

**Christ's Living Church
Today—One, Holy,
Catholic & Apostolic**

PASTORS' SCHOOL 1997

Evening Sessions

by Geoffrey Bingham

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Copies of the Morning Studies are available in a separate volume.

INTRODUCTION

An Introduction to the Studies on the Four Notes of the Church

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



THE FOUR NOTES OF THE CHURCH

The four 'notes' or 'marks' or 'attributes' of the Church, as they are variously called, are unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. They are only stated in full in the Nicene Creed which is appended to this introduction. From the studies which follow, we will recognise that the Church as a whole accepts these four notes.

At the Reformation, two basic notes were stated on an understanding of the Church as 'the company of all people who hold the faith'. The first note was that the Word of God be preached in purity in the congregation, and the second that the sacraments—namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper—be properly celebrated or administered. In some Reformed churches a third note was added, namely that discipline be administered in the congregation, especially to people living sinfully. Notorious sinners—those hardened in the practice of sin and impenitent in heart—should be excommunicated.

Whilst seeking to understand the origin and nature of the four notes, we need to keep in mind that Christ is the Church, and as Head of the Church, and as Lord of it and history, we must not merely examine the organisation which we call the Church, but keep in mind all the time that Christ is God's appointed One in history; to fulfil God's plan for history, which is ultimately to unite all things in Christ. We are not simply examining a body of people who should be in full unity, holy, catholic in outlook and action, and apostolic in that they follow the faith and practice of that early college of apostles. We must see the Church in all its figures, such as Bride, Body, Flock, Vine and so on. We should see her as the New Jerusalem who is above, the Mother of us all. We must see her working with Christ as his Helpmeet, and being Partner with him as the plan of God from Adam to the Last Adam is being fulfilled.

For example, the Church is not a unique unity merely that she may be right in her relationships. She is not holy because that is what all people of God should be. Nor is she catholic simply because God intends her universality to be a good thing. She is not

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to be apostolic simply because there is no other true way of being but apostolic. However right and proper these Notes are as to the nature and action of the Church, the point and meaning of them is that only such a Body can do the will of God the Father under the leadership of Christ. This 'Israel of God' is the only Body by which Christ works. Only by Christ and his Helpmeet will history come to its true conclusion.

We need to keep all these things in mind when we consider the Notes of the Church. Surely this will quicken our pulses as we grasp an understanding of the grandeur of God's plan and the high calling of the Church to be a participant with God in His purposes. For us the inner life of the Church will be important, as it relates to the outgoing ministry of that Church to the world, and to the completion of God's marvellous plan of grace for all His creation.

With this orientation let us proceed to understand the Notes of the Church—the four of the Nicene Creed, and two or three of the Reformation.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

STUDY ONE

The Church Is One

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



INTRODUCTION: THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

The Apostles' Creed speaks of the 'holy catholic church'. The Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed (dating from the Council of Constantinople in 381) speaks about the 'one holy catholic and apostolic church'. Moltmann observes of the 'marks':

If we see them as the conditions (*criteria*) of the true church, then we look for what distinguishes it from the false church, and ask what the premises are for fellowship between the different churches. If we see them as the signs (*signa*) or characteristics (*notae*) of the church, then we ask about the form by which it can be recognised in the world and their character as testimony.¹

At the time of the Reformation, the four marks of the Church were never questioned, but certain criteria were put forth by which the Church could be defined. Calvin wrote:

From this the face of the church comes forth, and becomes visible to our eyes. Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists (cf. Eph. 2:20). For his promise cannot fail: 'Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20).²

Otto Weber, writing of the nature of the Church at the time of the Reformation says:

The fundamental proposition was the Augsburg Confession, Article VII: 'But the Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly ministered'.³

Some confessions, for example the Belgic, had a third note and that was discipline in the Church, including punishment for sin.

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (SCM, 1977), p. 337.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. by John T. McNeill, Westminster, 1960), p. 1023.

³ Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 2, (Eerdmans, 1983), p. 547.

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The Roman Catholic church recognises only the hierarchically organised *ecclesia* as the Church, seeing its holiness as of an external character, its catholicity as unique to itself, and its apostolicity as deriving from its succession from the apostles, particularly from Peter as the foundation of the Church and as Christ's Vicar on earth. The Reformation criteria—whether the two or the three—have no value or status to these *notae* as interpreted by the church of Rome.

This means that whilst the four marks of the Church according to the Creeds was never questioned, certain criteria in the Reformed Churches were set forth by which the validity of a church could be assessed. That is, where the Word of God was preached and heard, and the sacraments were duly, evangelically administered, then there was the true Church. It seemed to be possible to have the four marks of the Nicene Creed apply to a church, and yet for it not to be truly functioning as the Church of Christ. The two criteria of true preaching of the Word and proper administration of the Sacraments could be missing. Keeping this in mind we will approach the four 'signs' (*signa*) or 'notes' (*notae*).

THE FIRST MARK: THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

God, the Foundation of the People of Unity

Whilst the development of Trinitarian theology awaited the first few centuries after Christ, and is even now proceeding, any discussion on the unity of the Church must have its basis and foundation in the unity of the Godhead. As Deuteronomy 6:4 announced, 'Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD', or 'Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is One'. This was aimed at showing there was no God but Yahweh, and that Yahweh was one. This was an assertion that there was no other God; the idols were not real (ontological). This unity of God is shown throughout the Old Testament and is the basis of Israel. If there were other gods, they were to be seen as unworthy of worship, devotion and following, since Israel asked, 'Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?'⁴

Unity in Continuity

Israel was God's *qahal* or *edah*, His congregation or people. In the New Testament *qahal* equals *ecclesia*. When the people of Israel kept to monotheism—monolatry—then they were the people of God, the covenant people, and the people of God's kingdom. We can trace the disintegration of the palpable unity when the Israelites indulged in idolatry, and through the idols' dependence upon other nations; virtually the idols of those nations. Yet the unity of Israel was not broken at core, for at core was the 'holy remnant' and it was the true Church.⁵ That holy remnant was present in the time of Christ, and responded at Pentecost. Pentecost led the hearers into

⁴ Exodus 15:11. This was sung by Moses and the people to Yahweh.

⁵ Doubtless history manifests clearly the fracturing of Israel, especially the Northern and Southern kingdoms under Rehoboam and Jeroboam, and then the final exile of the remnants of the nation, yet in Ezekiel 37:15ff. we have the prophecy of the joined stick—Israel and Judah coming together. In Ezekiel 34:11ff. and Jeremiah 23:5ff. the split nation is to be reunited. Ultimately the people of God will be one, and this is doubtless included in Ephesians 1:9–10 which is the mystery of God's plan to unite all things in Christ.

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‘all the truth’, and being baptised by one Spirit into one Body—Christ’s Body the Church—they carried on the continuity of the ‘Israel of God’. Whilst there was a discontinuity with ‘official’ Israel—that is, through the Sanhedrin—yet the new Christians who were Jews were still one with the heart of Israel—‘the holy remnant’. Paul’s term in Galatians 6:16, ‘the Israel of God’, covers all who accede to Jesus Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles, a term which finds its full explanation in Romans chapters 9 to 11.

The unity of God’s people came into dynamic action, as we see, following Pentecost and other outpourings of the Holy Spirit. The Church was called many times ‘the church of God’ and sometimes the Church was said to be ‘in the Father’ (I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:2). It was the church ‘of God in Christ Jesus’ (I Thess. 2:14). Christ was certainly said to be its head, as it was his body, and he was Lord of it, as well as Lord for it.

THE ELEMENTS OF UNITY

When we think of the unity of the Church, we are not thinking primarily of the unity of its members but of the unity of God who creates the Church and so affects it; the unity of the Son in himself which he brings to the Church as its very structure and its relational life; and the unity of the Holy Spirit who brings ‘all the truth’ to the members and acts as the Spirit of love, unity and fellowship. The simplest we can say, then, is that Christ is the unity, Christ is the holiness, Christ is the catholicity and apostolicity of the Church. Christ is the Church. Even so, the members in what we might call an ontological configuration of unity, need to be wrought upon by the Members of the Godhead in order to be relationally in unity.

The Atonement by Which All Unification Is Effected

We take note of the unity of the Church for granted. We say, ‘There is the church’, and we recognise it was brought into full being at Pentecost, but then what did Pentecost contain within itself that could cause the Church? The answer is that Peter pointed to the event of the Cross and Resurrection. John 11:49–51 speaks of the death of Christ being essential to save Israel from the Romans, but unconsciously the high priest prophesies that Christ will be the one to do that. John adds that Jesus would die for the nation, ‘and not for the nation only’ but ‘that the children of God scattered abroad should be gathered together into one’. Acts 4:25–28 expounds that Jews, Romans and other Gentiles were all gathered at the Cross. In II Corinthians 5:14, Paul says that he judges that if one died for all then did all die, that is, on the Cross. He also says that the world was crucified at the Cross (Gal. 6:14; cf 1:4–5). The most explicit passage, however, is that of Ephesians 2:11–22 where Paul shows that Gentiles were outside the Old Testament *qahal*, but through the blood of the Cross, Christ has brought into being ‘one new man’, that is, a new people, Jew and Gentile both having access to God together, or as the one. These now constitute the new temple—which is Christ—and their intimacy is such that the ‘whole structure is joined together’, a description fitting I Peter 2:4–10 where all believers are built together for a holy shrine. As such they are now a new people *in one*.

We need not here go into the dynamics of Christ’s death, but simply say the church was ‘born crucified’, as someone once put it. The hostility between Man and God, and humans and humans, was done away with in the Atonement. All believers are now ambassadors of reconciliation which God has effected. It was this truth the

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Holy Spirit opened so powerfully at Pentecost and which brought forth the new temple, the church of Christ.

The Triunity of God

These elements must come from ‘one Spirit’, ‘one Lord’ (Jesus Christ) and ‘one God and Father of us all’, all of whom are mentioned in Ephesians 4:1–6. In I Corinthians 8:6 Paul says, ‘for us there is one God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ’. The mention of ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’, ‘God’ and ‘the Holy Spirit’ in II Corinthians 13:14, draws our minds to the essential unity of these Three Persons. Whilst later Trinitarian theology was not first defined within the New Testament, yet it was immanent there. The ‘one God’ of the Old Testament is still one, albeit the Father and the Son are one, and the Spirit is the Spirit of unity, love and fellowship. Thus we can see, theologically, that the *ecclesia* drew its unity from the unity of the Godhead. When we have said this we have said everything needed for unity. John 17:20–22 is Jesus’ assertion that he and the Father are one, indwelling each other perfectly, and he prays that ‘they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one’. The unity of the Church, then, depends upon the Godhead. Another way of saying it, is that the Church, because of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, is essentially one, is essentially in unity.

Within this Triune unity we have first the Father. He is the One who gathers all things together in Christ.⁶ He is the One who through Christ reconciles all things to Himself, and so His work is always a unifying one. Primarily He is Father, not only of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, but also of ‘the whole family in heaven and on earth’. He is the ‘God and Father of us all who is above all and through all and in all’, so that His unifying action is what creates and sustains the unity of the Church.

Within this Triune unity we have the Son. We will see how he constitutes the unity of the Church. He is on all scores the Unifier. He is the Head and Lord of the Body, and the Body is his. He is the Shepherd of the flock, the Son in whom is our sonship as a Church, the Vine in which are the branches, the Elder Brother of the whole Family, unifying it at the same time by being High Priest—King—Priest—of the flock of God. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of God and Christ, so the unifying power of the Kingdom is also present. Shortly we will open up the meaning of some of these figures.

Within this Triune unity we have the Holy Spirit. The terms ‘love of the Spirit’, ‘unity of the Spirit’, and ‘fellowship of the Spirit’, to say nothing of ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ which is both the source and fruit of unity, all show us that without the oneness of the Triune Persons, unity would go the way of sinful humanity into disunity, strife and other dreadful outcomes.

Ephesians 4:1–6; Philippians 2:1–8

Note that the pericope is not primarily theological but hortatory. Paul wants the members to live together in unity. In fact Ephesians 4:1–6 has distinct parallels in Philippians 2:1–8. In Ephesians 4:1–6 the believers are shown they have one calling—both the vocation and manner of life they should live, to say nothing of its goal. The

⁶ The ‘all things’ sometimes refers to the all things of creation, and sometimes to the all things of the Church. Creation is by nature of the case a unity, although presently ‘subjected to bondage’, and so any ‘creation’ of God, such as the Church, will also be a unity because it derives from God, the One.

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words lowliness, meekness, patience and love, of verses 1–3, have their equivalents in the Philippian passage, verses 1–3. Note that Paul in both passages is not asking them to rise higher than their calling or what we might call ‘the nature of the church’. In the Philippian passage the members are exhorted to do nothing out of selfishness or conceit. They are to consider others better than themselves, that is, put others before them. They are to look primarily on the interests of others. The motivation for such unusual and gracious behaviour is that such was the mind of Christ by which he effected *kenosis*—‘self-emptying’, ‘self-disregard’—in the cause of others. We should take this pericope very simply, not seeking out a deep and complicated theology of incarnation which will blind us to the human parallel for which Paul is calling.

The Ephesian passage tells of the various components of, and powers for, unity: (i) one body; (ii) one Spirit; (iii) one hope; (iv) one Lord; (v) one faith; (vi) one baptism; and (vii) one God and Father of us all. Each of these components taken separately is of the essence of unity, each a power for unity, and together all constitute a strong ecclesiastical unity. All are objective to the believers even though each and all cause a subjective response from all members. As we saw, each member of the Church is exhorted to ‘maintain the unity of the Spirit’, though never to make it, since God has created it. The unity is not maintained by anything which the Church creates, but to be *in unity* means simply to accept and work by these seven unifying elements:

- (a) The *one body* is a unity, all members essential and interdependent on the others. The unity of the one body is such that when one member suffers so do all, and when one rejoices so do all. All members are inter-dependent, that is, members one of another.
- (b) *One Lord* must mean that the Lordship of Christ, especially in the Church, is what unifies the members: each looks to him as Head and Lord, and each works—though all together—under his Lordship, and so know the securing power of that Lord.
- (c) The *Spirit* we know to be God’s unity come to all members of the body, especially as the Spirit of love, fellowship and unity, as was shown on the Day of Pentecost, and in Acts 4 when the Spirit again fell on all and filled them so that it was said, ‘They were of one heart and soul, and no one said that anything he possessed was his own’.
- (d) He is the Spirit of hope, and *hope* as the one goal of personal and corporate calling is the great prolepsis which draws all members on. Without hope the dynamics of faith and love lose their vitality.
- (e) *One faith* is to do primarily with the content of the faith which is professed in the one baptism; that is, the *one faith*⁷ which confesses Christ as Lord, and carries the content of the Gospel, whilst living by it.
- (f) The *one baptism* inaugurates all into Christ,⁸ which is seen as an action of the Spirit in I Corinthians 12:12–13:

⁷ Colossians 1:23 speaks of continuing steadily in the faith, whilst Colossians 2:7, of being established in the faith. The statement of Ephesians 4:13, ‘the unity of the faith’, must point back to 4:5 where faith is a constituent of the objective unity of the church.

⁸ Note that whilst in the Acts people seem to have been baptised in the name of Jesus, that in Matthew 28:19 baptism was to be ‘in [or, into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’. When we take Trinitarian theology into this baptism, it would indeed be a baptism into the unity of the Three Persons.

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For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Although the five ‘ones’ here are adjectives, they strongly carry the sense of oneness, that is, ‘one-ness’ body, ‘one-ness Spirit’—and so on.

- (g) *One God and Father of us all*, as we have seen, makes us to be children in Him, and so in the unity of family we are one.

The verses 6–15, which follow the first passage, lead to Christ’s gifts to the Church,⁹ and so the upgrowth into ‘the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God’, and such maturity that they are no longer gullible children, but they, ‘truthing it in love’, are able to build up the body, every part of it working with every other part of it in unity. The Church in unity thus grows *in* unity as well as *into* unity.

The Oneness of I Corinthians 12:12–13; Galatians 3:28:–29; Colossians 3:10–11

Paul’s idea of ‘the Israel of God’ is a people—an *ecclesia*—drawn out of all cultures, genders and social groups—being in utter unity. So:

For by one Spirit we were all baptised *into one body*—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit (I Cor. 12:12–13).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for *you are all one* in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:28–29).

[You] have put on the new man which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, *but Christ is all, and in all* (Col. 3:10f.).

Here is remarkable unity. The unity of Israel prior to Pentecost was that of one people. Now it is the unity of all tribes and nations, so that gender and social status cannot split that unity. Nothing can split it. This is the great event of history which shows us that all people of faith are children of Abraham and have the same inheritance in the ultimate. Without doubt the greatest barrier of all times is culture. *Cultus*—the worship system—and *culture* are fiercely united, the one springing from the other. The miracle of the church is the unity of all humanity which is baptised into it. In the richest sense neither culture nor cultus can hold men and women apart when they are in the unity of the church.

DENOMINATIONS AGAINST THE MEANING OF ‘THE CHURCH’

Alan Richardson¹⁰ comments:

The Church is the Church of God in Christ Jesus (cf. I Thess. 2.14). It is God’s Church, not ours, something which God creates, not we. Men did not found the Church, nor can they found a

⁹ In one sense the nature of the Church is shown in its gifts. Gifts are the ministry of *agape* to one another within the Body. They are gifts of Christ—which constitute Christ’s working—and therefore are unifying. All *agape* is essentially unifying.

¹⁰ Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (SCM, 1958), p. 286.

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new Church (cf. I Cor. 3.11). There is only one Church of God, the one of which Christ's original apostles were the foundation members. There can be only one Church because there is only one Christ (Eph. 4.5), one body of Christ, one Spirit (I Cor. 12.13; Eph. 4.4). Christ is not divided (I Cor. 1:13) and therefore he cannot have two or more bodies; there cannot be two or more Churches. The plural [*ecclesiai*: churches] occurs very frequently in the NT, but it is always a plural of distribution, i.e. it refers to the several local churches of Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, etc.; it never means denominations, as in the phrase 'World Council of Churches'. Paul recoils with horror from the news that denominations have sprung up in Corinth—a Paul-party, an Apollos-'church', a Cephas (Peter)-denomination, even a Christ-party! (I Cor. 1.12; cf. 3.5). 'Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were ye baptized into the name of Paul?' (i.13). If the Church of the baptized is the *persona* of Christ, it is a body with many and varied organs, but it cannot be two bodies (cf. Rom. 12.4-8; I Cor. 12.12-30). Christians were 'called in one body' (Col. 3.15; cf. Eph. 2.16) Whether they recognize the truth or not, they are members of Christ's body (Eph. 5.30) and they are therefore members of one another (Eph. 4.25).

This quotation breaks wide open the whole matter of the Church and the churches. Self-evident is the fact that to a great degree the churches are schisms and heresies which have bred sects. Richardson said that, technically speaking, we should speak of 'The World Council of Schisms and Heresies'! This raises a large question which probably belongs more to the note of Catholicity than that of the Church as One. There are many ways we can rationalise the problem, the most obvious by dividing off 'the visible church' from the so-called 'invisible church'. The Reformers thought in terms rather of a 'mystical body of Christ' in which all believers—those joined to Christ by union with him—were members of him, and thus the whole Church is constituted. In this case the visibility of the true Church is partially—if not wholly—hidden. Even so, this rationalisation will not hold, as we shall discuss later.

CONCLUSION: THE CHURCH IS ONE

Unity of the Church is not an ideology: it is its essential nature. That is, its unity is one of its marks, never apart from the other three marks. Then again, the Reformation view of the Church as the company of faithful people, in which the Word of God be truly preached and the Sacraments be rightly administered,¹¹ is surely a view which does not seek to reform the many churches so that they conform to a given pattern, but which has criteria which are found in the New Testament. In order to understand the required action within the objectively wrought unity of the Church, we must yield to that leading and direction which would be commensurate in life and experience with Christ himself, his Father and the Holy Spirit. This is what the people of God are about.

¹¹ We omit taking up the mark of ecclesiastical discipline and punishment of sinners.

STUDY TWO

The Church Is Holy

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF HOLINESS

We need to define our term ‘holiness’, and this is by no means simple. Word studies do not always yield distinct meanings. Words are best understood by their contexts although the etymological derivation is always essential. At the beginning, in the creation, we have the holy Sabbath. It is the only thing *said* to be sanctified.¹ Not until Moses meets God at the burning bush is the holiness of anything mentioned. From that point onwards we are involved with the holiness which is set out in the Sinaitic covenant. At the end of human history we have the eschatological holiness set out before us.

Revelation 21:2 speaks of a ‘holy city’, and thus of a ‘holy bride’, whilst the temple is now ‘the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb’ and is thus holy. Only that which is clean may enter the holy city and we take it that they who do are likewise both clean and sanctified, especially as they constitute ‘a kingdom of priests’ unto their God,² for all priests are sanctified. The throne and the river must likewise be called holy. Since all things are holy, then it appears that the eschatology of sanctification is established.³ This leads us to the conclusion that God had always intended the sanctification of all things.

Between the sanctification of the seventh day (Gen. 2:1–3) and the *telos* are (i) the holiness of God’s *qahal*, the people of Israel, including its cultus, and (ii) the holiness of the *ecclesia*, the people of God’s Church. Exodus 19:5–6 and I Peter 2:9–10 are parallels regarding the holy nature of the two congregations. We will need to look at the holiness of Israel to grasp a basic understanding of the holiness of the Church.

¹ This does not mean that nothing else was sanctified, e.g. Eden, where worship was obviously present. Prophets and women were said to be holy, e.g. Sarah was one of a number of holy women.

² Note Exodus 19:5–6; I Peter 2:9–10.

³ God’s people are not only sanctified in the eschaton, but also glorified and perfected.

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The Holiness of Israel

As we indicated, when God begins to have dealings with Moses in the theophany of Exodus 3:1–6, His holiness is apparent—the very ground is holy (*qodesh*)—and in Exodus 15:11, God is described as ‘majestic in holiness . . . doing wonders’. Even prior to this the memorial of the Passover is stated in Exodus 12:16 to be the occasion of holding ‘a holy [*qodesh*] assembly’. Exodus 28:36 and 39:30 speak of a plate of pure gold fastened to Aaron’s turban, which is inscribed ‘Holy to the LORD’ or ‘Holiness to the LORD’. Exodus helps us to understand the ideas of ‘holy’ and ‘holiness’ because of the building of the tabernacle and its furniture, the holiness of priestly garments, anointing oils and incense, and the principle of 22:31, ‘You shall be men consecrated [*qodesh*] to me’.

The idea of ‘the holy’ is set out in Leviticus in the same manner, but all of it is in the light of God’s *presence*. In Exodus 29:42–46, God says he will dwell in the tabernacle:

. . . where I will meet with you, to speak there to you. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.⁴ I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests. And I will dwell among the people of Israel, and I will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God.

In Leviticus this presence must be taken into consideration when discussing holiness. *God is holy and God’s people must be the same* (cf. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26). In 10:10,⁵ Aaron and the priests are ‘to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the clean and the unclean’.⁶ In considering these distinctions, we must keep in mind that they are made and understood within the Sinaitic covenant. Such distinctions are not made explicit prior to this covenant. Wenham concludes that there are things holy (sanctified), and things clean but not sanctified, yet capable of being sanctified, but which may be defiled, that is, become unclean. Also there are ‘holy items which may be defiled and become common, even polluted therefore unclean’.⁷

Generally, then, we gather that God alone is holy, and that He sanctifies or consecrates persons, a whole people and things, all of which pertain to the worship of Him. In Israel this worship system, which we know as ‘the cultus’, was distinctly related to, and with, the covenant. Out of a *cultus* comes the *culture* of a people. What we must notice is that when Israel turned from holy things to idols and to dependence upon the people of those idols, they profaned God in the eyes of the nations. That is, they un-sanctified Him, and they were sent into exile to sanctify God again in the eyes of the heathen, as also they were recalled to the land for the very same reason.⁸

⁴ It is noteworthy that God’s holiness and His glory are often linked. See Isaiah 6:3 where the earth is full of God’s glory. See also my *The Splendour of Holiness* (NCPI, 1985), pp. 25–26.

⁵ See also Leviticus 11:47; Ezekiel 22:26; 42:20; 44:23; cf. I Samuel 21:5.

⁶ See Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 15–37. This section speaks of the theology of Leviticus and should be read as a whole. What must be kept in mind is that God’s plan is to sanctify the whole created world. Where it is clean but not sanctified, He aims to sanctify it. Where it is unclean or profane in a secular manner, He will persist until He has destroyed or sanctified it.

⁷ Wenham, *ibid.*, p. 19. See also Dr. John Kleinig’s *Sharing in God’s Holiness* (Lutheran Laymen’s League, 1984), pp. 4–6.

⁸ See Ezekiel 16:16–36.

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As to the way Israel understood the holiness of God, it was firstly that ‘otherness’⁹ of God which Isaiah met in the temple to the cry of the *trisagion* of the seraphim, and which was always portrayed through the cultus—Israel’s worship; and secondly, though no less importantly, the merciful nature of God in redeeming His people. Isaiah so often calls Him ‘the Holy One of Israel, your Redeemer’. Walther Eichrodt, commenting on God’s holiness in the Book of Hosea, says:

There can be no playing down the annihilating power of holiness, and the intensity of the threat of judgement in Hosea can hardly be exaggerated. Nevertheless, in the end it is *the incomprehensible creative power of love which marks out Yahweh as the ‘wholly other’*, the one whose nature is in complete contrast to that of the created cosmos.¹⁰

Pursuing this line of God’s transcendent holiness and the redeeming love which is innate to holiness, Donald W. McCullough concludes his survey of God’s holiness in the Old Testament by commenting:

So the eventual Old Testament view of the Holy may be summarised this way: the Holy is utterly distinct: *the ‘wholly other’* is the God of Israel; his set-apartness consists in the fact that he is Redeemer, the God of love. The holiness of God, therefore, refers to the fact that God is antithetical to humanity precisely in his overcoming of the antithesis. As holy, he is the consuming fire of love.¹¹

P. Bonnard makes a similar description of God’s holiness:

Firstly, Yahweh is holy in the sense that He stands utterly above the created world; He is the wholly other, the incomprehensible, the unanalysable, the unfathomable . . . (Gen. 28:16ff; 1 Sam. 6:19ff; 2 Sam. 6:6ff; Josh. 24:19) . . . (Isa. 6; 57:15; Hos. 11:9; 12:1; Ezek. 1; 28:25; 36:22; 38:23: ‘I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations; then they will know that I am the Lord’). In this first sense the ideas of holiness and of the glory of Yahweh are often equivalent. But on the other hand Yahweh is holy inasmuch as He imparts Himself, inasmuch as He wishes men to share in His own divine life as He brings them within the scope of His judgment and mercy. His holiness is dynamic, exacting; it confronts man to pour upon him a new life.¹²

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD’S HOLINESS FOR ISRAEL AND THROUGH HER TO THE WORLD

Unless we recognise that the sanctification of all creation is a primary aim in God’s creation of the world, we will miss the significance of both the *qahal* of Israel and the *ecclesia* of Christ. Exodus 19:5–6 speaks of Israel being God’s possession ‘among all peoples’ and *the* people who shall be *to Him* ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’. They shall be the one, true, worshipping people, and holiness has to do with worshipping God—as the Gentiles refuse to do—and reigning with God in His Kingdom. This witness of worship¹³ is with a view to the final witness of worship

⁹ The term ‘wholly other’ is not viable since it would be impossible to know God. To be created in the image of God must mean that in some way Man could know God, since he had affinity with Him, but the distinction of God from Man is what is intended by the term ‘otherness’.

¹⁰ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (SCM, 1961), p. 281.

¹¹ Donald W. McCullough, ‘Holy God, Holy Church’ in *Incarnational Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society, and Family*, ed. by C. D. Kettler and T. H. Speidell (Helmets and Howard, 1990), p. 19.

¹² P. Bonnard, ‘Holy’ in *Vocabulary of the Bible* (ed. J-J. von Allmen, Lutterworth, 1958) p. 166.

¹³ Israel is all about being a worshipping people, as indeed also is the Church (cf. Rev. 5:8–13;

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when the Church shall be made ‘a kingdom, priests to his God and Father’, ‘a kingdom and priests to our God’, and who will be granted to be seated with Christ on his throne and to rule with him, to reign on the earth forever, and with him to make judgments on the nations.¹⁴ This explains why God is so critical of idolatry and so judgmental of Israel when it exchanges worship of Him for that of idols. This is profanation of God and an attack upon His plan for the sanctification of the whole creation. All we say here has tremendous significance for the Church as ‘holy’, especially as I Peter 2:9–10 substantially equals Exodus 19:5–6, if not exceeds it in scope.

With this brief view of God’s holiness in the Old Testament, we will proceed to the theme of the Church’s holiness in the New Testament.

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

Once having grasped the idea of God’s holiness and the holiness granted to God’s people in the Old Testament, as well as being its way of life, we can more easily approach holiness in the New Testament and, in particular, holiness in relation to the Church. We first need to see that there has always been the Church of God, the holy people of God commencing with Abel, those whom He set apart for Himself and for worshipping Him. God always says to His people, ‘You be holy for I am holy’.¹⁵ It was firstly said explicitly to Israel, and secondly to the church. God will have no people as His people whom He does not first consecrate, that is, sanctify, setting them apart for Himself. The means by which He—the Holy Father—sets the Church apart as His holy people is Christ. On the night of his betrayal and the praying of his High Priestly prayer, Jesus addressed God as ‘Holy Father!’ He had bidden his disciples to prayer, ‘Our Father . . . *hallowed* be thy name’. He was about having a holy family, those whom God had given him from eternity, the continuum of the covenantal family stretching back to Abraham, to say nothing of the days prior to Abraham.

JESUS AND THE HOLY CHURCH

Jesus was known as God’s Holy One. In Mark 1:24 the demon addresses him as ‘the Holy One of God’, and although Jesus does not require such an attestation, it is true. In Acts he is twice called ‘thy holy child (or, servant)’, but his address to his Father denotes him as ‘Holy Son’. In Luke 1:35 the angel tells Mary that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of the Most High will overshadow her, ‘therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’. Because he is the Word become flesh, the Son of God incarnate, he is necessarily holy. The Father is in him and he is in the Father.

In his ministry he constantly contacted those who were known as unclean. To have to do with impure persons and objects was not only to become unclean by contact, but also to become profane, unholy. Even so, Jesus showed himself stronger than what was unholy, cleansing and healing it where occasion arose. He was accused of being

7:9–14; 15:1–4; 22:3).

¹⁴ Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 3:21; 20:4; cf. I Peter 2:9–10.

¹⁵ See Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; cf. Deuteronomy 14:1–2. Note that in I Peter 1:15f., the text ‘but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy for I am holy”’, contains an imperative and, possibly, a prophetic promise.

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ritually unclean when his disciples did not wash their hands. The Crucifixion was the final proof to his accusers that he was unholy, but the Resurrection, when he was raised from the dead by the Spirit of holiness, refuted this accusation. In Revelation 3:7 the resurrected One speaks of himself as ‘the holy one, the true one’.

THE CHURCH MADE HOLY THROUGH CHRIST

In John 15:3, Jesus speaks of having cleansed the disciples through his word. In 17:17 he prays the Father to sanctify them through the truth. Cleansing precedes or accompanies sanctification (cf. I Cor. 6:11). In John 10:36, Jesus speaks of himself as having been consecrated and sent into the world. In the Book of Hebrews this fits with his being appointed High Priest who, as we will see, sanctified his people, the Church. It also fits the picture of the risen Lord in Revelation chapter 1, where his garb is that of a Priest–King.

In John 17, Jesus needs to have his disciples sanctified before they go out into the world which is in so many ways unclean and profane, and it is to this end that he prays. In John 17:19 he sanctifies himself that they might be sanctified in the truth. They need a holiness like his own, one which had made him proof against the world, and yet, by which and at the same time, he had made sanctifying inroads into that world. It was the world intended for sanctification and the disciples must be holy (in him) since he was holy.

When we come to I Corinthians 1:2, we find Paul addressing those who were ‘sanctified in Christ Jesus’ (1:3). They were those ‘called to be saints’ and are such. In 1:9 they are those ‘called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord’. In 1:30 we read, ‘He [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption’. We need not here go into the work of the Atonement and the Resurrection in showing how this happened. In 6:9–11 we have the contrast of those who are unrighteous and will not inherit the Kingdom of God. By contrast we read:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

In Colossians 1:21–23 we see the aim of God is as in Ephesians 1:3f.:

And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

In Hebrews 2:10–18 we have a description of Jesus’ redemptive work in which his being the High Priest is mentioned. Commencing with the words, ‘For he who *sanctifies* and those who are sanctified have all one origin’, it is clear that the sanctifying one here, is Christ. In 10:10, 12–14 we read:

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all . . . But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God . . . for by a single sacrifice he has perfected for all time those who are *sanctified*.

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Later in this chapter the writers speaks of those who ‘profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified. In 13:12 the statement is made, ‘So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to *sanctify* the people through his own blood’.

As to God’s intention for His people, we have the statement of Ephesians 1:4, where Paul says that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose *us* in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. The *us* is God’s holy people, the Church. In 5:25–27 her holiness is paramount in the eyes of Christ:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might *sanctify* her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

The outcome—we might even say the culmination—of Christ’s sanctifying his people as the Church of God is seen in Hebrews 10:19–22, namely to be brought into the heavenly sanctuary now, whilst here on earth, and to come to him who was once shrouded by the curtain from human sight. Thus the church, the house of God, is in the Holy of holies:

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This means that the Church, the truly sanctified people can now ‘offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe’, which is part of the purpose of its sanctification. Hebrews 12:22–24 describes this worship.

THE SANCTIFIED PEOPLE IN ACTION: THE HOLY CHURCH FACES THE WORLD

If we look back to our section headed, ‘The Significance of God’s Holiness for Israel and through Her to the World’, we see that the Church is not merely a spiritual, social unit, nor one concerned with the sanctifying of an elite or separate group of people. We saw coupled together both Exodus 19:5–6 and I Peter 2:9–10. In fact we ought to quote all of I Peter 2:4–10:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.’

To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe,

‘The very stone which the builders rejected
has become the head of the corner,’

and

‘A stone that will make men stumble,
a rock that will make them fall’;

for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

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

Whilst we do not have time and space to exegete this significant passage, we can see at a glance that this new people is an important one. In Israel there was a physical tabernacle or temple which signified the people and enclosed their worship. Now the Church is itself this holy sanctuary.¹⁶ All constituting it as living stones are a spiritual priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices (cf. Heb. 13:15–16), and they are a people whom Paul calls 'the Israel of God', transcending even the Israel of the Mosaic constitution. They are not holy simply for holiness's sake. Holiness is manifested as the 'otherness' of God, awesome and glorious, yet at the same time merciful, loving, and redeeming and sanctifying people. 'Chosen race', 'a royal priesthood', 'a holy nation', 'God's own people'—these are great qualities. They call for the Church to 'declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. This is 'the kingdom of priests', who on the one hand are to declare the redeeming, sanctifying, glorifying and perfecting work of God, and on the other to manifest and tutor the world in being king-priests unto God, in perfect worship and service.

The side of holiness which we have not even touched upon is that which Reformers and Puritans called 'experimental holiness', that is, practical holiness. Up to now we have been careful to steer away from the achievement of holiness as a human work, knowing that sanctification is by faith.¹⁷ When the Church faces the world it must not only be the *ecclesia* elected by grace, but also the body of men, women and children, who live holy lives. Whilst it is true that they are 'simultaneously sinners and saints', it is also true that they are not set on sin, but against it and, although sinning, know the grace that does not allow it to defeat and destroy them. The church is always visible and it is, in one sense, a glasshouse. It has been given no less than the mandate of Genesis 1:28—the goal of which is the sanctifying of the world—and with that mandate the commission of Christ to evangelise the world unto ultimate sanctity. Because of this it must, itself, 'strive after holiness' (Heb. 12:14).

Many injunctions¹⁸ on this score are given to it and with them the assurance that God is working within them both to will and to do his own good will for them (Phil. 2:12–13). Paul prays that 'he [Christ] may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness . . . at the coming of our Lord Jesus with his saints'.

If we keep in mind that God's holiness sets out to destroy all that is unholy, unclean and improperly profane, then we will recognise that the principle of 'holy church' will meet with implacable opposition in this world. If we remember God's judgments and punishments of Israel for her unholiness and profanity, then we will recognise the judgments which are felt within the Church in the New Testament. Even greater judgments will come upon the wicked and the profane, and we must see that the judgmental side of God's holiness is worked out in the final events when all forms of evil will be destroyed and the creation will thus become the new heaven and the new earth; and all the holy things of the End-time will come into view and action; such as the

¹⁶ See also I Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21–22; Hebrews 3:6.

¹⁷ cf. Acts 26:18, 'those are sanctified by faith in me'; Acts 20:32, 'the inheritance among all those who are sanctified'. Other passages we have quoted speak of sanctification being the work of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ For example, II Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1; Galatians 5:16–26; Ephesians 4:17–32; Colossians 3:1–16; I Thessalonians 4:1–7; 5:12–24; Hebrews 13:1–6; etc.

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Marriage of the Holy Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City, the Holy Temple, the Holy Paradise, and thus the Holy Sanctuary. God's purpose of having a holy people for a holy (new) creation will thus be fulfilled. If we put all these things together—the things of sanctification, glorification and perfection—then we surely are in the eternal realm of God's Holy Sabbath, that is, in the Holy Rest of God.

Note: The practical working out of God's holiness in the world as the Church as his holy people is one we have not taken up here, and it would seem to be evading the practicalities of being as a holy Church in today's world. Even so, we do face this situation every day, and in so many ways. We do not lack scriptural injunctions, exhortations and practical suggestions. The Church itself can be said to be unholy in many ways as it is viewed as a visible entity. It is, nevertheless, the Church under grace. God in His holiness destroys human unholiness and profanity, and He does this out of His great love, that immutable sanctification may come in the ultimate.

STUDY THREE

The Church Is Catholic

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF 'CATHOLIC'

Jürgen Moltmann says:

The expression 'catholic' [*katholikos*] (which comes from the adverbial usage [*kath'holou*] 'generally', 'universally') is not as yet applied to the church in the New Testament . . . 'Catholic' means, first of all, what is general, universal, linked with everything, compared with the particular and individual. Applied to the church, it meant the main church, the bishop's church in a province, compared with the local churches.¹

It is first found in Ignatius:

Let that be considered a valid eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the congregation be present; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.²

Otto Weber ties together the ideas of 'unity' and of 'catholicity':

When we were speaking of the unity of the Church, we understood this to mean that every Community of Jesus Christ in its place is identical with every other. This means that the expectations and needs of each Community are fundamentally a concern of every other. We could express it in the following manner: the unity of the Church consists of intensive catholicity—the Community of Jesus Christ is essentially universal. Conversely, the catholicity means the extensive unity of the Church—the Community of Jesus Christ is never bound to its spatial and temporal limitations, never dependent upon the conditions which influence it in the place it happens to be. Instead, the realm in which it thinks and acts is the world. Therefore we can make only a conceptual distinction between the unity and catholicity of the Church. As the one Church, the

¹ *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (SCM, 1977) pp. 347f.

² Quoted by Jürgen Moltmann in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*.

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Community as the Community of Jesus Christ encompasses the world . . . the Community understands itself properly as always universal. This means that it not only knows that it is united with all other Communities, but it also does not acknowledge the factual boundaries of national and religious sensibilities as binding in faith. It lays claim to people in its proclamation who do not belong to it or who belong to another Community—it carries out mission. Whether it does so in the far land or right where it is situated, it never acknowledges or confirms a lack of faith of its fellowmen regardless of how tangible it may appear. *It will never take possession of a realm which Jesus Christ has not already subjected to his own lordship* [my emphasis].³

As we have seen, the word ‘catholic’ is not found in Scripture, but the idea is strong. Ephesians 1:22–23 contains the idea, ‘. . . the church, which is his body, the fulness⁴ of him who fills all in all’. but the previous few verses make it apparent that Christ has been raised above all celestial and terrestrial rulers and principedoms, so that as Christ he is ‘all in all’. If we couple this with Matthew 28:18–20, then we have the picture of the catholicity of the church—Christ, Lord over all, the church under his command, and all the world to hear the message of Messiah:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD ALWAYS CATHOLIC EVEN WHEN NOT CATHOLIC

If we fail to see both the present and the past from an eschatological point of view, then we will fail to have a proper perspective on the catholicity of the Church. By this we mean that catholic outcome of history (i) when there shall be those out of every tribe and people and kindred and nation, worshipping God in His temple (Rev. 7:9–14), and (ii) when the gates of the Holy City⁵ shall be open day and night and the nations shall stream in bringing with them the glory of those nations. We have spoken about a unity which is intensive—all are in unity—and a unity or catholicity which is extensive, discipling all nations to the end of the earth (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8), and both will be one and together the full outcome of history. Such a view of catholicity will give us the appropriate perspective we need.

Pentecost and Before and After

Even so, we must trace the origins of this catholicity to the Day of Pentecost.⁶ The Church did not begin at Pentecost. It was at Pentecost that the people of God

³ Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, 1983), p. 561.

⁴ The term ‘fulness’ is most important. For a treatment of this see G. C. Berkouwer’s, *The Church* (Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 112–115.

⁵ In Revelation chapters 21 and 22, the New Jerusalem is undoubtedly the Holy City, which in turn is said to be the Bride of Christ. Since the light and temple of the City are the Lamb, then it would seem that the City is also Paradise, for it is down its main street that the River of Life with its Tree of Life on both banks is seen. That the nations should flow into it is surely the fulfilment of the prophecies of Israel, combined with the understanding of the Church and the Kingdom in the New Testament. This, then, is the fulfilment of the catholicity of the Church and the universal nature of the Kingdom.

⁶ Some commentators have likened this day, and especially the speaking in many languages, as a kind of reversal of Babel, and doubtless in some sense it was, but far from eliminating tongues so as to make humanity by one language a monolithic whole, the tongues of all peoples and nations have been retained, so that the unity does not come from uniformity, since unity is full when it contains within it a rich diversity.

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were named by Christ; they were the people of Christ from this—seeming—beginning, but the people of God appear to be nominated as beginning with Abel (I John 3:10–11; Heb. 11:4f.). Certainly the covenant made with Abraham is universal in its intent and scope. All the nations of the earth are to be blessed and Abraham is to inherit the whole earth (Rom. 4:13). Israel’s Sinaitic covenant seems to make her people as an elite possession of God (cf. Deut. 7:6–11; Exod. 19:5–6), but the prophetic *corpus* of Israel gives the message that Israel will be the hub of all nations and that they will go up to her to learn her law and her wisdom, and that the nations shall know God and become His people.⁷ Whilst Israel did not appear to be catholic, and in practice was not so, yet its eschatology was catholic: the Abrahamic covenant bound it to a wide view of the nations. It rightly saw that its coming Davidic king would triumph over all nations and thus its own kingdom would prove to be universal, whilst the riches of its law, its wisdom and its redemption would bring unity to the people God has created.

What we are saying in all this is that a catholicity does not come to the church which is not inherent in Israel. Certainly it becomes explicit when Christ builds his Church. Pentecost is the day of commencing explicit catholicity, not only because Jews are there from many nations and cultures, but also because ‘Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth’ had been envisaged by Jesus to his disciples,⁸ and because the synoptic elements of the commission by Christ to the apostles were couched in terms of all nations. Of course we are taking into consideration the fact that in Luke 24:44–49, John 20:19–23 (a parallel account to that of Luke 24:44f.), and in Acts 1:8, it is the Holy Spirit who comes to implement the Commission through the apostles and their successors. We keep in mind that the Spirit comes to fulfil all ministries spoken of him in John chapters 14 – 16. The Spirit is Christ’s *alter ego* as said in John 14:16 (cf. I John 5:7), and in this sense is ‘Christ in action’.⁹

THE CATHOLICITY OF CHRIST

Adam, Israel and the Kingdom of God: Catholic Anticipation

Once this term ‘the catholicity of Christ’ is mentioned, the meaning of catholicity becomes clear. Israel of itself could not be catholic, but its eschatology was so. Even in Exodus 15:17–18 there is something of the universality of God’s reign ‘for ever and ever’ which is in the mind of Moses. A developed thesis of Israel’s prophetic expectancy of its catholic nature and destiny would indeed be a good gift to theology. As it is, we must go back to Eden, and God’s plan for humanity as expressed in the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28, et al. If we take Adam as the figure of the one who should have been prophet, high priest and king to all humanity, but virtually abdicated this *munus triplex*, then we see that the everlasting covenant had to come into operation through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and continue with Israel until the mediatorship of Christ in its form of the New Covenant was established with finality. As we shall see, it was Christ who was to hold this *munus triplex* so favoured by Calvin and Luther.

⁷ For example, Isaiah 2:2–4; 25:6–8.

⁸ In the prophecies linked with the Lukan birth narratives, the Gentile nations were envisaged as becoming enlightened by the birth of Christ.

⁹ Undoubtedly in this Essay much more should have been made of the work of the Holy Spirit in the active catholicity of the Church. In one sense, from Pentecost onwards it is the ‘era of the Spirit’. For this omission see my *The Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, 1985).

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What we must also take into consideration is the reality of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom was prior to time, prior certainly to creation, and forever extant within it, though rebelled against by some men and angels. Just as no king could ever be king of Israel satisfactorily so, certainly, no person could ever be king over all creation, as Man was shaped to be by his being made in the image of God. Hence Israel's eschatology of a king who would reign over Israel, and by this token, reign over all the earth. Psalm 2 sets this proposition forth powerfully as being universal, whilst Psalm 110 shows that such a king would have to be God's high priest after the order of Melchizedek. The promise of the Davidic kingdom is that of a universal—catholic—kingdom, but its messianic overtones also point to a catholic community, Israel expanded—so to speak—to a world community subject to God. Certainly nothing could evolve or grow out of the community of the Israel to which Christ came, even in the face of the Dead Sea community and its ideological anticipations. Of course, we look at all this material in hindsight, and are wise to it because of the event of Christ's incarnation person and work.

CHRIST'S KINGDOM NOT OF THIS WORLD: HIS CHURCH ONE WITH THE KINGDOM

When, then, we speak of a universal Kingdom, we cannot do so biblically if we think of a political kingdom, a kingdom which has 'succeeded' in this world. The Church is one with the Kingdom of God, but only in anticipation of the eschatological victory when 'the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 11:15; cf. Exod. 15:17–18). The Church is one with Christ as he puts down every rule and authority and power—undoubtedly by the power of his Cross and Resurrection—until God is all in all (I Cor. 15:24–28). So, then, we do not mean that to be catholic is to have or seek to have domination over the entire world in the natural. The Kingdom which shall come will be 'not of this world'. On the contrary, it will be a Kingdom which shall have defeated the historic and prevailing political systems, including the Babylon of all history, and it shall come in 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' and 'not only in word, but also in power'.

John Newman sang, 'A second Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came,' and this was certainly true. He was not, however, recognised as a Second Adam, or as Israel's Messiah: 'He came unto his own and his own received him not'. Nevertheless he was 'the Christ, the Son of the living God', and he was the true Davidic King, as the crowd was pleased to certify him on Palm Sunday, and Pilate to satirise him on Good Friday. John the Baptist had spoken of the Kingdom of God, and Jesus also. Both had spoken of believing the Gospel: John implicitly, Jesus explicitly. Jesus told Pilate that he was a king, that he had a kingdom, but that it was not political, and as such, no direct threat to Pilate. He talked much to his disciples about that kingdom, but his mind was also set upon the Church. Had he not proved to be the King of the Kingdom of God, then he would have been of little use to the Church were it to eventuate. In being Head over the church, he was head over all things, as shown in Matthew 28:18–20, Ephesians 1:21–23, and other Scriptures. Being Head over all things for the Church, he was likewise King of the Kingdom over all earthly and celestial principalities and powers. In this sense his universality (catholicity) is seen to exist actively and, in the best sense of the term, to catholicise all things. As regards the Kingdom, he was putting down all principalities and other powers. As regarding

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the Church, he was caring for her as his Bride and his helpmeet, so that she would work with him to the final denouement of all things. She would spread the news of the Kingdom, to the ends of earth and of time; she would evangelise those outside Christ, and minister pastorally to those in him.

Since the Kingdom of God is God's rule and power in action, with its pre-determined triumph over all evil and the establishment of humanity as a kingdom of priests unto their God, then the Church which works by the power of the Kingdom, and proclaims the Kingdom—enjoining all humanity to enter it through Christ its King—must be catholic. It has the fulfilment of the Kingdom in mind, and also its own fulfilment as the Bride of Christ. The simplest form of the Church is 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst' (Matt. 18:20; cf. 28:20—'lo, I am with you always'), and so it is the *koinonia*, the 'fellowship of Christ' (I Cor. 1:9; I John 1:3), and as we have seen, the local churches are one Church because Christ is fully present in the whole Church as in the many churches. The true Church is always the church in a place; 'The church which is at . . .' We have seen that denominations are anathema because they make many 'parts' in the one place. In this sense they divide Christ (I Cor. 1:12). The universality of Christ must be seen as a true mark of the church. Alan Richardson says:

By the fact that it is *the church of this city or country*, and not a denomination of somebody's followers (Apollos' or Cephas' or Paul's), it may be known to be the Church of Jesus Christ in that place. Locality, nationality, particularity are essential marks of the universal Church; the local congregation is the embodiment at a given place and time of the Church of all the world and of all ages. The contradiction of universality is not locality but denominationalism.¹⁰

In this paper which is a biblical rationalisation of the theological word 'catholic', we do not have the time and space to apply the *principles* of catholicity to church history. It is in part a vexed subject, in part a most beautiful one, but it must be left for a separate treatment.

CHRIST THE LAST ADAM

As we said, 'John Newman sang, "A second Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came". That he was not recognised does not greatly matter for one day 'every knee [shall] bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father'. This we presently see by faith, but what we see which sight cannot see is that Christ is the whole Church as also he is the King of the Kingdom, one with his Father.¹¹ Paul makes it clear in I Corinthians 15 (cf. Rom. 5:12–21), that humanity is either in Christ or in Adam. Those in Christ live, and those in Adam die. The first Adam failed in his destiny of being prophet, priest and king to his seed. Christ is all three to his seed. The old Adamic humanity is corrupt, doomed to death. The humanity of the New Adam is new, destined for eternal life. The old Adam had lived unto himself and not unto the whole of humanity. The New or Last Adam—for there can be none to follow him—lives *to* and *for* all humanity and as such is a life-giving Spirit. This is because he is of God. The Father is supremely catholic, and the Spirit is one with the Father and the Son in their Trinitarian catholicity. As Son of the Father,

¹⁰ A. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (SCM, 1958), p. 289.

¹¹ cf. Psalm 2; 110; Hebrews 1:3; 10:12–13; Ephesians 5:5; I Corinthians 15:24–28; Revelation 11:15.

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Christ has the whole creation in view and is the Apostle sent into the world by the Father.¹² He is the Father's Missionary: he has the whole world in sight. He alone has all the fullness of God. In him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. His fullness is irresistible to the world: he must inevitably overcome it because of his victory on Calvary, in the Tomb, and by his Ascension.

This New Adam, we say again, is the Church. It has been given his fullness, the fullness which is catholic in intent and action. The Church cannot resist her Bridegroom in his catholicity, and she, too, is therefore catholic in intent and action. So the work must go on, as it now goes on, seen by principalities and powers through the church, and only seen by the Church through faith. Yes, the Church is catholic. Through her the Last Adam shall 'see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied', when the catholicity of the Holy City shall reign over all eternity.

¹² We will deal more fully with his apostleship in our next Study, 'The Church Is Apostolic'.

STUDY FOUR

The Church Is Apostolic

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING AND FACT OF 'APOSTOLIC'

The word means, of course, 'pertaining to the apostles'. It carries the idea that the Church ought to have that ethos which was present in the Church of the apostles, the Church as it was in the time of the apostles. Its reference is not necessarily to the *mode* of the apostolic church and its component churches. In regard to the Church being one, holy and catholic, we look upon such marks as being continuous and permanent, but it could be argued that what was apostolic did not need to be carried on in the subsequent life of the church, since the apostolic period ended, the apostles died, and they left no nominated successors. Of course there is a doctrine of 'apostolic succession' which believes that bishops took the place of the apostles, and in particular that Peter's successor, whoever he may have been, had primacy in the order of episcopacy. It is clear, however, that this is not a teaching within the apostolicity of the New Testament, however well the case may be argued for that kind of apostolic succession. Certainly it cannot be linguistically valid to claim that there was any ruling (monarchical) episcopacy in the New Testament Church.

Apostolicity, generally speaking, covers the fact that apostles were appointed by Christ as those who had companied with him and could witness to what they had seen of the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of their Lord. Their number was limited—the selected college of twelve, the apostolate—and what they preached and taught was rightly called 'the apostles' doctrine' (Acts 2:42), and had authority, was respected as such, and was the rule of the truth.

The Church of God & Christ Was Apostolic

The Church, of course, was primarily called 'the church of God', but then it was also Christ's Church in that he had said he would build it (Matt. 16:18). In Colossians 2:7 it speaks of the members as 'rooted and built up in him', as in Ephesians 2:22 it is

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‘a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’, whilst in I Corinthians 3:9 it is called God’s temple. In I Corinthians 3:9 the members of the Church are described as ‘God’s field, God’s building’. It is also called ‘the household of God’ (I Tim. 3:15; cf. Heb. 3:6; cf. II Tim. 2:19). In other words, the Church is never so built by the apostles that it can be called ‘the apostolic church’, with the thought that primarily the apostles built it. Without doubt, they had their part in the building, but then their building was *in* Christ. In Ephesians 2:19–20, ‘... the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets [cf. Eph. 3:5], Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone’. In I Peter 2:4–8 the Church is ‘a spiritual house’ and the cornerstone ‘chosen and precious’ is Christ. On him the building is built. Paul could say of himself, ‘like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it’, but he says he did this ‘according to the grace of God given to me’ (I Cor. 3:10). However, ‘For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ’.

We therefore have no need of alarm as though we were saying the apostles built the Church.¹ When, in Jerusalem, they healed the crippled man at the Gate Beautiful, they denied it was their own doing: ‘... why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk’. This principle is for ever: the apostles do what they do and teach what they teach, only in the power of the Holy Spirit. They recognise they ‘[have] this ministry by the mercy of God’, for they are not competent of themselves to claim anything as coming from them, but their competence is from God (II Cor. 4:1; 3:4–6).

This was so when Christ—cf. Luke 9:1–6; Matt. 10:1, 5–15; Mark 6:7–13—sent the apostles out to teach, preach and heal; he gave them authority. The group of seventy sent out (Luke 10:1–12, 17–20) came back rejoicing in their powers, but he directed them to rejoice not in the powers, but that they had been given salvation, that their names were written up in heaven. In fact, in Revelation 21:10–14 we see where their names were written:

And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Having safeguarded the fact that the Church of God is Christ, that Christ built it—albeit enabling the apostles to build with him—and that the power does not lie in the apostles themselves, we can now proceed to examine apostolicity as we see it in the New Testament.

THE NATURE OF NEW TESTAMENT APOSTOLICITY

The Apostles in the Gospels

Luke 6:12f. tells us that Jesus chose the disciples after a night of prayer. Mark 3:13–15 says that:

¹ Any more than we can say that anyone has ever built a Church. That is the work of Christ and his Spirit. The Word proclaimed brings its own response and the Church commences.

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he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

‘To be with him’, suggests not only a support group, rather it denotes that they were first to be disciples—devoted learners—and be fitted to be apostles—‘sent ones’. Just prior to Matthew 10:1—the Matthean parallel to Mark 3:13ff.—Jesus saw the multitudes ‘harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd’, and had enjoined his disciples to pray for labourers to be sent into this plentiful and prepared harvest. There can be no doubt that the apostles were to have a shepherd ministry. John 15:16 makes it clear that they had not chosen Christ, but he had chosen them and sent them forth into the vineyard to bring forth fruit.

They were told they would be sheep among wolves, would be dragged before governors and kings to bear witness, the Spirit of their Father would speak from within them, and what had been whispered to them would be proclaimed loudly from the housetops (Matt. 10:10–27). He would make them fishers of men (Mark 1:17). To them was given to understand the mystery/mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11–12). The Holy Spirit would come to them to teach them, to bring into their remembrance all Christ had taught them, to lead them into all the truth, to empower them to bring conviction to the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, to glorify both Christ and the Father to them (John chs 14 – 16). The Spirit would empower them to preach the gospel (Luke 24:44–47).

This has been called ‘the training of the twelve’.

The Apostles in the Acts & the Epistles

Christ was with the disciples after his resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, in the upper room, and for forty days until his ascension. In those forty days he spoke to them of the Kingdom of God, and of the fact that they would be baptised in the Holy Spirit.² He told them that the Spirit would empower them to witness to him in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. This, in fact, was what happened, and the Book of the Acts is an account of proclamation in these three geographical/ethnic areas.

The task of the apostles, Jesus taught them, was to witness to him (Acts 1:8). In Acts 1:21–22 the criteria for apostleship was that one has ‘accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us’, so that, ‘one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection’. Matthias was chosen in Judas’ stead. In 4:33 we read, ‘And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all’. In II Peter 1:16ff., Peter is contrasting the witness of the apostles with those who devise myths. The apostles witness to Christ and his ministry, as they testify to having heard God’s attestation of His Son, on the Mount of Transfiguration. John in his first Letter speaks of living closely with Christ—seeing, handling him, and so on. There can be no doubt that the apostles were significant men in those early beginnings and that the people recognised their appointment was a special one.

² In John 20:19–23 at least ten of them received an effusion of the Holy Spirit, sometimes called ‘the Johannine Pentecost’, but the principal, universal outpouring did not come until the day of Pentecost. The Spirit’s outpourings in Samaria and Caesarea came through the Apostolate and were part of the Pentecostal outpouring.

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From Acts 9 onwards we have the admission to the Apostolate of Paul, but his commission was directly from Christ and not by the other members of the apostolic college. He agrees he was ‘the least of the apostles’ because he—unlike them—had persecuted Christ. Even so, he was one who had seen the resurrected Christ.³ Of course his commission was not less powerful than theirs, even if he was like ‘one born out of due season’. It was agreed in principle that he was the apostle especially appointed to the Gentiles, whilst it seemed they were more the apostles to the circumcised. Probably this clear distinction could have changed as the nature of the ‘Israel of God’ came to be more fully understood by the apostles. It is clear enough that Christ’s commission before his ascension was to all nations, and historical tradition does seem to indicate that the apostles proclaimed the gospel far beyond Palestine.

Apostolic Truth Is the Matter of Christ, Israel & the Nations

This sub-section should probably have been the introduction to our study on apostolicity, for we have simply looked at the facts—Christ’s coming to Israel, his call to repent and to believe the gospel, and his work in forming that gospel through his obedience in his incarnation, ministry, redemptive death, resurrection and ascension. All of this material is used in the Acts and the Epistles, but we may have missed something if this is all that we think is concerned, namely that which we have discussed under the heading of catholicity. We mean that if in our understanding all things are not brought back to their beginnings as at creation, their growth in Israel’s history, especially with an understanding of God’s salvation history and the burden of the prophets regarding the one who was to come to Israel and set up the Kingdom of God, then we have minimised the importance of Christ and God’s purpose for His people. We need to see how the gospel relates to biblical eschatology, that is, the relationship of the gospel to Christ’s end ministry and the *telos* which was always the interest and emphasis of the prophets and the apostles⁴—that upon which the church was built.

A key passage could be that of Ephesians 1:9–10:

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

In this passage we see that God’s plan from before creation—with which, incidentally, the whole first chapter of Ephesians is concerned—was always that Christ should ultimately ‘head up’ or ‘unify’ all things.⁵ These ‘all things’ were created by God, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit,⁶ and they are destined to become one again in the

³ Seeing Christ did not make him an apostle. It was Christ’s personal encounter with him and the commission he gave Paul which made him an apostle. Many had seen Christ in similar circumstances to Matthias, Justus—for example—and they were not made apostles.

⁴ Commentators have always debated whether the ‘apostles and prophets’ of Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 were those of the New Testament era or whether also included were the prophets of the Old Testament. Since the inclusion of ‘apostles’ seems to denote the New Testament times, it would seem the prophets were also of the same era. Even so, what must be realised is that the substance of the OT prophets—the prophetic residue, so to speak—is what both apostles and NT prophets base their teaching upon, and so the whole prophetic content is really caught up in the NT ‘apostles and prophets’.

⁵ Whilst this broad view of the entire plan of God is to be seen in a panoramic view, we must not forget the important and immediate details such as God’s intention for His people in holiness, sonship, redemption, grace, glorification, inheritance, and the like. The background to Ephesians is the vast panorama of God’s ultimate intention, and the details must be seen in the light of this broad vista.

⁶ Creation was by the Word (John 1:1–4), that is, the Son (Col. 1:15–17), and also by the creative Spirit (Job

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telos, though, of course, they will transcend the ‘all things’ as they were *at* the beginning. This means that the plan of God from Adam, through Abraham and the covenant made with him which includes Israel, the Sinaitic Covenant, and also the covenant known as the Davidic Covenant, must all find their fulfilment in Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant. This, Paul calls ‘the mystery of his will’.

This means we must see Christ as the continuity of the plan of God, as worked out in the Old Testament and continued in Christ, in the Church and, in particular, the gospel—‘the whole counsel of God’—which we call ‘the apostolic truth’. The apostolic truth—the gospel—also contains within it Christ as God’s eschatology. In other words, Christ is the One who has (i) determined all things from the beginning and participated in them, (ii) achieved by his person and work that which we call ‘the gospel’, and (iii) by whom all things from the time of Pentecost onwards will culminate in the *telos*.

It is important that we see that the apostles were not only concerned with Christ’s incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension, but that they also saw him as Co-creator with the Father and the Spirit, and as always participating in the Divine plan for creation, with humanity being of primary importance in that plan. He, as the Pantocrator and Cosmocrator, would draw all things to their close. By this we mean that the eschatological vision of the new heaven and the new earth and the ultimate pacification of all things was always seen as being fulfilled in Christ.

In the light of this understanding, we can come to see the rich significance of the apostolic truth. The faith of the apostles must not be primarily seen only as the basis for the praxis of the early Church, unless we clearly see that the way they went about the proclamation of the gospel was primary to them, and the godliness of the people sprang from the root of the gospel. This helps to enlighten us regarding the Church as one, the Church as holy and the Church as apostolic.

The Apostles, the Apostolate, the Apostolic Truth & Practice

What we must keep in mind all the time is that Christ trained his disciples to be apostles. He himself was the Apostle of God. Hebrews 3:1–2 exhorts:

Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. He was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses was also faithful in God’s house.

That Jesus was *the* Apostle, *the* Sent One, is quite clear. Although the term ‘apostle’ is not used of him elsewhere than this location in Hebrews, it is clear that Jesus referred to himself many times as having been sent by the Father. Some forty times in John’s Gospel, verbs ‘to send’ are used, and it is clear that Jesus saw himself in one sense as the ‘sent one’. There is also the point to be considered that as Jesus was the Sent One, so it was innate to him to be also in the work of sending as his Father was likewise the Sender. Redeemed humanity—the Church—was bound to share with him in going and sending.

There is no great point in trying to relate Hebrews 3:1–2 with the Johannine and other passages except that the phrase ‘was faithful in God’s house’ is speaking of Jesus as one *like* Moses but *greater than* Moses. Jesus is ‘the builder of the house’ and Moses

33:4; Ps. 104:30; cf. Ps. 33:6), with the Father as the Initiator of this work (Gen. 1:2ff.; Ps. 148:5–6).

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was a servant in the house. As Moses went forth to rescue Israel from Egypt, so Christ has come to rescue God's people from all their bondages and bring them into the true Eden of God—the Holy City and Paradise.

In this sense we can use the word 'apostle' for Jesus, for it is he who trains his apostles, and sends them forth on *his* and the *Father's* mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostles must have *all* the truth to teach—'the whole counsel of God'—as well as the personal, redemptive message for lost men and women. If we see this, then we can prepare to understand the meaning of apostle, apostolate, apostolic truth and apostolic practice.

The apostle, then, is one who has companied with Jesus, who has witnessed his resurrection, has been taught the whole truth of Jesus Christ by the power and revelation of the Holy Spirit, and has been specifically designated and commissioned to preach the apostolic truth.

The apostolate is that college of apostles, the twelve of which has had added to it the apostleship of Paul.⁷ It is that group of men who were commissioned to do the work of apostleship as a college, so that the truth as proclaimed by each apostle can be said to constitute the whole apostolic truth for faith and practice. The presence of these apostles means all faith and practice was referred to this college.⁸ In one sense Paul was tested as to his apostleship by the apostles, but Paul maintained he was commissioned by Christ and had no need of being tested. Even so, he is glad to refer to the fact that the apostles *recognised* his calling and affirmed it.

The apostolic truth is what we have referred to above. In simple terms it may be described as the recognition that the truth of God is God's action throughout history, the apostles recognising the events of Christ in his incarnation, life, ministry, death resurrection, ascension and present, continuous reigning as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, and the explication of this as part of the gospel. At the same time the Old Testament is vindicated and explicated in the light of the events of Christ. This means that something comes to the fore which is not the Old Testament, nor even the person and work of Christ, but which is a third matter. It is the gospel created which is the truth of both the Old Testament and the events of Christ, and it is this truth in which Christ and the Holy Spirit have tutored the apostles so that what they proclaim, teach and tutor others is the apostolic truth, 'the apostles' doctrine'.

This being the case and the truth being given orally and, bit by bit, being written down, the apostolic truth remains valid for all time, and does not call for amendment, recasting, alteration or substitution. It means that the apostolate being finished by reason of the deaths of the apostles, there is need for a substitution by succeeding apostles. Much study and research of the apostolic truth is certainly justified, but the proclamation of it throughout the stream of the Church's life and history is still dependent on the Father's care for the Church (cf. I Thess. 1:2; II Thess. 1:2), the presence of Christ with his Church which is his Body, Bride, Vine and Flock, and the continuing presence and operative power and guidance of the Holy Spirit by whom Christ is present and makes known his will as Lord of the Church.

⁷ There always remains that question of whether Matthias was correctly chosen by the means of drawing lots, whether Paul was the twelfth apostle Jesus had in mind, or whether the matter of 12 and 13 is significant or not.

⁸ There may or may not have been personal reference to the apostles, either singly or as a group, but this is not what we are conjecturing. There was no executive body called 'the apostolic college'. No group legislated or judged as a judicial body. They simply went about their work as apostles and would have been referred to as needed.

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We have already seen the nature of the Church as one, holy and catholic. It is living in these marks or attributes by reason of the apostolic truth, the truth of Christ as delivered by the apostolate, and since Christ is said to be the truth—especially the truth of the Father—and the Holy Spirit witnesses to the truth and is also said to be the truth, then we have every cause to be humble before the truth brought to us by the apostles. Because faith and practice cannot be divorced, we need to see that our primary instruction—as also our basis for it—is in the apostolic truth, reiterating that only in the fullness of Christ and the Holy Spirit can we both understand and practice that apostolic truth.

In order to understand the apostolic truth, it is obvious we must be richly soaked in the Old Testament as also in the New Testament. The apostles are fully conversant with the Old Testament, and the plan of God as shown in it, and as linked with the teaching of Christ in his life and ministry, especially as the Holy Spirit has brought Christ's teaching to the apostles' remembrance and has led them into all the truth, and brought them the power to proclaim the gospel and explicate the plan of God, which for the New Testament Church included eschatology which was Christ himself.

APOSTOLICITY IN CHURCH HISTORY

The Church came into being through the preaching of the gospel by the apostles. They preached in the power of the Holy Spirit the truth which was 'the whole counsel of God'. The only apostolic succession which can be authentic is the continuing proclamation of 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3), and the proper use of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We are immediately aware of the divergences in history from apostolic faith and practice, and must work our way through these with true faith, hope and charity for these three virtues are the very life of Christ and his Church. We must be aware that at any point of the history of the Church there will be divergences by reason of many factors, so that we must work patiently to reform these divergences and heal divisions. At the same time we must be aware that Christ is the Lord of the Church, that he is the one who walks among the golden lampstands, and that both the support of the Church and the judgments which are coming to her various communities are Christ's to give.

It may seem naive⁹ to suggest that we go back to the Scriptures and seek to rediscover, as a Church, our apostolic beginnings, but this is the only way we have open to us. We must always be doing this. Only from this source can the Church realise her unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. The four notes should be innate to the Church, but it is fair to say that the basic one of them all is apostolicity, for from this ministry of Christ the Apostle, through his apostles will come authentic understanding, response and consequent practice.

⁹ This article is not intended to cover Church history, nor to take up the matter of the successors of the apostles—if one assumes there were in the form of the episcopacy, the Papal claims of Rome and Constantinople—and so on.

STUDY FIVE

The Israel of God & the Holy *Telos*

(by Geoffrey Bingham)



INTRODUCTION: 'THE ISRAEL OF GOD'

Paul's statement 'the Israel of God' needs to be seen in its immediate, effective context, namely Galatians 6:11–17:

See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. 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. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

It is obvious that Paul is drawing his Epistle to that conclusion whereby he is insisting—against the Judaizers—that circumcision is of no consequence, any more than is uncircumcision. The Judaizers are pressing the Galatian church members who had once been Gentiles to perfect their salvation by taking circumcision and Paul is saying that it is useless. His great argument is that all persons who are persons of faith—whether culturally born into either the Jewish or Gentile situation—are true children of Abraham, and so circumcision is quite beside the point. It is a nothing. Only being a new creation is anything. Persons are to be judged by this *kanon* (canon, rule); that is, whether they are new creations, or not.

It would appear at first sight that those who walk by this rule are 'the Israel of God'. This would be especially true if the translations which have 'even on the Israel of God' were to be followed. This last phrase would be exegetical of 'all who walk by this rule', in which case the matter would be clear, Paul is using 'the Israel of God' for the church. However, the *NRSV* uses 'and upon the Israel of God', thus distinguishing 'those who will follow this rule' and 'the Israel of God'.

It seems there are various choices here. Some see it as referring to nonjudaizing Jewish Christians of Galatia (for example, G. Schrenk and D. W. B. Robinson), whilst others see it as an eschatological reference much as the ‘all Israel’ of Romans 11:26–27 when—according to a certain exegesis—it means the totality of Jews who will be saved ‘when the deliverer shall come from Zion’. However, not all agree that the Romans passage is referring to ‘the totality of Jews who will be saved’, but rather to all Jew and Gentiles who have come by the way of Christ’s atonement for sins.¹ N. T. Wright speaks of ‘ethnic Israel’ meaning ‘Israel after the flesh’, the Israel which has not acceded to Christ, and denies that in Romans 11:26–27 all ‘ethnic Israel’ will be saved.² In fact, it is only when the Gentiles have come in—during the period of ethnic Israel’s hardening—that ‘all Israel will be saved’. That is, when it comes to the time that the *elect* Gentiles have come in by faith in Christ, then will Israel be complete in that all its elect members have been saved.

I think it is fair to say that if we are caught up in Galatians 6:16 and do not see verse 16 simply as the conclusion of the whole argument of Paul which commences at 2:11, then we will miss the point of ‘the Israel of God’. ‘The Israel of God’ is the church, those who truly walk according to the *kanon*, and the *kanon* consists in being free from the Judaizers’ injunction to get circumcised. Behind their injunction is a refusal to glory in the Cross, and an insistence on a theology of glory apart from the Cross. That is, they refuse justification by faith—the thrust of Galatians 2:19–21—so that, according to Paul’s argument, all persons of faith are children of Abraham, and as such, justified and members of Christ’s Body, the Church.

I believe then, even against contrary exegesis, that we should understand the Church as ‘the Israel of God’. Here, too, we should understand the ‘all Israel’ of Romans 11:25–26 to be constituted of both Jews and Gentiles, in which case it is, again, the Church.

The Church Becoming ‘the Israel of God’

We still have to ask what does Paul mean by ‘Israel’ and what does he mean by ‘the Church’? The answer must lie along the lines that at Pentecost ‘all who believed’ (Acts 2:44) and who were ‘all’ Jews, were designated first as ‘the number’ (2:47), later ‘their friends’ (that is, of the apostles, 4:23), ‘the company of those who believed’ (4:32), ‘the whole church’ (5:11), ‘the number of the disciples’ (6:1), ‘the church’ (8:1) after which the company of Christ is called ‘the church’. Up to chapter 8, the Church is composed only of Jews. In Acts 9:31 we read of ‘the church throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria’, which means the assemblies were thought of as one church and Samaritans were in that church—a thing unthinkable for a Jewish synagogue. Whilst chapters 10 and 11 introduce the conversion of the Gentiles at Caesarea, chapter 11 onwards is concerned with the churches in which are Gentiles, and the official acceptance of the Gentiles within the churches is made clear in chapter 15. In fact, James the Elder quotes Amos 9:11–12 as a vindication for the entrance of the Gentiles into the body of the believers. It seems that those at Jerusalem, where the apostles and elders were the leaders of what we might call a council or conference,

¹ See N. T. Wright’s *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Fortress, 1993), pp. 249–250.

² It would seem there are two Israels; one ethnic, the other spiritual in the sense of Romans 2:25 – 3:2. There cannot be two Israels, as I make the point that there has only ever been one Israel. There are, however, in ‘ethnic’ Israel those who refuse Christ, and in this sense they may still be called Israel though they are not, spiritually and covenant-wise, of Israel, ‘the Israel of God’.

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concluded that the inclusion of the Gentiles was a permissible thing. The Pharisaic ‘party’ wanted to make the converts adhere to rules for admission of proselytes into Judaism, but their proposal was defeated. In other words, the Church was now composed of Jews and Gentiles, all of whom had come into it on the basis of belief in Jesus Christ, repentance, remission of sins and the act of baptism.

The ‘All Israel’ of Romans 11:25–27

We set the text before ourselves so as to look at it clearly:

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

‘The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’;
‘and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.’

There is a number of interpretations of this passage. The most common is that Paul is saying God will harden part of ethnic Israel until the full number of the Gentiles come in, so that when that has finished happening *then* all Israel will be saved by some act of Christ, as Deliverer coming from Zion. He will banish ungodliness from Israel and fulfil the new covenant promised by Jeremiah.

He first points to the matter of the hardening of a part of Israel and the Gentiles coming in fully as being a ‘mystery’. We recognise a mystery is something which is not obvious when read, but is an open secret to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. It is obvious that whilst the hardening of part of Israel is proceeding, so too is the gospel spreading across the earth in that period until all Gentiles who will respond have come into the Church. The *RSV*, *NRSV* and *NIV*³ have for *houtos* the translation ‘so’ whilst others have ‘then’, but Wright says:

During this period of time, the Gentiles are to come in to the people of God: and *that is how* God is saving ‘all Israel’. Despite repeated assertions to the contrary, the meaning of [*houtos*] is not ‘then’ but ‘thus’, ‘in this manner’. Paul’s meaning is not a temporal sequence—first the Gentiles, *then* the Jews. Rather, it is the interpretation of a particular process *as* the salvation of ‘all Israel’. And in this context ‘all Israel’ cannot possibly mean ‘all Jews’. It is impermissible to argue that ‘Israel’ cannot change its referent within the space of two verses, so that ‘Israel’ in v.25 must mean the same as ‘Israel’ in v.26: Paul actually began the whole section (9.6) with just such a programmatic distinction of two ‘Israels’, and throughout the letter (e.g. 2.25–9) as well as elsewhere (e.g. Philippians 3.2–11) he has systematically transferred the privileges and attributes of ‘Israel’ to the Messiah and his people.⁴

It is true that Paul constantly emphasises that only those who are true Israelites can properly call themselves Israelites. They are not really of Israel. It would be impossible to say that Gentiles who have become Christians and thus are members of the Church are not within ‘the Israel of God’.

Our paper, then, shall proceed now on the basis that the Church is the Israel of God, the ‘Israel of God’ is the Church.

³ The first *NEB* translation had: ‘when that has happened, the whole of Israel will be saved’, and the *Jerusalem Bible*—first translation—had: ‘then after this the rest of Israel will be saved as well’. Both these translation seem to use *houtos* as ‘then’. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–250.

⁴ Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–50.

ONLY ONE ISRAEL

We recognise that there is an ethnic Israel, and has been since the time of Jacob, and more obviously so since the Israelites were taken out of Egypt and implanted in Canaan. If our reasoning is authentic, then the Israel of God is the continuum of Israel, especially as it was the holy remnant, that is, faithful Israel. In that sense from Jacob to now there has been the Israel of God, and this will always be so until the end, and even in eternity, in the Holy City, the Paradise of God.

We might well ask whether there was an 'Israel of God' before even the age of Abraham. The answer must be, 'Yes'. Just as now the name Israel (Jacob) does not really denote the Church since Christ's name is linked with that, so, too, we find the Church generally being called 'the Church of God'. This is really a term similar in meaning to 'the people of God', although that term, as such, is not found in the Scriptures as an exact designation. It certainly is implied numerous times. In Hebrews 11:4, Abel is seen to be the first person of faith mentioned in a list of other faithful persons, and in I John 3:10–11, Abel is also seen to be the first nominated person of love, that is, of the whole, historical family of love. Jesus names Abel as the first prophet. Certainly there have always been the people of God. To read backwards from the time of Jacob, the term 'Israel' is obviously not literally possible, but to read backwards from Jacob, a 'people of God' is not anachronistic, any more than to read forwards from Pentecost the people of God as 'Israel', would be invalid. The prophets in Israel had long read 'Israel', 'Mount Sion', 'Jerusalem', 'the city of God', 'the mountain', 'the river' and other such terms into the future, not simply as literal ethnic and geographical features, but as powerful symbols of the people of God and the place of their life and worship. In the prophets the realities become eschatological symbols.

CHRIST, THE CHURCH AND THE PLAN OF GOD

Jesus Christ as the Alpha & the Omega, the Beginning & the End

Christ as 'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Rev. 22:13), and as the one who is 'the same yesterday and today and for ever' (Heb. 13:8), must mean that in every way he is connected with all things from the beginning of creation to the end of it, that is *to*, and *in*, the new creation. He was and is certainly the Word through whom all things were created. He is the one in whom, and by whom, all things will be united (unified), filled, reconciled and harmonised.⁵ There cannot have been a time when he was not occupied in the work of God's plan and purpose. If Christ is not explicitly mentioned and coupled with the plan in the Old Testament, the New Testament certainly testifies to his creating all things, his continuous upholding of the creation by his word of power, and of holding all things together.⁶ There are references to his work in Israel,⁷ and he told his disciples that the Law, the Psalms and the prophets all testified to him. Revelation 19:10 states that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy', and Paul says that 'all the promises of

⁵ Ephesians 1:9–10; 1:23 – 4:10; Colossians 1:19–22; 3:14; cf. Rom. 8:18–25; Revelation 21:5; cf. II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:6; 6:14–15.

⁶ Hebrews 1:1–3; John 1:1–4; Colossians 1:15–17; I Corinthians 8:5–6; cf. John 13:35; 5:19–29; 8:56–58; 10:30, 38; 17:1–5, 20–26; Hebrews 7:24–25; 9:28; 10:12; Revelation 1:5, 17–18; 5:12–13; 11:15; 17:14; 21:22–23; 22:1, 13.

⁷ See I Corinthians 10:1ff. and Isaiah 6:10 with John 12:40–41.

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God find their Yes in him'. All of this surely means that the one we know as Jesus Christ was God prior to his incarnation, God and Man—as one—during the days of his flesh, and following his ascension is still Man—the Second and Final Adam. In all he has been, and continues to be, God's Mediator in creation, redemption and the process of the ultimate unification, glorification, sanctification and perfection of Man in and with all creation. It is in the New Testament that the man Jesus is designated as Prophet, Priest and King, as Son of God, Son of Man, as Lord, as Messiah, as Davidic King, as the Servant of God, as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and it is in the New Testament that Old Testament Scriptures are quoted in regard to his Person and Work.

Jesus and the Mystery of God's Will

Ephesians 1:9–10 gives us Christ as the key to 'the mystery of God's will':

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

The 'we' and 'you' in verses 11–14 following, are really the Church with its Jewish and Gentile origins mentioned. This body of previous Jews and Gentiles is to be and to live 'to the praise of his [God's] glory'. There can be no doubt that this will happen because it is God 'who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will', a powerful statement. 'The counsel of his will' is similar to Ephesians 1:5 where God has made us His sons 'according to the purpose of his will'. The conjunction 'for' of verse 9 is linking Christ's unification of all things with the Church being 'to the praise of his [God's] glory'.

If we make the unification the mystery of God's will, and if we read Ephesians 2:11–22 with this in mind, then we see Christ's death as the unification of Jew and Gentile. They are now *one* before the Father,⁸ having access together, to Him. Thus, in Ephesians 3:1–11 we see 'the mystery of Christ' (v. 4) is 'how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel'. The unification of Jews and Gentiles is the 'mystery of his will' as it is 'the mystery of Christ'.

What is most significant is that Paul's mandated ministry is:

to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to *the eternal purpose* which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:9–11).

This surely means that Paul's apostolic commission was to make men and women to see 'the plan of the mystery'—the mystery of unification. What is most powerful is 'that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places'. In other words, *these great celestial powers cannot know God's will apart from the Church: they can only know it by the Church.*

We are now faced with the fact that 'the mystery of Christ'—the Unifier—is itself 'the mystery of God', and *the Church is one with Christ* in working out 'the plan of the

⁸ It was, I believe, Adolf Harnack who called 'the one new man' of Ephesians 2:15 'the third race', meaning there are Jews and Gentiles and now a third race which is neither Jew nor Gentile.

mystery’ or ‘the mystery of his [God’s] will’.⁹ This is borne out by the fact that Christ has given his fullness to the Church which is his body, so that it is now ‘the fulness of him who fills all in all’ (1:23).

CHRIST & THE FULL RANGE & SCOPE OF THE ‘PLAN OF THE MYSTERY’

Now that we see Christ is not a spiritual ‘Lone Ranger’ in history, and that he has always had that body of people from Abel to the End,¹⁰ who are the people of God, the people of faith and the people of love, then we see that Christ is the New, the Second and the Final Adam. If he is this life-giving Adam, then all his people are in him—‘in Christ’—just as all born human are designated as in the death dealing Adam. Those who are in Christ the last Adam, are no longer in the first Adam: ‘For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive’. Nevertheless we will have to see that Christ became *as* the first Adam and so bore the sins and disobedience of all the Adamic body of humanity. ‘Born of woman, born under the law’, he is in Adam, but he is stronger than Adam. Whereas Adam disobeyed and brought sin into the world and death to all humanity, Christ—as a man—obeyed completely—even unto the death of the Cross—and so brought obedience and life to all humanity. We have to see Christ as one with all humanity from the beginning and in that sense to be the protological Man, as he is one with all humanity through being the Second and Final Adam, and as such is the eschatological Man. Our point is quite complex and we will have to unpack it as we go: Christ must be both protological and eschatological Man. He must be *as* the First Adam and yet *be* the Last Adam.

In this Study we do not have the time and space to fill out our thesis which is all that happened in Eden and beyond. The thesis¹¹ is this, that the seventh day rest of God, the seventh day being sanctified, the rest of God was/is available to all humanity. It was to be the basis of Edenic life, the first Adam and the first Eve to be one flesh, having been given their vocation in life in the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28, *et al.* They were to be fruitful, fill up the earth and have dominion over it. This would mean bringing all the earth into the Edenic blessing in the context of the Sabbath rest. Eden was especially made for the couple, Adam being made outside it and then being placed in it, and naming the animals as part of that mandate of lordship over creation. Eve was then created from him to be his helpmeet and the two became one flesh, especially for the fulfilling of the commission to bring blessing and order to all the earth. This Edenic blessing was lost through acceding to the so-called wisdom of the serpent who opposed the Creator’s word to them, and they were ejected from the garden. Even so, an evangel was pronounced to them in the form of Genesis 3:15.

Adam led a humanity which, though it had good beginnings—as in Abel and Seth—was unable to bring Edenic blessing to the world, but slid downhill in a dreadful depravity which brought judgment in the form of the Flood. The righteous man Noah and his family did not prove to be a true Edenic family.

⁹ In our Study, we hope to develop the thought that as Christ is the true Adam of God, so the Church is the true Eve of God, the helpmeet of her Adam. This is by contrast to the disobedience of the first Adam and Eve.

¹⁰ At the End the nations pour into the Holy City. The picture of Revelation 7:9–14 is of a multitude which cannot be numbered out of all tribes, peoples and nations.

¹¹ Over the years I have gathered helpful materials from the following writers and their books: William Dumbrell, Graeme Goldsworthy, Mark Strom, and N. T. Wright. These authors and writers that they quote have helped to formulate what one might call Eden-theology, or better still, Adam theology. They incorporate the theology of the Kingdom of God, of covenant, and of the profound mystery of marriage—of Christ and his Bride of which Genesis 2:24 is protological. Unless the early chapters are protological of the ultimate Adam and Eve, Eden, and the successful mandate for the new heavens and the new earth, then Scripture does not appear to be a unity and a true whole. If Christ is present in all this theology, then Adam—and Eve—theology is without both point and substance.

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The reversion to violence and corruption was about to be fulfilled and would have, but for God's revelation of Himself to Abraham and Sarah and His revelation to them of a covenant for the whole world. These two were virtually as Adam and Eve to the nations, and in particular to the dynasty they were forming which we ultimately call 'Israel'. Yet their true dynasty was intended to embrace the whole world. Israel was supposed to be in a new Eden in Canaan, but matters did not resolve themselves this way and the prophets saw the true Edenic state would only come with and through Messiah. Likewise through him would come the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, and the universal Covenant, both being knit together as the one work of God, and of His Christ. Christ is Israel: Christ is the Second Adam. The people he brings to the *telos* are God's true Israel. Christ *is* them and they *are* his Body, Bride, Vine, Flock—and so on.

Christ was to fulfil 'the plan of the mystery' in heading up all things. This he did at the Cross. He made into one new humanity the Jew and the Gentile. Isaiah 40 – 66 prophesies a Suffering Servant who is at once all Israel, at once the holy remnant, and at once the Single Servant, whose work is redemptive, leading to a renewed Israel, and in fact to a world which is redeemed, even to a new heaven and a new earth. Christ is all of these things in his identity as the true Adam. He comes as the Messiah who was predicted in many aspects by the prophets, and is pronounced to be the King of Psalm 2 and the King–Priest—after the order of Melchizedek—of Psalm 110. He becomes *as* the whole of Adamic humanity on the Cross, suffers in propitiatory mode the wrath of God on all sin.¹² Through his death and resurrection he releases Mankind from its Adamic bondage, liberating all humanity into himself as its Saviour and Lord, and as the Head of his Body which is the Church. He was Israel as the Suffering Servant and still is Israel, but then the Church is Israel. This is 'the Israel of God' which is bound for the climactic Eden of the *telos*, and all the other events contained within that *telos*.

THE NATURE OF THE HOLY *TELOS*

We have pointed out that in the prophets all the eschatological elements and events are cast in the language of Israel, and that this way of referring to the end-time and the end-things is carried on in the New Testament. We do not have time here to cover this claim in detail. Yet, to give an example, Psalm 65:9–13 is speaking of Israel, yet is describing Canaan as an Eden. Indeed in many passages Israel's restoration is likened to an Edenic state.¹³ The *motif* of the river is also powerfully developed.¹⁴ Chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation have numerous references back to the Old Testament such as those to the new heaven and the new earth; to Mount Sion the true Jerusalem covering, as it were, the whole earth; to a situation of universal peace; and to a situation where there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more sickness and no more death. Of course the New Testament accords this ultimate peace, reconciliation and unification of all things to the Person and Work of Christ, as also the work of the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Israel of God is Christ's Bride, the Eve to his Adam, the Helpmeet to his being Prophet, Priest and King.

There are also references in the New Testament towards this holy *telos*—this climax of the plan of God, the unveiling of its mystery. The Book of the Revelation—

¹² In II Corinthians 5:14 Paul says 'We thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead'. It can be shown that all mankind was taken up into the Cross when he died for all, and bore the sins of all in his body on the tree. The true Adam took into himself the whole body of sin (Rom. 6:6) as the world was crucified. In this sense Christ became as the old Adam.

¹³ See Ezekiel 36:35; Joel 2:3; Isaiah 51:3; Zechariah 14:8.

¹⁴ See Jeremiah 2:13; Psalm 65:9–13; Psalm 46:45; Ezekiel 47:1–12. The New Testament equivalents are John 4:13; 6:35; 7:37–39; Revelation 22:1–5.

contrary to the opinion of many—is a very sane prophecy and builds up to the climax in an ordered way. The end chapters speak of the total judgment of all evil, including the devil, the beast, the false prophets, the ten kings and the armies which battle against the Deliverer on the white horse but are defeated. These evil powers plus the finally impenitent are cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. Babylon is destroyed in one day. When all evil is obliterated, purity and holiness cover all things. Creation is sanctified, freed from the bondage of corruption and brought into ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’. All things protological of the ultimate Sabbath rest, the Edenic River, the Edenic Sanctuary of worship, the Lordship of Man, the ‘profound mystery’ of the union of Adam and Eve in the ‘one-flesh’ marriage, the Paradisial *locale*, the Presence of God—all these things come to their eschatological climax and fulfilment in the things of the holy *telos*.

We have the New Heaven and the New Earth, the marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City which is the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven—where it has been formed—to the new earth. The Holy Presence of God is now forever with redeemed mankind. The Holy City embraces all the nations, their kings and leaders bringing the glory of the nations into it. It is a sanctified City, and indeed one which is glorified and perfected. The sanctuary of Eden had no temple since God was present. Likewise the Holy City has no temple for God and the Lamb are the temple.¹⁵ All that the temple signified in its structure, worship apparatus and cultus is now present in God Himself. The redeemed are now sealed with the names of the Father and the Lamb. They see these Two face-to-face. Down the centre of the Holy City flows the River of God, and the Tree of Life grows profusely on both sides of the River, constantly yielding fruit without restriction of seasons, and the leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations.

Israel—the people of God—is now transformed from ‘protological Israel’ into a kingdom of priests unto God and as such shall reign and serve for ever. Their Head and Lord, the Lamb and the Wife of the Lamb—the New Jerusalem who is the Mother of us all—shall be in the intimacy of fellowship with God, being ‘partakers in the Divine nature’.

All of this is ‘the mystery of the plan of God’ now unveiled. It is what God had planned before time, worked through in time, and brought to its conclusion—its Holy *telos*—for all eternity.

¹⁵ The interesting revelation of the Book of Hebrews, of Christ being a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, raises questions about the ultimate High Priesthood in the holy *Telos*. It may be that in Revelation 1, Christ is adorned as a High Priest not of the Levitical order, but perhaps of the order of Melchizedek. It does not much matter, but certainly the eschatological Church is ‘a kingdom of priests’, not after the order of the Israel, whose worship and service was of the Aaronic order, but of the Israel whose worship and order is Melchizedekian.

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