

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

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## **THE THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY**

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## SESSION 1

### MINISTRY AS GOD'S MINISTRY OF REVELATION AND RECONCILIATION

All ministry is God's ministry. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit carry out this ministry of the Father. It is a ministry of revelation and reconciliation through Christ's church. This first study sets out the Trinitarian basis of ministry - a theological reference point.

#### INTRODUCTION

It may seem inappropriate for me as a non-ordained person to be talking about ministry. Within the church, ministry has often been associated with the clergy. We use the term 'minister' to refer to the pastor or to one who is ordained by the church. He is the minister of the church and so 'ministry' is tied in with the one who has been called to be the 'minister'. While this terminology is used with reference to the church orders that our denominations have set up, it is not the intended use of these terms in the New Testament.

#### DERIVATION OF THE TERM 'MINISTRY'

We can get an idea of the way the word 'ministry' is used in the New Testament by looking at the idea involved in the various words used.

1 *diakonia*, attendance (as a servant, etc.); fig. (eleemosynary) aid, (official) service (espec. of the Chr. teacher, or techn. of the diaconate): - (ad-) minister (-ing, -tration, -try), office, relief, service (-ing).

Acts 1:17, Acts 1:25, Acts 21:19, Rom 11:13, Rom. 12:7, 2 Cor 3:3, 2 Cor 3:7, 2 Cor 3:8, 2 Cor 3:9, 2 Cor 4:1, 2 Cor 5:18, 2 Cor 6:3, 2 Tim 4:5, 2 Tim 4:11.

2. Ministry of the word (Logos - ministry)

Acts 6:2, Acts 6:4.

3. *Energeo* (mission)

Gal 2:8.

4. *leitourgia*, public function (as priest ["liturgy"] or almsgiver): - ministration (-try), service.

Heb 8:6, Heb 9:6.

5. *latreia*, ministration of God, i.e. worship:--(divine) service.

John 16:2, Rom 9:4, Rom 12:1, Heb 9:1, Heb 9:6

6. *leitourgos*, a public servant, i.e. a functionary in the Temple or Gospel, or (gen.) a worshipper (of God) or benefactor (of man):-minister (-ed).

Rom 13:6, Rom 15:16, Phil 2:25, Heb 1:7, Heb 8:2.

7. *nomizo*, to do by law (usage), i.e. to accustom (pass. be usual); by extens. to deem or regard: - suppose, think, be wont. ('work' in NRSV)

Luke 3:23.

Ministry is often seen as a response of love to God and this is rightly so. However, we see here a usage that refers to obedience to the command of God. This usage with reference to Jesus Christ should not surprise us as He has repeatedly told us that He does what the Father has commanded Him to (John 5:30).

Several ideas are included in the words used in the New Testament for which we used the word 'ministry'. These are the services that we render, in the things that we do for others whether they be spontaneous or legislated (as in *nomizo* - Luke 3:23). It is also used in the context of worship in the temple.

## **ALL MINISTRY IS THE MINISTRY OF THE FATHER**

2 Cor. 3:4, 1 John 4:7, Acts 17:28.

All is from God the Father. His is the source of all things. It is the Father who sent the Son and the Spirit.

## **THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST**

Heb 8:2, John 5:17, 19, John 5:26, John 5:30, John 5:36, John 6:37, John 6:38, John 6:44, John 6:57, John 8:16, John 8:18, John 8:28, John 8:29, John 12:49, Mat 11:27.

Jesus Christ was sent by the Father to carry out the ministry of the Father. He did not come on a separate agenda. Note the close relationship between the ministry of the Father and the Son. He came to do the Father's will. The ministry of the Son is that of revelation and reconciliation. Jesus Christ mediates this to us on behalf of the Father and to the Father on our behalf.

## **REVELATION AND RECONCILIATION**

John 1:18, 2 Cor. 5:17-19.

## **THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The other paraclete.

John 14:26, John 15:26, John 16:7, John 16:13, 1 John 2:1, Rom. 8:9-15.

The Holy Spirit does not carry on a separate ministry of His own. He is sent by the Father to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ, ie. that of revelation and reconciliation.

## **THE TRINITARIAN BASIS OF MINISTRY**

We see that Scripture presents to us a trinitarian basis for ministry. It is the ministry of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the respective ways. All ministry is the ministry of the Father. The Son was incarnate to minister in solidarity with all humanity. This led Him to the cross as the atoning sacrifice for humankind. The Holy Spirit of God was not incarnate but as the other Advocate continues the ministry of the Son in convicting and convincing humankind of their sins and leading them to repentance.

Christ's primary ministry is to the Father for the sake of the world, not to the world for the sake of the Father.<sup>1</sup> Needs do not determine the nature of the church's ministry, but the purpose of the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> R Anderson, 'A Theology of Ministry', in *Foundations for Ministry*, Ed. R Anderson, p. 8.

## CASE STUDY

Sondra, a woman of forty three who is wrestling with the effects of sexual abuse. Starting at the age of five and continuing through age eleven, she was sexually abused by her father. When she was eleven her father was taken to court for abusing not only her but also her two brothers.

From ages eleven through twelve Sondra lived an outwardly normal life with her mother and brothers. But inwardly, feelings of shame, guilt, and family disgrace were pervasive. Sondra received no help during these years. After she left home for college she knew that she needed professional care.

For the last twenty five years Sondra has sought help from both psychologist and spiritual leaders. About ten years ago, her father died. A hard and unforgiving spirit, however, still burns within her.

Sondra has been married for twenty two years and has a teenage daughter. She sees no hope, no release from her memories. Her pastoral counsellor at the local mental health clinic has told her that she needs to 'become more spiritual.'

What has the doctrine of atonement to say to Sondra? And how can that truth be mediated to Sondra through the life and ministry of the church?

(Taken from 'The Atonement in the ministry of the Church' by C D Kettler in *Incarnational Ministry*, Ed. Kettler and Speidell.

## SESSION 2

### POSSIBILITY AND ACTUALITY — ACCOUNTABILITY FOR MINISTRY

Lessons taken from Abraham and Sarah (Ishmael and Isaac) to illustrate the meaning of actuality and possibility in ministry. Ishmael was man's possibility and Isaac God's actuality. This forms the basis of accountability in ministry, not in terms of what is achieved, but in terms of what one is called to minister.

**READING:** Genesis 21:1-13

#### THE PROMISE OF ISAAC

We are all familiar with the story of the birth of Isaac. One can approach this set of stories from the standpoint of the miraculous birth or the faith of Abraham. However, I would like to look at this from the standpoint of the barrenness of Sarah. There is a tendency today to think of blessing as related to achievement and success, ie. the blessing of God is equated with approval of what we are doing, and failure or barrenness means the curse of God and therefore disapproval of what we are doing. We need to think again.

The plot of the story is simple. Abraham and Sarah had been promised a great future. They were to become the founders of a great nation with descendants as numerous as the sands of the seashore or the stars in the sky. (Gen. 15:5)

There is just one slight difficulty in believing all these. How was all this possible when Abraham and Sarah did not have a child? The promise of a son to Sarah was realised in her later years when she was past the age of child bearing. The possibility of such a fulfilment of the promise was so remote that Sarah laughed in scorn at the thought. (Gen. 18:12)

The writer of Genesis led us in the narrative to the various approaches taken by Abraham and Sarah.

- 1 Adopting his servant Eliezer.
2. Having a child with the maid servant, Hagar. The child born from this union was Ishmael.
3. Waiting for the child with Sarah, his wife.

The first two solutions were based on the self-reliance of Abraham. See diagram below. These actions were not in themselves wrong or unethical. They were within the cultural norm in Abraham's days. Let me explain.

Abraham had thought of possible ways of bringing about an heir. He first proposed the adoption of his servant which was the custom in those days. Eliezer was the trusted servant of Abraham. In the culture of his days, not having a son was a shameful situation to be in. A son was the symbol of immortality for a man in those days. So a process of adoption was devised to legalise the inheritance to be handed down to the next generation. Abraham's servant Eliezer was to inherit his property as Abraham did not have a son at that stage. However, the Lord did not allow that and renewed the promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:1-5) as an assurance to him.

Obviously Abraham and Sarah were not very keen about the arrangement to adopt the servant. There was another provision in their custom. When a woman was married, she was given a servant girl to accompany her. This servant girl was not only to serve her, but in the event of the mistress being barren, then the maid might be able to bear a child for the husband and this child would be regarded as the child of the mistress and therefore the heir to the property.

However, in this arrangement, should the wife subsequently give birth to a son, then that son would become the legal heir and the adoption process annulled. This was one way of overcoming one's barrenness.

It has to be noted that the arrangement within Abraham's household was for the purpose of posterity. To have a child and therefore the expression of one's immortality was important and consistent with the creation's purpose of being fruitful and to multiply. It was not an arrangement set up for sexual pleasure as perhaps it was in the case of having concubines in some ancient societies.

There are indeed certain aspects of a culture that are consistent with the express purpose of God and certain cultural norms are not. We need to make that distinction. It is not our purpose here to discuss cultural norms, but to gain some insight into our theology of ministry. It is enough at this juncture to say that these arrangements that Abraham entered into were culturally acceptable, but not within the purpose of God for Abraham.

And so finally the child of promise came, ie. Isaac. He was the fulfilment of all that Abraham and Sarah had hoped for though only very feebly at times.

What we see here is that like Abraham and Sarah, we often mistake the possibility for the actuality. We make do with the possibility in the present time frame and fail to see the actuality of the things that are to come.

Abraham and Sarah were preoccupied with the end product, ie. the child of promise. In the process they sought the human justification of the promise. They considered the possibilities and created a product that was short of the promise and felt comfortable in a creation of their own.

So often in ministry we seek justification in terms of what is achieved. Abraham fell into the same trap. All ministry is God's ministry. We are called to participate in that ministry. When we fail to realise our calling, then we seek justification in terms of what is achieved. Our calling is a participation, not a proprietorship.

Coming back to the story of Abraham and Sarah, their situation was somewhat different. They were given a promise. As the years rolled by, it looked more and more impossible for this promise to be fulfilled. So as mortal beings, we always looked at problems this way, 'Now what can I do about this?'. We look at problems as if we are in full control. So we look at all the possibilities available to us. Abraham and Sarah saw the possibility of young Hagar even though the promise was made explicitly to Abraham and Sarah as husband and wife.

I was talking to Dr Robert Redman, the Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller a few months ago. We were talking about the Chinese pastors in America. He remarked that when the Chinese pastors confront difficult problems in their ministry, they almost always ask, 'What can I do more to make things better?'. So they work even harder and get involved in more areas, and the more to get involved, the more problems they get themselves into. Instead, Dr Redman continued, that they should be sifting back and take a long hard look at what they are doing and what are they doing that for.

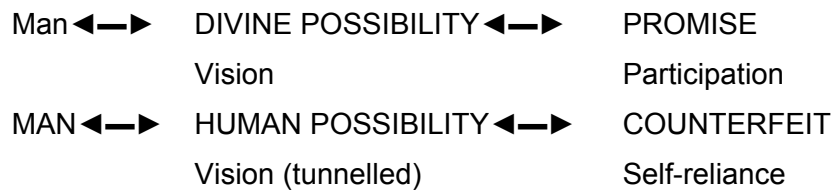
In the seminar that I attended, there were several pastors who are in a barren period in their ministry. In fact one of them had just been removed by his church and he was a very hurt and barren person then. He went to Fuller to spend a year there to renew his vision for ministry.

As we develop our theology of barrenness, we cannot just simply ask the question, 'What can I do to overcome it?' as if we have at our disposal all the means possible to overcome it. We need to ask the question, but we need to be aware that we have some of the means but not all of the means to overcome it.

We need to sit back and look at our barrenness and ask the question, 'What is God's purpose for us?' and 'How can we participate with God in the fulfilment of that purpose?'. We take another look at and come back to our model when we considered the call of Abraham. He

was called to participate with God in the fulfilment of God's purpose for the world. God told him that He would accomplish His purpose through Abraham and his descendants.

We might make a visual representation of what has been discussed like this.



### **WHAT WAS ABRAHAM AND SARAH SUPPOSED TO DO WHILE WAITING FOR THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROMISE?**

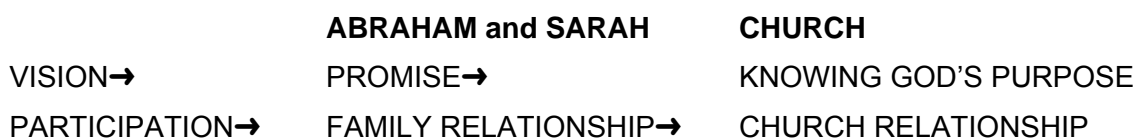
Many interpreters have taken this stories of Abraham and make a comparison between faith and works. They say that Ishmael represents human works and Isaac represents faith in God. To a degree that is so, but when faith in God is understood as doing nothing on the part of Abraham and Sarah, then that is a wrong interpretation of God's purpose. I suppose we imagine Abraham and Sarah sleeping in their own tents every night simply gazing at the stars in the sky waiting for a son to appear. No, Abraham and Sarah needed to embrace each other in their mutual love as husband and wife. As they expressed the gift of their sexual relationship to each other, God worked within their relationship. It is not an argument between faith and work, but a participation in the purpose of God. It requires a human component and a divine component. So often we only think in terms of an 'either or' alternative and not in terms of synergism.

So in barrenness, we need to sit back and take a hard look at our humanity and ask ourselves these questions.

- What are we created for?
- What is our relationship with God and with one another?
- What is God's purpose in our midst and how have we envisioned that?

It is only as we understand the purpose of the divine that we in our humanity can participate with what He has ordained.

God has created us for relationships - with Him and with one another. This relationship is the outworking of His covenants and that is what we refer to as covenantal relationship. God has chosen to work through human relationship as He exists in relationship. He is to be known in His relationship. The problem that Abraham and Sarah faced regarding their posterity, is an issue of the husband-wife relationship. God has chosen to work through the relationship between Abraham and Sarah, ie. through a family and then through a community and later through a nation. Following the coming of Christ, God has chosen to work through the church. We may depict the way in which vision an participation are played out in both situation in this way.



Every church would have gone through many a barren time. Each time, we need to come back and look at God's purpose for the church. We need also to look at relationships within the church.

What was Abraham and Sarah supposed to do while waiting for Isaac to come along? They should not be engineering all the other relationships to achieve an imitation of the fulfilment

which God has planned for them. They were firstly to live in hope and secondly to maintain and deepen the relationship they have with each other. So it is with the church. While we go through periods of barrenness which no doubt any church will in its life cycle, we need firstly to have a vision of what we may become. That is our hope. Secondly, we need to maintain and deepen our relationship with each other within the church so that we can meaningfully participate in the activity of God. The last thing we want to do in a time of barrenness is to engineer imitation outcomes and sever our relationships.

This is precisely what we do when we get into a barren patch in our lives. Because of Hagar, the relationship between Abraham and Sarah was put under a strain. If we understand that God has called us into covenantal relationship with Him and with one another, then that relationship is primary because God's purpose is to work through that relationship. Even though the situation may look impossible as in the case with Abraham and Sarah, we need to live in hope and with the vision that that will be so.

So we need to know what God has called us to and to keep that vision alive in the relationship within the church so that one day we will see its fulfilment.

## SESSION 3

# THE INCARNATION—GOD’S REVELATION OF THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION THROUGH CHRIST’S SOLIDARITY WITH HUMANITY —THE CHRISTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF MINISTRY

The humanity of Jesus Christ will be discussed. The ministry of reconciliation is not through an external legal system, but through Christ’s vicarious humanity. He is the mediator between God and man both in revelation and reconciliation. (To continue in session 4)

READING: Luke 1:26-35; John 1:6-14.

### INTRODUCTION

In this study we will see the Christological foundation for ministry. In the first session we saw that all ministry is the ministry of the Father. This ministry is carried out in specific manner by the Son and the Holy Spirit. This ministry of Jesus Christ is that of revelation and reconciliation. He achieved this through his vicarious humanity and sacrifice on the cross. Jesus Christ is the mediator of this ministry of revelation and reconciliation. During this session and the next we will spend time considering this as the Christological foundation of ministry.

### THE INCARNATION

This is the pivot on which Christology revolves. Is the coming of Jesus Christ a mere legend as a group of scholars in the 70s claimed in a book called *The Myth of God Incarnate*? Is this an event we think about once a year at Christmas or is this an event on which the whole of human history revolve? Many people have a problem with the fact that God has become man in Jesus Christ. Indeed, the virgin birth has been a stumbling block for many through the ages.

We have noted in Session 1 that Christ’s ministry is that of revelation and reconciliation. This study and the next will examine the relationship of this to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. What does it mean for the divine Christ to take on human form and what does it mean to us?

### THE TRINITY IN THE INCARNATION

The incarnation points to the trinity of God. It is God the Son who is incarnate, ie. become man. This was achieved through the Holy Spirit as we are told (Luke 1:35).

Jesus did not become man on His own accord. The incarnation is an expression of the love and purpose of the Godhead. We may not know the way this was brought about, but it is enough to know that we have been told without any doubt at all that this is the work of God. As the Trinitarian Godhead has created humankind in His own image, the incarnation of the second Person of the Godhead is not an impossibility.

### A THEOLOGICAL NECESSITY

We should not see the incarnation as an isolated supernatural event. If we do then we will miss its significance which lies in the theme, ‘Immanuel’, God with us. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the God-man achieved for us what created humanity has been unable to achieve, ie. to know God in His Triune relationship and to make the required response to God.

In the Old Testament God is known in His Oneness and in many aspects, unknowable (Job 11:7; Ps. 145:3; Ecc. 3:11; Is. 40:28).

Thus the incarnation of Jesus Christ brought to us the intimate knowledge of God from One who is 'close to the Father's heart'.

(John 1: 18 NRSV) No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Since the fall of created humanity, the response to God has been probational. Offerings and sacrifices were made in the Old Testament times for the atonement of sins. The blood of bulls and goats were only representative of the perfect One to come. They could not take away the sins of humankind (Heb. 10:4).

There is nothing that humankind can achieve through his efforts that will be acceptable to God because the whole of His creation has been defiled by sin. No ordinary man can redeem humanity because he is not even able to atone for his own sins. There is of necessity that the one who redeems humanity needs to be untarnished by sin and that unique man can only be provided by God.

Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God is also the representative man. 'He ministered the things of God to man the things of man to God' (Athanasius). He is not only the God who came to reveal to us who God is, but He is also the perfect Man who makes representation on our behalf to God. He is the God who is for man and the Man who is for God, Jesus Christ as the perfect Man mediates our responses before God. What is acceptable to God is not our responses but the response from Jesus Christ. He gathers up all our responses and presents them before God. That is why when we pray or approach God, we do so through the Name of Jesus Christ because we can come through no other.

With this construct then there is a theological necessity that the Man who comes as the Immanuel cannot come as an ordinary man through the natural process of conception. If He is the God who is for man and the Man who is for God, then He must of necessity come through an unique conception. T F Torrance remarked that if the virgin birth had not been told us then it needs be invented as a theological necessity.

## WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH ME AND MY FAITH?

So why is the doctrine of the incarnation and virgin birth so essential to our faith that we include it in our doctrinal statement? Liberal theologians have discarded this as an essential doctrine to the Christian faith. This is to rip from our faith the only one hope we have of restoration to God. To discard the incarnation is to place our hope on the essential goodness of created humanity to reach God.

As the God-Man, He mediates God to humans; as the Man-God, He represents humans to God. By faith-union with Him, men and women, as adopted children of God, participate in His filial relation to God as Father.<sup>2</sup>

This is vital in the way we come before God. The incarnation would not be important if Jesus were to be only divine or only human, and not as the God-man mediator. If He were only divine, then God would still be distant from humanity and not part of humanity. Our response would not be important as the divine Jesus had transacted this outside of the human environment. Human response would then become mere triviality. If Jesus were to be only human, then it says to us that there is an intrinsic righteousness within humanity and this is acceptable to God. Our human response becomes acceptable to God. That is the dogma of liberal Christianity. The dilemma demands a God-man mediator in the person of Jesus Christ. He mediates God to us as the divine revelation and He mediates our responses to God as our advocate. He is the reconciler. He is indeed the God who is for man and the Man who is for God. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is a theological necessity.

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<sup>2</sup> Walter D. Draughon III, 'Incarnation' in Holmer Bible Dictionary.

## IS JESUS CHRIST A REAL MAN?

Jesus asked His disciples this question, 'Who do people say I am?' (Mark 8:27). If our thinking were to be probed, it will become obvious that there are docetic elements, ie. we are not really serious about Jesus as a man. Many of us conceived of Him as some kind of an extraordinary being that is superhuman. Is Jesus Christ man or is He not man? If He is man, is He man like what we are?

The gospels described Jesus as a man. Jesus was tired from travelling and sat down (John 4:6). He wept as He shared the emotions of the loss of Lazarus with Mary and Martha (John 11:35). He experienced hunger during a period of fasting (Lk. 4:2). He underwent temptations as a man (Mat 4).

John the apostle had to battle the docetic ideas that Jesus Christ is some kind of a supernatural being and not truly human. There was a concept in his days that the flesh is intrinsically evil and therefore it is impossible for a holy God to be come in human flesh. That is why he -so emphatically opened both his gospel and first letter with the affirmation that Jesus Christ is man (John 1:14; 1 John 1:1).

Jesus Christ as a real human being had gone through the temptations in the flesh. Jesus faced the temptations with the same limitation as we do, but He was without sin. As He was just like us and experienced the same limitations as we experienced, and He is able to sympathise with our weaknesses as man (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:21).

If Jesus Christ is not man like us, would Peter have written that we follow His example? How could we be expected to follow the footsteps of someone who has supernatural powers or the footsteps of some other kind of being? Jesus was a man just like we are with our limitations and weaknesses. If we were exhorted to follow in His footsteps, there must be made available to us the same means that enabled Him to do so.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to look at Jesus merely as a man. In His humanity, He is divine. He has a divine consciousness of His role as the Son of God to accomplish the Father's plan and purpose.

The means that enabled Christ in His humanity is His unique relationship with His Father. Earlier on we noted some of the characteristics of Jesus' humanity, but those are mainly biological characteristics which we share with the animal world. What marks us out as human is the relational dimension we have with the Creator God. We are created in His image and are a people for Him. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. In His humanity, Jesus is dependant on the Father. He is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 17:21). Jesus can do nothing by Himself (John 5:19). He did not act on His own accord, but did what the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4). Everything that was given to Christ comes from the Father (John 17:7). He was set by the Father (John 17:3). The incarnation happened at a point in time. Jesus is the eternal Son of the Father and share in the communion of the Triune Godhead. He remained in that communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit in His incarnate life. We must not lose sight of this in our Christology.

## THE VICARIOUS HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NRSV)*

'**The word became flesh**' (John 1:14). These four words are the most poignant words in Christian thinking. *ho logos sarx egeneto* - could be rendered, 'the Word was born as flesh'.

God became man - that is our theme each year at Christmas. The main ideas of the Philonic logos are produced here, ie. the eternal existence of the logos, its relation to God and its function in relation to men. The logos was often personified and was identified with the logos of God in the Old Testament. John goes further than Philo and the Old Testament. His distinctive

contribution is verse 14, where he says that the logos has become flesh. The logos is not an abstract principle of mediation between God and man, but a living Person. The philosophers conceived of a logos, but could not conceive of a personality attached to it. The logos, of the Fourth Gospel is not essentially 'reason' but the living word of God manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. It is through Him that God communicates with the world He loves. He is the expression that links us to God. It is recorded in John's gospel that Jesus said, 'no man can come to the Father but by Me' (14:6).

**He dwelt among us.** Here John reinforces the reality of His incarnation. He did not appear and then went off. He lived in our midst as a man. The association to the tabernacle is implied in the word 'dwelt'. 'He tabernacled among us' (KJV). The words affirmed the solidarity of Jesus Christ with humankind. He became flesh and His life is lived in solidarity with the whole of humanity.

**We beheld His glory.** The glory is not that of dazzling light from a cloud. 'it is a true ethical glory, a glory of personality and character, manifesting itself in human conditions.'<sup>3</sup> It is the glory that we can see as a result of His habitation with man. It is an unique glory, described as of the only begotten from the Father - a reflection of the Father's glory. From the Father more naturally follows 'glory' than 'begotten'. As this glory flows from the Father, it is full of grace and truth. This twin attribute co-exist in the personality and character of our Lord Jesus Christ while He was on earth.

In these and other ways John seeks to portray the activity of the divine logos on earth, when he 'became flesh'.

The world has little problem in accepting the man Jesus Christ. He had been a great teacher and leader of man, but the world is reluctant to ascribe to Him the status as God. Many of us acknowledge Jesus as God, but are a bit hesitant in saying that He is fully man. That has been a dichotomy in thinking about the person of Jesus Christ through the centuries.

'The Word became flesh'. Karl Barth once asked, 'What kind of flesh?' And he dared to give the answer, 'fallen flesh' just like we are. If the humanity of Jesus Christ is any different to ours, then we are back to mere mythology. The writer to the Hebrew took pains to point out again and again that He was made just like we are. In Jesus humanity, there is the capacity of sinning, yet He resisted all temptations and remained sinless. While making the point that Jesus' humanity is just like ours, he also made the point that Jesus was without sin. His humanity "as the perfect humanity and it is possible for Him to represent all humankind before God as He is the perfect One. His humanity is a vicarious humanity.

**What is the purpose of Jesus' incarnation?** Jesus did not come to build an institution, yet we are all about institutions. He came to reclaim mankind. He fellowshiped with the republicans and sinners. He sat with them at tables much to the consternation of the ruling class. Jesus had little time for the doctors of the law who did their best to uphold their institution - Judaism. These people accused him and laid traps for Him. That did not deter Him from fulfilling His mission and carrying on His task. He said to the women caught in prostitution, 'Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more'. Jesus is concerned about people - people who are destitute and down trodden. He is not about the minutiae of the law as the ruling class had it, yet in His life, He lived out the minutiae of the law as it is correctly interpreted in the restoration of the dignity of the human person as God had created and desired it. Jesus came to restore our dignity - a dignity that was once lost through sin and disobedience, but now reclaimed through the taking away of our guilt.

Jesus humanity is a vicarious humanity. It is a humanity not live out for self, but for others. In His humanity, He bore the brunt of our guilt as well as the guilt of the Jewish nation expressed in their anger against anyone who dare to challenge the institution - Judaism. This is because Judaism harbours their guilt. The whole structure of Judaism was borne out of a guilt of the Divided Kingdoms when the sins of the kings finally brought the wrath of God and destined their eventual demise and captivity. As the nation reformed after the exile, they became excessive about observance of the feast and season and upholding every single letter of the law lest they be caught out again and a similar fate awaits them. Therefore there developed this extraordinary

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<sup>3</sup> The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. 1, p. 690.

legalism in Judaism so much so that it is the law and not the people that matters any more. The pendulum had swung too far the other way and Jesus came to restore that.

The coming of Christ is about reconciliation. 'God and sinners reconciled', we sing at Christmas. Reconciliation is about the cessation of hostility. It is now possible for the enmity between man and God to cease. It is now also possible for the enmity between fellow man (and woman) to cease. It marked a new phase of relationship and understanding bounded by love. It is not a erotic emotional love, but a love expressed in a vicarious humanity.

On the incarnation, the church fathers had succinctly put it:

'Jesus Christ became what we are in order that we might become what He is.' (Irenaeus)

'He became what He was not; He continued to be what He was.' (Athanasius)

This is the exchange that went on in the reconciliation mediated to us by Jesus Christ. He took what was ours and gave to us what is His. The Greek word *Katallage* (reconciliation) refers to the exchange that takes place as in restoration to the divine favour.<sup>4</sup> In His vicarious humanity, Jesus Christ took on Himself sinful humanity and confer in its stead, His righteousness. It is not to be assumed that Jesus Christ went about this alone by Himself. It is the work of the Triune Godhead for in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

This reconciliation is also not to be thought of as taking place in an external milieu on the cross when Jesus sacrificed Himself. No, this reconciliation took place through Christ's vicarious humanity, ie. in solidarity with humankind as the incarnate One. It is only in this way that the exchange can take place and gives meaning for our lives to be lived in Christ and for Christ to be in us.

We cannot separate the twin ministries of revelation and reconciliation. Neither can we separate the incarnation and the atonement. The incarnation is the presupposition of the atonement. Jesus Christ in His vicarious humanity mediates both revelation and reconciliation and to this we will turn in our next study.

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<sup>4</sup> Strong's Concordance.

## SESSION 4

### THE INCARNATION - GOD'S REVELATION OF THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION THROUGH CHRIST'S SOLIDARITY WITH HUMANITY - THE CHRISTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF MINISTRY

The humanity of Jesus Christ will be discussed. The ministry of reconciliation is not through an external legal system, but through Christ's vicarious humanity. He is the mediator between God and man both in revelation and reconciliation. (Continued from session 3)

READING: 1 Timothy 2:1-6.

#### THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST

Christ mediates both revelation and reconciliation to mankind. We need to see that revelation and reconciliation are intertwined. We cannot have one without the other.

(John 1: 18 NRSV) No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

That which we seek to know must determine the means of the knowing. We are not at liberty to determine the means by which we come to fathom any object. We need to interact with that object and the means of coming to any knowledge of that object is determined by the object. In other words, we cannot use a sphygmometer and expect a temperature reading. We need to use a thermometer for that. Secondly we note that the knowledge of God is an interpersonal knowledge, ie. a subject-subject knowledge, and not a subject-object knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

The knowledge of God must come from God Himself and that is by revelation, firstly through the prophets and finally in the supreme expression, through His Son Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-4). It is a knowledge that is given not deduced by the observer. The later Prof. H r Mackintosh wrote,

All religious knowledge of God, wherever existing, comes by revelation; otherwise we should be committed to the incredible position that man can know God without His willing to be known.<sup>6</sup>

Christ has come to reveal the Father so that we may know God. Knowledge of God is not just knowing a subset of attributes in an objective manner as we go about our usual way in building up our knowledge in various areas. Knowledge requires interaction with that which we seek to know. It requires relating with the sphere of knowledge. The revelation of God cannot be approached in an objective manner as if Jesus Christ has now made available that pool of knowledge of God and the apostles recorded that in the bible so that we can now absorbed that by our cognitive faculties.

Jesus made this point regarding the knowledge of the Father and the Son. (Matt. 11:27) 'no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' We cannot know the Father except through the Son and 'to whom the Son chooses to reveal him'. Knowledge of God is not an objective exercise. It is relational as 0 any branch of learning. All knowledge is relational. We can only know God as we relate with Him and as He makes Himself known to us.

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<sup>5</sup> M Buber, I and Thou.

<sup>6</sup> H R Mackintosh, The Christian Apprehension of God, p. 65. Quoted in 'The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Theology of T F Torrance: Sharing in Me Son's Communion with the Father in the Spirit', in SJT, Vol. 43, p. 366.

What is it that Jesus wants us to know and what is the purpose of His vicarious humanity? He came to reveal so that we may be reconciled. What it means is that we are taken into the communion of the Father-Son relationship in the Spirit. Jesus prayed that this may be so in His High Priestly prayer in John 17. (Note v. 21)

The goal of Jesus' ministry is not an external transaction on the cross so that we may be restored. The High Priestly prayer of Jesus makes clear that the goal of Christ's vicarious humanity is in order that we may come into the communion that the Father has with the Son...that they may all be one. As you, Father, am in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, Of course this is made possible only through Christ's vicarious humanity and His sacrifice on the cross. We cannot know God unless we enter into the communion of the Father-Son relationship, ie. when we are reconciled with Him.

So we need to be in Christ to know God and this implies that we are reconciled to Him. That is to say that we cannot know God unless we are reconciled to Him. It is not a case of firstly knowing God and weighing up the evidences and then decides whether we want to go ahead with the reconciliation. Revelation and reconciliation go hand in hand and Jesus Christ mediates both of that to us. (2 Cor. 5:17-19)

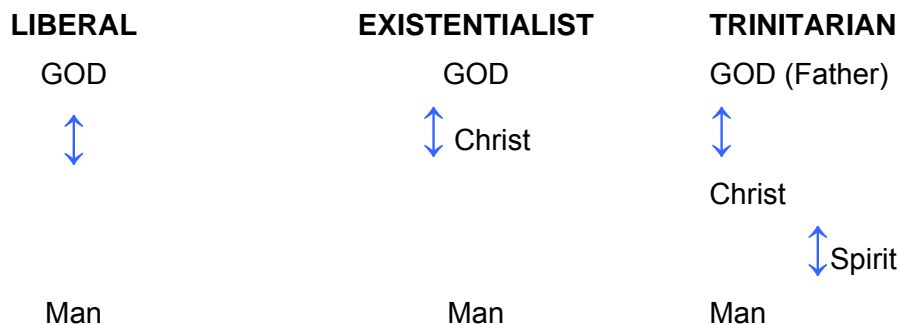
We have come along the traditional approach of considering revelation before reconciliation. However, there is no separation between revelation and reconciliation . ' . . . in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself so that we may be taken into the communion of the Son with the Father by the awakening of the Spirit. And so the knowledge of God only comes when we are in Christ and as Christ chooses to reveal that to us. This is the mediation of Christ and it is not through human ability. We are taken by grace to share in this communion and this is the basis of Christ's ministry of revelation and reconciliation.

Thielicke made this point when he wrote,

.... encounter with God's Word as a believer does not mean that I draw God and his Word into my existence, but that I can break away from my self-enclosed being and through the Word be drawn into God and his power and possibilities, so that I am born again.<sup>7</sup>

We will come back to this theme of Christ's mediation as we consider the continuing High Priestly role of Jesus Christ in a later study.

We may depict our relationship with God in this manner .<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> H Thielicke, 'The Evangelical Faith', in Theological Foundation of Ministry (Ed. R Anderson), p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> This diagrammatic representation is adapted from J Torrance.

## WHAT DOES CHRIST'S VICARIOUS HUMANITY MEAN TO US?

### 1. There is a God-man movement and a man-God movement through Jesus vicarious humanity.

As the God-man, he mediates both movements on our behalf. Christ is not an adjunct that enables us to draw near to God. Rather He draws us to God in the Spirit through His vicarious humanity.

### 2. It gives us an understanding of our humanity.

We need to be serious about the humanity of Jesus Christ. What we need to realise is that the divine is able to indwell the human because humanity is created in the image of God. We all share with the Mole of creation our creaturely status. He cannot deny it, but we are different from the rest of creation. We are human. To be human means more than just being above the animals. That is evolutionary thinking. To be human is more than having the ability to plan, to feel and to have an artistic flare.

The human being is created in God's image with the ability to have that special relationship with God. Jesus exemplified that in His humanity. Paul speaks of Jesus 'being the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15). What is so characteristic about His humanity? It is that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father. Similarly in redeemed humanity, God is in us and we are in God.

God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. (1 John 4:15 NRSV).

The flesh has the ability not to sin as Jesus Christ showed in His earthly life. We often excuse ourselves of the responsibility of sin by blaming it on the flesh as if it were destined to sin. Sin is a voluntary act of the will. Augustine said that we cannot place the responsibility of sin 'on a natural, but on a moral and ethical basis'.<sup>9</sup> It is because the will is estranged from God that it seeks to satisfy the demands of the flesh. The will that is in harmony with God overcomes the flesh (1 John 5:5) as Jesus had demonstrated.

Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. (1 John 3:9 NRSV).

We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God protects them, and the evil one does not touch them. (1 John 5:18 NRSV).

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15 NRSV).

We need not be ashamed of our humanity as I Am is something to be despised. John the apostle talked about the glory of Jesus Christ.

The Word ... made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory ... full of grace and truth (John 1-14).

### 3. It gives a new meaning and understanding to our worship and ministry.

See the diagrammatic representation above. In our ministry and worship our concern seems to be mainly on what we do. We go to church. We praise God. We serve Him. We made our offering to God. This approach is unitarian.

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<sup>9</sup> Finlayson, R. A., *The Story of Theology*, 2nd Edition, p. 29. (Tyndale 1969).

Secondly, we may regard Jesus Christ as an agent in our ministry and worship as depicted in the existentialist model. There is a place for Jesus Christ but it does not take His mediation and His humanity seriously. Ultimately it is still what we do that ascend to God and we think that this is pleasing to Him.

The third model takes the mediation and humanity of Jesus Christ seriously. It is also trinitarian and covenantal. It acknowledges the relationship of the Father and Son in the Spirit. We are taken through Jesus Christ in the Spirit into the communion of the Trinitarian Godhead. So it is no longer what I do that is acceptable to God, but what Christ has done. Jesus gathers all our feeble worship and services and offers them to the Father on our behalf through His vicarious humanity.

## THE NICEAN 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.

## SESSION 5

### THE CHURCH - THE ONGOING MINISTRY OF CHRIST

(The ministry of the Church and the ministry of Christ.)

The church continues the ministry of Christ on earth. Thus Christ's ministry determines the nature and content of the church's ministry. We are united with Christ - discussion on the phrases 'in Christ, 'with Christ' and 'Christ in us'. The 'indicative' precedes the 'imperative. (Continue in Session 6)

READING: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Romans 8:9-17.

#### REVELATION AND RECONCILIATION - THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST A THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

We will not be able to deal with the great doctrines that form the very foundation of the church in any detail here. Ecclesiology must be based on the doctrine of the Trinity, soteriology and eschatology. This is so because the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. He is the anointed one to carry out the Father's ministry. He will build His church because it is through His ministry of revelation and reconciliation that the church comes into being. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ and the Father continues this ministry as He is the other paraclete. We need to see revelation and reconciliation as the ministry of the Trinity.

Through His vicarious humanity and His crucifixion at Calvary, Jesus Christ as our Great High Priest offered Himself for our reconciliation. He is the Priest and the sacrificial lamb. 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself' (2 Cor. 5:17-19).

There is a parallelism in v.v. 18-19 as Paul seeks to clarify what he said. We may set this out in a tabular form like this.

18	All this is from God, who reconciled us to	and has given us the ministry of himself through Christ reconciliation
19	in Christ God was reconciling the world to	and entrusting the message of himself, not counting their trespasses reconciliation to us against them

The very act of reconciling the world was what Jesus accomplished through His life and sacrifice. God reconciled us through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is not to mean that the ministry of reconciliation becomes ours. There is a parallelism in verses 17-18 where Paul made his point in verse 17 and reiterated the contents in verse 18 and clarified that we are entrusted with the message of reconciliation. Our ministry of reconciliation is the proclamation of the message of reconciliation. This proclamation is not to be taken merely as a vocal exercise but involves the expression of the whole of our lives as individuals, in the family and in the community of our churches and society. The reconciling is the work of God through Jesus by the awakening of the Holy Spirit. Thus our ministry of reconciliation is to participate in what Jesus Christ has accomplished and our specific task is then the proclamation of that message.

The ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of God achieved through Jesus Christ. The church is called into this ministry by the mercy and grace of God (2 Cor. 4:1). The church is entrusted with this ministry and called to participate in this ministry, not to own or possess it. The church is given this ministry of reconciliation by the mercy of God.

The church's ministry is to continue the ministry of reconciliation achieved through Jesus Christ, ie. the proclamation of the message for the restoration and healing of the fractured relationship in our communities through the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

It is also a ministry in the Spirit. While we proclaim the message of reconciliation, it is the Spirit that causes the change within a person. We must not be deceived into thinking that it is our words that achieved the result. The 'other paraclete' will declare the things of Christ to us in fulfilment of the Father's will (John 16:13-15).

While in Christ we have redemption through His blood, it is by the awakening of the Spirit within us that we have this recognition (Rom. 8:14-17).

It is not to be conceived as an 'either/or' ministry but a ministry where the primary determinant is the Father's will and we are all participants in that one ministry, ie. we participate in the Father's ministry in the Spirit through Jesus Christ. All ministry must have its basis in the ministry of the Trinity.

This ministry of reconciliation requires a change in the direction in one's life. It is not merely subscribing to a creed or changing a particular life style or culture. It involves a change in the underlying values and assumptions that we hold. It is a radical change at the deepest level - a change only assessible to the Spirit. We cannot engage the world's assumption and hope that it will lead to that change. I include here a rather lengthy quotation by Prof. T F Torrance when he writes about Theological Education Today .

..... we cannot convince others by formal argument, for so long as we argue within their framework, we can never induce them to abandon it. 'Formal operations relying on one framework of interpretation cannot demonstrate a proposition to persons who rely on another framework'. That applies to theological communications as much as scientific controversy, and yet this is precisely the erroneous line taken so often by apologetics, whether by the theologian or the preacher. Whenever we take that line we are simply reducing ourselves to be servants of public opinion or popular ideas of science and religion, and in that event we have nothing at all to offer to people which they do not already know or cannot tell to themselves much better than we. Moreover by taking this line we eliminate from theological knowledge its real meaning, for we deprive it of its proper message. That is why theological statements inevitably appear meaningless and impossibly paradoxical if we claim for them validity within a frame of reference which is the correlate of ordinary observable and empirically verifiable experience.'<sup>10</sup>

You would have noticed from Jesus encounter with His opponents that He never answer their questions on their terms of reference. Jesus always points them away to the spiritual framework.

Prof. Torrance continues,

... .. the problem is deeper than that, for we are accustomed to live in our frames of reference; we and they belong together. Thus to cross from one frame of reference to another involves an act of radical self-denial on the one hand and the radical reconciliation to the new frame of reference on the other hand. This is another way of stating that theological communication and understanding always involve a movement of reconciliation.'<sup>11</sup>

## MINISTRY AND THE MINISTER

The way we see ministry is essential to the understanding of the church. We call the pastor the minister and his ministry expresses the way the church understands its own existence. The nature of ministry is the nature of the church. The minister par excellence, the leiturgos, is Jesus Christ Himself (Heb. 8:1-2).

Jesus Christ is the minister in the true sanctuary that the Lord has set up. He ministers to the Father on our behalf. All ministry is the ministry of the Father. God demonstrated His love to us in sending His Son that we might have life through Him (1 John 4:9). The Son does not act on His own accord but carries out the will of the Father. (John 5:17, 19, 30; 6:38). The Son's

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<sup>10</sup> T F Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 27-29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

ministry is that of revelation (John 1:18) and reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17-19) in response to the will of the Father. The Holy Spirit as the other paraclete continues the ministry of the Son. (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7, 16:13-15; Rom. 8:9-15). Thus we see that ministry is that of the Father and carried in a specific manner by the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is on this Trinitarian basis that we reflect on ministry theologically. It is out of this ministry of the Trinitarian Godhead that we have the church - the called out people of God, the ekklesia. Thus the primary control on ecclesiology as well as ministry is the tri-personal community of God.<sup>12</sup>

Christ's primary ministry is to the Father for the sake of the world, not to the world for the sake of the Father.<sup>13</sup> Christ ministers out of the Trinitarian relationship within the Godhead. Needs therefore do not determine the nature of Christ's ministry, but the purpose of the Father (John 6:38).

So the church is given to continue this ministry of Jesus in the Holy Spirit. However, the church cannot continue the ministry of Christ and runs its own agenda. As the called out people of God, the church must act only in accordance with the will of Father just as Christ did only what the Father has told Him. When the church goes on with an agenda of its own then she has removed from herself the very foundation of her constitution, ie. Jesus her Lord.

That which we seek to know must determine the means or methods by which we come to know it. We cannot impose a methodology that is inappropriate upon that which we seek to know. If the church is indeed the ekklesia, ie. the called out people of God, then it is the calling of God that brings the church into being. The nature of this calling and indeed God's ministry in gathering together this people must determine the way we come to know the church. This may seem too obvious to mention, but it is not what most of our congregations conceive of as 'church'. Without this calling then there is no church. This calling of God to constitute His church is achieved through the incarnation of the Son and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Word was made flesh so that through His humanity, Jesus Christ made that perfect response to God on our behalf even as He continues to intercede for us as our Great High Priest in heaven. And without that awakening by the Spirit within us, there is no recognition on our part of God as the Father. So to know the church, we must start with the ministry of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ mediates both revelation and reconciliation. His incarnation made manifest His solidarity with human flesh. It is through His vicarious humanity that He reveals the relations within the Trinitarian Godhead. Through His humanity, He made the response to God on our behalf. His response becomes our response when in our sin and weakness we are incapable of responding.

While we emphasise the substitutionary element in the sacrifice of Christ, we pay little attention on the participation on the merits of Christ. It is quite common to see that the understanding of redemption rests almost solely on the application of the merits of Christ to the sinner as a merely external transaction. There is no hint of the union of Christ and believers. Thus an extrinsic conception of the atonement will result in a detachment of Christ from the context of the covenant relationship with His chosen people.<sup>14</sup> This inevitably results in the conception of the church as an institution.

In Vincent Donovan's book, **Christianity Rediscovered** he speaks against the institutional structure of mission and the human determination of the church.

Because a missionary comes from another already existing church, that is the image of church he will have in mind, and if his job is to establish a church, that is the church he will establish. I think, rather, the missionary's job is to preach, not the church, but Christ. If he preaches Christ and the message of Christianity, the church may well result, may well appear, but it might not be the church he had in mind.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> C Gunton, 'The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community', in *On Being the Church*, Ed. Gunton and Hardy, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> R Anderson, 'A Theology of Ministry' in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, Ed. R Anderson, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> T F Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> V Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, p. 81.

The church that results then is the determination of the ministry of the Godhead and not the offshoot of an institution prescribed by the existing church.

## THE INDICATIVES PRECEDES THE IMPERATIVES

Our social order has allowed the imperative to determine who we are. This sets up a cycle where we are continually chasing the imperatives in order to know ourselves. The more we go down this track the more we go further away from knowing who we are. It is an artificial system and therein lies much of the pain and disappointment in ministry. It is a system where we seek justification in terms of the law.

The indicative precedes the imperative. Being precedes act. Who we are determines what we do.

M. Parsons, in his article on 'Being Precedes Act: Indicatives and Imperative in Paul's Writing',<sup>16</sup> argues for the priority of grace over law in the pattern of Paul's letters. The indicative is not unrelated to the imperative and neither should they be seen as one. An example of this relationship is seen in 1 Corinthians where Paul responded to the problems with a focus on Christ first of all and worked out the solutions from there. He responded to the divisions in the Philippian church with that majestic hymn in chapter 2: 1-11, focusing on the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the humility with which He adorns Himself.

He made this remark in his conclusion.

The indicatives speaks of that which has been accomplished by God in and through Christ - but does not denote simply the divine element as opposed to the human activity in fulfilling the imperative. We have noted that Paul's ethical admonition is directed to, and is determined by, the present redemptive-historical situation. The new age that dawned with Christ's resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit determined that this should be so. The Spirit, himself, then, is the link between the indicative and the imperative of Christian reality and existence. He is at once an element of the former and a constituent part of the latter.<sup>17</sup>

He has given us a summary of the relationship between the indicatives and the imperatives. This is expressed in terms of the Trinity and enables us to see clearly the divine accomplishment in our 'being' and the divine assistance given to us by the Holy Spirit in the fulfilment of our 'acts'.

One cannot avoid the impression that the principal ministry of the community is exercised by being, precisely by being a community of faith and love, and as such bearing witness to the presence of God's saving action in Christ and the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

## FREEDOM IN MINISTRY

We have seen that service is the response of love and also of obedience. If we say that service is the response to the love of God then the relationship with God that developed out of the experience of that love must be the determinant of the service. In other words service is relational, ie. it is an expression of the relationship with Christ and it cannot be rendered in isolation from Christ.<sup>19</sup> It is an essential part of the relationship and that is why it is sometimes regarded as a response to a command. Service is therefore not an end in itself as if it has to be rendered in order to gain acceptance or favour with God. Furthermore, the service

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<sup>16</sup> M. Parsons, 'Being Precedes Act: Indicatives and Imperative in Paul's Writing', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LX, No. 2, April, 1988, p. 99-127.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacrament*, p. 39, quoted in Naehaus, *Freedom for Ministry*, p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> T F Torrance, 'Service in Jesus Christ', in *Foundations for Ministry*, Ed. R Anderson, p. 714f.

rendered cannot stand on its own outside of the relationship with God. Service does not have a driving force of its own. Service for service sake finally results in boredom and despair.

Yet it is not a servitude, but a freedom, a movement of love. It is not even a service of love for love's sake.<sup>20</sup> He commands a service of love and gives that love that empowers for the service. The servant does not assume authority for the service nor is he responsible for the result of that service. He looks for no reward for the rendering of that service.

This is only possible because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ who has taken our humanity on Himself. He dealt with sin from within the depth of human existence. In Him and in His mercy lies the creative ground and source of such diakonia.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 715

## SESSION 6

### THE CHURCH—THE ONGOING MINISTRY OF CHRIST

(The ministry of the Church and the ministry of Christ.)

The church continues the ministry of Christ on earth. Thus Christ's ministry determines the nature and content of the church's ministry. We are united with Christ - discussion on the phrases 'in Christ', 'with Christ' and 'Christ in us'. The 'indicative' precedes the 'imperative'. (Continue from Session 5)

**READING: 2 Cor. 3: 1 -11; 4: 1.**

In this session we will look at this passage in 2 Corinthians to see how Paul saw his ministry. This will give us some understanding of our ministry and the ministry of the church. We are all aware of the problems of the Corinthian church. In this second letter to the Corinthians, Paul had to establish his status as the apostle and to deal with the church there in a firm manner. In so doing, he needed to explain what his ministry was all about and the objectives of his ministry.

#### 1. MINISTRY IS PEOPLE-CENTRED

##### a. IT TAKES PLACE IN THE HEART.

When we think about Christian ministry or enter into a ministry, we often think in terms of institutions or tasks. We may also think in terms of projects or programs.

Paul considers the Corinthian Christians to be the result of his ministry (2 Cor. 3:3). Ministry is directed at people. Programs and projects are not the results of ministry. They may be tools for the ministry. Paul is also contrasting ink with the Spirit, and tablets of stone with the human heart. The tablets of stone refer to the law, ie. the Ten Commandments given on two tablets of stone. He is obviously not referring to the brick and mortar in a church building as these were unknown in those days. Furthermore, he contrasts the law and the spirit in chapter 3. The use of the word 'ink' to contrast with 'the Spirit' supports this understanding.

We are dealing with people and their relationships, and not merely with policies and programs, though the latter may be adjuncts towards that goal. We need to be reminded that God's ultimate purpose is to reclaim a people for Himself. He sent Jesus Christ to achieve this through His vicarious humanity. Jesus did not come to set up a structure or institution. His ministry was effected through His solidarity with humanity. It is a people-centred ministry. After His ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit to continue this ministry which we will see later.

##### b. THIS HAS BEEN TAUGHT BY THE PROPHETS.

When the prophets saw the decay in the nation of Israel, they spoke against the institutionalised religion in Israel. This people-centred theme is best seen in the writing of Jeremiah when, as the spokesman for God, he repeatedly announced, 'they will be my people and I will be their God. (Jer 11:4, 13:11, 24:7, 30:22, 31:1, 31:33, 32:38).

The prophets of old had perceived this with acute clarity. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel wrote of the new law engraved in the hearts of God's people. (Jer 31:33; Ezek. 18:31, 36:26).

The prophets were acutely aware that unless the ministry took place in the hearts of people then the change would only be superficial and not a real change. The only ministry that will cut to the core is the ministry of the Father through the Son in the Spirit. We would have achieved nothing if we are only able to put pressure to demand a response from the congregation. We may even be able to hint subtly or use psychological techniques to manipulate a response from the congregation. This is not of the Spirit and is artificial.

## 2. OUR MINISTRY IN THE SPIRIT

2 Cor 13 any be expressed without the parentheses in this way.

*You are a letter from Christ, written with the Spirit of the Living God on human hearts. (2 Cor 13)*

While claiming that the Corinthian church was the result of his ministry, Paul was also quick to point out that the church is really the result of the ministry of the Spirit of the Living God. There is no doubt that Paul had the idea of participation in the Father's ministry at the back of his mind when he wrote this.

It is not man's ministry, contrived and executed by men. It is the ministry of the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor. 3:8) - it is something dynamic and alive, not static and lifeless. Note the word 'with' in 2 Cor. 3:3. It speaks of partnership. We are not just robots standing around waiting for the Spirit to work. Neither are we working independently on our own. We are partners with the Spirit. We often think of the things of the Spirit as something undefined. While there is an element of unpredictability, the work of the Spirit points to the work of Christ. The work of the Spirit is the work of Christ. In His final discourse with the disciples, John recorded for us in his gospel (chapters 14-16) very clear teaching regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit and His ministry.

### a. The work of the Spirit points to Christ.

(John 14:26, 15:26, 16:14-15).

### b. He will guide us into truth.

(John 16:13).

### c. He will bring about the conviction of sin.

(John 16:8)

We are not to think that the ministry is ours and we have to sustain it, perhaps with some assistance from the Spirit. Ministry belongs to the Father and the Father is continually working within His creation. There is a continuing ministry of Jesus Christ as we will see in a later session.

## 3. THE LOVE OF CHRIST COMPELS US TO MINISTRY.

(2 Cor 5:14). While talking about his ministry to the Corinthian church with all the difficulties and frustrations, Paul pointed out that it the love of Christ that compels him and his co-workers to continue. We mentioned last week that ministry is a response to God's love and we will discuss this in more detail in our last session on 'A theology of response'.

## 4. OLD AND NEW MINISTRY CONTRASTED

2 Cor 3:7-9. The old ministry, ie. of the law, is one that brought death (v. 7) and condemns (v. 9). This is contrasted with the new ministry, that of the Spirit (v. 8) and brings righteousness (v. 9). The old ministry is one of fading glory (v. 7); the new is even more glorious (v. 8, 9). This I new ministry of the Spirit' is none other than the continuation of the ministry of revelation and reconciliation effected through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ.

## 5. MINISTRY BY GOD'S MERCY

(2 Cor 4:1). This is not a ministry we choose to enter into ourselves. Ministry is a calling. It is firstly the ministry of the Father. We have this ministry through God's mercy. So often, Christians have rushed into service only to give it up after a period of time. This is a ministry that we are invited or called into through the grace of God. Unless we are participants in the ministry of reconciliation, we have no part in this ministry. (Acts 8:21).

This may be a difficult injunction to implement, but we need to take note of the reason we enter into ministry. Only the Lord knows our hearts and we can only make assessment of one's gifts and profession of faith and to judge that consistency. (1 Sam. 16:7).

## 6. A MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

(2 Cor 5:18). The word used for reconciliation (katallage) comes from the root allasso meaning 'alter' or 'exchange' (allos, 'another'). In the Old Testament, this concept is enshrined in the idea of atonement. A broken relationship with God is restored with the exchange of an animal. There is then forgiveness and a restoration of fellowship between the two parties.

This idea of reconciliation is not only used between God and man, but also used in reference to human relationship. In fact the latter follows from the former. When we preach the restoration of relationship with God, we want to see this expressed in the restoration of relationship with one another. Otherwise all this talk of a relationship with God is meaningless. In Ephesians and Colossian, Paul talked about a cosmic reconciliation where all things are brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We need to be reconciled with our past. (2 Cor. 5:17-18). The above verse, 5:18 says, 'All this is from God, referring to the result of reconciliation. What is 'all this'? It refers to the preceding verse, as a new creation, 'the old has gone, the new has come. The broken relationship of the past, the pain and sorrow, and all the misgivings - these have gone. There has been an exchange at the cross. We cannot go on living with the baggage of the past weighing us down. It is indeed very sad to see in so many Christian circles that people still carry with them the pain and hurt of the past. What is defective is our understanding of the cross and the forgiveness that comes along with that embrace.

## 7. THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Acts 6:2, 4 NIV). We have referred to this in our first study where the word logos is translated as 'ministry' in the NIV. The proclamation of the Word is a dominant part of any ministry as in doing so, Christ is proclaimed. This is the message of reconciliation.

The proclamation (kerugma) of Jesus Christ was an integral part of the ministry in the early church. (Rom. 16:25; Titus 1:3)

The ministry of the Word is an essential component of the ministry of the church. When the church departs from this ministry then she has separated herself from the very foundation on which she is built up. Barth once said, 'it is not that Christ needs our proclamation, but that our proclamation needs Christ'.

## RESETTING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CHURCH

1 The primary objective is not just an increase in numbers, but people and their relationships within the church. This is the mission objective of the church and we need to put this in our mission statement. A sample is given below.

2 We are concerned with people and not merely structures. As the numbers increase, we need to have some sort of structures, but these are not ends in themselves. We

do not go on attending to programs, but rather these programs must serve the needs of our members.

3. What we need is not a project model for the church, ie. people come along to accomplish some project. What happens when the project is over? People disband and it is all over. What we need is a relational model for the church, ie. people come together because they are in Christ, and the projects come out of this relationship.

Anderson made this point in his book, *Ministry on the Fireline*,

The church's mission is not to build up an empire or kingdom that it controls, but to disperse the mission of God through the lives of the members as well as the various groups and organisations that they form.<sup>21</sup>

It is fashionable nowadays to have a mission statement and many churches are doing that too. One may have reservation about doing that. However, the objection is not the idea of having a mission Statement, but what is written in the statement. In many ways, the statement can help us to express in a succinct way the purpose of our gathering and I include a proposed Church Mission Statement.

## THE CHURCH MISSION STATEMENT

'The church exists as the gathered people of God who have been redeemed through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ. As the Spirit of God indwells God's people, their primary concern is the worship of God in obedience to the Word of God and as the appropriate response to the love of God. This obedience and love is expressed in the daily lives of each believer and through the development of personal relationships within the family of God. The development of relationships entails activities such as ministering to one another, teaching and upbuilding one another, and loving one another as Christ would. Relationships expressed in this way witness to the power of the risen Christ both within and without the church. The structures of the church provide the framework for this witness as the people of God live in faith, hope and love, and look toward the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

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<sup>21</sup> R S Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline*, p. 38

## SESSION 7

### MINISTRY PRECEDES AND DETERMINES THE NATURE AND EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCH

The church has often struggled for identity and relevance. It has been given ministry by its very calling to be the presence of Christ in the world; its relevance is found in the gospel it lives and proclaims.

READING: John 15:1-17.

The way we see ministry is essential to the understanding of the church. The way we see the church will also influence the way we understand ministry.

. . . if the pastor's basic approach to God's people is as scholar-teacher, the people will tend to become student-learners. If the pastor views the church and his role as social activist, the church will become a center from which to trumpet causes of justice. If the pastor projects the image of a father-mother, the people will view themselves as dependent children.<sup>22</sup>

Many people see the church as an institution. Ministry understood in that context will emphasise projects and programs and people then become secondary or utilities towards that end. The church as an institution will run like a corporation with the pastor as its head. An pyramidal organisational structure results. The congregation watches this theatrical performance each week to gain whatever they could for their famished souls. Results are then important for the upper eschalon of this pyramid so that there could be continued support from the base below. This orientation towards outcome will direct the leadership towards a pragmatic approach and to move towards bigger and better programs to satisfy the increasing numbers and needs in the organisation. As an institution the membership are there to ensure its continued strength and survival and therefore they need to pledge their support and loyalty. What results is that the; people are there to serve the structure. It is a dehumanising experience. Furthermore in this scenario, the pastor enters into a contractual arrangement with the church. He is then the managing director in the hands of the shareholders who have the power to hire and fire.

### THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE CHURCH

It has been noted that in the New Testament, ministry was first a charismatic ministry and towards the later part of the first century, a more structured ministry developed. Structuring is a necessary process as a community develops. In the face of increasing attacks on the early church, the church relied more and more on the threefold defence of the canon, the episcopal office and credal statement. This legacy from the early church has put the church in a firm position in her subsequent development. However, these structures have been misused in subsequent periods of the church. This does not argue for their removal from the practice of the church as we shall see. There will always be need for structures in any community. If we were to remove these, then we will need to put something else in their place and what will these be?

The problem has been that the church has used its 'church orders' as the starting point of her ecclesiology. So often ministry is thought of in terms of the group of special people called the 'ministers'. What has happened is that our church orders have become the foundation of our ecclesiology. In a letter sent to the participants of the Pastors' School 1997, G Bingham wrote, 'There is no ecclesiology which is authentic without the Patristological, Christological and Pneumatological, Soteriological, Eschatological foundations, ....'<sup>23</sup> It is when we substitute 'church orders' for these foundations that our perspectives shift and then we see the structural framework as the reality of the church.

<sup>22</sup> G Ogden, *The New Reformation*, p. 85

<sup>23</sup> G Bingham, Personal communications (1 May, 1997) to participants of the NCTM Pastors' School.

In the 'Church Mission Statement' last week, I made this remark.

'The structures of the church provide the framework for this witness as the people of God live in faith, hope and love, and look toward the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>24</sup>

The structural framework supports the life of the church. The life of the church does not need to contort itself into some derived framework. As Jesus said,

Mark 2:27 Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; 28 so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath. (NRSV)

It is out of the ministry of the Trinitarian Godhead that we have the church - the called out people of God, the ekklesia. Thus the primary control on ecclesiology as well as ministry is the tri-personal community of God,<sup>25</sup> and not the structural framework of the church which may change. It is when the church becomes anchored to its structural framework that it becomes institutionalised. The Reformers confronted a church that was hierarchical, sacerdotal, and clerical<sup>26</sup> It was a church truly institutionalised.

## MINISTRY AND CHURCH GROWTH

One cannot talk about ministry without making some comment on the church growth movement though only very briefly. We often talk of church growth in numerical terms. It is a measurable index but it is not the only one. We need to use some other indices to evaluate growth, eg. in terms of our relationship, care for one another or care for the community, or in terms of maturity. Are people changing from talking of expecting care for oneself to considering how best to care for others? When we see that change, then we see growth, and that is not the same as talking of how many you have on a Sunday morning. Of course, when you have growth in a spiritual way, you will naturally draw others into the group. We need to know clearly what our primary aim is. You cannot make numerical growth your aim and expect the spiritual part to fit in afterwards, because if you do not make Christ the determinant of ministry, then you have perpetual problems that you have no hope of fixing up later on. Much of the data from church growth is a sociological Rudy. It is an illuminating data and we should all take note. However, that taken as an end in itself is self-defeating because if it is detached from the source of all ministry, then it becomes outcome determined and we are back to where Abraham found himself. All ministry is the Father's ministry and we need to fit the church growth data under that framework.

## THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

The way we understand ministry will determine the way we see the church. Calvin in his Institutes pointed out the marks of the church.

4:1:9. Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and hear, and sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.

The ministry of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, ie. baptism and the Communion, are the marks of the church. These activities are the distinguishing marks of the church because they point beyond the actions themselves to the works of the Triune God.

The ministry of the Word is essential because 'faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ' (Rom. 10: 17 NRSV). However, preaching by itself is

<sup>24</sup> See notes in Session 6 of this series.

<sup>25</sup> C Gunton, 'The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community', in *On Being the Church*, Ed. Gunton and Hardy, p. 77.

<sup>26</sup> G Ogden, *The New Reformation*, p. 48.

to no avail unless the Word of Christ is taken by the Spirit and made known to us (John 16:14-15).

Christ's ministry of reconciliation is made effective by the Spirit through the preaching of the Word. The result is the indwelling of the Spirit in whom we are taken into the Son's communion with the Father. (Gal. 3:2)

As we have noted earlier, our ministry is the participation in the ministry of the Triune God. As we minister, our service points beyond itself to what Christ has done. Our service, in itself, counts for nothing as Paul says in 1 Cor. 3:7, 15:10.

And so it is with the sacraments. So often we see baptism as a profession of our faith - an outward manifestation of an inward change. This is a truncated outlook. We do profess our faith in baptism but our baptism is more than that. It is a baptism into the body of Christ. In whatever way the sacrament is administered, it points beyond what has happened to us to what Christ has done for us. It points to the reconciliation that has taken place and we are now taken into the communion of the Father-Son relationship. It is a sign that points us to the past and identifies us with its effects in the present.<sup>27</sup>

It is the same with the Communion. It is not merely the remembrance of what Christ has done on Calvary though this event is an important part of the celebration. The participation in the body and blood of Jesus Christ points beyond the action of the celebration and the elements of the bread and wine to the presence of Christ in our midst and to the communion that we have with the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The reality of our participation in the life of God occurs not by the upward push of nature, but by God Himself lifting humanity to its new and climatic stage.<sup>28</sup>

So Calvin saw the marks of the church as the manifestation of the ministry of Christ. Ministry is the participation in the ministry of Christ. The church does not determine ministry. It is ministry that determines and produces the church. The ministry of the church points beyond itself to the ministry that has taken place in the ministry of Christ.

## **THE MINISTRY OF THE CLERGY AND THE MINISTRY OF THE LAITY**

The Reformation recovered the principles of sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone), sola gratia (by grace alone), sola fide (by faith alone), and the priesthood of all believers. Calvin saw the distinguishing marks of the church as the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments thereby making the point that the church exists on the basis of the completed work of Christ and not as the institutional dispenser of God's grace. Luther recognised that there should not be a hierarchy of callings. He wrote,

God has placed his church in the midst of the world among countless undertakings and callings in order that Christians should not be monks but live with one another in social fellowship and manifest among men the works and practices of faith.<sup>29</sup>

However, the reformers did not go far enough in the implementation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Though changes were made as a result of their conception of ministry, the church has continued to identify ministry with the clergy. The attempt to graft a concept of ministry of the people of God onto the root of ordained ministry has not really worked.<sup>30</sup>

Ministry is first and foremost the ministry of the Father and He calls and appoints His people to participate in His ministry. Thus the prerequisite for ministry is the calling of God to a

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<sup>27</sup> L B Smedes, Union with Christ, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> M Luther, 'On the Ordering of Divine Service in the congregation,' vol. 4, Weimar (Ed.), Luther's Works, 62. Quoted in G Ogden, The New Reformation, p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> J Dunn, Ministry and the Ministry: The Charismatic Renewal's Challenge to Traditional Ecclesiology, (Unpublished paper, 10. Quoted in G Ogden, The New Reformation, p. 54.

particular service and not the appointment to a particular office. There is not to be supposed a hierarchy of ministries.

Eph. 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (NRSV)

What commissioned us to ministry is our baptism when we become incorporated into the body of Jesus Christ. That is not to say that ordination does not have a place. There is a hierarchy in every community and in the ordering of the affairs of the church, this may be a necessary thing to take place.

### **ALL MINISTRY IS THE MINISTRY OF THE FATHER**

(Num 14:42; Isa 42:1; John 15:16). While we may be engaged in ministry of one type or another, it is the Father who calls and sustains because it is His ministry. It is when we allow the needs or any other human determination to form the basis of our ministry that we succumb under the sheer weight of such a burden. Needs are insatiable for the poor will always be with us. (Mark 14:7)

God will sustain those whom He has called to His ministry. Our task is to be in His will and to participate in what He has called us to. Our concern is with the indicative and to allow that to work through to the imperative rather than to be focussed on the outcome.

A story worth relating is one I heard from D Tidball. A certain pastor used to be disappearing each day from the parish office during the lunch hour. His wife knew of the stresses he faced in his ministry. He pastored a small church in the country and every activity in the church depended on him. There was little help from the lay leadership. On many occasions his wife could not contact him during the lunch hour and wondered what was happening at the office. She rang the office and the office secretary expressed the same concern and curiosity. So one day, his wife followed him from afar and tracked him to an isolated stretch of the railway line. He sat down on the grass by the side of railway line where he then opened his lunch box and had his lunch. At just about the dot on the hour the train came tearing past. The pastor having finished his lunch by then jumped up as the train passed by. His wife screamed in horror thinking that the stress on her husband might have been too much for him and he might throw himself in front of the train. She then heard her husband shout, 'Hallelujah' in jubilation. She could not help herself and ran up to him to find out what that was all about. Her husband was all relaxed and joyful. With a smile on his face, he said, 'When that train tore past, that was the only thing that moved which I do not need to push.'

### **A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES<sup>31</sup>**

**Church 'A'** is a well established church in the city. Many years ago several Christians came together and decided that there should be a church that will meet the needs of a certain section of the community in that city. They were committed Christians and desired to see those from their same ethnic origin reached with the gospel. The believers were members of various other churches and they decided to move out of those established churches to form a church of their own for this specific ministry. They procrastinated and several of them talked about it from time to time. They met for prayer. In time and after several business like meetings, they finally constituted their group with the government bodies and operated as a legal entity. They found a suitable church building at which to gather for their worship and meetings. They gave of their worldly possession to the church. Many people were reached with the gospel. The group grew. The lay leadership managed the affairs of the church and

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<sup>31</sup> Told with reference to G. Bingham, *Christ's Living Church - Today*, p. 29-34. Church 'A' went about to determine its ministry according to models it can identify. Church 'B' was more concerned to engage in the proclamation of the Word and allow be form to develop in a spontaneous manner. Bob are imaginary entities and have no reference to any particular church here or elsewhere.

engaged several itinerant ministers to their pulpit on Sunday mornings. After several years they were able to hire a minister to serve the increased needs of the group.

More people were brought into the church and eventually they acquired a building in the city as a more permanent meeting place. In the process of acquiring the building and carrying out the renovations, the members were assigned various tasks to raise money to pay for the expenses incurred. Challenges were made to the congregation week after week for an increased commitment to the work of this church and to this some were willing. Others felt an undue pressure on them to perform like the rest and became somewhat disgruntled. The church increased in number. Commitment to the work of the church equates with blessings from God. Miraculous signs did occur in their midst and for these there were much praise.

Over a period of time pressure was brought to bear on the minister because the church reached a plateau. The lay leadership felt that he was unsuitable for the needs of the church then. There was some dissent within the church because of this. Some related well with the minister and were saddened by the turmoil. Others kept a firm eye on the outcome and argue strongly for a change. There was no charge of heresy or misconduct on the minister for he was a godly man. Sensing this, graciously the minister resigned his office and sought other ministry.

**Church 'B'** is also a well established church in another city. A few Christians began a ministry in a home many years ago to explain various aspects of the Christian faith for those who wanted to know more about Jesus Christ. In the process Christ was proclaimed. They met once a month. A short while later, a second group met to study the bible. As a result their lives were enriched and their understanding of the things of God deepened. Many of those who came along to those meetings did not go to any church and some of them had stopped meeting altogether in worship because of previous painful experiences in the church. As they were enlightened, the group then wanted to gather on a Sunday morning in that home for praise and worship. As an identifiable group in the community they were legally constituted under the laws of the land. In time the group outgrew the facilities in the home and they moved to shared premises with another established church - a traditional church of a very different background. While they differ in ethnicity and in some areas of practice, they were of the same conservative evangelical heritage. Despite those differences, they acknowledge each other and respected each other's conviction regarding aspect of their faith. They met together for worship jointly during Easter and Christmas, and their relationship with each other were enhanced. They planned then to meet more frequently. One congregation was traditional, the other 'free'. One went back for a few hundred years, the other a recent gathering. One more advanced in age, the other younger. Their origins were from almost opposite ends of the globe.

At one stage they decided to raise some money for one of their numbers working with a mission overseas. Those who wanted to participate came along and each volunteered their wares according to their ability to do so. There was no compulsion or coercion to do so. Some chose not to do so for various personal reasons and their feelings were acknowledged. Whatever each chose to do, they were not judged or criticised. Their wishes were respected and accepted. Of those who participated, some worked much harder than others as they had the ability and time to do so. In the process they had much fun and the relationship within the church was enhanced. The amount to be raised was not pre-determined. The money raised was sent to the mission. It was much more than they had expected.

They did not have a 'minister' in their midst as they gave a large proportion of the offering to the mission overseas. A few of their numbers taught the Word Sunday by Sunday. On occasions, they invited others in the 'ministry' to share the Word with them. Their numbers grew but only slowly. They continued in the study of the Word, in prayer and in fellowship.

## **ASSIGNMENT**

Give your assessment of Church 'A' and Church 'B' in the light of your understanding of the Theology of Ministry. (Approximately 2000 words.)

## SESSION 8

### A THEOLOGY OF PRESENCE - CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD

Discussion on a 'theology of presence' combining servanthood with transcendence, that is, in ways which make solidarity with the world occasions for radical freedom, faith and healing.

READING: Ephesians 1:1-23.

**Reference:** G Bingham, *The Everlasting Presence*.

Lewis B Smedes, *Union with Christ*.

#### INTRODUCTION

The central theme of the Bible is that of communion with God. In the Old Testament we see the recurring theme, 'You will be my people and I will be your God', spoken repeatedly by the prophets. In the movement of the exodus from Egypt and the subsequent occupation of the promised land, the biblical account leads towards the building of the tabernacle which signified the presence of God in the midst of His people. This was the climax of the theme of the exodus. The people of Israel were to dwell in the land in the presence of God. This climatic conclusion was heralded by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Exo. 13:22). It is God's presence in the midst of His people leading them onward to all that they did.

It is great sorrow to the people when the presence of God had departed from the community, eg. when the ark of God was captured. (1 Sam. 4:21)

That is why the temple in Jerusalem was of such great significance to the people of Israel. Its glory is that of the glory of God in the midst of His people. Paul saw the reality of this theme fulfilled in the incarnation and experienced by the whole of humanity with the coming of the Holy Spirit. He then expressed the reality of that experience in the language of the Old Testament, ie. we are the temple of God and that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. (1 Cor. 3:16)

Thus we see that God has always been with His people. The incarnation was a unique event in history. It was not an event so that we may know God by having seen Him in His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus' incarnation demonstrated His solidarity with humanity and He takes us into the communion with His Father. Thus the incarnation reveals the relationship within the Godhead. To know God is to know Him in His relationship. Jesus communicated to us 'the true relationship a human being can have with God.'<sup>32</sup>

Christ made this very point crystal clear in His High Priestly prayer in John 17:20-23.

God is in Christ and Christ is in God - the perichoretic relationship within the Trinitarian Godhead. We do not see the ministry of Christ as His alone. It is the ministry of the Triune God. So 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). By His grace we have been redeemed to participate in that perichoretic relationship when Christ prayed, 'May they also be in us' (v. 21).

These verses – 26-23 - speak of the presence of the Father in the Son, of the Son in the Father, and then of the believers' presence in the Father and the Son, and of their oneness together because of that mutual indwelling. Perhaps there are no richer verses anywhere than these, ...<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> G Bingham, *The Everlasting Presence*, p. 60. The book expounds the faith union in Christ especially in the chapter, 'The Apostolic Abiding'.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70.

To be in Christ means that we are in union with Him, we have submitted to him.<sup>34</sup> This union is not a mystical one.<sup>35</sup> It is a faith union as we see in Eph. 3:17 and 2 Cor. 13:5.

To be 'in Christ' is not an escape from history, but a participation in the new reality in history, . . . <sup>36</sup> It is to be part of a new community where the Spirit of holiness and life is the dominant power and guiding norm.<sup>37</sup> The theme 'in Christ' abounds throughout the New Testament and to this we will now turn.

### 'IN CHRIST'

The church continues the ministry of Christ on earth. Thus Christ's ministry determines the nature and content of the church's ministry. As the called out people of God, redeemed by Christ's precious blood, we are united with Him. The Christian life is lived in union with Christ and our ministry is a ministry in the Spirit through Jesus Christ. The expression 'in Christ' is a recurring theme in the New Testament epistles. 'In fact 'in', 'with', and 'through' in relation to Christ and his people are so frequent that not much doctrine of faith and practice of life would be left if they were withdrawn.'<sup>38</sup> This expression 'in Christ' is nowhere more beautifully expressed than in the opening chapter of the letter to the Ephesians.

Eph 1: 1 faithful in Christ Jesus: 3 blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 chose us in Christ 5 adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, ...6 ...glorious grace bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood . 9 according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance . 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, and had believed in him . 15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus 20 God put this power to work in Christ 22 the church 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This is the charter of the church. God has 'blessed us in Christ' (v. 3), 'chosen us in Christ' (v. 4), 'adopted us through Christ' (v. 5), 'glorious grace .... bestowed on us in Christ' (v. 6), 'redemption in Christ' (v. 7) and faith in Christ as a result of the hearing of the word of truth in Christ (v. 13). All these are made possible as a result of the power of God working in Christ (v. 15), the fullness of Him fills all and in all (v. 23). There is nothing apart from what God has wrought in Christ Jesus, the church being specifically mentioned here because she is the body of Christ, the continuing earthly expression of the humanity of Christ.

And so Paul could say,

Rom 8:9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (NRSV)

1 Cor 13:3 He 0; Me source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (NRSV).

If God is the source of our life in Christ, then it must mean that there is no source of life (redeemed) outside of Christ.<sup>39</sup> And so as we are in Christ, Christ is in us - the expression of the faith union that we have through Christ. (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:9)

Paul uses 'in Christ' interchangeably with 'in the Spirit'. This should not surprise us as the Holy Spirit is the other 'paraclete' whom the Father sends and who will bring home to us the things of Christ.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. P. 77

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. P. 99.

<sup>36</sup> L B Smedes, Union with Christ, p. 77

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p, 82.

<sup>38</sup> G Bingham, The Everlasting Presence, p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 77ff

L Smedes gave an excellent summary of Paul's thinking in his expression 'in Christ'. 'Several things become clear as we scan Paul's vocabulary:

1. There is no clear distinction between Christ indwelling in Christians and the Spirit dwelling in them.
2. There is no hint that Paul is using metaphor, as though he really means only that an impersonal power is at work on us to make us somewhat Christ-like or Spirit-like.
3. It is clear that the Christ who is in us is the person named Jesus, the concrete individual who died and rose again.
4. The presence of Christ and the Spirit within Christians is not limited either to a few Christians or to odd moments. The presence of Christ within is normal for all Christians.<sup>40</sup>

The Christian life is to be lived in Christ. To be outside of Christ implies that we do not have communion with Him and this is to be 'in the flesh'. (Rom. 8:6-9)

We need to start with the question, 'Who we are in Christ?'. The 'indicative' precedes the 'imperative'. What we do must result from what we are. We do not take Jesus into our lives so that He can assist us in what we chose to do. Rather, it is Jesus who lifts us out of our egocentricity and takes us into the communion He has with His Father. This motif is well expressed in the song, Angel wings.<sup>41</sup>

*Angel wing, beating my face,  
Forcing me into grace.  
Dear eyes, loving my soul,  
Drawing me to the goal.*

*Strong Word, piercing my brain,  
Bringing me holy shame.  
Pain's cry, welling within,  
Lifting me out of sin.*

*Red hands, clotted with blood,  
Thrusting me up to God.  
Angel wings, beating my face,  
Forcing me into grace.*

This is the ministry of all ministries. It is the ministry of the Father in the Spirit through Jesus Christ that takes us into the communion of the Triune God. It is out of this communion that the church discovers her ministry. So the way we express ourselves in ministry will tell clearly what the foundation of our ministry is. The ministry of the church continues the ministry of Christ and is the heart's grateful response to Christ.

### **'WITH CHRIST'**

'To be with Christ is to participate in the redemptive events of the past' as the following verses show.<sup>42</sup> (Gal. 2:19; Col. 2:12, 3:1)

The reconciliation which took place in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ and which made our communion with Christ possible must need, on our part, to go through the process of dying and rising, actions not initiated on our own, but in participation with Christ in His dying and rising again. This has to be so since Christ's incarnation affirmed His solidarity with humanity. What we are 'in Christ' has its basis in what took place 'with Christ' in history. So in our baptism we identify our new life with the dying and rising of Christ. The action of baptism

<sup>40</sup> L Smedes, *Union with Christ*, p. 115.

<sup>41</sup> Angel wings by G Bingham. *New Creation Hymn Book* 65.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 93.

points beyond itself to what Christ has done in history. We cannot be what we are 'in Christ' without having been 'with Christ' in His dying and rising.

### **'CHRIST IN US'**

To have 'Christ is us' expresses the other side of the union with Christ, ie. the inward transformation of our Wes by the life of Christ.<sup>43</sup> (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27)

In a previous study we note the point made by Thielicke when he wrote,

.... encounter with God's Word as a believer does not mean that I draw God and his Word into my existence, but that I can break away from my self-enclosed being and through the Word be drawn into God and his power and possibilities, so that I am born again.<sup>44</sup>

It is not a case of we taking Christ into our lives so that we can go on to do the things that we want. Rather, we are drawn into the communion of the Father-Son relationship through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ. In this communion, the Lordship of Jesus Christ is expressed in each of our lives and in the corporate life of the church. If that is so then the transforming work of the Father-Son-Spirit in us must inevitably result. The ministry of the church is carried out on the basis of this communion and it is then not difficult to understand Isaiah's words,

(Isa 42:1 NRSV) Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

It is the Father's ministry and it follows that He will uphold the ones that He has appointed to His ministry by His Spirit. The empowerment of the Holy Spirit in ministry follows from this communion and not in isolation of this relationship. Jesus ministers in the Spirit and in the communion with His Father.

The theme of the presence of God in the midst of His people is the most endearing theme of the bible. Revelation gives a glimpse of the future when we see God dwelling among His people - an echo of the incarnation theme in John 1:14.

Rev. 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; (NRSV)

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. P. 112

<sup>44</sup> H Thielicke, 'The Evangelical Faith', in Theological Foundation of Ministry (Ed. R Anderson), p. 87.

## SESSION 9

### THE THEOLOGY OF RESPONSE<sup>45</sup> REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

'He ministered the things of God to man and the things of man to God.' (Athanasius)

READING: Hebrews 8:1-13.

So far in our studies we have not touched on the aspect of the covenant. This is an important subject and I gather that it will be dealt with sometime next year. It is a must for everyone and the whole of scripture cannot be understood outside the context of the covenant. God's dealings with us in reconciliation is based on His covenant with humanity. The covenants that we have in scripture must be seen as expressions of the one eternal covenant covering the whole of mankind. This is the covenant of creation - the primary covenant. Expressions of this primary covenant are seen in its particularity in history.<sup>46</sup> The covenant expresses the inner structure of the relation between God and man.

#### JESUS CHRIST - THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE RESPONSE

God is the initiator of the covenant and as we have noted this covenant expresses the movement of God towards man and in so doing there is a reciprocal movement from man towards God. This is the response from man. In a relationship, there is a two way movement. We have placed great emphasis on the revelation (A God that Jesus Christ brings to us as well as His mediation for our salvation and this is rightly so. We must not trade this for anything less. However, when we come to make a response to God, we consider it to be our own response. We make that response in our own name and on the basis of our achievement. We seem to ignore the mediation of Jesus Christ in our response to God. The responses in the Old Testament were mediated by the priests in the temple. Saul sought to offer a sacrifice without this mediation and he was reprimanded for that (1 Sam. 13:6-14).

God has no delight in our sacrifices. The prophets of old did not approve of the thousands of rams brought to the temple for sacrifice when the hearts of the people were not right with God.<sup>47</sup> There is only one sacrifice that God accepts and that is the holy sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

There is within the Godhead a perichoretic relationship where one is responsive to the other. Man is created in the image of God and therefore is a responsive creature. His response is not merely a reaction to his environment like an animal or vegetable. What distinguishes man from the rest of God's creation is his capacity to relate as subject to subject recognising the other in the relationship. 'What is it to be human?' we need to ask. Our humanness is defined not by our objectivity or rationality though these are important facets within our being, but by our relatedness.<sup>48</sup> Therefore our relationship with our Creator and fellow creation constitute the distinguishing mark of our humanity. And being estranged from God in our fallen status, it is only in Jesus' perfect humanity, that we will find fulfilment in our restored humanity.

As created beings, the possibility of our response lies in what God as creator has given to us. He has created us within limits and provided for our response. Our response lies within these

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<sup>45</sup> Adapted from study prepared for Christianity and Culture, NCTM Term 1, 1996.

<sup>46</sup> The Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants are expressions of the primary covenant.

<sup>47</sup> Ps 51:16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

<sup>48</sup> There is a present series of studies, 'Being Human' conducted by NCTM on Monday evenings.

limits. We cannot go outside of these limits as if we can respond 'in our own right'.<sup>49</sup> God has given us the enabling to respond. This is through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit. He is indeed our response to God and we are responding to the Response. We are all called to share or participate in the merits of Jesus Christ.

Now in Jesus Christ becoming man, He has taken up our sinful humanity in Himself and made that perfect response to God - a response that we are not able to make, Jesus come to reveal to us God. He is indeed the God who is for man. There is more to that. Jesus Christ is also the Man who is for God. Becoming man is not a foreign thing to God. God created mankind in the first place.

There is incorporated within the divine Godhead, a humanity that God relates with. John says,

*John 1:11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*

In Jesus becoming man, He not only revealed to us the Father, but also as a man responded to the Father in perfect obedience. He is the second Adam and did that on our behalf. In standing beneath that man Jesus Christ and relying on His meritorious humanity, we now can approach God not in a direct manner but only through Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man as Paul puts it.

*1 Tim 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*

## **UNITARIAN OR TRINITARIAN**

Our evangelical dogma has rightly emphasised the mediatorial role of our Lord Jesus Christ in redemption. However, when it comes to considering our response to the Father, we switch to our pietistic mode. In other words, it is the 'I' responding to God. We come before God to worship Him. We pray to Him and serve Him. We offer ourselves to Him. In these responses, where is the place of Jesus Christ? We have treated Christ in an utilitarian manner as if to say that when He has got us back to God, then His function is over. It is then over to us. We then pay lip service to His role in concluding our prayers with the words. 'In Jesus' Name'. This is an unitarian approach, ie. it is between me and God. Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man, and this mediation is necessary and present in both the pathways from God to man and from man to God.<sup>50</sup>

## **THE CONTINUING HIGH PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST**

Many years ago I was asked the question, 'What is Jesus Christ doing today?' It drew a blank. Of course there was a blank to the question as it was something that I had not thought much about nor was I taught that as far as I can remember. In the churches that I had worshipped in, there had been a great emphasis on the finished work of Jesus Christ and that is rightly so. The words from the cross, 'it is finished', gave the impression that there is nothing more to do on the part of God and Christ. The writer to the Hebrews emphasised the 'once and for all' sacrifice of Jesus Christ which is fully sufficient and is not to be repeated. Again this is the right emphasis and needs to be reinforced again and again. Hebrews also mentioned Jesus achieving the 'rest' for the people of God. We also read that Jesus is now ascended into heaven and seated on the right hand of God on high giving us a picture of a very relaxed pose. So what more is there to do? The rest is up to us and perhaps with the assistance of the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus Christ has asked us to continue His work and sent the Holy Spirit along to assist us. This is far from the truth as I will try to explain. We can be forgiven to have deduced from the above that there is nothing more to do on the part of Jesus Christ. Nothing is further from the truth. We need to consider the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>49</sup> R Anderson, *Incarnation and Historical Transcendence*, p. 136.

<sup>50</sup> This issue is dealt with very succinctly in the article by J B Torrance. 'The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship'. in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, (Ed. R S Anderson), p. 348-369.

## **A MAN IN HEAVEN** - Our forerunner (Heb. 6:20) and High Priest in heaven (Heb. 4:14)

There is today as it has been for the past 2000 years, a man in heaven. Jesus is incarnate in human flesh and His humanity remains with Him. We are not to think that Jesus Christ took pity on us and came as a man and now that He has done His job as a man, left His humanity behind and went back to heaven. It is not with cold detachment that Jesus took on the form of a man and left it when the job is done. He identified with humanity and He has now taken that humanity with Him into heaven as Heb. 4:14 tells us - **a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.**

And as our great High Priest in heaven, He understands us and is able to sympathise with us in His humanity.

### **Intercession on our behalf (Heb. 9:24)**

Jesus Christ continues to be our great High Priest in heaven. He intercedes on our behalf. While it is true that we can approach God the Father with confidence, it must be remembered that it is only through the accepted work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We need to be reminded of the model of the temple in ancient Israel. There are priests in the outer courtyard of the temple where they accept the sacrifice from the people and make the appropriate offering to God for repentance and consecration. However, on the Day of Atonement once a year, it is the high priest that entered into the most holy inner chamber of the temple into the presence of God. The priests are not given that special service. That special service belongs only to the high priest.

Now we have a High Priest who has done that for us and He continues that ministry of intercession on our behalf before God. Our acceptance before God is only on the merit of our High Priest and not on how we have performed. If my ministry is considered on my own merit, then it counts for nothing. What I am doing is only acceptable to God on the merit of Jesus Christ and I need to trust in that in my ministry. This takes me away from any arrogance on my part and cause me to acknowledge what others are doing because our services are not acceptable on account on how perfectly we have performed it.

## **THE LAW AND OUR RESPONSE**

Now we can be free from any bondage or yoke that demands we come up to some manmade standard. All of us stand covered by that perfect response of Jesus Christ, whether you be a great theologian or missionary or serving locally at home. Some of us may be called to one kind of service or another, some given more prominence than others, but none of these services merits any more or less in the sight of God. It is that perfect humanity of Jesus Christ that counts and we stand as beneficiaries of His perfect response.

The law and the cult do not constitute the centre of the covenant.<sup>51</sup> God is the centre of the covenant. They form the covenant response through the enabling of God. They are the divinely provided way of covenant response. While we consider the covenants made with Abraham and his descendants as covenants of grace, our dualistic mind halts at the Sinaitic covenant and to our delight, we find something contractual to feast on. This is not so. The Sinaitic covenant is also a covenant of grace. Within the laws given to Moses is the covenanted way of response to the God of grace and He has graciously provided for us in the cult and ceremony the response that He desires. The cult and the law is the enabling of God in our response to Him. It is from beginning to end the grace of God.

When the creational covenant is interpreted in a legalistic manner, the result is the concept of a 'covenant of works'. However, the obedience expected of Adam was the response to grace that was first imparted to him. Within the limitation placed upon Adam was the enabling of God to effect that response. David in his prayer understood this very clearly

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 139.

Men he said 'Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand' (1 Chr. 29:14).

So in the transaction of the New Covenant, God provided the perfect response for us in the person of Jesus Christ. We often only think in terms of His substitutionary death as an act external to us. We also need to think in terms of the incorporation within His vicarious humanity as He continues as our Great High Priest in heaven.

Our response to God consists of what He has first provided for us in grace. 'Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou wilt'. This prayer from Augustine landed him into endless troubles with his contemporary Pelagius. Augustine understood the priority of grace.