

# THE HOLY, LOVING AND EVERLASTING PRESENCE

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## Study One:

### **GOD BEING PRESENT TO MAN**

In biblical history we have many instances where God has appeared to man, revealing Himself to the degree which was appropriate for His purposes. Because He created man He did not reveal Himself to them, in the sense that He had not been hidden from them. Creation of man must mean He had relationship with them—such as commanding them to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth and have dominion over it: such as forbidding them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and such as walking with them in the cool of the day.

These things show the primal couple were one with God. It was the testing of them by the sinuous serpent which determined whether they would hold to the word God had spoken, or to a new and treacherous word of the superb serpent. When they chose the latter they rejected God's word, that is they refused His holy utterance from Himself. So they died. They were afraid of His appearance. They sought to hide from it. The word God had spoken to them remained poised in their memories, and it is still present to the human race. The couple tried to cover their guilt. In this sense they were dead to God. In Paul's word of Romans 5:12, the whole race—i.e. the race in Adam—died to God.

That is why God's personal manifestations of Himself to men and women must be seen as acts of sheer grace. We do not mean that God absented Himself from man, but that there was an absence of the Presence\* which was—and is—man's most painful experience of this world. We mean that the separation of God's personal Presence from man brings intolerable anguish, even though that Presence would be unbearable to man who wishes to assert his own 'I am' independently of his Creator. When Paul approvingly quoted the Greek poet who had said, 'In Him we live and move and have our being,' he was saying that there never has been an absence of the Presence, but rather that the Presence is such that it is torment to man. The 'absence of the Presence' is really the 'presence of the Absence'. It means God is absent from man as regards man's desire not to know Him and to live apart from Him, but is present in that He will not let man go, and such Presence is painful and confronting, and something about man must be active. We mean man is active in refusing the Presence, because the Presence is judgemental, invoking wrath upon the deliberate unbeliever. God for His part is Creator, and so will never abandon any element of that creation, let alone the creature, man. Whether for rescuing man or bringing judgement to him God is never absent.

Man's action in refusing the Presence causes him to become idolatrous, recasting the true Deity in forms of a lesser deity and other deities, rationalizing it all so that he can still worship, so that he can escape the awful void left by the absence of the Presence, and so that he can utilize all things to feed and foster his 'I am'. He must devise his 'way' so that he can walk somewhere.

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\* Note that throughout the book we will refer to God's presence as 'the Presence', but at times we will omit the capital P when we are referring to presence—even God's presence—in general.

We now return to our statement—‘In biblical history we have many instances where God has appeared to man, revealing Himself to the degree which was appropriate for His purposes.’ These instances are many. Abel was a man who was a prophet, and men cannot become prophets until first God has shown Himself to them, and drawn them into Himself. ‘Enoch walked with God’ is as close to the paradisaical as can be possible. ‘The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham in Mesopotamia’ is similar. Jacob at Bethel, Isaac on Mount Moriah, and Moses at the burning bush are, no less, occasions of revelation. Judges, kings, prophets and priests—so many of them—saw God in His manifestations. Thomas saw Him in the risen Christ, Paul on the road to Damascus, Augustine in the hour of his realized depravity, and the other saints in their bewildering variety of states. Blaise Pascal\* has left us a description which might fit any one of us who has seen ‘the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’. There can be no doubt that God reveals Himself personally to human beings, and His purpose is simply the act—to reveal Himself and bring His Presence to the recipient.

God, of course, reveals Himself continually through His ever present and active media, such as creation, the prophets, dreams and visions, the word of law, the related action of conscience, His deliberate acts, His judgements, His Son, His Spirit and His church, but these media are ignored because man wishes to keep his ‘I am’ intact. Where God is represented as indispensable to man’s total being as an ‘I am’ in the I AM, then man sees his desired autonomy to be threatened. He has invested everything in not knowing God. Whilst he knows of the existence of God he must insulate himself against His Being. Hence his rationalizations of religion, philosophy, agnosticism, atheism, and his attempt to control religions which claim to be revelation of God.

If God were only to reveal Himself irresistibly to certain persons and not to others, we might think these manifestations to be arbitrary, i.e. ‘off the cuff’. The continuous presence and action of His dynamic media give the lie to this thought. If a man would know God then he could, but he does not will to do so. When God decides to know a man then he comes to know God as Paul puts it clearly in Galatians 4:8 (cf. I Cor. 8:1–2). Man can never excuse his ignorance of God by saying God did not choose to know Him, for Paul says the very fact and communication of creation makes man guilty for not knowing God. He also claims that man deliberately ‘suppresses the truth by acts of unrighteousness’ which indicates man knows in some way the truth he refuses to know. This is because ‘he exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator’.

It is interesting to see that man who rejects God still demands His Presence, even though it is intolerable. Is this because he knows that the deliberate absentation of God by His own decision is too dreadful to contemplate? Cain did not wish to go out from the Presence of God. The writer of Psalm 22 cried out at being forsaken by God, and this was properly interpreted by Christ in the hour of his own dereliction—the hour of the Cross. Man dreads to think he might come to the place where such a cry as this would wrenched out of him, i.e. ‘My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?’ Is this because it is a thought too terrifying to man to believe that somehow, at some time, and because he deserves it, he will be left to his own ‘I am’, which then may prove him to be—and forever—an ‘I am not’? Was this what the philosopher meant when he cried, ‘I, myself, am hell!’?

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\* On the evening of Monday, 23 November, 1654, Pascal had an ‘extraordinary assistance’ of God’s grace. His account of it was written on parchment, sown into the lining of his coat where it remained until the day of his death. The substantial part of it is reproduced here: [See Below]

## THE JOY AND TERROR OF 'GOD WITH US'

It seems clear that God did not appear to men and women simply for the sake of appearing to them. Doubtless that manifestation was life-changing to the recipients, but it was always with a view to God's action in history and man's corresponding vocation. For the moment we shall have to leave the mystery of why some had faith in God and others did not. The fact of history is that there has always been a people of God, as also a people who were—and are—not people of God.

Abel was the first prophet. His 'righteous deeds' (I John 3:11) which Cain hated were not merely moralistic acts. The witness of sacrifice was that of faith. The dynamic nature of this evoked the dark hatred of his brother and the inevitable murder. Enoch 'walked with God' may seem to be a deeply pious action, but Jude 14–15 tells us that that man Enoch was powerful in prophecy. Was he saved from such a doom as Abel's by being translated? We cannot be blamed for having this thought, since the prophets are generally killed. What we are saying is that God's Presence is always vocationally demanding, and is always linked with God's purposive acts in history, acts which man keeps opposing because they threaten his own plans and his own desired goals. This, surely, is the key to God's grace towards Noah, and his fellowship with that 'preacher of righteousness'—that he saved him from both the violence of the world, and His own judgement upon it.

Cain's objection to the measure of God's punishment was an indictment on Him—as though it were deserved. Cain's argument in not wanting to be 'hidden from thy face' was that he would be left exposed to death. Reassured that this would not be the case 'Cain went away from the Presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod east of Eden'. We might meditate on the kind of operation he undertook out of the Presence of God. Certainly from the account we have it appears to be secular, and his descendant Lamech was of an even more arrogant and bitter nature than he. We are reminded that the prodigal son of Luke 15 went to a far-off country, not wishing to do in the presence of his father the lustful things he desired to do!

For those persons who may be of a somewhat mystical nature in devotion, the fact of God appearing to man and His Presence ever going with them, may be seen only as a thing of wonder, adoration and joy, and whilst this may be true in part, it is not all the story. It is a fact that God's Presence with Abel resulted in his being murdered. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, but not in the eyes of men. Abraham is clearly set out as a man who was a pilgrim and sojourner in this world. The hour of God's 'cutting the covenant' at Mamre must be described as 'dreadful' for 'As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him'. It is no true experience of the Presence of God which does not have its revelation of the lofty holiness of the Most High God. It is the awe which evokes 'the fear of the Lord' which is 'the beginning of wisdom'.

Jacob experienced the terror of awe at Bethel, and he wondered at Peniel how he could have seen the face of God and lived. Isaiah in the temple saw the glory of the Lord but it only served to convince him of his own unholiness, and he likewise wondered that he had seen God and lived. Moses at the burning bush was inclined to intrigue and put his critical faculty to work, only to be rebuked sternly. He hastily removed his sandals and worshipped. Later, when he wished to lead Israel into the promised land, God revealed His character to Moses in wonderful terms (Exod. 36:6–7), and we are told 'Moses made haste to bow his head towards the earth, and worshipped.'

The angel of the Lord who was called ‘the angel of his presence’ (Isa. 63:9) was the one who was seen. He was an intimate manifestation of God, yet was not God Himself. This seems to be the case when in the Pentateuch it appears that God gave the law to Israel, yet in Acts 7:53 and Galatians 3:9, Stephen and Paul both state that it came through angelic mediation.

When, then, we speak of an angelic communication of the Presence of God, we are not saying God was not present in the events described, but that He was present after the manner of a theophany. Since God is Spirit, and does not have a form that can be seen, it is evident that He must be made manifest in a seen form such as theophany, or by His uttered word which communicates Himself. We will examine both of these elements more particularly later.

When then an angel appeared to Gideon his terrified conclusion was, ‘Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.’ To this the Lord replied, ‘Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die.’ Only in this way could peace come to Gideon in the midst of terror. When the angel of the Lord appeared to the barren wife of Manoah, it was to tell her that she would have a son, Samson. She described the event to Manoah, ‘A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible.’ When the angel appeared to them both, Manoah said to his wife, ‘We shall surely die, for we have seen God.’ Again there was terror at seeing God. We observe in passing that Gideon and the parents of Samson were given revelations of God with a view to the outworking of covenant in the life of Israel.

Samuel’s experience of God was a simple and rather gentle one, though none the less effective because of that. Elijah’s experience was of a varied nature. He stated his relationship with God, ‘As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand....’. The magnificent action of God on Mount Carmel in consuming the true sacrifice ought to have encouraged the prophet, but some threatening words of Jezebel the queen sent Elijah fleeing into the wilderness. Twice he was ministered to gently by an angel, but later—at Mount Horeb—the powerful manifestation of God came to him, but not in the strong cyclonic wind, the terrifying earthquake and the consuming fire but in ‘the still small voice’. ‘And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.’ It was then he heard what God was saying to him.

The book of Daniel describes the visitations of the angel Gabriel to the prophet. Later we will examine the event in more detail but it is sufficient to say here that Daniel was to be given an understanding of God’s action in history, relating not only to Israel but to all the world. When Daniel saw the angel he swooned—‘I fell into a deep sleep’ (8:18). In 10:2–12 we have the account of another angelic visit. ‘So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me; my radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground.’

We might say that all these varying manifestations were revelations of the many aspects of God, but whether that were so or not, we know that the viewers of the theophanies went on to do the deeds God had commanded them. This would be as much true of the New Testament as of the Old. When the angel appeared to Zechariah—the one who was to be the father of John the Baptist—he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah.’ Mary was troubled by the greeting of the angel, if not by the angel himself, but was told, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.’ When the angel of the

Lord appeared to the shepherds then ‘they were filled with fear’, but were told, ‘Do not be afraid....’.

We need not trace all other appearances of angels, but need, at least, to glance at the Book of the Revelation in which the appearances of angels were many. In particular John the Seer was attended by at least one angel (cf. 1:1; 19:9; 21:9; 22:8–9), and we see that John was so moved by the angelic visitant that he wished to worship him only to be forbidden. We must keep in mind that every appearance of an angel to man is not a theophany, even though in some way it is connected with ‘the Presence’.

All of these events which have been mentioned have to do with God visiting His people. There are many more occasions which we have not recorded, but they can all be seen to be vital to the action of God and His plan. Whilst they tell us of human reaction—and response—to God’s visitation, the main point of them all is God’s forwarding of His plan, and His bringing it to its climax. Even so, it is a rich teaching given to us to know that God’s Presence as manifested in these forms is both awe-inspiring and wonderful. It is also confronting, facing us up to the reality of human relationship with God, and what we can expect from being one with Him. Perhaps there are all too few indications of this, and of the nature of man having fellowship with God.

That is why we need to pursue the matter further. It would not seem that by doing so we will be walking on forbidden ground for the materials in Scripture are plentiful, and richly informative.

### **FIRE ( BLAISE PASCAL)**

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,  
not of the philosophers and scientists.

Certainty, certainty. Feeling. Joy. Peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

*Deum memum et Deum vestrum.*

Thy God shall be my God.

Forgetfulness of the world and all, except God.

He is to be found only by the ways taught in the Gospel.

Greatness of the human soul.

O righteous Father, the world has not known Thee, but I have known Thee.

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I separated myself from Him.

*Dereliquerunt me fontem aquae vivae.*

My God, wilt Thou forsake me?

‘This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.’

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ

I separated myself from Him; I fled Him, renounced Him,  
crucified Him.

May I never be separated from Him!

He is to be kept only by the ways taught in the Gospel;

Renunciation, entire and sweet.

**Blaise Pascal**

## STUDY TWO

# GOD PRESENT TO HIS WORLD

## GOD PRESENT TO HIS CREATION

Peter said that God is a faithful Creator. 'Faithful' in the Old Testament is the equivalent of 'truthful'. That is He cannot be the Creator of all things and not be true to His intention for that creation. Since He said of creation, 'It is very good,' then as Creator He must sustain that goodness or full functionality, and bring it to whatever goal He has planned for it. Warning man—creation's key-figure—against the temptation to become autonomous, He, nevertheless, did not abandon man or the creation at the time of the Fall. The idea of God creating man and then forsaking him because of his failure does not fit with the idea of a concerned and faithful Creator.

The descent of man into sin, and the creation into the curse means only that God will rescue his world from its sin. This is the promise of Genesis 3:15 that the Tempter will be crushed, and this by 'the seed of woman'. Long before he spoke in grace to Abraham He spoke in grace to the human race. Even Cain knew a measure of grace. The flood was a judgement, but one which helped to liberate the earth, although full liberation—as we see in the prophets—belongs to the last time, the climax of history. Noah knew the grace of God, not only in being saved from the judgement of water, but also in the promise of the future that there would be no further judgement by a flood. God assured the preacher of righteousness that His family had a special place in his plan. He was concerned for Noah and his descendants, and would be faithful to His 'fixed order' (Ps. 148:8–9; Jer. 31:35–36) of creation.

Because of this Noah said, prophetically, 'Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem, and let Canaan be his slave. God enlarge Japheth, and let him [God] dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.' An Aramaic (Jewish) Targum renders it, 'He will cause his Shekinah [dwelling] to dwell in the dwelling place of Shem.' This is the first indication—as such—of God dwelling with man, and doubtless it is linked with God's covenant promise. Covenant with God was an agreement which was unilateral, i.e. God was the Initiator and the matter was of grace.

## GOD PRESENT IN THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

The Abrahamic covenant introduces clearly the idea of God's making of a special people. The promises to Abraham that Abraham would be special to God, and God to him are contained in the statement, 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' The promise that 'I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you . . . and I will be their God' spoke of an intimate relationship. Abraham had so much contact with God that he was called 'the friend of God' (Isa. 41:8), and theophanies were even in human form (cf. Gen. 15:1), so

that when the theophany was finished ‘God went up from Abraham’ (Gen. 17:22) which means He had personally accompanied with him for a time.

The relationship between God and Abraham underwent a test in the offering up of Isaac on Mount Moriah. Here Abraham came to see how deep it was. He saw the God ‘who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that are not’ (Rom. 4:17). His belief in a God was not merely that of mental assent but one which was deeply personal and total. Likewise Isaac, as he lay on the altar, witnessed the drama of that relationship, and knew himself to be in the line of such fellowship with God (Gen. 17:21).

‘The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham in Mesopotamia,’ Stephen told the Jewish Sanhedrin of his day. What did it mean for this young idolater with his father, grandfather, and other members of the family away there in Mesopotamia? What did it mean for God to appear to him? Well, just about everything. For a man to see God is an extraordinary event. To suddenly be confronted by God with His Being is as much—and perhaps more—than a man can experience. To be drawn to Ur of the Chaldees, then to go out into a place he did not know, i.e. to change from a sedentary to a nomad life—that is a radical revolution in a person’s life. To be given a vision of ‘a city to come’ is to have one’s present life truly significant in the light of what is yet to be. To have God visit—time and again—and each time to have His glory to confront the spirit of man, that is to come to know what it is for God to dwell—even if only somewhat—with man. Revelation after revelation unfolded itself to Abraham, and he saw Sarah from a new point of view, Ishmael and Hagar from different vantage points, and Isaac as his beloved, on whom his future and the future of the nations depended. Who can scan the heart of Abraham on the night of the covenant sacrifice, or the day of the ordered offering up of his own son? Who can understand the impressions of the fine and mature old man as the promises of God soaked into him, and as he became the very friend of God—a term given to no other man on earth (cf. Exod. 33:11)? Who can tell the greatness that comes to a man when God dwells with him? Who can understand that, apart from God, the way of a man is not in himself, and then understand that it is, indeed, in God?

It was Jacob who pursued the covenant promises. God appeared to him at Bethel, telling Jacob that He was ‘the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac.’ Then He said, ‘I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go.’ This was presence, and this was intimacy. Henceforward Bethel was—as its name indicates—‘the house of God’. The ‘house of God’ is the affirmation that God dwells with His covenant-people.

The account of Jacob wrestling with God—i.e. the angel of God—at Peniel deserves close reading and thoughtful contemplation. It was no mere incident. Jacob was intent on receiving the blessing of God, and knowing the name of God, i.e. having a full revelation of His Being. The astonishing thing to Jacob was ‘I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.’ Here the I AM of God met the Jacob ‘I am’ of carnal human endeavour and transformed it into a princely ‘I am’ of new worth. Again, we see the purpose of God in the intimate theophany. Subsequently when God again met Jacob at Bethel at a yet later time he confirmed to him the covenant promises as given to Abraham and Isaac, after which ‘God went up from him’.

## GOD PRESENT IN THE COVENANT WITH MOSES

We need to see that God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was expressed in His covenant with Moses, as later He would make a covenant with David, and then the new covenant through Christ with his people. These covenants are all the one, whatever their particular purposes may have been in the flow of history and according to God's specific intentions.

The suffering of Israel in Egypt caused the people under bondage to cry for help. We do not know whether it was to God they cried, and cried in virtue of the covenant, but in any case 'God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob', and made plans for their liberation from Egypt into Canaan. His theophany of the burning bush at Horeb to Moses was the revelation of Himself. Moses was to tell them, 'the God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and when they asked, 'What is his name?' to tell them, 'I AM has sent me to you.' He told Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'

Here, then, we see God moving to bring His presence first to Moses and then to His people. Whilst God spoke in dreams and visions to the prophets—even of Moses' time—yet of Moses He said, 'With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the Lord.' A kind of epitaph to Moses was, 'And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses whom the *Lord knew face to face.*'

The story of Moses is the story of Israel from its suffering in Egypt to the edge of the promised land. It is the story of a man to whom God spoke time and again. It seems there was scarcely a time in the last forty years of his life when God was not present to him. It was said of Moses that there was 'none like him for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel'.

God directed him in all these things. Moses spent time with God on the forty days at Mt. Sinai, beholding him in a wonderful way and receiving the directions which were to be for the well-being and worship of Israel to their covenant God. Moses argued with God for his near apostate people who had made and worshipped the golden calf. He met the Most High in the tent of meeting where 'the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend'. Yet even all these things did not fully satisfy the hunger of this 'meekest man upon all the earth'. He insisted on knowing more, and doing what was right. 'Now therefore,' he told God, 'I pray thee, if I have found favour in thy sight, show me now thy ways, and that I may know thee and find favour in thy sight. Consider too that this nation is thy people.'

God's answer was 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' Perhaps no more thrilling or comforting words have ever been spoken to a human being.

Moses wanted to seal the promises. His answer, too, is of great character. 'If thy presence will not go with me, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in thy sight, I and thy people? *Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people from all other people that are upon the earth?*'

Here then, in history the great event had happened. God had appeared to a people, had chosen them within covenant and had promised His presence would always be with them. Had He not told Pharaoh, 'Israel is my first-born son'? Was it not written later that God had said,

Surely they are my people,

sons who will not deal falsely;  
and he became their Saviour.  
In all their affliction he was afflicted,  
and the angel of his presence saved them;  
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;  
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

It was the dwelling of God with His people that became so prominent. God did not simply reveal Himself from time to time, and help from situation to situation. He made what we might call elaborate provisions for dwelling with them His covenant nation. His command to Moses was, 'Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.'

There was to be nothing arbitrary about God's dwelling. Nor was there to be any presumption on the part of the people, any easy familiarity with their Creator-Redeemer God. The tabernacle was to be in the midst of the camp, so that God was in the midst. The shape of worship was to teach His holiness and induce reverence. He would dwell above the mercy seat which was to be overshadowed by the cherubim. God's promise was, 'I will dwell among the people of Israel and I will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.'

Something of great importance had happened in Israel, but it was of importance to all the world. Whereas man had died to God, and his death throes had been seen down through all history, and man had been separated from the living God by the death and deadliness of his sins, now a new era was opening. God was dwelling with a race of His people. God was bringing His presence to bear upon this people, and the goal of it all was blessing to all the nations of the earth. Man was learning—even as a nation—what it was, and is, to know the presence of God.

Great prophet Moses—prince among men and worthy successor to your ancient ancestor Abraham—how was it with you and God? What questions we could ask you who spoke face to face with God as does a friend speak to his friend. What did you come to know as you shared in manifestation after manifestation? You heard the words which themselves told the glory of God and were the glory of His character—'merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin but who will be no means clear the guilty'. What did you learn on the Mount, not only of the wonderful and terrible law but of Him Whose glory you saw, and in which you lived those forty days? Was it all this that made you a man of compassion, and the meekest man on all the earth? Was it the glory you could not forget which took you through those demanding years with a nation that began as a rabble, that was rebellious and idolatrous, but for whom you were prepared to have your name blotted out of the book of life? When the end came and yet your eye was not dim, nor your natural force abated, was there regret for the incident in the wilderness when you twice struck the rock in your anger, profaning the Lord, or did the great grace of the Redeemer heal you of your failure, and set you moving towards Him 'seeing Him who is invisible' so that you might have the true sabbath rest which is the crowning glory of creation? We hear rumours and intimations and have understandings of you in your psalms, and in the strong and noble songs you sang, for when a man sees God he sings as never any other time he sings.

You have taught us what it is to have God dwelling in a man, as also what it is for a man to dwell in God.

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### STUDY THREE:

## THE PRESENCE, THE GLORY, THE ANGEL, THE WORD, AND THE SPIRIT

God was present to Israel. The ark of the covenant signified His presence for it was called 'the ark of the covenant' and 'the ark of testimony' containing as it did the two stone tablets of the law. How reverently was the ark to be handled in times of travelling, and how specific the instructions for its conveyance. Crossing into the promised land it was 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth' which was to pass over Jordan before the people, and in its passing the miracle of stopping the waters of the river took place. God was the living God. God was with them.

Later the ark became a thing to Israel almost of superstition. They took it out to fight their enemies the Philistines, and God broke their use of it as a mere fetish by allowing it to be captured by the enemy, but then it was to the enemy's hurt and humiliation. Dagon the Philistine deity fell face down before the ark leaving only the trunk of that idol intact. When the temple was built, the ark was placed in the holy of holies, and was a thing to be revered.

The glory of God was linked with the ark. When Eli's daughter-in-law was giving birth to her child in her own death-throes, she heard the news of the capture of the ark by the Philistines and named her child '*Ichabod*', saying, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured!'

The glory of Israel was that God's glory dwelt amongst them. By 'God's glory' we understand the nature of God Himself. The Hebrew word *kabod* carried the idea of substantiality, something heavy, hence the ideas of wealth, honour, dignity and power. Other words such as *adderer*, *tiphara* and *tsebi* had the connotation of beauty, radiance, majesty, power and glory. Altogether the words conveyed the ideas of esteem, essential worthiness, reputation, prestige, fame, position and honour.

When Moses requested God to show him all his glory (Exod. 33:12–34:9) we might have expected that he would have been given visual representations of it, but the essential glory was communicated by the word of God, especially in the language of Exodus 34:6–7—the revelation of the very nature of God. Doubtless there were visual elements, and if so then they, too, were interpreted by the word of God.

We have seen that the glory of God was symbolized in the ark of the covenant, but the whole covenant, the law, the presence of God—the Shekinah—all combined to be the glory Israel knew. The glory of the idols was a transitory and foolish glory, one having no true substance. The worship of God was the worship of His glory—the glory which was seen in theophanies such as Isaiah witnessed in the temple where celestial creatures proclaimed the holiness of God—the *trisagion*—and said that the whole earth was filled with His glory, and it was this vision the prophets pronounced—that one day the earth would be filled with the glory of God and the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

At one with the glory was the Shekinah, the Presence of God—the cloud of glory. Although the Hebrew word shekinah (dwelling) is not present in the Bible, yet the glory-cloud of Exodus 13:21–22 (cf. Exod. 14:19, 24; Num. 14:14) was representative of God’s presence and glory.

*And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from the people.*

When the congregation was at rest the glory-cloud stayed over the tabernacle (Exod. 40:36; Num.9:17; 14:14). When God wished to speak personally with Moses, the pillar descended to the door of the tent of meeting. When the tabernacle was completed it was attested by the descent of the glory-cloud upon it (Exod. 40:34–38; Lev. 9:23f.). Again, at the dedication of the temple built by Solomon the temple was filled with the cloud of glory (I Kings 8:10f.; II Chron. 5:14). In Deuteronomy 5:24 it was said, ‘Behold the Lord our God has shown us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire; we have this day seen God speak with man and man still live.’ The glory of that Mount Sinai visitation with the law is described in other—and most beautiful—words in Deuteronomy 33:2,

*The Lord came from Sinai  
and dawned from Seir upon us;  
he shone from Mount Paran,  
he came forth from the ten thousands  
of holy ones,  
with flaming fire at his right hand.*

The glory of the Lord is described with great beauty and pathos in the prophecy of Ezekiel. With beauty because the majesty of His glory is depicted in terms of fire and attendant celestial worship and service, and with pathos because the glory rises up and departs from Jerusalem—the sign of His wrath on its evil and pollution, and the seeming renunciation of the whole covenant. However, Ezekiel also shows a new temple, of vast proportions and significance which foreshadows the return—the eschatological return—of the glory of the Lord. Haggai 2:6 prophesies the filling of the second temple with the glory of the Lord. All in all, the people of God knew Him to be present because He manifested His glory amongst them.

We have already spoken of the angel of the Lord who appeared to different ones of God’s people in order to reveal to them the will of God. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob knew such visitations. So did Moses in greater measure than others. As we have seen, it was the angel of the Lord who gave the law at Sinai, for the angel was as the Lord Himself. Joshua was met by ‘the commander of the army of the Lord’ near Jericho, and he was not aware that this was a theophany until he was told, ‘Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy.’

The judges were likewise visited, as also prophets and kings. Such visitations were outward manifestations of Yahweh who was present to His people.

God’s presence by His word is not to be thought of as mystical and occultic. The word of God was the direct expression of His will, and of His intentions for His people. I Samuel 3:1 speaks of the period of the Judges, and especially at the time of the judge Eli; ‘And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.’

This passage was speaking of the rarity of the prophetic word. We saw in Numbers 12:6 that the prophetic word was given in dreams and visions, i.e. 'in dark speech'. Even so, the prophetic was given.

If God were not present, then He could not speak, but He spoke from His presence with His people. It is true that His law revealed His righteousness, and constantly demanded the obedience of His people, but from time to time He expressed Himself personally at points of their living history. Left to their own thinking they would undoubtedly make deficient decisions and proceed on wrong paths, such as the devising of the golden calf. God's presence then, was made effective in His giving of the word. The deposit of that word—the covenantal, legal and prophetic word—was a rare treasure for Israel. This can be seen by the revival that happened in the time of King Josiah when the book of the law was discovered in the temple.

The word of God was never apart from the Spirit of God. The prophecy of Ezekiel had identified the glory and presence of God with the Spirit of God. He was the Spirit of the Lord, and in Haggai 2:4–5 God told the people not to think He had forsaken them, 'for I am with you, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not.' The thought here is that the Spirit of God had never really departed from them, and so God has always been with them.

Isaiah 63:7–14 is a powerful passage speaking of God's leading of His people out of Egypt into Canaan. In this remarkable and comforting passage the Lord personally leads His people and is a Shepherd to them for, 'In all their affliction he was afflicted'. At the same time it is really the angel of the Lord who cares for them and leads them for 'the angel of his presence saved them'. Yet again it is the Spirit of the Lord who was present; 'he put in the midst of them his holy Spirit'. It is true that 'they rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit'—doubtless by their murmuring and complaining, but most terribly by their invention of the golden calf—yet 'the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest'.

The Holy Spirit, then, was the Spirit of His presence. As the Spirit came upon Moses, upon the seventy elders, upon Joshua and Caleb, upon Bezalel, upon the judges, upon prophets and upon such kings as Saul and David, so always the work of the Spirit was the inspiration of the word of God, and was at the heart of the glory of the presence of God.

So then the presence of God was manifested in and by the glory, the giving of the word, the angel of the Lord and the Spirit, so that Israel never was without the Presence. Sometimes it indeed seemed that the Presence was absent, but the absence of the Presence was what made the Presence so precious. It became ever so more real by its absence, yet its absence was intolerable. Israel could not live without the Presence, and since God had promised, 'I will not leave you nor forsake you,' Israel knew that in the ultimate God would never absent Himself from them.

Indeed they looked to the day when the glory of God would fill Israel to overflowing, and the nations of the earth would come to Jerusalem and partake in 'the house of prayer for all nations' and the whole earth would worship Him. That would be the day when the glory of the Lord, and the knowledge of the glory of the Lord would cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea.

## STUDY FOUR:

# GOD'S PRESENCE IN JESUS CHRIST

## GOD IN THE FLESH

'Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' 'But as he [Joseph] considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' Also, 'Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel.' '

What God had told Ahaz the king of Judah through Isaiah (7:14) he repeated through his angel to Joseph, applying it to the conception and birth of Jesus. Immanuel means 'God with us'. No stronger name could be given in regard to God's settled and continuing presence with Israel through His Son, the Son of whom the prophets spoke in such Scriptures as II Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 9:6-7; Hos. 11:1; Psalm 2; and Psalm 89. This Son was to be the King set on holy Zion, to whom the nations of the earth were to be given, who would sit upon the throne of David, ruling the nations with a rod of iron, and who would cry to God, 'Thou art my Father!'

John portrayed firstly the Word, the eternal Logos. By this Word all things were made, for when the beginning began he already was. He was face-to-face with God, and he was God.

*And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

These words of John 1:14 catch up many of the elements of the Old Testament by, or 'pitched His tent among us'—a reference to the tabernacle in which God dwelt. Scholars have linked 'full of grace and truth' with Exodus 34:6-7, since the New Testament 'grace' (*charis*) is compounded of 'gracious' (*chen*) and 'steadfast love' (*chesed*), and 'truth' (*aletheia*) is 'faithfulness' (*emunah*). The 'glory' (*doxa*) is the same as the glory (*kabod*) which was always in Israel. So then God was now present in Israel by the presence of His Son, who in his coming was even more God than the angel of the Lord.

John goes on to show that the incomparable Moses was the means by which the law came to Israel, but even more than that wonderful law, 'grace and truth' have come by Jesus Christ. That is, the nature of God has come to the earth dynamically in the person of Jesus Christ—the one who has become man. Not all the theophanies of the Old Testament add up to this revelation of God. 'No man has ever seen God, the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.'

That is why John continually records the fact that the Son has been sent by the Father, into the world, to redeem the world, and to give perfect revelation of the Father. The ultimate act of that revelation was the death of the Cross in which 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself'.

The Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—are concerned with the incarnation, not only in its origins, but in its effects. Mark speaks of 'the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God', and speaks about 'the Gospel of God'. For these three writers there is the fascination of this man who does such remarkable things, and speaks such wonderful words. For them he is historic flesh and blood. There is very little contemplation of who he is. They scarcely develop any theology of him. 37 times Mark, having described the quick and complete actions of Jesus, says straightway he went on to the next thing.

Without doubt, descriptions of him as 'Son of God' are present, but most of his works are done—as it has been said—'under veils'. Jesus is not anxious to prove himself as Son of God. He often refers to himself as 'Son of man', and this title firstly refers to his flesh-and-blood humanity—a fact which no one doubted. Even so, his humanity was special as 'Son of man' for he had authority to forgive sins, authority over the Sabbath, and undoubtedly referred back to the man who had universal authority and judgement, as set out in Daniel chapter 7.

It is not our intention here to develop the ideas of him as Messiah, as Son of God, and even as Son of man, but just to see that—in John's words—he tabernacled amongst us. Later, John in his Epistles is anxious for all to believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. He was no phantom, no illusion of a man. He was man, and as such was present amongst humanity.

Even in the Gospels which emphasize his coming to Israel and for 'the lost of the tribes of Israel' there are intimations that his mission is universal. He is to be 'the light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel'. In the apocalyptic passages such as Mark 13, Matthew 13 and 24, and Luke 21, the Gospel is to be preached among all nations, thus precipitating the end. The ends of the three Gospels speak of the Gospel being preached to every person on the earth, to all the nations, and of the nations of the earth being baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The point of all this is that God's presence will be in all the earth. As though to emphasize this, Jesus tells his disciples that he will be with them always 'to the close of the age' (Matt. 28:20).

Paul also makes much of the incarnation. His magnificent passage of Philippians 2:5–9 shows that the Son was prepared to become man for all time, and to enter into the historic stream of the human race with redemptive purpose. In Galatians 4:4 the apostle says he was 'sent forth out of' God (*exapostello*), and was born of woman, born under the law that he might redeem them who were under the law. In Romans 8:3 he says that God 'sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh'. These are all statements much in the same ethos as John's description of the incarnation.

Paul speaks of the incarnate one as 'the visible expression of the invisible God', a statement which is almost parallel with 'the word was with God, and the word was God'. Like John he attributes the creation to the Son, even saying it was 'unto him', i.e., that the purpose and goal of creation is to Christ, and is Christ, a thought which is substantially repeated in I Corinthians 8:6.

The writer of Hebrews richly takes up the matter of the incarnation. The same greatness as Creator-Mediator is expressed in 1:2 as in Colossians 1:15–17, but in 1:3 his work of the Cross is mentioned without speaking of his incarnation. In 2:5–8 the author identifies the ‘son of man’ of Psalm 8 with Jesus, which in Psalm 8 means created man. 2:10–18 speaks of his incarnation which led to salvation. As the children ‘share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature’, for ‘he had to be made like his brethren in every respect’ in order ‘to make propitiation for the sins of the people’.

The rest of the Epistle is given over to showing that this man Jesus was greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Aaron and his order of priesthood, as his sacrifices transcended those of the former covenant, and were wholly effective. Jesus was a greater mediator than had been those before him, especially as he was the mediator of the new covenant—‘a better covenant’. Moses was the builder of the former ‘household of God’ but Jesus was ‘faithful over God’s house as a son’.

If we wish to spell out the implications of the person and work of Jesus as set out by the writer of Hebrews then we see that the wonder of the covenant as Moses saw and proclaimed it—including the amazing presence of God as He indwelt His people—has been superseded and transcended. Just as in the former covenant God had promised not to fail, leave, or forsake Israel—i.e. His presence would always be with them and go with them—so in Hebrews He gives the same promise regarding the church, the new people of God (Deut. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5; cf. Heb. 13:5).

Not only was God present with His people, but through the new and living way Christ had opened because of his death, God’s people could now enter into the holy of holies—hitherto denied to the congregation as a whole—and come into the presence of God, that presence in all its awfulness and holiness, now became the place of the living God, the Holy Father of all grace.

Oh, Son of man it is an amazing matter that you should become man, that you should empty yourself of your divine prerogatives—though not of your divine self—and become man. We humans who are ashamed at the forms our fleshly humanity take, and who are even horrified—from time to time—at the devilishness we can devise, we are astonished beyond measure that you should desire to become human. Glorious as was our created humanity in the beginning, and recognizing that it will be even more glorious in the end, we nevertheless are astounded that you should wish to become not merely like us but become us.

We have learned that unless and until you became one of us you could not live for us, die for us, rise for us and ascend for us. Without your humanity we could never be redeemed from our corruption. One part of us can understand you temporarily taking on our humanity, and then putting off that humanity as a garment which has fulfilled its function, but you never disrobed your humanity. It is with you, and it is you, forever! Your Deity has a human face forever.

Had you become incarnate, simply to be with us, and to encourage us, and to empathize with us, then that would have gone down in history as a great act of God—perhaps the greatest. But you came not simply to temporarily tabernacle, or even permanently to tabernacle, but to die for us so that we might live with you forever. So great was your tender mercy.

We tell you in the humility that weeps that we see the greatness of God as He revealed Himself to Israel in the ancient covenant: we see that greatness in you, greatness become man, and greatness walking Palestine in your flesh, and walking the roads of all lands, the seas of all oceans and then moving through the airways of all skies, for having become enfleshed you did not bid us ‘Good-bye!’ as you returned to your own heaven. Your presence is with us now, and in you the Father of us all is also present, and through the eternal Spirit You Both abide with us, and you are our home, and—as we have been taught—we too are Your home.

We cannot now visualize what our world would be like had you not become incarnate, let alone not been our Redeemer. We cannot visualize what history would have been these past two

milleniums had you not visited us, and stayed amongst us, and done the work you have done. Not only we who believe in you have been deeply affected by your coming, but those of other religions and other faiths, too, to whom we have been witnessing these past 2,000 years. Doubtless our brethren in Israel-after-the-flesh cannot be other than mindful of you. The whole world is mindful, but then especially us, for we have been shaped after your likeness. We can never see human flesh without thinking of you who took on such flesh, forever.

These are things of continual wonderment to us, but we must be vocal and let our doxologies flow for the greatness of Your humility, and the humility of Your greatness. Day by day and year by year we must add to the treasury of praise and worship the new and wonderful things we realize about you, about your coming in that past time, and about your coming again.

## STUDY FIVE:

### THE ABSENCE OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE

It seems that no sooner had God's presence come among us in Jesus Christ, than he was gone from us. The disciples were always uneasy about the intimations he gave of his crucifixion, his death, and his rising again. They feared to ask of these sayings, putting them out of their minds as best they could. The last hours before the betrayal and the death were heart-sickening ones, yet it was in the very hour of his betrayal that he told them,

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am there you may be also. And you know the way I am going.

When Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?' Jesus said to him,

*I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me. If you had known me you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him....he who has seen me has seen the Father.*

It was clear that Jesus was going to leave this world, and his going made his followers fearful. No sooner had they come to know him than he was leaving them. His presence had made him indispensable to them, but now he was going. During the evening of the last supper he said to them, 'I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also.' Later in the night he said, 'A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while and you will see me' (John 14:18-20).

These words have been generally interpreted to mean that Jesus would come to them after the Resurrection, and that he would be permanently with them indwelling them by the Holy Spirit. The passage refers to the new abiding form, i.e. 'in that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.' This is the powerful new fact that God is present to believing man through the Son and the Spirit, and so man is also present to God.

In John 16:16, Jesus said again, 'A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while and you will see me.' Whilst this may in some sense refer to the Death, and then to the rising of Jesus, it would seem more to be fulfilled in and by the coming of the Holy Spirit, for in previous verses he had just said that the Holy Spirit would show the Son and the Father in a rich revelatory way. Whilst the Spirit is present, Christ is present, and that is how it was to be for the disciples.

The Ascension of Jesus was in one sense a terminal matter for the followers of Jesus. Those who saw him go were told by two persons in white that Jesus would come again. The event separated Christ and his disciples. He was gone beyond their sight. He had gone away into heaven—whatever that might mean. Jesus had told them, ‘Where I am going you cannot come,’ and, ‘I go to the Father, and you see me no more.’ He had also told them plainly, ‘I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father.’

They should have rejoiced at the thought of his going—‘If you loved me you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father.’ They were, however, sad, yet Luke records that having seen the Ascension ‘they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, blessing God.’

His departure to the Father, then, was not a thing of sorrow but a thing of joy. For one thing he had told them he would be preparing a place for them in his Father’s ‘many mansions’, and that they would meet him there. He had also said that his going would mean the coming of the Holy Spirit in that way which the prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus had said would happen. All this was to be to their advantage.

The seeming contradiction was that he had gone from them bodily, and in that sense was absent from the earth yet in another sense he was with them in his unseen Presence. That is, he was present to them by the Holy Spirit. There was, then, the real absence of Jesus as well as the real Presence. In one sense he was more present to them than prior to his death since his person was made real to them by the Holy Spirit at—and following—the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. In fact it was only possible for him to be present because he had gone, for only in this way could the Spirit make him real to them.

If we say he had not really ascended and was present in unseen form, then we are wrong. If we say he really ascended and so was present by the Holy Spirit, we are right. The concept of the ubiquity of Christ is a theological rationalizing of the problem presented by the fact that Christ was the Creator-Mediator of the world prior to his coming to earth and yet had to be present to all the creation.

The term ‘ubiquity of Christ’ covers the attempt of the early and late theologians to explain how Christ could be present in heaven—following his Ascension—and yet be present to all things of the creation. The explanations are rather scholastic. Augustine and Hugo of St Victor held that ‘Christ is humanly in heaven, divinely everywhere’. With the incursion of the transubstantiationist view of the eucharist, i.e. that Christ’s body was actually present in the elements following their ritual consecration, then some doctrine of ubiquity had to be held. Luther held a consubstantiationist view, i.e. that Christ was present ‘in, through, and under the elements’, although such a statement is difficult to explain. He taught that ‘the body of Christ is exceptional and supernatural, different from ordinary human flesh and blood; that his flesh is born of the spirit, of a spiritual nature, and that the attributes of magnitude and extension do not apply to his body’ (*The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1977, Vol. XII pp. 50–51).

It is essential to understand the doctrine of the Ascension, and with it that of the Session of Christ, i.e. that Jesus having risen from the dead ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father, and with the Father reigns over creation until the defeat of all evil powers is accomplished, and evil creatures are judged and brought to the punishment of destruction. ‘The right hand of God’ is not intended to be locative so much as a term for the place of authority. The Son who is the Word is the one by whom all things were created, and so he is present to them as Creator-Redeemer, although the mode of his presence is not easy to understand.

For these disciples which understood his Ascension and Session in functional terms, there was no difficulty in asserting the bodily absence of Jesus whilst insisting on his presence with the church as its Lord and its Head. Figurative terms do not mean the lack of reality. The early church knew Christ was present to it whilst they also knew he reigned over the creation, and did so for the church. Doubtless the theological exercises in seeking to rationalize 'absence' and 'presence' are numerous but it is the functional reality of both 'absence' and 'presence' that matters.

## STUDY SIX:

### THE ABIDING PRESENCE

We could come away from our last section thinking wrongly that God came amongst His people in the incarnation, which, although wonderful, ceased when Jesus Christ ascended to His right hand. This is because we confuse the presence of the Word (Logos) in flesh with the presence of God. God was present to His world from creation. In Him man has always lived and moved and had his being. For want of a better term we can say that creational man has always had his being in God even though relationally—through the Fall—he has been far from God. We have talked of his existential anguish which is his lot because of being alienated from God. The world of the Creator in which sinful man lives is God's world, and does not belong to evil powers such as Satan and his fallen angels. It belongs to God. He is present.

We saw that the people of God related to Him by faith in Him. They met with Him in worship, and addressed their prayers to Him. He brought them into covenant relationship with Him, set out the worship rituals, blessed them with His life, and was present in their midst. Again they acknowledged this presence by and in worship.

The coming of the Son was the greatest event of history. Immanuel was God-in-the-flesh, God-amongst-them. Christ's humanity did not so much visibilize God to them, as it communicated the true relationship a human being can have with God. Christ's work was to deal with the sin which alienated man from God; deal with the rebellious spirit of man by winning him through the love of the Cross. The reconciliation brought man to God, and man to man. This was the presence of God. The going of the Son in his risen and ascended humanity altered nothing in the new relationship through reconciliation. Before the departure of his humanity from the human scene, Jesus set in motion the things which make for union with God.

As in Israel the glory was one of the elements of the Divine presence so the word became flesh and his glory was seen, 'the glory as of the only Son of the Father'. John's Gospel is the story of glory—especially how Jesus revealed the glory of God. He kept claiming that he did not seek his own glory but that of the Father, and that he had glorified the Father. Henceforth, men—seeing the incarnate Word—see the glory of the Father. It is 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'.

The glory of God in the covenant with Moses was set forth by His word. The two were inseparable. We saw that God communicates Himself by what He says. He spoke His covenant into being as He had spoken creation into being. What began to be said to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, flowered out with Moses. The word of the covenant was both the word of the law, and the word of the prophet. We need to keep in mind that almost all communication is by the word, whether between men and men or God and men. The revelation to Moses of His glory in Exodus 34:6–7 was the spoken word about his being. So then, in the new covenant, when 'the word became flesh' there was no creation of a word which was other than God, though comporting with God—an hypostasis, so to speak. No, it was—and is—the Son who is the Word (the Logos) who

actually speaks to us in our time as God spoke by the prophets in past time (Heb. 1:1–2).

In Israel the glory of God was His attributes which were covenantal—'merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty'. The words 'mercy', 'grace', 'long-suffering', 'love' and 'faithfulness' are New Testament terms which take on enhanced beauty and significance, because of God Incarnate. If God met His people via His moral attributes, then no less under the new covenant. God's presence is in His Son. He who has seen the Son has seen the Father.

The new covenant was established as Jesus was the mediator of a better covenant. The legacy of this was the new worship in the Spirit. Just as God was 'enthroned on the praises of His people', so the new worship was of the Spirit and of a new kind. The new covenant people were able to break through by the living way—Christ's crucified and sacrificial flesh—into the holy of holies and come to the Father. Jesus said, 'such the Father ever seeks,' so that when they come it is at the Father's initiative. Because of the Son—and out of his own Sonship—they cry 'Abba! Father!' They are new sons worshipping the Father.

Because of all these things—and more—the covenantal presence of God is in the midst of His people. Christ's Ascension does not cancel out 'the benefits of his death and passion'. God's calling and gifts are without recall. The new community is established. He said, 'I will build my church,' and he did. If its Head is in heaven, then its body is on the earth, very much on the earth, moved in all its action by him. He has made of Jew and Gentile 'one new man', and he has made more. He has made the worshipping community to be the habitation of God through the Spirit.

The church the habitation of God! That is a marvellous matter. The new temple was to be 'the house of prayer for all nations', and so it began to be at Pentecost when the new worship came to be 'in Spirit and in truth'. The church is 'God's dwelling place in the Spirit', the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning 'the Israel of God', 'a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ', for it constitutes a new 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation', those who 'were once no people, but now are God's people'.

All of these things, then, dispel the thought that with the bodily absence of Jesus Christ the benefits of his human mission were lost. To the contrary: they could only be sealed by his going. If God had dwelt wonderfully with the patriarches, and with Israel, then how much more now with His people who had been led to the heart of His Fatherhood by the Son! Yet in saying this we are led to enquire and examine how it is that in this age we have the closest intimacy with God that man has known in his history.

In you, oh Christ, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We say 'hidden' because they are not displayed to curious eyes. No one may see these deep things of God unless he be in God. In you, oh Christ, dwells the fulness of the Godhead, bodily. And we are filled full in you. Indeed our lives are hidden with you in God.

Again the peering world shall not see as with human analysis or discernment. No, are we the sons of God but the world does not know that any more than they knew you as the Son of God.

We are glad that you came as a human being to move amongst us. In all our afflictions you were afflicted. You were familiar with our griefs and sorrows, yet you did more than empathize and sympathize. You bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and you healed our wounds. You reconciled us to the Father. You brought us to dwell in Him, and Him to dwell in us. You effected this new and intimate relationship. Then you left us to work out what you had wrought. You are with us in it all. Your intelligence, will, love and encouragement flow down to us as we are the body to your head.

We praise you for going to the right hand of the Father. With Him you move in history to bring the good end and climax to it, and you incorporate us in that plan, demanding our participation as you work it out to its glorious fulfilment, its holy telos.

Teach us then in this hour in which we live, love and labour upon this earth to know your personal presence in heart and mind and spirit, that we may know you more intimately, and so know the Father Himself more deeply. You have not left us as orphans, but as children of the Father, you being our Elder brother, the one who unceasingly day and night intercedes for us, intervenes against the powers of darkness, and prepares the heavenly mansions for our coming.