, and would reveal the work of the Father and the Son. At Pentecost such action came, and the resultant worship was certainly in the fullness of the Spirit who was the Spirit of truth (I John 5:6–8), ‘the Spirit is the truth’. Thus Paul could say, ‘For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit [or, ‘worship by the Spirit of God’; RSV footnote]’ (Phil. 3:3).

In Galatians 4:4–7, Paul says that, redeeming believers from the law by Christ’s death, the Father then sends the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, the Spirit crying ‘Abba! Father!’ This cry of the Spirit becomes the involuntary ejaculation of the believer. His heart cry is to the Father. He now worships ‘in Spirit and in truth’. The Spirit has brought the worshippers first to the Son, who has then brought them to the Father.

CONCLUSION: THE DYNAMICS OF THE TRIUNE WORSHIP OF THE FATHER

Those believers of the church who have not yet seen God as Father¹² cannot have the richness of worship that is the new gift of God to the church. The personal intimacy within the Trinity that the Three Persons have, cannot be as yet known where God is not seen as Father. The love, joy, peace, security and delight of the sons of God is as

¹⁰ As against the dead, inanimate sacrifices of their past Jewish ritual, they now worship him in every detail of their lives. Their bodies are utterly given in the rendering up of continuous spiritual (*logikos*) worship.

¹¹ Hebrews 9:14; 2:9–10; I Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:26; 4:4–7.

¹² It would seem to be impossible that believers should not live in the fullness of the Father, but sadly enough much so-called Christian worship is unitarian, without the worshipping community realising this fact. Again, there are congregations whose worship is unwittingly binitarian; they concentrate on two Persons of the Triune God. It is the worshipping community which consciously worships the Triune God, by the enabling of the Three Persons, which knows the richness of worship.

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yet missing. The prospect of being conformed to the image of the Son, to reach ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’, is an anticipation not yet envisaged. The walk in the Holy Father, and the worship of him which issues from a purified conscience, have yet to be experienced. The prospect of the glorious inheritance is yet to grip the person, as it was envisaged that day to the prodigal daughter by the well in Samaria.

Now it is, then, even in this life, in this world, we enter into fellowship with the Triune God. We begin to taste the glories of an intimacy with Triune Community, and to know what is their life of coinherence in one another. We are caught up in that perichoretic flow of love and service the Godhead know. This is presently glorious worship, and some of its beauty is shown in the remarkable passage of Hebrews 12:22–24:

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

On the broadest canvas possible we see the flow of the nations¹³ to the new, true Mount Sion to worship in Spirit and in truth through the gospel, Jesus being the leader of worship in the temple, and the Spirit of prayer standing with him in that ministry. This is what Jesus prophesied as he sought to redeem and sanctify fallen humanity. This he is doing in the process of the history which will climax in the victory of the *telos* when the vast multitude, the true Family of God, will concertedly utter their cry, ‘Oh, Father! Oh great and beloved Abba!’

All of history must be bound up in the reality of the worship of God as Father. All history is the outworking of this irreversible truth. In the new heavens and the new earth, when the Bridegroom—the Lamb of God and Son of the Father—will take us into the Godhead, for God and the Lamb are the true temple, in which and by the Holy Spirit, we will worship for ever as the kingdom of priests unto our Father.

¹³ See Isaiah 2:1–4; 25:6–9; 56:6–8; cf. Revelation chs 21 and 22.

STUDY THREE

The Blessing & the Cursing: Rest or Turmoil?

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



THE NATURE OF BLESSING

Most people have a fairly strong sense and understanding of the two words ‘blessing’ and ‘cursing’, even though they may be puzzled as to how and why these two states exist.¹

In the Scriptures we find the verb ‘to bless’ used for invoking blessing, and the substantive ‘blessed’ stating the fact and case of blessing.² Blessing as a state of experience is often thought of as being a mixture of happiness, peace and wellbeing, but this description is not strong enough. C. Westermann in *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (John Knox Pr., Atlanta, p. 103) describes it as:

Blessing is a working of God which is different from saving insofar as it is not experienced as the latter in individual events or in a sequence of events. It is a quiet, continuous, flowing, and unnoticed working of God which cannot be captured in moments or dates. Blessing is realized in a gradual process, as in the process of growing, maturing, and fading. The Old Testament does not just report a series of events which consists of the great acts of God. The intervals are also part of it . . . One receives from God’s hand one’s whole life, especially in its daily unobtrusiveness in which nothing particular happens. The blessing is a matter not of the extraordinary times when, e.g., one experiences deliverance, but rather of the daily flow of daily life.

Looking at it from another angle we may say that when God blesses a person, or a blessing is successfully invoked by another from God on him or her, then it is that state where a person knows and does the will of God, even though it may seem to turn

¹ The reader of this Study is advised to see my two studies ‘God’s Blessings and Cursings—I and II’, issued in the Pastors’ Monday Studies on April 1 and June 3, 1996. They contain much more material than this present article which is mainly derived from them.

² In the OT in Hebrew the two main roots are *brk* and *asre*. The first applies mainly to the action of invocation of blessing and the second mainly to the state of being blessed. In the NT, roughly speaking, the *brk* words are translated by the verb *eulogeo*—adjective *eulogetos*—and *asre* by *makarios*.

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out, in some cases, for harm. The blessed person is in communion with God, for it is because, and out of, such communion that the blessing is present and effective.

GOD'S BLESSING IN THE HISTORY OF CREATION AND MAN

The Blessing of Creation

The creation account in Genesis 1:22 and 1:28 shows us that God blessed the air and water creatures, commissioning them to be fruitful and multiply; filling the earth as birds, and the waters as sea creatures. Creating Man, he blessed the primal couple and told them to be fruitful, to multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, having lordship over all things.³ Creation was not finished until the seventh day, for it was in it that the work of creation was completed and God rested from all the work which he had done. In the light of this he blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.⁴ In these three occasions the act of blessing appears to be the giving of that power by which his mandate could be fulfilled: no blessing, no possibility of successful action. To be identified with God's commands and to participate in God's holy day of rest meant the subjects were blessed. This principle of sabbath rest obtains throughout all history until it comes into its holy rest in the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. We only escape restless toil when we 'strive to enter into his rest'.

Hiatus in Creation

Genesis 3:1–13 shows the fall of Man in going against the blessing and its commission. The wisdom required for being lord of the creation was exchanged for a disastrous 'knowledge of good and evil'. The blessing as a state of being was diminished. The serpent was cursed, and the ground was cursed for Man's sake. A new, wrong way of life was inducted by Cain's false worship. Hence began 'the way of Cain' which we will examine below under the heading 'The Nature of the Cursing and Cursings'. Man's violence corrupted the earth which, in turn, occasioned the judgment of the Flood—the earth cursed by flood for Man's sake. God blessed Noah and his sons and reiterated the original mandate. The creational mandate⁵ was to proceed. Since the covenant was renewed, we may conclude that the seventh day rest of God was still available to Man, for his *shalom* and daily renewal of life.

The Blessing and Blessings of Covenant

Without doubt the covenant with Noah was for blessing. It was linked with the entire creation—'the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth'. Was this, then, the first covenant God made with Man? We have argued in other Studies that the Covenant was inherent in God, that is, in the Trinity, and part of the works *ad intra*, and so was innate to creation—the works *ad extra*—namely, that there has always been an everlasting covenant under which Man was created and in which he lives, whether he desires to do so or not.⁶

³ The idea of 'filling' and 'subduing' may be seen as expanding the Eden in which they received the mandate until it—Eden—fills the whole earth which would then live in an Edenic state.

⁴ Blessing could be called that state where and when Man rests in the rest of God, no matter what work he may be doing. See, in this respect, Matthew 11:28, et al.

⁵ We might also say, 'The Covenant and the Kingdom proceeded'.

⁶ Pastors' Monday Studies 17/10/94, 7/11/94, 5/12/94.

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The covenant with Abraham is very significant, for he was blessed with a view to multiplication of descendants and material wealth, but mostly in that in him all nations would be blessed—or cursed—according to their relationship with him as the father of faith, of the children of faith. Romans 4:13 says Abraham is to inherit the earth. Certainly he looked for the Holy City to come. From Genesis 12 onwards the Scriptures show that blessing and cursing devolve around the Abrahamic Covenant which becomes the marker of all God's covenantal, salvific and sanctifying intentions. As we know, the Abrahamic Covenant brings its blessing to Isaac and Jacob, and then to Israel as it is saved from Egypt, is taught in the wilderness, and moves into what might be called the 'second Eden'. This new holy land has its own cultus, worship apparatus and practical prescriptions for holy living, all of which are for the blessing of the people, and then, in turn, for their being the source of blessing for the nations.

Hiatus in Abrahamic Covenantal Blessing

Israel was given enough prescription regarding their obtaining continuing blessing, and part of that prescription related to warning against idolatry and customs which arose from Adamic 'knowledge of good and evil', obtained from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The basic principle that all Israel's times—and, for that matter, the times of the world—were, and are, in God's hands enables them never to be scandalised by even the most horrific happenings and judgments. To go against God and the Covenant would bring cursings, the deteriorating of the Edenic land, and exile from it. This matter we will discuss below.

Renewal of the Abrahamic-Mosaic Covenant

The priests were to teach wisdom, and to keep the worship cultus in movement. When they failed in this duty the prophets took up the teaching of the law and covenant, giving hortatory teaching about blessing and cursing. The failure and success of the people in the Mosaic Covenant, occasional revivals and prophetic teaching, all combined to bring the promise of (i) the Davidic Covenant and kingdom, and (ii) the New Covenant and the coming of the Kingdom of God. God's covenant with Israel was 'everlasting'⁷ and promised things eschatological. In the New Testament the Kingdom of God is Davidic, Jesus being Messiah—and the New Covenant is shown to be inseparable from it. Thus, what was initiated in the Creation Covenant, reiterated after the Flood, pronounced to Abraham, the patriarchs and Israel, comes to pass in the New Covenant under its Mediator, Christ, who is also with his Father, 'King of kings and Lord of lords'.

The Blessing of the Covenant-Kingdom

It is fairly evident in the New Testament that John the Baptist and Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, which can be shown to be the Davidic Kingdom. Kingdom and covenant motifs are found in Zechariah's 'Benedictus'. In fact, so many elements are there in this Song that they might be called an introduction to the Kingdom, Covenant and Rest of the whole New Testament. Clearly, Jesus is Saviour; Lord of all, that is, of the Kingdom; Mediator of the New (better) Covenant; universal High Priest; Lord of the Sabbath; Judge of the evil and the cursed; and Warrior Bridegroom,

⁷ The term 'everlasting' is applied to all covenants God makes with his people.

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bringing Covenant-Kingdom history to its climax by virtue of being the Slain Lamb and Son of God. By him all are brought into the ultimate Sabbath, the true Eden, the place of total freedom. Thus we are given ‘the whole spiritual blessing’ (Eph 1:3f.),⁸ and:

all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he had granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion [lusts], and become partakers of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:3–4).

CONCLUSION AS TO THE PRINCIPLE OF BLESSING/S

God’s Blessing of Man and the Creation

Were we to study the ‘the way of Abel’, we would find that God’s blessing comes to Man in the face of the mandate of Genesis 1:28 (cf. 1:22; 2:1–3; 9:1ff.) where Man is made in the image of God as King and Lord. The blessing of Abel under the Creation Covenant-Kingdom is found where God’s people are persons of faith and love. Their history and action begins in the Paradise of Eden, and moves through the Fall, the action of Kingdom and Covenant, via the Abrahamic and following Covenants,⁹ until they consummate in the predestined *telos* when there will be the New Heaven and the New Earth, the Holy City, Paradise—and so on.

Man and Creation Living in States of Blessing

When God blesses Man and the creation, both respond in gratitude and praise God, blessing him. They are also moved in doxological living to bless others, bringing to those others the blessing of the gospel, and admission into the Kingdom, the Church, and the life of the Covenant. The states of blessing—being blessed—are many in the Old Testament, 21 of these being explicitly stated, whilst in the New Testament 25 are recorded.¹⁰ All the elements experienced within the state of God’s blessing are worthy of a study in themselves. We do not mean that certain states of being access us to blessing, but having been accessed by God into blessing, these states then obtain. The primary element is rest, that is, serenity, tranquillity or *shalom*.

THE NATURE OF THE CURSING AND CURSINGS

We can say definitively that ‘the way of Abel’ brings blessing/s, and ‘the way of Cain’ brings cursing/s. To understand the matter more fully we will need to think in terms of true worship, the sanctification of the offerer and the sanctuary in which worship is offered. Briefly we conclude that Cain offered not only a faulty sacrifice, but also, a

⁸ The Greek term *pase eulogia* can be translated as ‘every spiritual blessing’, ‘all spiritual blessings’, ‘every [kind of] spiritual blessing’, and ‘the whole spiritual blessing’. I believe the latter translation carries the true emphasis, especially in the light of II Peter 1:3.

⁹ There is one Covenant, that made in creation and which is reiterated after the Fall, with Noah, and is shown in its universal connotation with Abraham, Israel, the Davidic and New elements, which develop to the teleological completion and consummation. With Covenant-History, Kingdom history proceeds, both being inseparable.

¹⁰ Arithmetic as to the number of times states of blessing and cursing are mentioned is not sufficient for us to comprehend the nature of the two acts and their experienced states.

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wholly wrong one, it not being accepted. Such thinking involves the original sanctuary, Eden; the Fall and the cursing of the serpent and the soil, as well as the punishments of the man and the woman. The ejection from Eden's sanctuary, and the offerings of Cain and Abel, show us that cursing is in the mind and life of the cursed, as blessing is in the mind and life of the person, family and nation of those knowing blessing. In the midst of cursing, God nevertheless acts with that kind of blessing which may be said to sustain a person under cursing (Matt. 5:43–48).¹¹

In the Old Testament, cursing (or, 'the curse') is linked with the Fall, the murder of Cain, the state of humanity at the time of the Flood, the universality of the Covenant in terms of either blessing or cursing. The Abrahamic Covenant speaks of this universality and anticipates the eschatological outworking of blessing and cursing. The Mosaic Covenant explicitly states the matters of both blessing and cursing in Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 (cf. Lev. 26; Jer. 11:3).¹² The New Testament speaks of Christ being made ('a' or, 'the') curse for us, so that all the curse of the Fall and sins seemingly passed over are forever expurgated. There can be no curse, ever, for those having faith.¹³ The Book of the Revelation treats both blessing for the people of God and cursing for all evil powers and human unbelievers in the chapters (11–20) which destroy creatures accursed, making way for the blessing of the celestials and terrestrials who will be present in the paradise of God, from which is excluded forever those who followed 'the way of Cain'.

We conclude, then, that the human race on the whole is linked *either* with cursing *or* blessing. God certainly seeks to bless those who are accursed (cf. Matt. 5:43–46), thus alleviating the pain and misery of cursing to a somewhat bearable state, but Man should seek God's blessing by repentance and faith in Christ. Blessing has innate to it a joy and peace which causes us to desire it continually.

CONCLUSION: TURMOIL OR REST

Creation is concluded on the seventh day and God rests and is refreshed. We scarcely know what these two terms mean—'rests', 'is refreshed'—but we gather they are elements Man may enjoy when subsisting in the sabbath rest of God. Those who persist in compulsive and never-ceasing work will necessarily miss out on the rest. God's covenant, his salvific work, his sanctifying power through Christ, all bring the elect to the Holy Rest at the end of time—which includes all things such as the Heavenly, Holy Marriage; the Holy City; the Holy Temple; the Holy Paradise; the Holy, Beatific Vision. Eden, as was, is now Eden as it will ever be.

On earth, as we live in faith, hope and love, we can be freed from destructive human turmoil into edifying, godly rest.

¹¹ I suggest the use of the Notes suggested in footnote 1, along with reading other literature on the subjects of 'Blessing' and 'Cursing'. Only then will the glorious nature of the former and the terrible nature of the latter be realised.

¹² It is not as though history waits for the pronouncements of Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 (cf. Lev. 26) in order to discover the matters of blessing and cursing. It can be shown that consciousness of these had always been present but became 'hard copy' in the Mosaic covenant prescriptions.

¹³ All beatitudinal states, such as in the Sermon on the Mount and the seven in the Book of the Revelation, show that being in states of blessing are linked with communion with God, proper states of humility, and preparedness to do the will of God in his outworking of the history he has planned. Likewise, the curse on those who put themselves outside the covenant of God does not cease to be when Christ is made 'curse for us' (Gal. 3:10–13). The curse endures until the end, when the judgments destroy those elements which are presently under the curse.

STUDY FOUR

The Blessing of the Hierarchy of Love

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



INTRODUCTION: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE WORD 'HIERARCHY'?

Deriving from the Greek *hierarchia*, the word had originally to do with Greek temples, priests and religion. Both the Greek (Eastern) and Roman (Western) churches have hierarchies, that is, orders which descend from the Patriarch and Pope respectively. This is a priestly order which ranks above the laity. In Reformed and Free churches the doctrine of 'the priesthood of all believers' does not make room for a special ordination of clergy at the episcopal level, and the use of the Divine power to ordain at the lower levels of priest and deacon. The Roman church has two orders of hierarchy, one being of *order* and the other of *jurisdiction*. The use of the term has so filtered into modern society that one description of the word is 'any system of persons in a graded order'. Such will be found in government, army, navy and air-force, education, general science, botany and biology, commerce and society.

Today the term is generally used pejoratively. This is because humanistic egalitarianism generally holds sway. We find a concerted effort to oppose authority and law, both of which are closely linked with hierarchy. Often the word 'authoritarianism' is used when 'authoritative' would be the correct one. The word 'law' is often confused with the word 'legalistic'. It is nigh impossible to show that 'authoritative' and 'law' or 'lawful' are, in fact, good and necessary terms. Because the word hierarchy is linked with the ideas of authority and law, it is extremely difficult for people to even consider the idea of hierarchy. If one could invent a word which held the same value, then one would not use it in a Study such as this one.¹ Secular forms of

¹ It is a fact of life that those who oppose the concept of hierarchy and reject 'authoritative' action, and the use of 'law', are often, themselves, the most authoritarian and legalistic—to say nothing of hierocratic—when they have the opportunity to be so.

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hierarchies give opportunities for abuse in their use, but this does not invalidate them. In society there seems to be a natural antipathy for ‘tall poppies’.

I would like to give a different description of the word ‘hierarchy’, suggesting it is *a formation or cluster of persons or creatures who form a functional unit, rather than exist as independent monads.*² In heaven there are said to be three hierarchies of angels. Creatures are often in the form of flocks (birds), herds (cattle), prides (lions)—and so on. It is discernible that these groupings generally have an hierarchic order.

Linked with hierarchy is the idea of ‘rulers’ and ‘ruling’. In Genesis 1:14–18, the sun is said *to rule* by day and the moon *to rule* by night. Here is the element of hierarchy, and it is functional. In 1:28 created Man is ‘to have dominion’, that is, to rule over the whole earth with all its creatures. In Genesis 3:6 the husband is said to rule over his wife. Here is hierarchy, and some may say that hierarchy was a form that had to happen because of the Fall, but the woman was not created *apart* from the Man, but *from* him. He was prior to the woman, and Paul used this account to show that the woman was to be subject to the man because she derived from him. We could argue that in practice a hierarchy may well be a good thing, that the animal kingdom and society uses it anyway, so that in that sense it may well be a good thing. Today it is being argued that we can work for the elimination of any and every formation of hierarchy. For the moment we will not try to reason what is behind this determination. If, ontologically, we could show that hierarchy is part of an unchangeable order, and indispensable to appropriate living, existence and progress, then our discussion could terminate here.

THE REALITY OF LOVE WHICH MAY INVOLVE HIERARCHY

We now set out on researching what we might call hierarchical love.³ In doing so we face the antipathy for the word ‘hierarchy’, let alone its reality and the dislike for the concomitant ideas of authority and law. In fact the real problem is contained in the two terms, ‘superordination’ and ‘subordination’. I suggest reading the Pastors’ Monday Study of 2/7/90, entitled ‘Superordination and Subordination’. The problem is that most people regard superordination as superiority and subordination as inferiority. In God, creation and the gospel of God, this is *not* the case. Jesus taught clearly that the one who would be greatest should aspire to be least of all. In Mark 9:33–37 we read:

And they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you discussing on the way?’ But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, ‘If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.’ And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.’

Whilst the message is clear that the one who serves is the greatest, what does he mean by verse 37, ‘Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me’? Surely Jesus is saying,

² *The Macquarie Dictionary* defines hierarchy in scientific usage as ‘a series of successive terms of different rank. The terms *phylus*, *class*, *order*, *family*, *genus* and *species* constitute a hierarchy in zoology’.

³ I suggest that all readers use the Pastors’ Monday Study (NCPI) dated 6/8/1990, entitled *The Matter of Hierarchy—Functional and Relational*. It is also dealt with in my *All Things Are Yours* (NCPI, 1996).

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‘This child in simplicity is of the Kingdom, of me, and is my servant. If you receive him in my name, then you are truly receiving me; but in comparison with the Father, I am as the child you receive’. In none of these categories—Father, Son and child—is there personal ambition, but only the ministry of *service*.

Likewise, in Luke 22:24–27, we read:

A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves.’

By saying these words, Jesus was saying that the one who serves is the greatest. So in Mark 10:45, Jesus says clearly that he did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Paul, in Philippians 2:1–11, brings out the same points, ‘consider others better than [i.e. before] yourselves’, ‘look to the things of others’. Thus so-called ‘subordination’ is willingness to serve, even to God becoming Man! In this vein we can speak of God being the Servant of all creation. Likewise, the Son and the Spirit must be seen as servants, yet as the truly great ones. Jesus also spoke of true love being in preparedness to lay down one’s life for a friend. It is Adamic for humans to consider subordination as inferiority. It is ‘New Adamic’ for transformed lives to consider so-called ‘subordination’ to be ‘greatest’ in character.

Conclusion as to True Subordination of Humans to Be *agape*

Our argument is strange in that it commences not from God’s love (*agape*), but from the love Christ expects believers to exercise. Granted that Christ’s expectation of his followers is that they will be flooded with love (Rom. 5:5); love one another (I John 4:7); walk in love (Eph. 5:1–2); and all of this on the scale of I Corinthians 13, especially verse 8; then we can postulate a human community which is community-in-love (*agape*). We assume this is the ‘New Adamic’ community, and one which has resulted from the work of the Cross and Resurrection—Trinitarian *opera ad extra*, but really being one with *opera ad intra*. Now we may look at the source and fountain of such love, namely the Triune Community of Love.

THE TRIUNE COMMUNITY OF LOVE

By this term ‘community of love’ we mean the Holy Trinity. Nicea–Constantinople brings us to the point of ‘one substance and three Persons’. This Study does not permit a coverage of the historical theology of the Trinity, the quantity of which is immense. At this point I would like to insert a helpful statement, a quote from Leonardo Boff’s book, *Trinity and Society* (Burns and Oates, 1988, p. 2). Speaking of developing the doctrine of the Trinity, he really enunciates a general principle:

In this development, it is important to distinguish what is *faith* and what is the explication of *faith*. So, saying that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is *faith*; saying that God is one nature and three Persons is an explication of *faith*. We welcome *faith* with open hearts; explications of *faith* can be debated and even rejected. *Faith* is response to divine revelation; explications of *faith* are the responses of reason to the questions raised by *faith*. All explications of *faith* seek to shed light on *faith* so that it may become stronger and find more reasons to praise and proclaim.

The Blessing of the Hierarchy of Love

Our use of this quote is to set aside all the great Trinitarian theologians⁴—those both ancient and modern—and seek to see from the Scriptures that the Trinity is an hierarchy, though an hierarchy in a sense differing from the modern image of the word. If the idea of Trinity is an explication of the revelation of ‘God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit’, then we are faced with innumerable explications, all of which may be valuable for the strengthening of faith, but none of which is revelation, *per se*.⁵

The Trinitarian Works Called *opera ad intra*

The knowledge of the intimate relationships of the Trinity⁶ presupposes that the New Testament Scriptures give us a ‘window’ into the relationships of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This particularly so when Jesus says his Father gave him glory before the world began, and that he gave it in his love for his Son; that the Father was greater than he—Jesus—yet he and the Father were—and are—one. At least four significant elements of the Triune relationships can be discovered, namely; (i) all three Persons honour the others; (ii) all three Persons give to one another; (iii) all three Persons receive from one another; and (iv) all three Persons serve one another.⁷ The four elements flow from and constitute love (*agape*). The flow may be called *perichoresis*. The *opera ad intra* are really the ‘internal’ activity of the Trinity.⁸

The Trinitarian Works Called *opera ad extra*

If we commence our studies with the assumption that the Three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—constitute the Triune Godhead, then we can trace the Trinitarian work of creation and providence; the Trinitarian work of redemption as salvation from human fallenness (Adamic flesh), the guilt of sin—which is at the same time the wrath of God—and the active sanctification of all things through the Cross, at which event the Three Persons were present and active. The eschatological (or teleological) consummation is also a Trinitarian work. Since these are all Trinitarian, they require the incessant *perichoresis* which is essential to the works.

THE REALITY OF THE HIERARCHY OF LOVE

The Father as *fons divinitatis*, Thus Uniquely God the Father

If we read I John 4:1–16, we will discover that the two times God is referred to as love are references to the Father alone. Likewise, in I John 3:1, the apostle speaks of the love which the Father has bestowed upon us. In II Corinthians 13:14, Paul speaks of ‘the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ and the *love* of God and the *fellowship* of the

⁴ The theology of the Trinity has had remarkable seasons over the past 2,000 years, and is presently having a new season of explications of greatly divergent nature.

⁵ Those who have worked their way through Trinitarian explication of many schools might despair of coming to a conclusion not as to the *fact* of Trinity, but as to the nature of its *mode*.

⁶ I have here given the essence of Monday Pastors’ Studies of June to September of 1990.

⁷ We must never make *Love* an element on its own. The Trinity does not have its unity from an attribute or element which we call ‘Love’, for that would make a fourth hypostasis, and the Godhead would be a quaternity, three Persons held together by ‘Love’. The Father is love and the three Persons are one in unity of that love.

⁸ Most modern theologians do not accept the two categories of *opera ad intra* and *opera ad extra*, insisting that creation, salvation and sanctification of the world were as much at the heart of the Trinity as were their innate relationships.

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Holy Spirit'. In Romans 5:5, he says, 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit', and in Romans 8:39, says that '[nothing] will be able to separate us from *the love of God in Christ Jesus*'.

We have spoken of the *perichoresis*—that circulatory movement of the Three Persons which means they coinhere with one another, though they never coalesce. The Father's love is on the Son; 'The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand' (John 3:35); 'The Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that he himself is doing' (John 5:20). Above we have said that (i) *all Three Persons honour the others*, (ii) *all Three Persons give to one another*, (iii) *all Three Persons receive from one another*, and (iv) *all Three Persons serve one another*. All these elements derive from the Father, so that another way of describing them and their effects is 'all Three Persons are other-persons centred'. Only the Three truly know each other.

The Son as Uniquely the Son of the Father

The credal statement was 'the only begotten Son'. God has many sons, some celestial, some terrestrial, but only one who was begotten and who—as the Creeds say—is 'eternally begotten', or who is 'continually generated from the Father'. We saw that the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Also, we see that 'as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself' (John 5:26). In any case the Father has given all things into the hands of the Son. He is Father-centred; 'I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me' (John 5:30); 'I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do' (John 14:31); 'I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me' (John 8:28).

In John 17:21, Jesus prays for the world 'that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee', and this idea comports with John 10:38, 'the Father is in me and I am in the Father'. Since God the Father is 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', he is this in unique manner. Colossians 1:13–14 speaks of him as the Son of his (the Father's) Love. It is appropriate, then, to speak of the Son having love. Just as the Father knows the Son, so the Son knows the Father and alone can reveal him.

The Spirit Uniquely the Spirit of Love

The Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of the Father', 'the Spirit of the Son', 'the Spirit of Christ', 'the Spirit of Jesus'. It is he who poured the love of God into our hearts (Rom. 5:5), and Paul can beseech prayer 'by the love of the Spirit' (Rom. 15:30), and speaks of 'your love in the Spirit' (Col. 1:8). He is also the Spirit of unity and of fellowship. He is held so high in the esteem of the Father and the Son that sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. Whilst the Father and Son can reveal one another, it is the Spirit who reveals and glorifies them both (John 16:7–15).

Conclusion as to the Divine Hierarchy of Love

Since the Father is the fountain of the Godhead, and since from him the Son is eternally generated, and since the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (or, from the Father, through the Son), then there must be a hierarchy, yet not hierarchy in the secular sense we might perceive. The Father gives commands to the Son; the Son does nothing but what the Father teaches him; and the Spirit, 'shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak' (John 16:13).

THE HUMAN HIERARCHY OF LOVE

Primarily we see that the Father is ‘above all and through all and in all’ (Eph. 4:6). He is the Eternal hierarch or the Divine hierophant—the One from whom all rule and wisdom flows. His Son is ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’, and so is ruler over the Kingdom. Ephesians 1:21–23 (cf. Matt 28:18), shows Christ as being head over all forms of government, for the church. II Corinthians 3:18 speaks of ‘the Lord who is the Spirit’. We have seen that God as Creator set up hierarchies—those of the sun and the moon (Gen. 1:14), and Man as lord over all creation. Woman, deriving from Man by the creative work of God, is subject to him as her head. This whole theme is worked out in Ephesians 5:21–33 as Paul’s explication of Genesis 2:24.⁹

I Corinthians 11:1–3 is an example of Divine–human hierarchy. Verse 3 is important, ‘But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God’. The term ‘head’ has been variously explained by terms such as ‘source’ or ‘origin’, but whilst this is certainly one meaning, the contexts of the word in the New Testament cannot exclude the idea of head as rulership having a *prius* in a hierarchy. Again I recommend reading my Monday Pastors’ Study of 2/7/90, ‘Superordination and Subordination’.

What we note here is the simple order of Christ being the head of every man, the husband being the head of his wife, and the Father being head of Christ. In the Trinitarian hierarchy, the Father is Head of the Son, and (with the Son) of the Spirit. When we see that the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, the Father is in the Spirit, the Son is in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in both, then we have perceived the Divine hierarchy. When in I Corinthians 11:3 we perceive the Father is in the Son, the Son in the Father, Christ (the Son) is in the man, and the man in him, and the man is in the woman, and the woman in the man, and both are in the Three Persons and partake of their love and wisdom, then our antipathy to ‘headship’ disappears, for each ‘head’ is servant to the one subordinate to it, and in response to love all respond to those superordinate to themselves.

Also we must note that all partake of the Divine *perichoresis* which now becomes the Divine–human *perichoresis*. This is another way of saying (cf. John 17:21–22) that all are in each and each is in all, and that the Father is ‘everything to everyone’. In order to receive love and give love, we cannot be monads. Where God is love and hierarchies are in him, then a hierarchy holds no terrors or antipathy for the ones within it. It may be claimed that in practice, all members contribute to the purpose of the hierarchy; that a ‘steps and stairs’ figure is deficient, since all participate in one another and so give and receive from one another. But better than ‘give and receive’ is the term ‘participatory love’, for this is the heart of hierarchy and shared *perichoresis*.

Final Note: I had hoped to include the main features of the principle of ‘Friendship’, for this is the most intimate of all human relationships, and in fact is the heart of being human. So vast is the subject that it has had to be omitted, but something of its nature can be seen in the Pastors’ Monday Study of 6/4/92, ‘The Pastoral Power of Friendship’.

⁹ Jonathan Edwards has worked out a ‘marriage theology’. See my *The Profound Mystery* (NCPI, 1995), ch. 10.

STUDY FIVE

Doxological Man— The Return of Fullness & Unity in Worship

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



THE MEANING OF DOXOLOGICAL MAN

Doxology derives from *doxa* which means ‘glory’, and *logos* which helps to make a theme or system to words to which it is attached, so *psychology* and *theology*. Thus, to glorify God is to praise him, and so the doxological person is one who gives praise to God. Praise is linked with worship. In particular, we think of the ‘doxological person’ as one who has been lifted into praise through the delight of knowing God, seeing his actions and receiving benefits from him. A fairly common saying is, ‘All theology is at its best when it is doxology’; that is, that when a person is lifted into praise he or she has the right mind to consider God, his nature and his activity.

The person who operates in ‘the fullness of the blessing of Christ’, would necessarily be doxological. When we recognise that the Christian life is experienced in an unremitting battle with the powers of the flesh, the world, Satan, and many difficulties, then not everyone will be bouncing and overtly doxological. Indeed, we can assume that doxology may be felt in the depths, and not always be expressed vocally. Perhaps the best advice is from Paul, ‘So whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God’ (I Cor. 10:31).

FULLNESS AND UNITY IN WORSHIP

Original Doxology: Celestial and Terrestrial

The state of doxological worship is a rich one, and it comports with the experience of the personal, objective and yet intimate knowledge of the fullness of God, which, in

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its turn, creates or causes the fullness of God's blessing in celestial and terrestrial creatures. The heavenly creatures and all God's works are often called upon by a Psalmist to praise the Lord; the Psalmist having urged himself to such praise, and calling upon the congregation of Israel to praise God.¹ Other Psalms record the fact that all God's works praise him. The fullness of blessing in the Old Testament can be understood when one responds to 'Taste and see that the Lord is good!', so that the person says, 'My cup runneth over'. In fact the Psalms are human experiences in which the fullness of God is so richly experienced and vocalised because of the nature of God. He who does not praise God is self-centred; he who praises God and fellow-creatures is not narcissistic. To praise another is to be centred on that other for his or her sake.

True Praise is the Natural, Healthy Response Evoked by the Being and Action of God

Doxology has within it a sense of wonderment and gratitude to God for who he is, and for what he does. Job 38:7 speaks of the joy of celestial creatures at the creation of the earth. The immensity of God's Being and work are seen in his *opera ad intra* and his *opera ad extra*.² Hence praise is of the highest order of human experience because it is seated in communion with God; God's communion within himself into which Man is called, and God's going out to Man in fallenness, bringing him back into undeserved fellowship. When all his 'unfallen' works praise him, it is because of his relationship with them and the purpose he has set for them, which is, in fact, linked with his purpose for Man.

Pictures of pure doxology are found in the Book of the Revelation.³ There are seven clear passages: 4:11; 5:9–10, 12, 13; 7:9–17; 11:17–18; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–8; and, on each occasion, the reasons for worship—that is, the substance of the worship events—are stated.

The Loss of Doxology

We have seen that the true, doxological state is Edenic. Eden was the place of true worship because of the presence of God, man and woman in pure marital union, law unfractured, and vocation as a royal, universal calling. We can only conjecture that these innocent persons lived as one in the true doxological state. The acceding to the serpent's word as against the Creator's word locked Man into a knowledge of good and evil that was false, hence his (their) view of all things was wrong theologically, cosmically and anthropologically. *Sin is locking oneself into oneself and others out, and this against the Triune way where the Three Persons have perichoretic life and relationships.*

¹ See Psalm 103 for these three invocations to worship. See also Psalms 19:1–4, and 145:10, for the fact that his works and his saints praise him.

² This statement is made when the Covenant and Kingdom themes are explicated and interpreted by the Incarnation of Christ who revealed the Father, and to some degree the Spirit, the introduction of the true worship, after the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension and the coming of the revelatory Spirit. The *opera ad extra* really give us rich understanding of the *opera ad intra*.

³ All worship in heaven is pure because given by (i) unfallen celestial creatures, and (ii) restored, regenerated and sanctified humanity. Also see the Essay, 'The True Worship and the Worshipers', in my *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (NCPI, 1993), pp. 258–268.

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Because I believe the primal couple worshipped in Eden, therefore I believe we should start at the worship of Cain and Abel in order to comprehend right and wrong worship.⁴ True worship must have had such elements as fellowship with God (love) and true adoration, plus thanksgiving. Without doubt, both brothers brought their offerings (Gen. 4:3–4). The manner of the offering was unacceptable in Cain's case and acceptable in Abel's case. Obviously Cain did not offer in faith and Abel did. We have to see clearly that some propitiatory element was required in sacrifice, and it may have been that an 'offering of the fruit of the ground' was deficient, since primarily propitiation requires blood. In any case, Cain lacked authentic doxology and Abel did not. The Apostle John states clearly⁵ that, whilst Cain hated his brother, Abel loved Cain. The loss of doxology of God destroys praise (love) of the brethren. Doxology and fellowship are found together, for where persons walk together in light there is true praise of God and fellow-man. Idolatry is the transference of doxology from God to the particular deity or deities one worships.

The Worship That Is in the Unity of the Congregation

This paper does not permit us to take in the whole history of doxology. Whilst persons worshipped God in their own contexts, and often singly, yet on the whole they worshipped congregationally.⁶ We can only suggest the patriarchs and some others worshipped acceptably, but, when it comes to Israel, we see that all worship was prescribed, and prescribed in much detail. From the ecstatic doxology, by the Red Sea, Moses, Miriam and her women, and indeed the whole congregation (*qahal*), to the later formulated congregational worship, all praise to God is in ordered fashion. The tabernacle in the midst of the camp showed the centrality of the presence of Yahweh. Moral law and ethical living were of the one piece. When true worship was practiced, then it was (i) the purifying of the already sanctified community, and (ii) the corporate expression of worship, which (iii) climaxed in doxology. Thus the connection between doxology and unity⁷. Many gods made for a disparate community. When sin locks a person into himself and locks all others out, then there can be no unity and, of course, no doxology. History—mainly through the prophets—taught Israel that the unity of Covenant had always been opposed by idolatry. Thus the prophets predicted (i) the idea of God's Kingdom and its Messiah,⁸ showing it was on the way, (ii) that the covenant people would never be deserted, however punished they might be, and (iii) that the New Covenant would bring all Israel back together, receiving as they would the instilled holy law and the total forgiveness of sins without the sacrificial apparatus. Finally, Israel would have all nations gathered to herself, and the Abrahamic promise of inheriting the whole world would be achieved.

⁴ I believe the two types of worship—one wrong, the other right—are the key to all worship human beings give down through history. It is imperative, then, that we understand the true nature of worship-in-sacrifice.

⁵ I John 3:4–18, esp. vv. 10–12.

⁶ To note this we should pursue the terms *edah* and *qahal* as they are used in the Old Testament. The term approximating to both in the New Testament is *ecclesia*.

⁷ Psalm 133 is the classic of unity of the brethren, 'Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!' Genesis 13:8, 'Then Abraham said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen"'.
⁸ The whole doctrine of the Davidic Kingdom, and the Davidic Covenant need to be studied together. In Luke 1:68–79, these two themes are seen to be one, as indeed they are seen to stem from the covenant with Abraham.

HUMANITY RESTORED, AND WITH IT, UNITY AND DOXOLOGY

In the Old Testament we need to keep in mind the principle of the Everlasting Covenant, of the fact that Israel was a kingdom of priests among all the nations, and that its future was assured by the blessings and gifts of God—none of which was to be recalled—in order to understand the doxology which so often manifested itself. Doubtless there was liturgical worship, and often it included songs both personal, congregational and psalmic in nature. Some Psalms are doxological in nature, generally in the form of ascriptions. Psalm 29 is one of these:

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy array.

In Psalms 92 to 106—to nominate but a few of the praise Psalms—we have ascriptive and doxological Psalms. It is interesting to note that they look back to what God has done. He has acted in history (cf. Exod. 15:11, et al.). So many ascriptions are there, that it is evident that they are congregational, that the *qahal* is met to worship. This is the moment of the brethren dwelling together in unity. Descriptions of worship in the temple use the phrase ‘holy array’, which means all things are set out beautifully and functionally for worship, which, in its turn, is prescribed in every detail. Sometimes when the Levites played their instruments they began to prophesy. None of this can be ascribed to gatherings of idolaters. The whole covenant people was looked upon as an assembly, a congregation, worshipping as one. Often they met for ‘holy convocation’. Generally doxologies were in the third person, but in I Chronicles 29:10–13, we have one of the most powerful of doxologies. In order to appreciate it, we need to furnish our minds and imaginations with the choreography of the temple. In what a ‘holy array’ it must have been!

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

In the New Testament the Benedictus of Luke 1:68–79 needs close study, recalling as it does the Abrahamic Covenant and the Davidic Kingdom-Covenant. We simply mean that there is always a cause for doxology. ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people’, speaks of a present happening, but the whole song speaks of the past and the future also. In this sense it is classical doxology.

There are many doxologies from the Gospels to the Book of the Revelation. In Luke 2:14, we have ‘Glory to God in the highest’ at Jesus’ birth, to Christ being praised by ‘Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’, being the doxological greeting on Palm Sunday (Matt. 21:9). During the times of his birth and his ministry, praise is accorded, often even by his enemies in spite of themselves.⁹ Jesus was worshipped by the women on the Resurrection Sunday (Matt.

⁹ See Matthew 9:8, 15:31, Mark 2:12, and Luke 5:26, where the gathered crowd was mainly in opposition to

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28:9). At the time of the Ascension (Luke 24:51–53), doxology followed Jesus' blessing of them. From that point onwards, we see in the Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation that doxological utterances and worship were habitual to Christian life and worship.

THE GOSPEL AND FULLNESS OF WORSHIP IN UNITY

God created Adam the man, and placed him in Eden the sanctuary, gave him the gift of Eve as part of him for ever, and in the midst of pure worship gave him the mandate for the expanding of his ministry to 'fill the world', which can be construed as enlarging Eden as the special sanctuary of God, the place of the covenant, and the Kingdom to the ends of the world. Man now had his reason for being created, his life and goal, and all of this in a community context and not in the place of atomistic individualism.¹⁰ God's goal for all creation is to sanctify it and admit it into pure worship, yet as the entire creation, celestial and terrestrial.

Jesus, the Fullness of His Blessing, the Unity and the Doxological Worship

We must note firstly that Jesus had the end of the age in mind, the salvation of the nations from the Fall and its consequences. He had come only to 'the lost of the tribes of the house of Israel' and ministered only to them, yet he had the whole world in view for God always loved it and *gave*¹¹ his Son for it and to it. Thus, Israel's view that God's promise to Abraham and to it—Israel—was that the whole world would come to Israel, and *would be Israel*, and in this sense all under the eternal covenant of God, within and as, his Kingdom, and participate in the eschatological Sabbath and its Holy things, especially worship within the Eternal Sanctuary, the Triune God himself.

Between the time of Christ's ascension and this glorious *telos* or climax, there would be the church. Jesus would build the church. He would be its leader and it his bride—his new Eve to his being the new Adam—and it would be his people, holy unto him, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests to witness to his saving and sanctifying work. He was the one who would bring the new worship, transcending all that had been known, even in the Edenic sanctuary and certainly in Israel in the time of the Old Testament. This 'in-between time' is *the age in which we now live*. It is the time of unity, the unity of love, vocation and worship.

We must speak of God as 'The Holy One of Israel ['the Israel of God', Gal. 6:16] thy Redeemer'. This redeeming of the Israel of God is redemption unto sanctification and redemption, that is, unto Edenic unity. This is the amazing miracle of which we speak *all too little*. It commences with Pentecost, which is the time of the fullness of Christ manifesting himself and which is the time of new, true worship. The new sanctuary, Christ—as the new temple—causes the nexus between the physical temple and Christ's *qahal/ecclesia* to atrophy; and the new people of the Israel of God—new

Jesus. There are also other occasions when hearers waxed lyrical about Jesus.

¹⁰ To pick of the threads of the protological–eschatological thrust of history, see the works of William Dumbrell, Graeme Goldsworthy, Mark Strom, and N. T. Wright. Also my Pastors' Monday Studies for March, April, June and July 1996.

¹¹ Note that in John 3:16, the word is not 'sent' but 'gave' (*didomi*), although some 40 times in the same Gospel two verbs 'to send' are used in regard to him coming into this world. The world possesses the Son. God gives him up (*paradidomi*) on the Cross for us all.

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wine in new bottles—to flourish in worship; and the original mandate to be in action, with the new salvific power and thrust. It is the true holy people, the true company of kings and priests, the true holy nation.¹²

Look at the facts of the early church.¹³ Jesus had promised new and universal worship (John 4:21–24) which would be worship in the truth and by the Holy Spirit. This began at Pentecost in a powerful way. *It was worship in unity*. The Book of Acts shows us the utter unity and worship, the doxological nature of it. The new company was in accordance with I Corinthians 12:12–13, Galatians 3:26–29, and Colossians 3:9–11. It was the sanctified community, proclaiming the Gospel of God to the ends of the earth, that the whole world might become the worshipping community, Edenic in its consummation, and all the elect sharing in the completed ‘Israel of God’. Its present doxological nature can be, because it is in Christ, the Body of Christ, the Bride, the New Temple. It is the Holy Community.

Without doubt it is not perfect, it is the holy people living under the redemptive and sanctifying grace of God in the Kingdom and the New Covenant, but its glorious consummation is not in doubt, and is the source of dynamic, living hope. Thus it lives in faith, hope and love, and at the heart of its worship is the fullness of the blessing of Christ, and so it gives vent constantly to doxological amazement, gratitude and joy.

Hebrews 12:18–29 shows the unity of the church on earth and the church with Christ beyond time and space, the holy family celestial and terrestrial, at one in the unity of holy adoration, and the passages we have quoted from the Revelation give prophetic teaching and glorious assurance of the eternal doxological state of God’s true elect.

¹² It is mandatory to see (i) that this *ecclesia* is one with the old *qahal*, and (ii) it is the continuity of the Covenant-Kingdom people Israel, and so is ‘the Israel of God’.

¹³ See my booklet, *Christ’s Living Church Today* (NCPI, 1993).