

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

(Tuesday, 6 February 1996 to 9th April 1996)

Dr. Siew Kiong Tham

I. Culture and Christianity. (6 Feb., 96)

A look at culture and its grip upon our lives. The study of culture. The missionary movement - Christian or cultural with reference to Donovan's *Christianity Rediscovered*.

II. Christ and Culture. (13 Feb., 96)

A synopsis of Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*.

III. The Incarnation - the Hermeneutical Centre. (20 Feb., 96)

Includes a look at the struggle at Nicea.

IV. Covenant or Contract I. (27 Feb., 96)

A historical survey - the early and medieval church.

V. Covenant or Contract II. (5 March, 96)

A historical survey - the reformation. Calvin and scholastic Calvinism.

VI. The Covenant Response. (12 March, 96)

VII. Implications of the Covenant. (19 March, 96)

VIII. Covenant as it relates to our Culture. (26 March, 96)

Marriage, Congregation and Pastor relationship, The Workplace, Euthanasia and other ethical issues.

IX. The Cultural Orientation of the Chinese churches. (2 April, 96)

X. A look at our 20th Century Evangelical Church Culture. (9 April, 96)

An optional session. Open discussion. A self-critique using the framework discussed.

RECOMMENDED READING

Carson, D A and Woodbridge, J D (Ed.), *God and Culture*.

Donovan, V., *Christianity Rediscovered*. Niebuhr,

H Richard, *Christianity and Culture*, (Harper and Row, 1951).

Stott, J and Coote, R (Ed.), *Down to Earth*.

Siew-Kiong Tham 26 January, 1996.

I. Culture and Christianity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of how Christianity is related to culture is a continuing issue that confronts us. Many answers have been given and the classic responses were presented very clearly in Richard Niebuhr's excellent book *Christ and Culture*¹ written 40 years ago.

In this series of studies, I will look at culture and its meaning for us. Next I will review the patterns of the relationship between Christianity and culture as given in Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. We will consider the proposition that Christ is the transformer of culture. While there may be various responses to the relationship between Christianity and culture, scripture informs us that a transformation of our culture needs to take place. Thirdly, I will look at how our culture has determined to a very large extent the way in which we have understood our faith. The struggle at Nicea will be used to illustrate this. I will then go on to look at the contractual relationship in our society and see how far we have departed from the biblical understanding of the covenant relationship. This will lead us to reflect on what should be the covenant response from our part. Lastly, I will explore several areas where this transformation should have taken place and why they have not taken place. In particular, I want to discuss the cultural situation in many Chinese churches where this transformation needs to take place.

Though the series is partly titled, 'Practical Christian Living' there will not be any 'prescription' issued by me here. The reason will be obvious as we go through the studies in the subsequent sessions. Rather, I will try to present a framework from which we can work through the cultural issues that confront us. The last session will be used for some of us to present to the class the way we have worked through some of the issues in our own lives and churches. I trust that the studies will be challenging as we all attempt to wrestle with our cultural orientation.

2. WHAT IS CULTURE?

It's not easy to define culture. We can talk about the culture of a nation, of a community or of a church. It is the sum of how we conduct ourselves and this is expressed in language, actions or the arts. It is part of what we mean by being human. One may say that culture is what we do around here that gives us meaning. Other ways of putting it are:

1. A set of common understandings for organising actions and language and other symbolic vehicles for expressing common understanding.²
2. 'Culture is religion made visible; it is religion actualized in the innumerable relations of daily life.'³

Perhaps a quote from Tevye, in *Fiddler on the Roof* may help us here:

Because of our traditions, we keep our sanity . Tradition tells us how to sleep, how
to work, how to wear clothes . How did it get started? I don't know - it's a tradition.
.....Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects of him!

There is some truth in what Tevye said. Culture is what gives meaning to us as we relate with the external world. It is through the things that we do, ie. our culture, which allows us to express the values we hold. Therefore as our values change so will our culture.

¹ H Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (Harper & Row, 1951).

² P Frost, *Organisational Culture*, p. 170-172.

³ J H Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World*, p. 57.

Niebuhr categorised several characteristics of culture which will help us to examine it more objectively.

1. It is social.
2. It is human achievement.
3. It speaks of the values of humankind.
4. It is for the good of humankind.
5. It is concerned with the temporal and the material realisation of values.
6. It is concerned with the conservation of those values.⁴

3. THE STUDY OF CULTURE

Culture is not an exact science whereby our analytical tools can provide us with assured results. Difficult though it may be, there are still useful analytical tools which will enable us to study culture and to understand how it operates in our society. They render some objectivity to our understanding of culture. These tools are,

1. Psychology and sociology - explain why a particular pattern of behaviour occurs.
2. Theology and ethics - judge how acceptable that pattern is.
3. Organisation development - help to change the pattern.
4. Ethnography and literary criticism - help in exploring the pattern and to understand its meaning among those who undertake it.⁵

Carl Dudley presented the above when he was writing about culture in relation to the local church. All the above tools are necessary in arriving at a balanced picture of what the culture of any community is, whether it be the church or an organisation. If only the theological and ethical are used, then one becomes very judgmental without a compassionate understanding of how that situation has arisen. If only a sociological or psychological approach is used, then one will compromise the norm because what that community ought to be will become clouded. What is central is still the theological and ethical consideration. They give some standards by which culture can be interpreted. This is what our postmodern culture is lacking. It lacks a norm for evaluation. Of course this interpretation may be altered when there is an interaction between culture and hermeneutics. This will be discussed further at a later stage.

We can look at culture at 4 levels.

1. Artefacts.
2. Perspectives.
3. Values.
4. Assumptions.⁶

What we see in a culture is only what is external, ie. the expressions or the artefacts. What produced the artefacts are the perspectives with which one sees the world and people. These perspectives are determined by the values one holds and this is ultimately dependent on the assumptions we hold regarding life, the world and who God is.

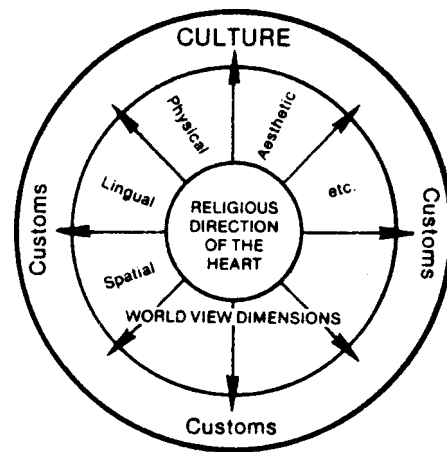
This may be illustrated with a diagram from Stott and Coote in *Down to Earth*:⁷

⁴ Niebuhr, p. 32-38.

⁵ Carl Dudley, *Building Effective Ministry*, p. 80.

⁶ P Frost, p. 171-172.

⁷ J Stott and R Coote (Ed.), *Down to Earth*, p. 149.



When we look at culture we are only looking at the artefacts, ie. what is external. There are values and assumptions that go to produce those artefacts. Any culture, ie. the artefacts, may change depending on the basic assumptions that the community holds. Probing into these underlying assumptions in sociological studies, various dimensions have been uncovered. It is around these underlying assumptions that cultural paradigms form. These assumptions are:⁸

1. Humanity's relationship to nature.
2. The nature of reality and truth.
3. The nature of human nature, what it means to be human, the relationship of the individual to the group.
4. The nature of human activity.
5. The nature of human relationships.

When we look at these dimensions of thinking, we see that these are the issues that deal with reality and our understanding of God and man. These are the fundamental issues for us to grapple with. A culture will not change unless there is a change in these underlying assumptions. Writing on the issue of pluralism, D A Carson commented, *Recognised or not, the doctrine of God lies at the heart of contemporary debates over pluralism.*⁹ What we do so often is to address culture at the artefact level, ie. we try to change the external manifestation of a culture. It appears that the missionary movement in the past has focussed on changing this external artefact of culture.

In the tenth section of the Lausanne Covenant of 1974, the authors made this comment.

Missions have all too frequently exported with the gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture.¹⁰

This was again brought up in a recent volume of Fuller's *Theology, News and Notes*.

The failure to differentiate between the gospel and Western culture has been one of the greatest weaknesses of Western Christian missions. Western missionaries too often have equated the gospel with their own cultural background.¹¹

These above two quotations are put in strong words and an indictment of our missionary movement. As one who had been reached by the mission movement from the west, I can affirm that this is so. Vincent Donovan's book, *Christianity Rediscovered* speaks against the

⁸ E Schein, *Organisational Culture and Leadership*, p. 85-111.

⁹ D A Carson and J D Woodbridge (Ed.), 'Christian Witness in an Age of Pluralism', in *God and Culture*, p. 46.

¹⁰ C R Padilla, *The New Face of Evangelicalism*, p. 177.

¹¹ G P Alexander, 'The Changing Hands of Leadership', in *Fuller's Theology, Notes and News, Diversity: Threat or Opportunity?*, Dec. 1993, p. 5.

cultural and structural approach to missions. In a radical departure from accepted mission practice, he worked on the core assumptions and simply taught the Masai people what God is like and what Jesus Christ has come to do. In so doing, the core assumptions are changed and he allowed the Masai people to work these assumptions into the artefacts of their culture.

Let me quote a short section from his book.

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.
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There needs to be an openness regarding what may eventuate as result of our ministry. Whether we view our churches as organisations or communities, they should really be seen as cultures. The perceptions and experiences of any culture are expressed in what we term 'myths'.¹³ Dominant myth within a community goes way back to the past and is not easily assessable to change. This is so because these 'symbols' are held as representation of reality in the minds of the people. Within the powerful symbols in a culture, people find the meaning of life.¹⁴ Analysis of the culture is not easy as what is deepest in people's feeling is often not verbalised. There is no easy solution for the pastor, but a patient and close interaction with the membership in an effort to learn from them so as to feel with them what their symbols of reality are.

It has been pointed out that much of the conflict between pastors and congregations are in the area of changes and decisions,¹⁵ ie. at the artefact level. This is to misunderstand the true nature of our ministry which as Vincent Donovan pointed out is at the level of the assumptions. Many of us in pastoral ministry are really tinkering at the periphery without making the changes which matter most. We have often missed the opportunities given to us as ministers of the gospel to minister the essentials of the gospel.

¹² V Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, p. 81.

¹³ The term 'myth' is used in a technical sense. See P. Frost, *Organisational Culture*, p. 288.

¹⁴ P Frost, p. 234

¹⁵ R Croucher's article reprinted in *New Life*, 30 June, 1994, p. 11.

II. CHRIST AND CULTURE

In this session we will review the book *Christ and Culture* written by H Richard Niebuhr about 45 years ago. It is a classic, but not an easy book to read. He explored the various interactions between Christianity and Culture and illustrated his points with examples from the church through the 20 centuries. In his book, he classified the relationship between Christ and culture into 5 neat categories. This does not imply that these are separate entities, but rather in many of the responses to define the relationship between Christ and culture, there are these 5 elements. In some responses, one of these elements stands out more than others while in some responses, there are several of these elements intertwined together.

1. CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE

This motif is suggested in I John 2:15.¹⁶ Whatever that does not belong to Christ is under the rule of the devil. The monastic movement is one example of this culture. This approach has its roots in strict legalism.

Perhaps the best exponent of this motif is Tertullian of the early church. He was a presbyter at Carthage in the second century A.D. and trained in rhetoric and law, a prestigious background in those days. He was a brilliant orator and writer of the second century. Many of his one-liners remained with us today. He was the first of the Latin fathers to write extensively in defence of the faith, denied any philosophical approach to theology in his well known rhetorical question, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?'. This overstatement was in response to the gnostics who used philosophical arguments in their attacks on the Christian dogma. He rejected anything that had to do with culture because he believed that it is in culture that sin resides.

Tertullian was a strict moralist and this combined with his legal background led him to join the Montanist movement in his later years. Account has also to be taken of the African theological tradition to which he was an heir. African Christianity had always been passionate and intense, mourning man's inherent depravity and exulting in God's salvation. It is not surprising that the doctrine of predestination should have derived from among the spiritual heirs of Tertullian.

For Tertullian, his starting point was the guilty man and the questions of importance to him were 'How can I find acceptance and salvation?', and 'How are the benefits of Christ applied to me?'¹⁷ It is from this that he worked towards the doctrine of the work and person of Christ. His approach was legalistic and therefore, repentance and baptism became the conditions of grace. The sacrament of penance developed out of this and this approach in the west laid the foundation for the early church to head straight into the legalism of the medieval church and there it stayed until the Reformation.¹⁸

The proponents of this approach were sincere people and devoted to the claims of Christ. They were struggling to remain true to Christ and avoid the temptations of this world. Niebuhr accepts that this is an inevitable answer given that there are times when we need to withdraw and renounce what is not of Christ, but this is also an inadequate position. Jesus Christ 'has become human in a culture; who is not only in culture, but into whom culture has penetrated.'¹⁹ The Incarnation speaks of the interaction of God within the material world that is His. John 1:11 reminds us that He came to that which was his own, We are locked into a cultural expression of some sort. Niebuhr pointed out that 'the movement of withdrawal and renunciation is a necessary element in every Christian life, even though it be followed by an equally necessary movement of responsible engagement in cultural tasks.'²⁰ We are not to think of the relationship between Christ and culture in a linear, static manner, but as a

¹⁶ 1 John 2:15. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love for the Father is not in him.

¹⁷ J B Torrance, *Lecture Notes in Fuller's D. Min. course, Theology and Ministry of Worship*, (PM 706).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Niebuhr, p. 69.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 68.

relationship that exists in a dynamic equilibrium which is the only proper way to understand all relationships.

2 .THE CHRIST OF CULTURE

There is in this approach a loyalty to culture. We see this trend in the teachings of the gnostics²¹ (2nd century A.D.), Immanuel Kant²² (1724-1804), Schleiermacher(1768-1834) and Harnarck(1851-1930). It tends to find favour among the aristocrat.

In the Christ of culture, there is no tension between Christ and the world. In stripping off those attributes of Christ which have become a scandal to society, cultural Christianity has harmonised Christ and the world which is what Schleiermacher, the father of liberal Christianity, did. It preaches the universal fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and the infinite value of the human soul. It made Christianity acceptable to the prevailing culture.

In dealing with the issue of law and grace, the cultural Christian tends to lean towards law and this leads to what Calvin called a legalistic repentance. Cultural Christianity acknowledges the human person as it is derived from natural theology. It therefore gives rise to a self-reliant humanism.²³

The basic problem is in their Christology. Only certain aspects of Christ that is consistent with that culture is taken. It sees Christ as the great teacher, reformer liberator, etc. In doing so, it distorts the true image of Christ and strips Christ of all distinctiveness as the Incarnate Son of God. It does not start with the question, 'Who Christ is?', and therefore does not acknowledge the Trinitarian Godhead.

This approach has been condemned by fundamentalist Christianity and rightly so. However, fundamentalist Christianity has also developed a culture of its own and to which it rigidly adhere. Who is the Christ of fundamentalist Christianity?, we need to ask. If the answer does not conform to the Incarnate Christ, then it has become another form of cultural Christianity. The Christ of many Chinese churches is also a Christ of culture. This issue will be taken up at a later stage of the study.

3. CHRIST ABOVE CULTURE

The above two approaches take extreme positions in the relationship between Christ and culture. The first denies culture and the second in subordinating Christ to culture effectively denies the uniqueness of Christ as the second Person of the Trinity.

This and the next two approaches acknowledge the importance of culture and the uniqueness of Christ and seek various ways to bring the two together. As created beings, humanity expresses itself through cultural exchanges and Niebuhr argues that 'culture itself is a divine requirement'²⁴.The incarnate Jesus expresses Himself through the cultural medium of the Jewish world. He used the symbols of His environment in the parables He taught and in the way He related with His disciples.

This approach of 'Christ above culture' is what we may call the synthesist approach. It is really a synthesis of reason and revelation. It seeks to absolutise what is relative. It is a reduction of the infinite to a finite form, and a materialisation of the dynamic.²⁵ It gives an Mon of perfection, but in effect it is not. This system deals more with the culture of the Christians than the Christianisation of culture.²⁶

²¹ A system of religious philosophy which was prevalent in the second century AD.

²² See his notable work in Religion within the Limits of Reason.

²³ Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, p. 113.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 118.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 145

²⁶ Ibid. p. 128.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) is perhaps the best exponent of this system. A great scholastic theologian, he joined the Dominicans who emphasised the gospel and academic leaning. His reasons for belief in the existence of God as spelled out in the 'five ways' remain as the starting point in thinking about God for many people. As a monk in his withdrawal from the society at large, he proposed a system of ethics that found strong support not only from his monastery but also in the church. His system has a strong dependence on natural law and therefore legalistic in dealing with the theme of law and grace. It is culturally conditioned and therefore subject to continuous and infinite conversion because culture is subject to change. The formulations in this system is at best provisional, otherwise, those who come after will be more concerned with the defence of the culture synthesised with gospel rather than with the gospel itself. It tends to drift toward the approach of the cultural Christian.

It is within the desire of man to seek unity and integrity. There will always be this trend to find the cultural expression to the claims of the gospel. As we daily seek the revelation from the Word, this approach represents the honest and sincere desire to express that understanding in terms of our philosophy and social framework.

Since culture is the work of man and when that revelation is worked into the cultural framework and absolutised, then this approach leads to the development of a rigid structure and therefore the institutionalisation of the church, Christ and gospel. It leads to a cultural Christianity. This 'man-devised form represents a usurpation in which time seeks to exercise the power of eternity and man the power of God.'²⁷ The defect in this system is that it treats the relationship of the gospel and culture in a static manner and does not allow for a dynamic process to take place. Furthermore, this system does not take seriously the fallen state of mankind.

4. CHRIST AND CULTURE IN PARADOX

This is a dualistic approach to the issue. Unlike the Christ above culture approach, this dualistic approach take the state of fallen mankind seriously. It assumes a light and darkness motif pitting the two in a conflict. Christian theology rejects such an approach. The proponents of this take their cue from verses such as I John 1:6-7.²⁸

The word 'dualism' comes from the Greek word duo meaning two.' The dualist sees the world not in its unity, but in its divisiveness and conflict. He contrasts good and evil, law and grace, wrath and mercy, or even God as a grumpy Father with God as a loving Son. The two entities are thought of as equal, and opposed.

There is such a dualistic motif in the writings of Paul. He contrasts the life in the flesh and the life in the Spirit (Rom. 7-8). There is indeed a real struggle in the Christian life as we live in the in-between times. There is the power of sin and the power of God in the Holy Spirit, and we ascribe to them equal power as in a conflict. God is One and sovereign. So often we start our theology from the sin of man and build the grace of God around it. Rather, we start from the grace of God and Who God is?.

The distinction between the dualist and the synthesist lies in their view of the sinful nature of man. The dualist sees the work of man as infected with sin and therefore regards culture as 'erecting towers that aspire to heaven on a fault in the earth's crust'.²⁹ As a result they are disinterested in culture and seek emancipation from human institution to the allegiance in Jesus Christ. They do not authenticate all cultural norms as the cultural and synthetic Christians do.³⁰ They are often criticised as antinomians.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 147.

²⁸ 1 John 1:6. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we #a and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he I A Me VIA we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

²⁹ Niebuhr, p. 156.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 187.

It is because the dualists see the need to interact with culture and are not willing to accept the accommodation viewpoint, that they have been reinvigorators of both Christianity and culture. They have mediated new resolutions and emancipated Christianity from the customs and organisations that have been substituted for the living Lord.³¹

It is because the dualists see the need to interact with culture and are not willing to accept the accommodation viewpoint, that they have been reinvigorators of both Christianity and culture. They have mediated new resolutions and emancipated Christianity from the customs and organisations that have been substituted for the living Lord.³²

Furthermore, because of their lack of interest in the existing culture, they tend to drift into a cultural conservatism. They are only interested to bring change into their religious life and to let state and economic culture remain unchanged.³³

5. CHRIST THE TRANSFORMER OF CULTURE

Evangelical used to champion the stand of 'Christ against culture' until the appearance of a book in 1947, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* by Carl Henry who was one of the first to call the evangelicals back to what Niebuhr termed, 'Christ transforming culture'.³⁴

The Christians are not of the world, but they are in the world and God does not intend to take them out of the world (John 17:11).³⁵ They are in the world just as Christ incarnate is in the world in human form (John 17:15-16).³⁶ He came as a man and not in a man. Humanity is part of the deity of God.³⁷ In this there is no dualism, ie. a spiritual versus a secular.³⁸

Rom. 12:2³⁹ reminds us that we are not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed. However, this transformation is, to quote Niebuhr,

.....often perverted into banal, Pelagian theologies in which men were concerned with the symptoms of sin, not its roots, and thought it possible to channel the grace and power of God into the canals they engineered. Thus the conversionism of Edwards was used to justify the psychological mechanics of shabby revivalism, with its mass production of renovated souls, and the sociological science of that part of the social gospel which expected to change prodigal mankind by improving the quality of the husks served in the pigsty.⁴⁰

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE

The culture of our day is pluralistic. However, our present pluralistic culture is not new. It was there in the early church and this was well dealt with in M Green's book, *Evangelism in the Early Church*⁴¹ We work in an open and tolerant society even when there are strong disagreement with our ideas.⁴²

³¹ Ibid. P.186.

³² Ibid. P.186.

³³ Ibid. p. 188.

³⁴ D A Carson and J D Woodbridge in the Preface to *God and Culture*, p. Vill.

³⁵ John 17:11. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name - the name you gave me - so that they may be one as we are one.

³⁶ John 17:15. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

³⁷ K Barth, 'The Humanity of God, In Hodgson and King, *Readings In Christian Theology*, p. 78-80.

³⁸ R Anderson, 'Living in the World, in *Theological Foundations of Ministry* (Ed. R Anderson), p. 567ff.

³⁹ Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your *mind*. Then you will be able to discern what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.

⁴⁰ Niebuhr. p. 220.

⁴¹ M Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, p. 13-47.

⁴² D A Carson, 'Christian Witness In an Age of Pluralism', in *God and Culture*, (Ed. Carson and Woodbridge), p. 31-66.

In such a culture more and more we (ie. Christians) are pushed against the wall and we need to be able to trim off the peripheral and non-essential and stand on what it is that makes Christianity distinctive. This very distinctive feature must reside within the nature of the God that we worship. In the book, *God and Culture* (Ed. D A Carson and J D Woodbridge), the author concludes the sub-section on 'Christian Witness in an Age of Pluralism', with the question, 'How then shall we know what God is like?'. He then went on in the next two subsections to discuss the question of revelation in the Christian faith.⁴³

The question 'Who God is?' lies at the heart of our debate over pluralism. While we work through the culture of our day, Christianity needs to exert an influence to shape culture as well. We need to go back again and again to the revelation of the Trinitarian God to judge culture and not to allow the present pluralism to chip away at our foundation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There must be myriad of permutations in the way people express the core assumptions that they hold. When we read a text such a culture, it is so easy to misread it and make conclusions that are totally erroneous. As Christians, we need to make judgements on culture with care because of the following reasons.

1. The partial, incomplete and fragmentary nature of our knowledge; 2. The measure of our faith and unbelief; 3. The historical position we occupy and the duties of our station in society; and 4. The relative values of things.⁴⁴

While there are many areas where there is a need to transform culture ⁴⁵ yet there are many areas where we are not able to make dogmatic statements in judgement of culture. We need to be aware that there is a difference between God's absolute reality and the culturally relative reality around us.⁴⁶ There is a gap between the two and with the limitation and finiteness of our knowledge, we try to bridge it in our different ways. We also need to develop an awareness of our own cultural programming that mistakenly teaches us to feel that we are right in our values, lifestyle, thinking, and therefore are better than those around us.⁴⁷

In coming to understand culture as an expression of the faith that is in us, we need also to understand there is a diversity in the values that others hold. It is this relativity of values that makes it impossible for us to make categorical statements on some aspects of culture. Our understanding can only be enhanced by trying to appreciate some of these values sociologically. A Korean lady, the only Asian female on the teaching staff of Fuller concluded her article on Diversity with this statement.

Once we see ourselves in others and others in ourselves through our shared stories, our perceptions become enlarged, and we realise that we are all marginal. This enlargement of perception through mutual affirmation opens the way for the building of community in diversity.⁴⁸

In concluding his study on *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr wrote,

We make our free decisions not only in such dependence on origins beyond our control, but also in dependence on consequences that are not in our power.⁴⁹

⁴³ Ibid. p. 49-60.

⁴⁴ Niebuhr, p. 234.

⁴⁵ I have indicated above some of those areas in relation to the Chinese churches.

⁴⁶ C H and M G Kraft, 'Understanding and Valuing Multi-ethnic Diversity, In Fuller's Theology, *Notes and News, Diversity: Threat or Opportunity?*, Dec. 93, p. 6-8.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Y L Hertig, 'Coping as a Minority Female Leader', in Fuller's *Theology, Notes and News, Diversity: Threat or Opportunity?*, Dec. 93, p. 13-16.

⁴⁹ Niebuhr, p. 250

I was sharing with Geoff regarding the cultural Christianity that I see in so many Chinese churches. I made the remark that I believe that I am free from the bondage of the Chinese culture, but how do I help my friends to be free from it? Geoff's answer is,

By the preaching of the cross. We will never free people from culture by pointing out the bondages they represent. We will do it only by a pure preaching of the gospel. It is Christ who transforms men and women, and he cannot do it by a theology of the cross, a detached, objective set of ideas, though they may be correct doctrine.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Personal communication.

III. THE INCARNATION --THE HERMENEUTICAL CENTER

1. DEFINING CHRISTIANITY

We see Christianity with cultural glasses⁵¹ and the Christ that we have come to know may have been a product of our culture. We have mentioned that the god of Schleiermacher is the god of the aristocrat culture; and the god of some of the Chinese the god of Confucianism and Buddhism. We will see in a little while that the god of Arius was the god of Greek absolutism, the supreme substance. We can go on with the god of the liberationist, etc. Take for example liberal Christianity. Richard Niebuhr in his most expressive style describes the god of liberal theology thus,

A god without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.⁵²

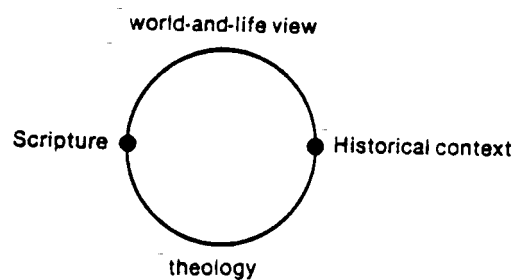
What we see here is the abstraction from Christianity only those aspects of God and Christ that fit into our cultural framework. It is a god that has been subordinated to the prevailing culture. Well, we might ask what about the god of evangelical Christianity?

2. THE HERMENEUTICS OF CULTURE AND THE CULTURE OF HERMENEUTICS

I have made mention above to the core assumptions out of which culture develops. When we can interpret our own culture, we come to understand ourselves. When we confront a culture we need to interpret that culture in terms of its core assumptions. This is not an easy process. More often we judge it in terms of our own understanding and methodology. We may think of culture as a text that has come to us and we need to interpret it. We can look at culture sociologically, historically, philosophically as well as theologically.

The problem of hermeneutics can only be dealt with superficially here. There is no doubt that we bring to the bible our presupposition. Indeed, it was Bultmann who insisted that there cannot be any such *thing* as presuppositionless exegesis⁵³ I have mentioned above a few of the cultural gods that Christianity has created.

As we interact with the text of scripture, there is set up the so called hermeneutical circle.⁵⁴ The deeper the appreciation of the text, the more it informs us of our culture, and the richer the understanding of our culture, the greater our appreciation of the text, and so a deepening spiral is set up. This is illustrated in the following diagram.⁵⁵



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⁵² H R Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God & America*, p. 193.

⁵³ R Bultmann, 'Is Exegesis without Presupposition possible?' in *Existence and Faith*, p. 347

⁵⁴ C R Padilla, 'Hermeneutics and Culture', in Stott and Coote (Ed.), *Down to Earth*, p. 75-76.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 75.

3. CULTURE AT NICEA - THE GRAFTING OF THE TRINITY ONTO THE GREEK GOD OR THE GOD OF ANY CULTURE.

So what culture to do with theology? A great deal. We are all familiar with the Nicene Creed and have come to regard it as the foundational statement of our faith. We see the problem of Nicea to be a theological one, but it should also be seen as a cultural problem. Arian was not the villain of his age. He was genuine in wrestling with the concept of God and the deity of Christ. Arian presented his thesis with the assumption of God in Greek philosophical thought, i.e. he conceived of God in absolute oneness.

THE BACKGROUND TO NICEA

In the early fourth century, there was a bishop of Alexandria named Alexander. He taught that the Son was eternally begotten of the Father and in every way equal to the Father. Because he so emphasised the oneness of the Son with the Father, he was accused of Sabellianism (or modalism where there is no distinction between the Son and the Father). In Alexandria, there was also a very learned presbyter named Arius who taught differently. He subordinated the Son to the Father in his famous statement, 'There was a time when He was not', referring to the Son as the firstborn of all creation.

So the controversy engulfed the whole of Christendom and culminated at an ecumenical conference at Nicea. The dispute was over the words, *homo-ousios* and *homo-i-ousios*.

THEOLOGY SUBORDINATED TO CULTURE

Much of the theological differences in the early church, apart from the differences in terminology between the Hellenic east and the Latin west, stem from the fact that the Greeks tried to graft the incarnation onto a god whom they understood in terms of the Greek deity. This is the god of the philosophers, the first cause or the unmoved mover. This graft did not take. The controversy at Nicea over the term *omoiousia* which Arian favoured is an example of this problem. Arian's starting point was the Absolute God onto whom he tried to fit the man Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ So his problem ran something like this. If he put Jesus Christ on the same standing as God, then God would no longer be absolute. To do otherwise would make Jesus Christ less than God. Athanasius pointed out that the incarnation⁵⁷ is the starting point in our understanding of God. He anchored his understanding of the incarnation firmly onto the redemptive work of God and from this he did not waver. Bromiley commented on the stand of Athanasius in these words.

Athanasius undoubtedly put the incarnation at the centre of the gospel, yet not in the place of or at the expense of the death and rising again, but rather in unbreakable relationship with them. ⁵⁸

The difference in the two approaches by Arian and Athanasius lies in their ability to go past their cultural heritage. Athanasius freed himself from his cultural heritage to interact with the reality of God while Arian was locked in by his Greek heritage.

The statement of faith from Nicea has remained the definitive statement for the doctrine of the Trinity up to today.⁵⁹ It has not attempted to speculate on how it is possible, but merely to state the confession of the experience of the people of God. It is interesting that a modern day theologian, T. F. Torrance has taken a fresh look at the doctrine of the Trinity in his recent book, *The Trinitarian Faith*, based on the work of Athanasius at Nicea.

⁵⁶ J N D Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 243.

⁵⁷ Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word*.

⁵⁸ G Bromiley, *Historical Theology*, p. 80.

⁵⁹ The Nicea statement of faith has received only minor modifications in subsequent Councils including that from Chalcedon in 451 AD.

4. THE INCARNATION AS THE HERMENEUTICAL CENTRE

Why is a Christology important and central to the discussion of culture? If the *doctrine of God* lies at *the heart* of contemporary debates over culture⁶⁰, and if this understanding of God is obtained from the revelation given in the bible, then the supreme and final revelation of God in Jesus Christ must be central to our discussion on culture.

Calvin saw the only way to understand God is to place Christ at the centre of all things as He is truly God and truly man (Col. 1:15-18). He wrote the Institutes to help the people to read the bible. The only way to understand the Bible is to interpret it Christologically. In his commentary on John's Gospel, he wrote, 'The Scriptures are to be read with the purpose of finding Christ there'.⁶¹ The bible is a book that enables us to appropriate the life-giving grace of God.⁶² Calvin thought of the bible as a mirror showing Christ. He saw the Lord's supper as the mirror God has given to us to see Christ, even more intimately than the bible.

The God that we worship is the Triune God. I refer you to the NCTM Pastors' School of 1994 where many excellent papers on the subject were presented. It suffice to say at this juncture that our culture reflects our understanding of the God we worship. If this is so then the way we conceive of God in His Triunity is vital to the discussion on Christianity and Culture.

5. A CRITIQUE OF CULTURE

We have seen above that it is our core assumptions that determine our culture. One of the core assumption is the way we conceive of God. As Christians, the way we think of our God determines the way we go about doing things that give meaning to our lives. Moltmann made this remark regarding the way our earthly political and religious orders are structured.

The notion of a divine monarchy in heaven and on earth, for its part, generally provides the justification for earthly domination - religious, moral, patriarchal or political domination - and makes it a hierarchy, a 'holy rule'.⁶³

When we think of God in His absolute unity, then we have monarchianism, ie. one above all. We have used monarchianism as a model in political and church relationships and in government. That is why our churches have difficulty in adopting a plurality of presbyters. Even in those who have adopted this, there must need be one as the first among equals. We have modelled our culture according to our core assumption of the Godhead. A doctrine of the Trinity must overcome this monarchianism.⁶⁴

While the trinitarian dogma has been developed Once the time of Tertullian, its fullest exposition was not till the time of Augustine. He developed the Trinitarian dogma as a category of individual persons as against the thinking of the Cappadocian fathers who developed the dogma as a community of persons.⁶⁵ The former understanding of the Trinity leads to the excesses of individualism in the west.

The persons of the Trinity are distinct from each other and yet there is a oneness of substance. It was John of Damascus (7th-8th Cent. AD) who expounded the idea of the interpenetration of the persons within the Godhead. He used the term, perichoresis to describe this relationship. Moltmann developed this idea of the interpenetration of the persons of the Godhead to avoid any tea of subordination within the Trinity. In his section on the 'Life of the Trinity', he concludes,

⁶⁰ D A Carson and J D Woodbridge (Ed.), 'Christian Witness in an Age of Pluralism', in *God and Culture*, p. 46.

⁶¹ Quoted in Calvin, *Institutes Vol. 1*, p. Ivi.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ J Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 191 -192.

⁶⁴ J Moltmann, *Trinity*, p. 192.

⁶⁵ J Moltmann, *Trinity*, p. 198.

.... every divine Person exists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they exist totally in the other the Father exists by virtue of his love, as himself entirely in the Son; the Son, by virtue of his self-surrender, exists as himself totally in the Father; and so on.⁶⁶

We lack this insight into the interpenetration of the persons within our community. Where there is this interpenetration this is often with the aim of control and manipulation which leads to a loss of personhood.

In this framework of our understanding of trinitarian relationship, there is an implied freedom of the individual person. There is freedom in a community of men and women without supremacy and subjection. Yet at the same time the men and women in the community retain their respective differentiation and are not enmeshed into an amorphous mass. Just as dignity is conferred so is freedom conferred. Both are relational entities. I quote again from Moltmann.

I am free and feel myself to be truly free when I am respected and recognized by others and when I for my part respect and recognize them. I become truly free when I open my life for other people and share with them, and when other people open their lives for me and share them with me. Then the other person is no longer the limitation of my freedom; he is an expansion of it.⁶⁷

What is implied in this is that there is love within the relationship just as there is love in the trinitarian relationship. In other words, it is a liberating love as the title one of Geoff's book goes.

It is in terms of one's distinctiveness as well as interpenetration that we formulate a model of relationship. Here I want to shift over to the sociological equivalents of cohesion and disengagement. These terms are used in sociological models. In a relationship there is cohesion and disengagement. Where the two individuals or units are so cohered that they cannot be disengaged, that is referred to as enmeshment. It is not a healthy relationship. It is the loss of one's distinctiveness or identity. On the other hand, to be so disengaged that there is no cohesion whatsoever is also an unhealthy state. It is the loss of interpenetration of persons.

This model of interlocking circles can be applied in marriage and family. It can also be applied in intrachurch and interchurch relationship. All cultures have their assumptions in the relationship formed at these basic units of society.

We can also relate this model in the workplace as well. Is the workplace merely for the accumulation of profits only? Or is it the place for the development of those who work there? Is the so-called Protestant work ethic a Christian principle to apply in the workplace? Is efficiency and productivity the only criterion to judge the performance of a workplace? Are those employed merely the servants of the masters? If so we are back to a monarchian theology. Is it possible to experience the interpenetration of persons within the workplace? Can we not continue to keep in employment an inefficient worker out of grace? Could not the workplace be the place for the development for these workers? These are important questions for the Christians engaged in organisational culture.

Our western culture has put the emphasis on structure above people. In so doing we have ignored the dignity of the human person. Such a dignity is conferred. We confer this dignity onto the human person not by lording it over them or by contorting them into a rigid structure, but in empowering them.⁶⁸ God confers upon us our dignity by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 173.

⁶⁷ J Moltmann, *Trinity*, p. 216.

⁶⁸ H Thelicke, 'The Evangelical Faith' in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, Ed. R Anderson, p. 63 ff.

ADDENDUM TO SESSION III

I have passed over many issues that are relevant to the discussion on the Trinity in the previous session. It assumes many things as the study locates the anchor point from which we can interpret our culture. That is in the Incarnation and the revelation of the Trinitarian Godhead. I realised that I may have given the impression of an egalitarianism within the Trinity. This is not so and I apologise if I have given that impression. Looking through my paper again, I realised that it is not difficult to come to that conclusion. The matter had been brought up when this was presented at the Pastors' school two years ago. I had written a note to correct this but this was not included in the study notes.

Many theologians, over the centuries, had shipwrecked when embarking on the discussion on the Trinity. Many had said what should not have been said and others have not said what should have been said. What I mean is this. One can so emphasise the oneness of the Godhead that obscures the distinction of the Persons, or one can so emphasise the uniqueness of the Persons of the Trinity that one can be charged with tritheism. The 'perichoretic' relations within the Godhead can be so emphasised in a social Trinity that one loses the sense of the hierarchy within the Trinity.

My presentation reflects very much the 'cultural baggage' that I carry. In my church, I have to be careful about expressing an opinion just in case it be taken as fait accompli by some sections. The Chinese concept of God leans towards monarchianism. Chinese society had for centuries been under the authority of the emperor, *ti*. Unfortunately, when Mateo Ricci (1551 - 1611), a Jesuit missionary, came to China, he favoured the use of the term *shang-ti*, (the Lord from above), to refer to God. He equated *shang-ti* with the personal God Yahweh of the Bible and this term has been retained in the Union Version of the Chinese Bible. This has been the orientation of the Chinese churches since.

Monarchianism has to be rejected and when emphasised strongly, the pendulum may swing to a democratisation of the Trinity. This can so easily happen. To do so would be to read into the Trinity our cultural framework. There is a divine hierarchy in which the Father is *fons divinitatis* in the Triune Godhead. This is not to infer a superordination or subordination within the Godhead. I refer to a comment by G Bingham in the 1994 Pastors' school.

Popular today in the interests of the establishing of certain social mores is the democratisation of the Trinity. It is conceivable that there is a Trinitarian hierarchy and we may miss the love-dynamics such as divine hierarchy may hold - and thus the love-dynamics the human equivalent may hold - In dismissing hierarchy because, as is the case with all ontological categories, there has been misuse and abuse of it. The ineradicable (fallen) human idea that superordination and subordination mean superiority and inferiority is countered by Christ's loving subordination to the Father whilst being 'one' with Him, and his teaching of the greatness of the one being the servant.⁶⁹

Our understanding of the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity prevents us from embracing a static model in our community relationship. There is a movement from one person to the other in the Trinitarian Godhead, a movement of giving and receiving in love. So too there is this movement of giving to and receiving from one another in our communal relationship. The movement in these relationships is expressed for us as the Covenant and this leads us into our fourth session.

⁶⁹ G Bingham, 'The Law of the Triune Godhead', *Relationships: Divine-Human*, NCTM Pastors' School, 1994, p. 7.

IV. COVENANT OR CONTRACT—I

A culture will not change unless the core assumptions that people hold dear are changed. The human person will always find meaning as an integral whole. At the NCTM Pastors' session on 'Christ Liberator of the Conscience'⁷⁰, it was pointed out that 'conscience is always incorporated within the framework of a particular anthropology. Hence it is always indicative of a specific self-understanding of human existence.'⁷¹ A person cannot deny that which his or her inner being holds.

There are several ways of conducting a relationship. It may be on economic grounds, utilitarian and so on. For example, many marital relationships in the past have been stable because the woman of the house adopts a submissive role in exchange for economic security. In that context the relationship may be fulfilling for both parties because of the assumptions that each holds. However if those assumptions are altered then the way in which they relate has to change. It then needs to find a new forms of expression. For our understanding of relationships, we need to come back to what we know as the covenant.

Even in the secular world there is a sense of a finality and unchangeableness in the understanding of the covenant. For a corporation, the constitution can be changed with a stated majority of its shareholders or members. In order to preserve something that cannot be changed in any way by any subsequent generation of members, this has to be stated in the constitution as a 'covenant clause'. This clause then cannot be altered in any way at subsequent meetings of the corporation regardless of support given at the meeting. It will stand forever as long as the corporation exists.

In our relationships today, we often come into it with a contractual framework rather than the biblical covenantal framework. The contractual framework celebrates the idea of mutuality and is based on a given set of laws or regulations. So the church's relationship with the pastor, sadly, has become a contractual rather than covenantal one. Our marital relationship has also become contractual. This is a tragedy for our churches and families today.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE COVENANT

The theme of the covenant is central to the bible. This theme runs throughout the Old and New Testaments. The study is important to us today as we have discarded the covenant in favour of the contract or rather we have come to understand the covenant in terms of a contractual framework.

The word '**covenant**' in the bible is used to describe the relationship between God and man. It is an everlasting covenant. We should note that the concept of an everlasting covenant lies within the relationship of the Triune Godhead. The Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in eternity, giving to and receiving from one another in communion. They are distinct from one another but they coinhere in a perichoretic relationship. Man was created in God's image in that covenantal relationship.⁷²

In our study of the Covenant, we need to explore the general concept of covenant in the bible and traced its development through the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Issac and Jacob, David and finally the excellence and glory of the New Covenant. It has to be emphasised that we are discussing the one eternal covenant and all these specific covenants in the bible must be considered as subsets or expressions of the one eternal covenant.⁷³

⁷⁰ NCTM Pastors Monday Study Group, 5 September, 1994. G Bingham.

⁷¹ H Thielicke, *Theological Ethics, Vol. 1, p. 314*. Quoted in NCTM, 5 Sept., 94.

⁷² I recognise that the treatment of the biblical material in this section on 'The Theology of the Covenant' is brief as our concern here is more with its relationship to culture. For more detailed treatment on the subject of the Covenant, I refer to the NCTM Pastors' School of 1995, *God's Covenant and Christ's Church*.

⁷³ NCTM Pastors' Study Group, 'Christ: The Mediator of the better Covenant - I & II', 17 Oct., 94 and 7 Nov., 94.

Covenant is a relational term. Contract is legal. While the concept of covenant is expounded from the bible, yet its application is by no means restricted to the religious sphere. The concept of covenant should undergird all our relationships. In fact following the reformation, the recovery of the concept of the covenant influenced much of political theory up to today.⁷⁴ We will take a look at that later on.

C H Dodd in his lectures on Gospel and Law, remarked that many theologians 'have protested against any construction of the Christian religion which, by introducing legal conceptions, seem to blur the splendour of the Gospel in the affirmation of the free and unconditioned grace of God to sinful men.'⁷⁵ Because this understanding of covenant has been understood in a legalistic framework it distorts the whole approach to God and the Scriptures. Unfortunately this legalistic framework has been firmly entrenched in the church thinking since the early centuries.

In the next few sessions, I will take a look at a few key points in the history of the church to show the dominance of legalistic thinking. For a brief period, the covenant teaching was recovered at the reformation and then was lost again to legalism. The basic problem there was that in their core assumption they have inverted the order of grace and law. I will then look at some of the general implications of the covenant in our relationship and contrast this with the introspective narcissistic culture so prevalent today. Finally I will look at a few of the burning issues in our society today, such as worship, marriage and ethics. The scope taken is wide and within the time constraint, the treatment in some areas will of necessity be brief and maybe inadequate.

EARLY CHURCH

Legalism was rife in the early church. The Pharisaic movement comprised a very devout group of people, but unfortunately they had enshrined into legislation the lessons learnt after the captivity. Jesus had to confront the Pharisees on numerous occasions to tell them that it is grace and not law. The message did not get across.

Paul had the same problem in the Galatian church. It was again legalism taking over the gospel of free grace. The people were returned to a bondage from which they were once freed.

In the second century AD there was a man named Tertullian from Carthage in the Western Roman Empire. He was the first of the Latin writers to gain prominence in the church. His contribution to theology is best remembered as he gave us the word 'Trinity' to describe the Godhead. He was also a rigorous apologist who went on the attack against the heretics of the church. However his teachings suffered from one drawback. He had a training in law and he approached the issues of the church with that framework. The Latin vocabulary was rich in the legal and administrative fields, but it was limited in theology. Tertullian had to coin numerous theological terms to express what was in Hebrew and Greek. Now, when the Greek word *metanoia* (repentance) had to be translated into Latin, it adopted a legal connotation and this paved the way for a legal repentance. His teachings abounded with do's and don't's and there were severe penalties for not conforming. His teaching was a mix of what Niebuhr termed 'Christ against culture', and eventually what developed was a form of 'cultural Christianity'.

The important unit in Roman law was the *paterfamilias* (the head of the family or household). This leads to the view that the law is the final authority. In the natural world and in human relationships there are eternal principles inherent in natural order. All are subject to a common 'obligation'. Failure to fulfil this 'obligatio' requires reparation either of offering compensation or enduring pain. Every offence carries an exact penalty. This can be mitigated by the bond of friendship. When applied to the gods, sacrifice is the answer.

⁷⁴ Pev. Prof. Jurgen Moltmann has written an article, 'Covenant or Leviathan? Political Theology for Modern Times', in the *SJT*, Vol. 47, p. 19-41.

⁷⁵ C H Dodd, *Gospel and Law* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 65. Quoted in J B Webster, 'Christology, Imitability and Ethics', *SJT*, Vol. 39, p.311.

For Tertullian, his starting point was the guilty man and the questions of importance to him were 'How can I find acceptance and salvation?', and 'How are the benefits of Christ applied to me?'⁷⁶ It is from this that he worked towards the doctrine of the work and person of Christ. His approach was legalistic and therefore, repentance and baptism became the conditions of grace. The sacrament of penance developed out of this and this approach in the west laid the foundation for the early church to head straight into the legalism of the medieval church and there it stayed until the Reformation.⁷⁷

The eastern church, being Greek dominated, was more philosophical in its approach to theology and is more concerned with wrestling with the issues relating to the person of Jesus Christ rather than with the practical issues of the church. Their starting point was not 'How?', but 'Who?', ie. 'Who is Jesus Christ?'. Unfortunately, western legalism dominated the church.

MEDIEVAL CHURCH

One of the great thinkers in the medieval church was St Anselm. His contribution to the church and theology is immense and the influence of his thought is still being felt in the church today. His thesis on the doctrine of atonement has been a cornerstone in Christian thinking ever since. However, with his legal background, Anselm put his doctrine of atonement on a legal basis.

The real value of Anselm's theory establishes the objective character of the atonement and bases its necessity on the immutable nature of God, which makes it impossible that He should permit the violation of His honour to go unpunished. It deals with God first, and only secondarily with us, and a transaction that gives satisfaction to God. Thus propitiation is the basis of reconciliation.⁷⁸ We can see that in Anselm's satisfaction theory, the basis of all succeeding study of the atonement had been laid. It ensures the approach to the atonement which we call 'evangelical', that is, the approach from God's side.⁷⁹

Anselm's theory based the redemption exclusively on the death of Christ, and denying the atoning significance of His life. It emphasises the substitutionary element, but has little on the participation on the merits of Christ. It represents the application of the merits of Christ to the sinner as a merely external transaction. There is no hint of the mystical union of Christ and believers.

Anselm's model (of the legal processes) of God's ordering of His world cannot be accepted to express the relations between God and man. He had taken the Roman model developed by Tertullian and applied it to explain the atonement. He appealed to reason and made little reference to the Bible. T F Torrance described Anselm's theory of the atonement as 'a severely juridical conception of atonement as an external penal transaction between God and sinful humanity, as in the teaching of St Anselm'.⁸⁰ He again took up the point in his book, *The Mediation of Christ*, when he contrasted the difference between an intrinsic and extrinsic conception of atonement.⁸¹ We can only gain a knowledge of things when they are disclosed in their internal relations and structures.⁸² 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.⁸³

⁷⁶ J B Torrance, *Lecture Notes in Fullers D. Min. course, Theology and Ministry of Worship, (PM 706)*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ R A Finlayson, *The Story of Theology*, p. 41.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ T F Torrance, 'Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy', *SJT*, Vol. 39, p. 477.

⁸¹ T F Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 40-42.

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 51.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 47.

V. COVENANT OR CONTRACT—II

REFORMATION

The teaching on the covenant was recovered by Luther (1483-1546), and Calvin (1509-64). Both men identified the priority of grace in their teachings. Calvin developed the meaning of the covenant in 11/10, 11 of his Institutes setting out that there is only ONE covenant expressed in two different manners in the old and new periods.

We need to make two points about our discussion of the covenant.⁸⁴

1. It is a covenant and not a contract. A contract is a mutual agreement and the two parties bind themselves to an agreed set of conditions to ensure some future result. A covenant is not a contract. It is of grace and is initiated and maintained by the Lord. It is not conditional on our effort. It is all of grace. Grace precedes law as Paul argues that the promise to Abraham came first and the law came 430 years later (Gal. 3:17).
2. There are not two covenants, but one covenant expressed as two different forms, the old and the new, the shadow and the substance, the promise and the fulfilment. The grace of God is as much evident in the old as it is in the new.

When we refer to the old and the new covenant, we are not referring to two covenants, but to the two expressions of the one covenant. The old covenant was external to the hearts and minds demanding a compliance which the people did not have the ability to maintain. It is important to point out here that the law spells out the obligations of grace and not the conditions of grace.⁸⁵ In his epistle to the Romans and Galatians, Paul explained that the law could only bring about a sense of guilt and hopelessness. Indeed our transgressions as made known by the law should make us aware of our need of grace.⁸⁶ It is the stubbornness of the human heart that denies this.

The writer to the Hebrews (8:6-15) contrasted the old and new covenants and made it clear that the new covenant through Jesus Christ would be internalised. He was quoting from Jeremiah 31:31 with reference to the promise of the new covenant. The new covenant would be internalised by a process that Jeremiah and his contemporaries did not know about. The writer to the Hebrews made it clear that the process of internalisation is through the mediation of Jesus Christ.⁸⁷

At the last supper Jesus announced that the new covenant would be written in blood, ie. His very own blood, and the cup that they drank would then symbolise the new covenant which was brought in by His mediation.⁸⁸

We do not assume that it is we ourselves who have transacted the new covenant by our decision and that we are now able to internalise the law ourselves. That is not so. We rely solely on the mediation of Jesus Christ to make it possible for us, so that again no one may boast. As it has been pointed out above, Calvin has expounded *sola gratia* in terms of the doctrine of the vicarious humanity and sole priesthood of Christ (Book 11) and the doctrine of union with Christ through the participation in the Spirit (Book 111).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is still our great High Priest today. While His earthly ministry has been completed, He is now 'at the right hand of the right hand of the throne' of God and continues to

⁸⁴ Calvin *Institutes*, 11/10/1 -6.

⁸⁵ J B Torrance, *Covenant or Contract*, S. J. T. 23 (1970), p. 66.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 13.

⁸⁷ This topic has been discussed in the NCTM Pastors' Study Group, 'Christ: The Mediator of the better Covenant - I & II'. 17 Oct., 94 and 7 Nov., 94.

⁸⁸ Luke 22 20

serve at 'the sanctuary set up by the Lord' interceding on our behalf.⁸⁹ This continuing High Priesthood of Jesus Christ highlights the fact that while the victory has been won on the cross of Calvary, we are still living as it were in the shadow of that reality with Christ as our mediator and High Priest. This has implications for our interpersonal relationship and the worship of God.

POST REFORMATION

After Calvin came several saints who veered away from the Incarnational and Trinitarian approach to the understanding of God, and emphasised the piety from man's point of view. These are essentially theologies of works. St John of the Cross is an example of this trend.

St John of the Cross (1542-1591), was a catholic mystical theologian and a Spanish Carmelite who went about barefooted. He came after the reformation, was beatified, made a saint in 1726 and a doctor of the cross in 1926. He wrote several books and among them were *Ascent of Mt Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul*. The latter book had inspired a famous painting of the cross. In these two books, he showed the steps to be taken on the way to receive a vision of or union with God.⁹⁰

The writings showed the typical piety of that age. It was thought that union with God is something one has to strive towards. It is not so. God has created us for union with Himself. That relation is internal to God. The question is not 'How we can attain to it?', as these writers worked to demonstrate, but 'How can we participate in it?', ie. in something that has already been accomplished. Jesus Christ came to draw us into it. We participate in His relation with God.⁹¹

FEDERAL THEOLOGY AND SCHOLASTIC CALVINISM

After the reformers, we see the inversion of grace and law. Natural theology and the light of reason dominated the thinking of that age. The law was regarded as the final authority and central to the covenant. Grace was given only to the elect of God. Grace was made subordinate to election and law. Among those who adopted this order are the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the Southern Baptist in the United States. In fact I may be permitted to add to this the overseas Chinese churches in Australasia, Europe and North America.

Scholars who came after Calvin distorted his teaching and soon there developed the school of Federal Theology (Federal from foedus meaning covenant). This school subordinated grace to law and made the grace of God conditional on the works of man. The thinking of the scholastic Calvinist was dominated by the Aristotelian method of logic and the conception of God as the absolutely omnipotent, omniscient and immutable law giver.⁹²

The reason for this trend is the development of the doctrine of 'double decree' by Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, who made this the major premise of his system of theology.⁹³ Calvin had not taught this. Beza taught that Christ is the mediator, not for all man, but only for the elect. The inevitable result is a doctrine of 'limited atonement' because election is now made prior to grace.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Heb. 8:1-6

⁹⁰ A chart of the complexity of the steps required is given in the notes of the Seminar on the 'Theology and Ministry of Worship'.

⁹¹ This theme has been dealt with very clearly in Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, chapters 3-4.

⁹² M Jinkins, 'Elements of Federal Theology in the Religious Thought of John Locke', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 66:2, p.123-141.

⁹³ J B Torrance, 'Interpreting the Word by the Light of Christ or the Light of Nature? Calvin, Calvinism and Barth', in R V Schnucker (Ed), *Calviniana*, Vol. X, p. 259.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

We have inherited from the scholastic Calvinist the phrase 'covenant of works'. This is the first of a two covenant scheme - the covenant of works with all creation and the covenant of grace with the elect. The phrase 'covenant of works', otherwise referred to as the covenant of nature, covenant of creation or covenant of law, as far as we know, was first used by Dudley Fenner, an English puritan, in his publication, *Theologia Sacra* in 1585.⁹⁵ This covenant of works was originally made with Adam. If he obeyed he would live and if he disobeyed he would surely die. Adam was supposed to be able to discern the laws of nature by the light of reason. This set up a strictly legal relationship between God and Adam.

In the discussion on how this election relate to God's sovereignty and social ethic, J B Torrance traced the way this led to the 'grace-nature' model and subsequently a 'covenant of works'.⁹⁶ There was a return to the medieval view that *grace presupposes nature* and *grace perfects nature* in contrast to the Reformation view that there is nothing prior to grace. So since God has by nature created mankind black and white, so grace does not destroy nature but conforms to nature and this justifies the segregation. It is a deeply dualistic approach so characteristic of our age too.

Theology after the reformation had come a full circle at this point. Law is again made prior to grace. It ought to be pointed out that this modification of Calvin's teaching was made by his successors. Calvin did not teach this.⁹⁷

The Federal Theologians had great influence on the development of democratic governments and issues such as the divine rights of kings, etc. Unfortunately the nature-grace model also advocated ethnic segregation and slavery.⁹⁸ In a recent article in the Time Magazine⁹⁹ was a report that the Southern Baptist made a repentance at their recent Convention of their stand on Federal theology in the past 200 years.

THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The concept of social contract was developed in the philosophy of politics and economics, in particular in the influential writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), in his *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes made use of the social contract theory to justify the absolute power for the sovereign. The late 16th and 17th centuries saw the struggles for justice and liberty with the collapse of feudalism. Pacts and contracts were made to bind people to one another. Hobbes held that a person's duties are laid down by the state. If there is no government to enforce performance of the duties, then the 'duties' are not binding.

The events that led to formulations of this kind in Western Europe were the deposition of Mary Queen of Scots in 1567 and the massacre of the Huguenots¹⁰⁰ in 1572. Questions were raised as to how the rights of both king and people can be safeguarded.¹⁰¹ The answer was 'by covenant, ie. by contract'.

John Locke (1632-1704), known for his thesis on the social contract, came under the influence of scholastic Calvinism.¹⁰² A movement was developing to reject the Divine Rights. There need to be checks and balances between the ruling class and the people. Scholastic Calvinism had taught the contractual framework based on natural theology and the light of

⁹⁵ Ibid. P. 260.

⁹⁶ Ibid. P. 259-267.

⁹⁷ Space does not permit a discussion of the Issues involved here and I simply refer to the following article. J B Torrance, 'Interpreting the Word by the Light of Christ or the Light of Nature? Calvin, Calvinism and Barth, in R V Schnucker (Ed), *Calviniana*, Vol. X, p. 255 -268. This article traces the development of Federal Theology and the implications of this line of thinking in the social unrest of our day.

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Time Magazine, 3 July, 1995, p. 41.

¹⁰⁰ They were French protestants of the 16th and 17th centuries and persecuted during the religious wars of the time.

¹⁰¹ J Torrance, *Calviniana*, p. 261.

¹⁰² M Jinkins, *Federal Theology in the Religious Thought of John Locke*. *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 66:2 (1994), 123-141. This article begins with the characteristics of Federal Theology and shows the influence of scholastic; Calvinism in the writings of John Locke.

reason. Locke saw God as the great law maker. His contemporary, John Milton (1608-1674), who had witnessed the civil war and the execution of Charles I (1600-1649), wrote, 'The crown sits on the constitution, not on the head of a man'. The law became supreme. Soon the law or a contractual relationship found its way into all avenues of life and dictated how humanity should relate to one another. It puts humanity again under a bondage that it should not have known.

THE INDICATIVES OF GRACE PRECEDES THE IMPERATIVES OF LAW.

Covenant has been interpreted in terms of the law and we have come to regard the law as supreme and therefore we seek find our righteousness in terms of what the law demands. In a covenant relationship, the promise is prior to the law. It was the promise to Abraham that made him the father of a great nation, not the law. M. Parsons, in his article on 'Being Precedes Act: Indicatives and Imperative in Paul's Writing',¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴

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'.

COVENANT NOT CONTRACT. GRACE NOT LAW.

When we are in a covenantal relationship, we are in a relationship that is unconditional. The moment we introduce an 'if' into the relationship, we are introducing a conditional clause and that will turn it into a contract. As our relationship with one another develops we come to know the other person more and more. Knowing brings along with it problems. The more you know about a person the more you see the idiosyncrasies, and the more difficult it is to accommodate to that. Closeness brings along an intensity of passion and also an intensity of demands.

Covenant relationship has its basis in grace and forgiveness, without which no relationship in our imperfect humanity can exist. The greater the expectation in that relationship, there will be a need for a greater degree of grace and forgiveness. So when God expects from us a perfect response, He provides the ultimate in grace and forgiveness, ie. in giving to us His Son Jesus Christ, in whom God has provided the perfect response on our behalf. In responding to God's covenant it is not our response that is perfect, but we come through the perfect covenant response of Jesus Christ. It is only grace and forgiveness within the relationship that will sustain and nurture it thereby leading the participants into greater intimacy. Otherwise, its

¹⁰³ M. Parsons, 'Being Precedes Act: Indicatives and Imperative in Paul's Writing', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LX, No. 2, April, 1988, p. 99-127.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 127.

demands and conditionality will fragment the relationship and we see so much of that today in families, society and including churches. It is so reassuring to know in any relationship that when one stretches out a hand the other will take it and accept it unconditionally.

In a contractual framework, when there is a breach in the attached conditions, then one has to make recompense for that breach. That is our understanding from the natural law and the 'light of reason'. In other words there is forgiveness but it follows from repentance and whatever the recompense that is involved. This is falling into the error of making repentance prior to forgiveness, ie. law prior to grace.

However, in a covenantal relationship, forgiveness is built into the relationship. In other words, forgiveness precedes repentance. Did Paul not write, 'While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8)? In exasperation, Paul asked which came first, the promise or the law, to the Jews who took so much glory in their history.

J Torrance has argued that forgiveness is logically prior to repentance.¹⁰⁵ That has to be so in any relationship that is unconditional. If that is not so, then one would have to confess and repent of every sin committed during the day. Now what happens when the person forget to confess one sin or wrong done? That one wrong will not be forgiven. That was the problem Martin Luther had when he spent each night contemplating on his sins during the day. One omission would mean that he remained a sinner.¹⁰⁶ If that is the scenario in a relationship then what confidence have we in relating in a meaningful way without a continual sense of guilt.

One of humanity's basic need is belonging. Our society has locked us into a conditional framework where we need to prove our worth before we can belong. This is based on the grace-nature model discussed above. The covenantal framework accepts us into the community (family of God) where grace is prior to law and forgiveness prior to repentance. Of course there will be some who will not accept this framework and continue to struggle to prove their own self worth.

When we try to understand this covenantal relationship in a legalistic framework, then we have the continuing problem of our response. 'Shall we then continue in sin that grace may abound' (Rom. 6:1)? Or shall we repent so that God will forgive us? So we are back to either cheap grace or conditional grace.¹⁰⁷

Within the covenantal framework, our repentance is not the condition of grace, but the response or obligation to grace.¹⁰⁸ in Book III of Calvin Institutes, he differentiates between legal repentance and evangelical repentance.¹⁰⁹ This brings us to our next section, the Covenant Response.

¹⁰⁵ J Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract', SJT, (1970) Vol. 23, p. 51-76.

¹⁰⁶ Calvin Institutes, 111/4/16. 'The enumeration of all sins is impossible'.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 56.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ III/3/4

VI. THE COVENANT RESPONSE

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

The covenants that we have studied 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.¹¹⁰ 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 of 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 (I 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.¹¹¹ 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.¹¹² 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 His limits and provided for our response. Our response lies within these limits. We cannot go outside of these limits as if we can respond 'in our own right'.¹¹³ 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 came 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.

¹¹⁰ The Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants are expressions of the primary covenant.

¹¹¹ Ps 51:16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring 6; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹¹² There is a present series of studies, 'Being Human' conducted by NCTM on Monday evenings

¹¹³ R Anderson, *Incarnation and Historical Transcendence*, p. 136.

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.¹¹⁴

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.

There is nothing erroneous in the statements that I have mentioned above. Those teachings are biblical and form part of what we know today as Reformed Theology. The problem is that we have just stopped at that point which gives us an incomplete picture.

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

Heb 6:19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ° where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf, He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Heb 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

¹¹⁴ 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.

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)

Heb 9:23 It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.²⁴ For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.

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 man-made 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.¹¹⁵ 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.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 139.

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 when 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.

VII. IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVENANT

1. IT ENABLES US TO RECOVER THE MEANING OF GRACE

Grace was eminently demonstrated on the cross and it gripped the hearts and minds of the people. The early church understood that. However, the meaning of grace was lost in the medieval church and recovered during the reformation. Though we stand in the reformed tradition, legalism continually creep into our thinking and interpretation of the Word, and so transform the grace of God into a system that we can manage within our legal framework. We are continually confronted with a 'covenant of works' and the priority of law. Our culture whether it be east or west, is founded upon a legalistic contractual framework and to this we continually return. This must reflect something of our fallenness.

For many of us today, we need to rediscover the meaning of grace. Covenant theology enables us to see that works and the law are subordinate to grace. Grace came first, then came the law to enable us to express our response to the grace of God. It gives us no occasion for boasting because who we are and what we are are the results of the grace of God.

We cannot take grace and try to graft it into our egocentric and self-sufficient framework. We need to move over to a new framework or as John expresses it, 'put it into new wineskins'. This new framework or wineskins requires that we take seriously the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Trinitarian Godhead.

2. IT UNDERSCORES THE MEDIATION OF JESUS CHRIST

There is only one sacrifice that the Father accepts and that is the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There is nothing that we can offer to a Holy God. We often pray that our praise and meditation may be acceptable to God. Our praises are only acceptable on the best of what Jesus Christ has done for us. In other words, Jesus Christ gathers up all our weak and feeble worship and offers them to God on our behalf¹¹⁶ - that's how our worship can be acceptable to God, not on how righteous we may have been for we have not.

Jesus Christ is continuing to minister to us today and that is the continuing mediation on our behalf before a righteous and holy God. Jesus Christ came as our High Priest and is continuing today as our High Priest, mediating between us and God. Jesus not only mediates the grace of God to us but also mediates our responses to the Father.

This mediation takes us away from our self-centredness and pride. It shows to us that our response is acceptable in so far as it is through Jesus Christ. It enables us to acknowledge the responses of others as it is only through the mediation of Jesus Christ that theirs and ours are acceptable to the Father.

3. IT RE-FOCUSES ONTO THE TRINITY

Not only has Jesus Christ mediated between us and God, the Holy Spirit is also our mediator. Romans made this clear. '*The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express*' (8:26). So in our approach to God the Father, He has given us the Holy Spirit to enable us in our prayer and praise. These are then collected by Jesus Christ as our mediator and offered to God. We see here the priesthood of Jesus Christ and the priesthood of the Holy Spirit acting in different ways in our worship of the Father under the new covenant. Our worship to the Father is through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit.

¹¹⁶ This is an expression that J Torrance was so fond of using in his class and I cannot express it better in any other way.

We see that it is only through the new framework of the Trinity Godhead that we can move away from our legalistic culture to an appreciation of the covenant.

Just as the Father, Son and Spirit exist in mutual love and fellowship, and interdependence, so too this is the model for our community. This brings us to the last implication, ie. that of the freedom and dignity of all humanity.

4. IT REAFFIRMS THE FREEDOM AND DIGNITY OF ALL HUMANITY

Our Triune God is one of grace and love and the covenant that He has transacted for us is one of grace and love. When we worship this God we express what He has done for us in terms of the relationship that has been re-established, - a relationship with Him and with one another. It is the result of this restored relationship with one another that we can speak of freedom and dignity. By dignity we do not mean the stiffness and air of a generation past. Reflecting on Christianity as the true humanism, J I Packer said,

Our dignity is only realised as we love and serve God for Himself, and mankind for God's sake, according to the two great commands in which Christ said that all the law and the prophets are summed up.¹¹⁷

Our affirmation of the dignity of all humanity has its basis on the work of Jesus for all humanity. The grace of the Father is towards all His creation. 'Show proper respect for everyone' (1 Peter 2:17).

J I Packer continues to elaborate on what it means in practical terms for us to confer dignity on our fellow beings.

We would emphasise that the horizontal relationship of honouring God's image in others by seeking to give and secure to them respect, goodwill, help, protection, shelter, food, education, justice, and freedom of thought and religion - meaning liberty to differ from *us* without our neighbor-relationship to them being hereby endangered - is integral to the worship and obedience in which love to the Father and the Son finds expression.¹¹⁸

The reason for thinking in this way is that we are all created in the image of God and have been given the capacity to relate with the creator and the rest of created humanity. Above all, we have been given the gift of life so that we can give expression to that relationship. Therefore to confer dignity upon our fellow humanity is the expression of our relatedness to the Creator.

We can only understand this on the basis of grace and covenantal relationship. When we worship a contract God, we think in terms of right and wrong, fairness and justice in an absolute sense. When we think in terms of a covenant God, we think in terms of relationships - relating to God through Jesus Christ and relating with one another. In our imperfect world, we are able to relate in a meaningful way only because we love and forgive, not that we are able to initiate these gracious gestures, but that we have received it first from our Lord Jesus Christ. We are enabled to be gracious to one another because we are all under grace. We stand before God with nothing to boast of in ourselves, but only of what Jesus Christ has achieved for us. We come together not because we are better than those who do not gather in this manner, but because we have received of the free grace of God to appreciate the wonderful salvation that is being offered.

When we think in this way, we accord to our fellow beings irrespective of their background, ethnicity, religious or denominational background, and even their criminal background (if any), a dignity that is first given by God the creator who loves them and gave Jesus Christ for them and for us. We ought to think in terms of the one eternal creational covenant in our relationships. In that way we learn to think of the other firstly as a fellow-being having received

¹¹⁷ J I Packer and T Howard, Christianity: The True Humanism, p. 154.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 156.

the gift of life from the Father rather than in terms of some external characteristics such as colour, sex or even their religious affiliation. Ray Anderson, writing for the Fuller's *Theology News and Notes* after the Los Angeles riots in 1992, has this to say when we refer to others in terms of their ethnicity.

For the Korean American, the Asian American, the Mexican American, and the African American, the connecting issue is not 'American' but human. When one's ethnic identity only serves as the adjective and not the noun, there is already a loss of personhood at the human level.¹¹⁹

That is not to say that we cease to be Asian or African or whatever our ethnic origin may be, but rather our connectedness with one another is not because of our ethnic origin, but because we have been given life by the same creator God and Father. To be in covenant means to be related as a core value of human existence. Our colour, race and social status are only incidental to our human existence.

CHRISTIAN OR SECULAR HUMANISM

There are many others today, such as the secular humanist, who have the same approach to humanity, but only in terms of asserting their human rights. It is unfortunate that the church has not been there in the early stages of this movement, though the movement indeed has its roots in Christianity. While our connectedness is on the basis of our common humanity, yet evangelical Christianity has chosen to ignore secular humanism.

Secular humanism has its roots in Christianity but has developed along different lines Once the days of the Reformation. With the Enlightenment, reason has been elevated to be the basic characteristic of what it is to be human. This together with the development of the scientific method, secular humanism has gone a separate path from Christianity. The result of these developments is that secular humanism abandoned the metaphysics and revealed religion, and based its premise on the basic goodness of the human person.

The contribution of this movement to humanity is significant as it highlights the inhumanity that exists in our society. There is biblical support for the 'rights' movement, but we need to be careful that we do not interpret those references in the legalistic sense of the secular humanist because the language of 'rights' runs in opposition to the language of 'covenant'. How do two people relate when each stands on the rights, especially when those rights may not be in congruity? The language of rights is demand and conditionality. The language of covenant is forgiveness and unconditionality. To express forgiveness is to give up the insistence on one's rights. It is not enough for us to accord to our fellow beings their basic human rights. We need to go further than that. As the people of God who have tasted the grace of God, we need to call them our brothers and sisters.

God's one eternal covenant provides the framework for an appreciation of the dignity of humankind. Moreover, the issue of human right is grounded on the dignity of humankind. It is more desirable to talk of human dignity in terms of relations rather than human rights in terms of legality. Such an approach on the basis of the covenantal relationship rather than rights and legality will lead us to realise our creational status in God's image and to discover the reality of what God has bestow upon us in our relationship because we are created for relationship.

¹¹⁹ R Anderson, *Theology, News and Notes*, June, 1992, p. 15.

THE TRINITY AND THE HUMAN PERSON

Our discussion on Christianity and Culture has taken us through a brief consideration of culture and the theology of the Trinity and covenant. We have stated simply that culture is the sum of how we conduct ourselves and this is expressed in language, actions or the arts. We have also noted that the doctrine of God lies at the heart of contemporary debates of our pluralistic culture.¹²⁰ If that is so then what we understand of the Godhead and what we mean by being human are central to the way our culture develops. Christianity taught that man is created in the image of God. We have criticised others for having created a god in their own image. May I be bold enough to say that we cannot help that. The way we think of god is the way we see humanity and conversely the way we think of humanity is the way we understand the nature of God.

We need to ask the question 'What it is to be human?' before we move on to consider specific issues in our culture. We can seek to understand the nature of being human through various methodologies, such as that of philosophy or science (biology and sociology). We know that biology is inadequate as a discipline to tell us what humanity is. Its inevitable conclusion is Darwin's Origin of Species. Sociology is a useful science in order to help us understand many of the issues relating to humankind, but their bold attempts to define humanity are really approaches from below. In other words they made observations of fallen humanity and then assume that humankind possesses intrinsic goodness. That is the starting point of secular humanism.

Since the secular humanist regards 'human persons as complete masters of their own affairs and destinies and deliberately excludes the transcendent from its philosophy',¹²¹ it cannot legitimately claim to be able to see man in its essential nature, ie. a humanity understood ontologically. A humanity understood ontologically can only be theological. It needs an approach from above.

Our understanding of what it is to be human must therefore flow from our understanding of the *imago Dei*. The supreme example of humanity is seen in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The concept of the *imago Dei* comes from a few passages in the Old Testament.¹²² The New Testament picks up this theme ¹²³ and ultimately identifies Jesus Christ as the *imago*.¹²⁴

Ray Anderson gives a succinct summary of the *imago Dei* as presented by three prominent protestant theologians, Brunner, Berkouwer and Barth.

'The emphasis has been on the unity of the 'imago' as the orientation of the person toward God as the source and determination of existence as a human being **The relational aspect of the 'imago' is primary.** Relation with God entails the intersubjectivity of relation with other persons as the content of the 'imago'The total person is affected by sin in such a way that no aspect of the human person continues to bear the 'imago' as a natural and positive orientation toward God The renewing grace of God is necessary for both a noetic and ontic restoration Of relationship with God.' ¹²⁵

Thus the **imago Dei** is present in the specific and concrete encounter of human relationship. What is human is the ability to respond freely to the another being, and in the relationship so developed, discover what is self in the community of humanity. It finds its completeness in the 'other'.¹²⁶ Barth has this comment to make in his understanding of the *imago Dei*:

¹²⁰ D A Carson and J D Woodbridge (Ed.), 'Christian Witness In an Age of Pluralism', in *God and Culture*, p. 46.

¹²¹ W. Franklin, and J. M. Shaw, *The Case for Christian Humanism*, p. 5.

¹²² Gen. 1:26f, 5:1, 9:6.

¹²³ Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:; 18; Eph. 4:24; Col 3:10.

¹²⁴ Col 1:15 'He is the Image of the Invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.'

¹²⁵ R. Anderson, *On Being Human, Essays In Theological Anthropology*, p. 224 (Eerdmans, 1982). Italics mine.

¹²⁶ Gen. 1:27 male and female He created them.'

Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signified existence in confrontation, ie. in this confrontation, juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female ¹²⁷

It is co-humanity that we need to put our emphasis on. Because the true orientation of humanity is toward the ontic restoration of relationship with God, humanity needs to seek the good of his fellow beings as the realisation of that restored relationship. Thus the moral demands of humanity is firstly anthropological before it is ethical. The locus of the ethical is therefore found in the responsiveness of the essential nature of being human (anthropology) and this essential nature is hinged on the understanding of the imago Dei.

This understanding enables us firstly to see the internal relationships of the Godhead in the honouring and serving one another - the perichoretic relationship. This is secondly applied to our human relationships and then worked out in our ethics.

¹²⁷ Church Dogmatics, II/III, p. 195.

VIII—COVENANT AS IT RELATES TO OUR CULTURE

Our understanding of the covenant will cause us to rethink some of our core assumptions leading to the external expressions of our culture. Martin Luther King writing on the social injustice in the deep south remarked, 'I have heard so many ministers say, 'These are social issues with which the gospel has no real concern.' Nothing is further from the truth. The gospel is concerned with the way we see the world and the society around us. We need to wrestle with the way our theology impacts upon our sociology.

It goes without saying that we can only come to comprehend a new thing in terms of what we know. It is no different when it comes to our understanding of the things of God. Our approach is basically an approach from below, ie. we impose upon spiritual issues the framework that we have developed from the human life that we know. However, we need to start somewhere and that earthly approach was taken by Jesus Christ when He tried to reveal spiritual truth to His disciples. However, we need to move over to a new framework, or in the words of John, we need new wineskins. When we come to the things of God, we need to develop a new framework or a new reference point.

One particular trait of our modern day culture is that of introspection. It has its origin in the Cartesian dictum of 'I think therefore I am'. It teaches us an awareness of our own existence. This existentialist approach has been prevalent in the interpretation of the scriptures. Of course our secular culture has been calling to us all the time to consider the fulfilment we get from our careers, our marriage and in all areas of life. This has led to an intensification of the isolation of the self. It is a culture where the first question is 'What is in it for me?' It is a totally individualistic, narcissistic culture. Therein lies much of the difficulties we have in our churches and marriages. It is only a change to a new framework of thinking in terms of the covenant that will help to rid our culture of its predicament.¹²⁸

Our materialistic and technological culture emphasises the things that are outside of ourselves. It concentrates on tasks and achievements and very little on the being and relationship issues. Our churches also are also involved in this culture of numbers and achievements. We need to change over to the covenantal framework in working out our relationship.

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.'¹²⁹

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.

¹²⁸ This Issue has been dealt with very adequately In an article by Prof. Alan Torrance, 'Narcissism and the Gospel of Grace' In SJT, Vol. 40, p. 481-510.

¹²⁹ T IF Torrance, Theology In Reconstruction, p. 27-29.

Prof. Torrance continues,

..... the problem is deeper than that, for we are accustomed to We 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 ¹³⁰

WORSHIP - WHAT WE ARE OR WHAT WE DO?

There is much controversy on the subject of worship. This centres mainly over the form, ie. the way we do it. If worship is to show the worth of God then it must reflect what His nature is and the way He relates to us. Our God is the Triune God existing as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and is in a covenant relationship with us - a covenant made through His Son, Jesus Christ. Within the covenant, He has provided for us the covenant response In His Son Jesus Christ, the God who is for man and the Man who is for God. He is indeed our Mediator, the Great High Priest who is continuing to offer intercession for us.

Much of our worship is self centred and does not reflect the covenant response that God has provided for us in His Son. The pertinent questions for us is, 'Where is Jesus in our worship and what role has He?' He is the true worshipper and our worship is only acceptable in so far as it is offered through Him as covenanted. The prophets of old fought hard to dissociate worship from its external forms and put it where it ought to be - the covenanted response.

I also refer you to the works by T F Torrance and J B Torrance on worship as our covenant response.¹³¹

CHURCH LIFE - PASTOR/CONGREGATION RELATIONSHIP

This is an area where there have been many unhappy endings. I need to curtail my remarks here and present to you the view as seen through the eyes of the laity rather than through the clergy. It seems very strange to me that so many denomination have advocated a contractual set up between the minister and the congregation. I have no doubt that this is due to the many complicated scenarios that have caused difficulties in the relationship. So based on management principles, contracts and job descriptions have been drawn up in order to manage the difficulties. What has happened to the covenantal framework in the meantime?

As one who had been involved in such a difficult occasion on the side of the laity, I am aware that the issues relate to an almost total lack of appreciation of the covenant in the life of the church. The laity do not seem to understand the implications of the covenant. This may reflect a deficiency in the clergy in not communicating these issues more succinctly to the congregation.

A core assumption of many in our congregations is that of absolutism, ie. as they perceive the absolute God, they transpose that image onto the minister. Perhaps many ministers give that impression of themselves as well thereby reinforcing the error among those whom they seek to minister. Furthermore, many ministers seek security of tenure and it is not an unreasonable request, but the congregation then expresses this security in terms of a contract rather than a covenant, because that is all the only way they know how.

In today's world of achievement and results, many ministers are forced by the prevailing culture to produce what can be clearly seen. As the result the peripheral issues are emphasised and the primary relationship with the congregation suffers.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ T F Torrance, 'The Word of God and the Response of Man'. J B Torrance, 'The Place of Jesus Christ In Worship'. Both articles are in R S Anderson (Ed.), *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, (Eerdmans). Also, J B Torrance, 'The Vicarious Humanity of Christ' In T F Torrance (Ed), *The Incarnation* (Handsel Press).

I see that congregations need to be taught the implications of a covenant relationship, the priority of grace and forgiveness. There will be weak areas in each of us and perhaps these should be highlighted right at the beginning rather than presenting a perfect image. As part of the laity, I see the role of the lay leadership is to back up these areas in the minister so that the body work as an efficient whole. I see the minister-congregation relationship as one of mutual building up. I am not giving the impression that this is an easy thing to get across as I had failed on my part to get my fellow lay leaders to take this line and it may even be more difficult for the minister to get it across.

THE WORKPLACE

Our western economy embraces the 'hire and fire labour-' system. it is a system of the free market forces. We need to go out there to prove our worth and find acceptance. So in a slow down in the economy many people are laid off because the company need to balance Its books. It has no option because it has a fixed wage cost structure.

Let me relate something that has happened in Japan and Singapore in recent years. The Japanese has a 'lifetime employment' system. So when there is a downturn in the economy, people are not laid off but continue to be employed. With the extra labour, the company then concentrate more on providing service for its customers. It is a strength in the Japanese economy. This restricts competition for labour with the unwritten 'no poaching rule'. Strike action is seldom taken as it strikes against the long term future of the worker. A Japanese union idea of a strike is an 'one-hour' stop work meeting during the lunch break. While the company continue to keep its labour force and to trade itself out of the difficult period it also has the flexibility of reducing the bonus payment to the workers. This bonus payment can amount to 30-40% of the annual salary. This is a secular modal but it speaks to me more of a covenantal relationship than the western model we have here.

So too in Singapore many years ago when the island state went through a very bad recession, the workers accepted a reduction in their wage packet in *exchange* for continued employment. Many people were able to keep their jobs and this prevented the recession from becoming even worse. During the pick up stage a few years later, they were rewarded with a 13th month wage packet. And so the bonus system has come to stay in the wage structure in Singapore.

These models though not perfect are closer to the idea of a covenant in the work place than what we have here in this country. Our workers are not merely there to service the company and to create profits. On the contrary, we need to see the work place as the environment where the workers are given opportunities for service according to their abilities, and for their development. In the process there has to be some income generated to keep those opportunities available. There ought to be a covenant relationship between employers and employees. Each does not treat the other as a means to an end. In the workplace, the primary objective should be investment in the development of those who work there. The financial consideration is necessary to keep the business of people's development going. This may be too much for some to accept, but experience shows that those businesses that invest in its personnel are the businesses that do well.

I do not speak here as an economist but one does not need to be an economist to see the inconsistency with a covenant relationship within our labour system and indeed our whole social structure.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS - COVENANT OR CONTRACT?

When we say those words at our wedding, 'For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part', we are expressing an unconditionality in the relationship. However, marriage today is clothed in the language of companionship and fulfilment. So we go around seeking the right partner. Worse still, it is approached with contractual obligations. When we run in difficulties in our marriage we talk in

terms of incompatibility and therefore separation. Rather, 'the first sign of contradiction in committed relationships is not the end but the beginning of covenant love.'¹³²

When we move out of communion, we withdraw into self and therefore sink into our narcissistic culture. 'A person is a person only because of others and on behalf of others.'¹³³ We need to see marriage as a covenantal relationship. 'Because humanity is originally and essentially co-humanity, the fundamental affirmation of human existence is surely one of relatedness. Covenant is the theological paradigm for co-humanity experienced as relatedness.'¹³⁴

It is not often that marriage is talked of in terms of 'a prophetic foretaste and forecast of the Ultimate Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb (Christ)'.¹³⁵ It is indeed a profound mystery and I refer you to the book of the same title for a theological exposition.

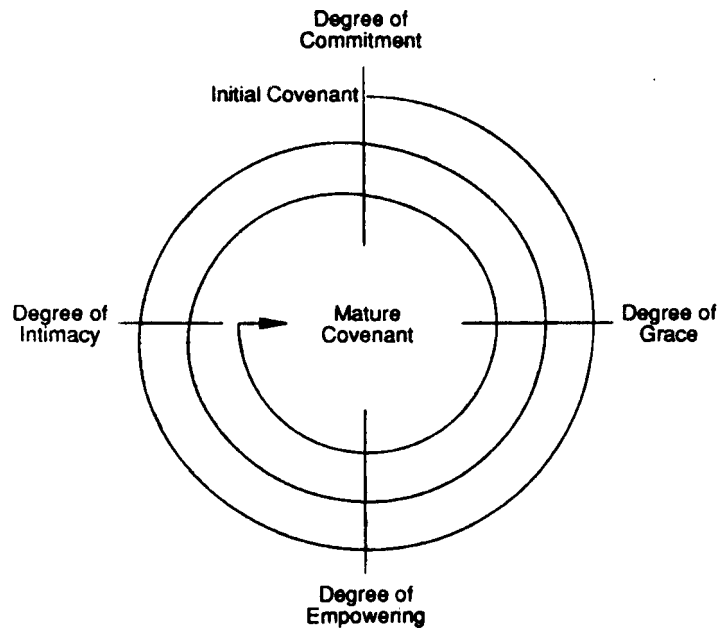
In applying the concept of covenant to the family and marriage, Ray Anderson concludes,

'It is covenantal love that provides the basis for family. For this reason, family means much more than consanguinity, where blood ties provide the only basis for belonging. Family is where you are loved unconditionally, and where you can count on that love even when you least deserve it.'¹³⁶

In attempting to spell out the sociological implications of the family relationship, the Balswicks; in their book, **The Family**,¹³⁷ presented a model to depict the family relationship in graphic form. It is a helpful working model. They have also tabulated the sociological differences in various models of marriage relationship. These are helpful for us to understand the different cultural expressions in our multicultural society. I include both the model and the table for your reference.

A THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIP¹³⁸

Degree of Commitment



¹³² R Anderson and D Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 45.

¹³³ John Macmurray, *Persons In Relations*, p. 150. An African proverb.

¹³⁴ R Anderson, *On Being Human*, p. 168.

¹³⁵ G Bingham, *The Profound Mystery. Marriage Love, Divine and Human*, p. xiv.

¹³⁶ R Anderson and D Guernsey, *On Being Family*, p. 40 (Italics mine).

¹³⁷ Jack Balswick and Judith Balswick, *The Family*, p. 21

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 21 (with modifications).

A COMPARISON OF THE TRADITIONAL PATRIARCHAL, THE MODERN OPEN, AND THE BIBLICAL IDEAL FORMS OF MARRIAGE¹³⁹

TRADITIONAL PATRIARCHAL	MODERN OPEN	BIBLICAL IDEAL
	MARITAL COMMITMENT	
Commitment to institution of marriage	Contract (self fulfilment)	Covenant (between partners)
Dutiful sex (male pleasure)	Self centered sex	Affectionate sex
	(personal pleasure)	(mutual pleasure)
External coercion	Disengaged	Internal cohesion
Bondage	Unbonded	Bonded

	MARITAL ROLES AND ADAPTABILITY	
Law	Anarchy	Grace
Role segregation Pre-determined	Undifferentiated roles Undetermined	Role differentiation Creative (interchangeable)
Rigid, stilted	Chaotic	Adaptable/flexible

	MARITAL AUTHORITY	
Ascribed power	Achieved power	Empowering
Authoritarianism 'Male headship'	No authority	Dual submission to Lordship of Christ
Wife submissive	Neither submission	Mutual submissiveness
Male centered	Self centered	Person and relationship centered

	MARITAL COMMUNICATION	
Inexpressiveness	Pseudo-intimacy	Intimacy
Pronouncement – Legislate (talking at spouse)	Declaration – Stalemate (talking past spouse)	Discussion – Negotiate (talking with spouse)
Non-assertive (Withdrawal)	Aggressive	Assertive

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 80 (with modifications).

The model is depicted in a spiral rather than in a linear fashion. It tries to highlight a dynamic relationship and the presence of struggles and difficulties are implied. Otherwise there is no need for grace. It is a model that seeks to factor in reconciliation and restoration as a continuing process in the relationship rather than at a single point in time. There is no mention of the law or regulation in the model, but a progression from covenant, grace (forgiveness implied), empowering to intimacy, and therefore a deepening of the relationship. It is a model that assumes the unconditionality of the relationship.

God provided a 'helper' for Adam (Gen. 2:18). It speaks here of an assistance to man. ¹⁴⁰ The marriage ordinance brings together the created maleness and femaleness of our co-humanity to its full realisation in its interdependence and co-operative interaction.¹⁴¹

It is the Christian gospel that brings about reconciliation and restoration of a person. So often, the tendency is to seek legal help when relationship problem arises. Our culture teaches us to stand on our rights and to seek self-fulfilment. We set up the framework on which we judge ourselves and when we look at ourselves within that framework we are always in the right. The other party does the same and we have got a stalemate and no longer a helpmate.

EUTHANASIA

We now have legislation to legalise euthanasia in the Northern Territory. This has been passed and will have a ripple effect all over the country. South Australia already has a draft to be put through Parliament here. This is a matter of concern for those in the medical profession. Some would want to side-step the issue by arguing that this is a matter of personal judgement. I beg to differ when the right to euthanasia becomes enshrined in legislation. We have all seen the slippery slopes when this legislation was passed in Holland where initially, the legislation for euthanasia was instituted for the terminally ill, but increasingly, the right to die legislation is being transformed to a duty to die so that the individual would not be a burden to society. The so-called safeguards in the legislation for euthanasia are no safeguards at all as we have seen what has become those safeguards when the legislation for abortion was introduced many years ago.

The issue at stake here is not so much as a right to euthanasia but the kind of care given to those in the terminal stages of their illness. We are not arguing against disconnecting the respirator when it is beyond doubt that there is brain death and it is shown beyond doubt that there is no possibility of recovery. We are not arguing against the discontinuation of treatment when that situation is present.

Of course a terminal illness is an unbearable situation when there is inadequate management of pain. Of course it is a hopeless situation when there is no one around the terminal ill to talk to and care for them, and to relate to them at that stage of their illness. Of course life is not worth living when one's immediate relations are not around to support and to care. The movement to legislate on euthanasia is a reflection of the disintegration of the family and societal network. It is also a reflection of the inadequate health care services provided though in some areas these services may have been ignored in favour of vested interest.

The true humanist approach to the situation is not in euthanasia but in the restoration of relationship in our fractured society. It is not even in the provision of better health support services though this will certainly help to ease the pain of the terminally ill.

There are many problems that need to be managed in the care of the terminally ill. As is so often in our society we seek resolution of our problems in a legalistic manner. We fail to identify what are the relational problems and to deal with them. We allow issues peripheral to the person to determine the outcome rather than to rectify the many personal and relational involved.

¹⁴⁰ G von Rad, Genesis, p. 82.

¹⁴¹ J & J Balawick, The Family, p. 20

We cannot ignore the move towards a legislation that so blatantly disregard the sanctity of human lives. It is an infringement of the creational covenant. The human person did not ask for the right to be born. That was the gift of life. When a person would rather die than to live with a disablement, then the gift of life is seen as getting into the way of the pleasures of life. It speaks of the breakdown of the covenant relationship that that life was created for. We have noted that absolutism is a problem in our core assumptions. We referred to that in passing when dealing with the pastor-congregation relationship. We cannot accept that vulnerability may be an essential component in God's plan for us. We cannot accept anything that is less than perfect. So when the in-utero ultrasound or blood screen shows up a defect in the foetus, we demand an abortion. A learned man of God, John Cardinal O'Connor offered this guidance, 'Speak from the heart of the experiencing of human vulnerability and wear your disabilities like a mantle about your shoulders.'¹⁴²

ETHICS

In ethics today the language of right dominates. In particular it is the right to freedom that seems to rise above all other rights. So it is the right to express our freedom in sexual preference. It is the right to die.

The Sermon on the Mount is very commonly quoted in any discussion on ethical issues. Indeed it is a challenge to us to reconsider many of the ideals we hold. This section of Matthew's Gospel is held by many to contain the ethical standard of the Christian faith. Indeed it does. It challenges us to reconsider the standards that the law demands of us. Are they just and adequate? Jesus acknowledged those standards, but insisted that they did not go far enough. He has come to inaugurate the New Covenant which is sealed in His blood. This New Covenant will be in the heads of the people as Jeremiah told us.

Jesus wants to move beyond the external legalities of the law to the inner sanctum of our being where the Spirit of God dwells. There the Holy Spirit inspires and motivates us bringing our whole being into line with His will.

When we are devoid of the inner reserve which the Holy Spirit of God brings, then we will seek justification in terms of the demands of the law. We see that happening everywhere in society and even in the church. When the Spirit is the driving force, the obstruction from the legal code will be challenged and a new code brought in to facilitate the new awakening. That will be the dawn of another new day.

So often the Sermon on the Mount is taken as a rigid moralistic code to judge and to condemn. Rather it is a call to us to enter into the reality of life with the Spirit. It is not a code that tells us what to do, but rather a call to remind us of what we should be and who we are. It shows us where and why we should be different from the conventions of society. It tells us to go where our heart leads us because the Holy Spirit is there to do the leading.

We need to come out of our legal enclave and accord the human dignity to our fellow beings as participants in the one eternal covenant of God. We have lost the sense that we are only created beings and do not have any right to an existence except that it be given from above. We share that givenness with all others that God has brought into being.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have covered quite some grounds in this paper, from church history to present day economic system, from marriage and family to ethics and euthanasia. Though the coverage is only brief, I have attempted to demonstrate perhaps barely adequately that the concept of covenant needs to pervade our culture. It will cause us to appraise our present strategy quite differently. It will cause us to come away from our deeply dualistic approach and start thinking from the one eternal covenant and see the way it ought to influence the way we live, the things we do and the way we relate.

¹⁴² M J Owen, 'The Wisdom of Human Vulnerability (Disability: The Tie that Binds)' In *Dolentium Hominum* (1993), Vol. VIII, No. 22, p. 171.

IX. THE CULTURAL ORIENTATION OF CHINESE CHURCHES

I want to take this opportunity to relate to you the way I see the Chinese culture and the denial of the Trinity within the Chinese churches. The issues discussed here will no doubt be relevant to other cultures. There are three major problems within the Chinese churches, and these are ethnocentricity, self-sufficiency and isolation.¹⁴³

1. CHINESE CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA

The migrant Chinese, and for that matter any migrant group, have tended to cluster together wherever they go. This has been the pattern of Chinese migrants world-wide. When the Chinese migrated to S E Asia, they formed clans and associations to preserve their ethnic identity. When they migrate to other parts of the world, the Chinese tend to cluster together as any migrant group would do. The Chinese Christians are no different. Over in North America, where the Chinese have migrated to much earlier than in Australia, there are numerous independent Chinese churches all over the country. Most of them are small churches, managed by one or two dominant families. They are aloof from the mainstream churches and exist in isolation from them. The pattern in Australia is not much different.

In the last five or six years, there has mushroomed in the Eastern States of Australia, and to a lesser extent in Adelaide, a large number of Chinese churches, mostly independent and so-called evangelical. In 1985 all the Chinese churches were accounted for and introduced during the conference of the Chinese churches as there were only about twenty. During the conference last year, it was a problem just trying to compile a mailing list to send out the circulars.

There are some inherent problems within the Chinese churches in North America and Australia. These are mainly the two factors of ethnicity and self-sufficiency resulting in their isolation from other churches and the mainline denominations. The two characteristics of ethnicity and self-sufficiency are hall-marks of the Chinese over the centuries. What is even more disturbing is their isolation from all around them, even in relating to their sister Chinese churches. This is not a healthy state of affairs and while justifiable in terms of sociology and certain sections of the church growth movement, this trend falls short of the biblical norm of all one in Christ'.

Before going further, we need to make an exception here for the Chinese speaking churches as their medium of communication does not permit them to move freely outside their ethnic grouping. Despite this they can still relate with other Chinese speaking churches in an effort to express the relationship of the visible church. However, because of their sense of self-sufficiency, they have preferred to isolate themselves, reflecting their connectedness with years of tradition of Chinese culture rather than the transformation that should have taken place as a result of their salvation in Jesus Christ.

2. INFLUENCES UPON THE CHINESE MIND

There are several influences upon the Chinese mind and these are discussed briefly below.

a. Ancient Chinese concepts of God (Terminology for 'God' in the Chinese Language)

Chinese concepts of God. are referred to by three terms, **shang-ti**, **tien** and **shen**. They signify different aspects of God. Shang-ti refers to the Lord on high. Interestingly, the word ti means 'emperor, and shang means 'above' or 'on high'. The worship of shang-ti goes back to the Chinese Emperor Shun who worshipped shang-ti

¹⁴³ See my article on A Personal Reflection of the Chinese Churches In Australia in the Light of the Trinity, Fuller Seminary Post-Seminar Project, 1993.

in the 23rd century BC. by offering a sacrifice. *Shang-ti* was worshipped as a supreme ruler over the earth. Now whether *shang-ti* was a personal or impersonal god has been subjected to extensive debates among scholars. Mateo Ricci (1551-1611), a Jesuit missionary to China favoured the use of this term, *shang-ti*, to refer to God. He equated *shang-ti* with the personal God Yahweh of the bible¹⁴⁴ and thus this term *shang-ti* has been retained in the Union version of the Chinese bible. This brings to the Chinese mind connotations of authoritarianism and oppression which were inflicted upon the peasants by the emperors.

The second term, *tien* refers to the heavens above, an idea that is far remote from the minds of the people. The worship of *tien* (lit. heaven) also goes back to the same period and it represents the impersonal deity from which is derived the moral standards of man. It is probably close to the Greek concept of *logos*. The Roman Catholics accepted the term, *tien chu*, meaning master of heaven, in a Papal decree **Ex illa die** in 1715. The religion of *tien chu* is the term the Chinese use for 'Catholicism'. It leans more to the idea of natural theology rather than revelation.

The third term, *shen* is usually used for the spirits. This is the term favoured by the modern translation of the Chinese bible.

From this it can be seen that Chinese thinking of the deity is more in terms of natural theology and this theme will be discussed further below.

b. Confucianism

Confucius (551?-478 BC) was a humanist and emphasised moral ethics and human relationships. Many Chinese do not regard Confucianism as a religion. There is no worship of god in Confucianism. Confucius merely taught that it is good to acknowledge god. This god is an impersonal god and is referred to as *tien* (see above).

At the heart of Confucianism, the principle of *Li* was considered very important. It has to do with etiquette and courtesy, and forms the central point of his ethics. His ethical stance is more akin to what is discernible from natural theology. Because Confucianism is more a moral philosophy than a religion, there is emphasis paid to what constitutes a right relationship between individuals and people. Filial piety expresses this relationship and leads to the cultivation of respectful affection towards one's parents. In these relationship each remain within their class distinction as Confucius taught, 'Let the prince be prince, minister be minister, the father father, and the son son'.¹⁴⁵

A Chinese professor, Woon Swee Tin, describes Confucianism in these words. 'It is a closed system that puts excessively emphasis on filial piety, chastity, material achievement, loyalty to family and moderation to the point of insensitivity.' (Quoted in G Knight, *The New Israel*)

C. Taoism

Taoism originated in China and was founded by Lao Tzu (604-531 BC). He searched for the 'Way', ie. the physical and moral laws of nature. The philosophical division of Taoism decided in about the 4th century AD when Buddhism took roots in China. The religious division of Taoism borrowed many ideas and cults from Buddhism, while the Buddhists took over Taoist terminology to express their philosophy. Thus Buddhism and Taoism fused in the popular thinking.

¹⁴⁴ B R Ro, 'Chinese Concepts of God and the God of the Bible' In *God In Asian Context* Ed. Ro and Albrecht, p. 169.

¹⁴⁵ Enclopaedia Britannica, 4:1092

d. Buddhism

Buddhism entered China in the first century AD from India and provided the doctrines of transmigration and salvation (Nirvana). It found ready acceptance in China and was very quickly assimilated into Chinese culture and history. This ready acceptance is probably due to the common trend of natural theology which the Chinese mind and Buddhism shared.

e. Folk Religion

In addition to the above, there developed many minor deities among the Chinese. These vary with the localities they find themselves in. Examples of these are Kuan Yin (hearer of cries), Tu Ti Kung (the earth god, also considered as the god of wealth), Wang Yeh (king), the kitchen god and ancestral spirits.

All these influences serve to accentuate the I-centred life leading to a utilitarian and pragmatic outlook. The common question asked is, 'How can this god or goddess help me?'

3. BRINGING THE GOSPEL TO THE CHINESE

Early efforts in bringing the Gospel to China was by the Syrian Nestorian Church who entered China in the 7th century and the Roman Catholic friars in the 13th century. There was little recorded of what was achieved during those times.

In the 16th century, Mateo Ricci, a Jesuit priest presented to the Chinese people the gospel which was largely reasoned out from general revelation. He worked mainly within the framework of natural theology in order to make the gospel acceptable to the Chinese. This process of making the gospel acceptable to the local populace is termed the contextualisation of the gospel. It attempts to make the gospel understandable to the local community and in itself is a laudable effort. However, in the process, the understanding of God was distorted because the Chinese, with their background of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, have tended to work around the premise of natural theology rather than on the specific revelation of the bible.

Ricci equated God with the Chinese deity, shang-ti and tien (see above). In his approach to the proclamation of the gospel Ricci relied mainly on the faculty of reason.¹⁴⁶ He reasoned mainly from the letter to the Romans¹⁴⁷ where Paul argued that what was created was known to the people and therefore they have no excuse. He made little reference to the special revelation in the bible and his proclamation went forth without the Trinitarian God of the bible.¹⁴⁸ It was an extreme case of the indigenisation of the gospel. He spared no effort to accommodate the gospel to the local civilisation.

It was not until the missionary movement in the 19th century that the gospel reached the masses in some regions of China. The first Protestant missionary to reach China was Robert Morrison from the London Missionary Society. He arrived in Canton in 1807. The China Inland Mission (now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship), in the 1900s made a concerted effort to present the gospel to the Chinese people. Several other missionary societies made inroads into China. This was also the period when many western nations tried to dominate China in the name of trade as the Chinese imperial government was in a state of decline.

Over the few centuries when the gospel has been preached to the Chinese, the God of the bible has been understood in terms of the Chinese concept of god and heaven. The traditional term for God in Chinese, shang-ti (lit. the emperor from above) makes it difficult for the Chinese mind to grasp comprehensively the gracious Trinitarian God of the bible. Many

¹⁴⁶ M Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ed. E J Malatesta, p. 71, (Taipei: Ricci Institute, 1985).

¹⁴⁷ Romans 1:18-20.

¹⁴⁸ B R Ro, 'Chinese Concept of God and the God of the Bible', In *God in Asian Contexts*, Ed. B R Ro and M C Albrecht, p. 180, (ATA, 1988).

Chinese still conceive of their shang-ti as one demanding perfection from them before they are accepted.

Christianity has not been widely accepted by the populace as it has always been seen as a foreign religion in Asia. The anti-Christian force was gathering momentum while the missionaries were ploughing away. The Boxer uprising and the expulsion of the missionaries demonstrated the extent of the anti-Christian sentiment in the nation. The Christian church was thrown into disarray and large numbers of foreign missionaries were forced to leave the country. It was then left to the indigenous Christian leaders to defend the Christian faith.

The problem of the whole period of missionary outreach can best be summarised in the words of Dr W H Lam,

The gospel consisted primarily in a western Christ presented to the humanistic and pragmatic Chinese mind.¹⁴⁹

We can see that the problem of bringing across the Trinitarian God of the Bible to the Chinese is not easy. While the concepts of God and the supernatural are not alien to the Chinese mind, but because of their roots in natural theology, there are certain difficulties in accepting the Trinitarian God as we shall see below.

In summarising the fundamental problems in the theological development in China, G H Anderson, in his book *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* made these two observations.

1. Christianity has been largely a 'potted plant' in Asia. It was transported without being transplanted. It is still viewed by Asians as a foreign importation and imposition. The challenge has been for the churches to relate themselves more fully to the soil of Asia to get down to the rice-roots level of Asian civilisation.
2. The second problem is that Christians have tended toward a ghetto mentality of nation-building among themselves. The churches have been preoccupied with their own existence and organisation, and correspondingly they have lagged behind in prophetic concern for the social relevance and outreach of the Gospel into the mainstream task.¹⁵⁰

4. PATTERNS OF CHINESE THEOLOGY

W H Lam summarised Chinese theological thinking into 5 categories.¹⁵¹ These are:

- a. Presence of classical precedents.
- b. Harmonisation of cultures.
- c. To fulfil, not to destroy.
- d. Cultural dualism.
- e. Christianity judges culture.

This summary follows the classic work by Richard Niebuhr published in 1951¹⁵²

The above patterns line up in a spectrum ranging from Christianity being subordinate to Chinese cultural thinking (a), to Christianity judging culture (e). In my observation in Australia, a good number of Chinese churches show a range of thinking from (b) to (e), with a minority in (a). If we accept the biblical records and the centrality of the cross for the redemption of the whole created order, then we need to accept that our culture, whatever it may be, has to be to

¹⁴⁹ W H Lam, 'Patterns of Chinese Theology', in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, Ed. B R Ro and R Eshenaur, p. 328, (ATA, 1964).

¹⁵⁰ G H Anderson, *Asian Voices in Christian Theology*, p. 5 (Orbis Books, 1976).

¹⁵¹ W H Lam, 'Patterns of Chinese Theology', In *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, Ed. B R Ro and R Eshenaur, (ATA, 1984).

¹⁵² Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1951).

judged by that which has been revealed to us regarding the Godhead. This is the triune God which Jesus Christ has come to reveal. The church through the ages has struggled with this revelation of the Trinitarian God.

A CRITIQUE OF THE CHINESE CHURCHES

1. A RETURN TO TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

In the continuing debate on contextualization in Asian Theologies, Bruce Nicholls emphasized that 'we need to recover the central themes of dogmatic theology that are either neglected or misunderstood in Asia'.¹⁵³ He called for a recovery of the Trinitarian faith.

We need to put the emphasis on the starting point of our theological thinking. This point is none other than the Trinitarian God as given to us by revelation. So often, as in Nicea, the starting point is the god that we conceive of and onto this god we try to graft the Trinitarian God. The Chinese churches are guilty of this as well. They start with the god of natural theology, the heavens (tien), and onto this god they tried to graft the Trinitarian God of the bible. The Chinese churches need to consider seriously the proposition that Christianity is the judge our culture.

2. A DEPARTURE FROM CONFUCIANISM

Much of the problems within the Chinese churches in Australia and America have to do with the new generation of Australian (or American) born Chinese, the so called ABC. The older generation of pastors and elders still clinging on to the Confucian concept of filial piety which retains the class distinction between senior and junior. Because Confucianism is more a moral philosophy than a religion, there is emphasis paid to what constitutes a right relationship between individuals and people. Filial piety expresses this relationship and leads to the cultivation of respectful affection towards one's parents. In these relationship each remain within their class distinction as Confucius taught, 'Let the prince be prince, minister be minister, the father father, and the son son'.¹⁵⁴ In the concept of filial in Confucianism, while there is reverence of the son for the father, the son and the father could not conceive of a oneness within that relationship. They will always remain father and son in their distinctive ways and their relationship does not allow them to get any closer.

The Chinese churches continues to uphold this concept of filial while trying to preach oneness of the church to the younger generation. The young people have rightly questioned where the locus of this oneness lies. They very quickly see this as a demand for submission to the older generation. While the younger rightly serves the older, it is difficult in Confucianism for the older to conceive of service to the younger except in a symbolic way from his high pedestal. This hierarchical relationship make the concept of Christ's Incarnation foreign to the Chinese mind.

Now when one approaches the problem starting with the Trinitarian God, then the emphasis becomes very different. The relationship within the Godhead is described as a perichoresis ie. an interpenetration of one another. When this occurs, there is not a fading of the distinctiveness of the individual, but a oneness resulting from the receiving and giving to one other. There is a kind of circulatory movement within the relationship. While the father and son remain distinctively father and son, there is also a time when the lives and acts of the father and son will be indistinguishable as one. When there is an interpenetration of one another within the relationship there is a mutuality to be experienced. The Chinese church need to return to the Trinity to understand what perichoresis is and then to express that in the horizontal relationship with one another.

¹⁵³ B J Nicholls, 'A L'ving Theology for Asian Churches' in *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts*, Ed. B R Ro and R Eshenaur, p. 134, (ATA, 1984).

¹⁵⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 4:1092.

3. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Another area is the way in which the Chinese pay lip service to the sovereignty of God. The Chinese are a pragmatic people. The end result is important to them and they seek to determine that result in a way that does not pay attention to the means. Therefore there developed a manipulative tendency that in fact does not acknowledge the true sovereignty of God.

Now if again one were to start with the Trinitarian God and the Incarnation, then one will acknowledge the continuing High Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ and our participation in the Holy Spirit. If one confesses that then one would take a very different stance. One would have the end result undetermined and pay attention to the process giving consideration to the people involved. The relationship becomes the central issue, ie. attention is paid to the 'Who?' question and not merely to the 'How?' question. One is able to take this approach knowing that it is the Holy Spirit that works within the hearts of His people.

4. ETHNOCENTRICITY

The Chinese in general are an ethnocentric group of people. Their terminology of foreigners as 'foreign devils' (literal translation) belies their sense of racial superiority. This is often carried over to the church scene and that is why most Chinese churches are so ethnically exclusive. Chinese Christians have to think of others in terms of their humanity and as a fellow creature of God. They need to rediscover the meaning and implications of covenant theology.

5. A THEOLOGY OF RESPONSE

The Chinese have always been a people with a strong sense of personal achievement. Their history of government by oppressive rulers and a religion steep in natural theology have made them a people that is very self reliant and rather contemplative. As such, they can only understand response in a legalistic manner. So when the Chinese embraced Christianity, they have understood response as a condition of grace. If they fulfil these obligations then God will be gracious to them.

However, this is not so. We see in our understanding of covenant theology that our response is the result of having received grace. The grace of God is shown to us in the covenant in an unilateral manner and is not conditional on our response. They need to see that the commands of God are the obligations of grace and not the conditions of grace.

6. DENIAL OF THE TRINITY

As discussed above, the Chinese churches have a tendency to emphasise their ethnicity and self-sufficiency with the result of increasing isolation. This tendency is in effect a denial of the Trinity.

a. Ethnicity - a denial of God the Father as the Creator God.

In the Chinese churches, where there is an undue emphasis or exclusiveness as regards to ethnicity, this is to disregard the whole of humanity which God the Father has created. In doing so, they have denied God the Father as the Creator God. His grace is expressed towards the whole of His creation. The gospel is indeed given to the world (John 3:16). In the covenant with Abraham, the blessings of God are to flow to the whole world and to all people (Gen. 12:1-3). A covenant theology implies that we acknowledge all of humanity and to accord to them a dignity that befits the creation of God.

b. Self-sufficiency - a denial of the Priesthood of Christ.

For the Chinese churches to think that they are self-sufficient is to deny the Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It would be so easy from this point on to develop a whole

doctrine of works based on our innate ability. The all-sufficient work of Christ on the cross has put all our works to shame. There is only one sacrifice that God accepts and that is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. All of humanity stand beneath the cross in order to have our offerings accepted by God through Jesus Christ. The all-sufficient work of Christ precludes any sense of our own sufficiency.

c. Isolation - a denial of our participation in the Spirit.

The Chinese have been isolationist and protectionist in their development. China had chosen to isolate herself over centuries trying to preserve the purity of her race and the secrets of her skills. Trade secrets are kept within families and handed only from parents to children in a restricted fashion.

For the Chinese churches to be inward looking and isolated from the rest of Christendom is to deny the oneness in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who creates faith in us making us conscious of the merits of Christ. It is this participation in the Holy Spirit that makes worship real to us. All of God's people in their worship participates through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father. So as we worship, we are joining in with all God's people in this participation. Our isolation results from our sense of self-sufficiency and this does not reflect the Trinitarian God that we claim to worship.