



New Creation Teaching Ministry

1991 Pastors Study Group Titles

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The Trinity and Relationships

Introduction and Plan of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationships that exist between the Members of the Triune Godhead, as they are biblically revealed, and to enquire whether such relationships are not, in fact, those that obtain between members of the human race as they are in true relationship with God. Also to see true Man¹ as a creature who is not only ontological, but who is, at the same time, teleological, so that ultimately he is not only admitted into the mystery of the Godhead but is, himself, one in fellowship with the Triune God, and participates in the Divine nature.

The plan of the Essay is as follows,

1. The Relationships of the Triune God,
 - (i) as biblically revealed, and as worked through in historical theology,
 - (ii) the form of these relationships.
2. Man in the Image of God is a Relational Creature
3. The Present Relationships God Has With Redeemed Humanity, and Redeemed Humanity has With the Triune God.
4. The present relationships redeemed humanity has within its own community.
5. The ultimate mutual relationships of God and redeemed humanity.

The Relationships of the Triune God

The Scriptures the Way to Comprehending the Triune God

We must affirm the unity of God as set out in passages such as Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 6:4, and assert that His Being is immutable (Mal. 3:6; Num. 23:19; James 1:17), and ineffable (Isa. 40:18, 25; 44:6–7; 46:5, 9). It is obvious that, apart from the Scriptures, we can have no knowledge of God that constitutes a revelation. The so-called ‘general revelation of God’ is only known to exist because the Scripture describes it (cf. Rom. 1:19ff.; Ps. 19:1ff.). Again the *vestigia trinitatis*, which Barth acknowledges does exist, but which he does not see to be a revelation, or even a way to

¹ The use of the term ‘Man’ in this essay should not be seen as discriminatory or part of exclusivist language. Just as God is One, and has one centre of consciousness although composed of Three Persons, so is Man who is in the image of God-Man has one centre of consciousness. Man is a male-female entity according to Genesis 1:27 and 5:1-2 and whilst each male person and each female person may be spoken of with particularity, just as members of the Godhead can be spoken of with particularity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) yet God is One. So, then, made in His image, Man is one. Even the word ‘humanity’ conveys the thought of a multiplicity of human beings, rather than one male-female entity.

revelation, do not directly aid us. Within the Scriptures there are statements regarding God's unity and ineffability, posited mainly on the basis that knowledge of God is impossible without His self-revelation, especially as there is no point of comparison with Him. Since He has created all things He cannot be compared with them ('I am God, and there is none like me'; cf. Isa. 40:18, 25; 44:6-7; 46:5, 9). In addition to this is the impediment to true human knowledge of God, i.e. Man's rejection of his original knowledge of God (Rom. 1:19f.) and his continuing refusal to know God (Rom. 1:28; 3:11; Ps. 14:1).

Within the Scriptures it is axiomatic that God reveals Himself and does so by many media such as creation, His word, theophanies, His covenant, His law, prophets, works signs and wonders by His Spirit, His Son and by the people of God—in whom He has always dwelled and manifested His presence.² For our purposes it is God's self-revelation as Father by the Son and the Spirit of Himself, as also of the Son and the Spirit which concerns us. It is helpful in this respect to examine what O Kirn says³ in which he leads us to the important point that 'the immanent Trinity must never be isolated from the revealed'.

If it is the nature of faith to conceive the mundane in the supermundane, the historical in the eternal, then the religious realization of the history of redemption is only practicable as the eternal self-revelation and self-communication of God are perceived in the person of the Redeemer and the possession of the Holy Spirit by the Church. The same Christ who, as the founder of a new religious life, belongs to mankind and to history, belongs at the same time to the eternal life of God, of whom he is the full revelation. The Spirit by whom man calls God Father and is transformed into the likeness of Christ, belongs both to the temporal life of the Christian and to the self-manifestation of God, who desires to fill his personal creatures with his presence. If in the historic revelation of salvation the eternal activity of God be recognized, every other self-revelation of God must be connected with the historic Redeemer, and every other self-communication of God with the Holy Spirit. Without this self-evidencing of God, no spiritual existence is conceivable to be complete. In this not only is the thought resumed which Origen associated with the idea of the eternal generation of the Son, but the idea of Paul (Col. i. 15 sqq.) is applied anew to the present world-conception. What, however, stands out clearly in a temporal process in the course of which the religious, moral, personal life takes shape, is, when considered as divine act, not a becoming but an eternal presence, the expression of his unchangeable being. In this sense, Son and Spirit are to be assumed as eternally existent in God. This is the final statement possible for thought. But the how of the immanent Trinity is inscrutable for want of categories of temporal thought to conceive the eternal or for want of analogies in human experience. To speak of three persons in one Godhead is to use an inadequate symbol. The ancient conception of person was elastic enough to admit a recoalescence after the distinction, but the modern idea of personality as a distinctly self-conscious, self-determining psychological unity would yield only a collective unity as well as extinguish the human self-consciousness of Christ or ascribe to him a double personality. Better is it to speak of three elements, or a threefold eternal determination of the divine being. No theory must impair the personality of the exalted Christ for Christian piety. In him divine grace takes human shape in history, and in unison with the Father he remains the head of the Church. Likewise, God's holiness, transforming the earthly, obtains its historical form in the community of redemption, which joined in the Spirit with God through Christ participates in eternal life. To avoid empty schemata and the barren field of mystical contemplation, in the interest of vital reality, *the immanent Trinity must never be isolated from the revealed. The religious value of the doctrine of the Trinity consists alone in expounding the history of*

² No matter how fine this revelation is, it is not necessarily received, i.e. is not always seen and heard. The hearers have to have an ear to hear or they will remain deaf-hearing being a matter not primarily of the intellect, but of the will (cf. Luke 8:7).

³ Article, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity', The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1977), Volume 12, pp. 18-23.

revelation as the self-disclosure of the eternal God. Thus the order ever remains from the triad of revelation to unity and not vice versa, and the doctrine of the immanent Trinity can be no more than a limiting concept.

A Theology of Trinitarian Relationships

One of the problems of Trinitarian theology has been in examining as separate entities—so to speak—the immanent (ontological) and economic (revealed) trinities. They are of course the one, but it is not easy to coalesce them into one. In the quote above, O. Kirn is saying that what we can know of the Godhead in our situation as human beings is only that which has been revealed through the self-revelation and self-communication of God. The nexus for us as humans is the incarnation, so that ‘the same Christ who, as the founder of a new religious life, belongs to mankind and to history, belongs at the same time to the eternal life of God, of whom he is the full revelation’. Likewise the Holy Spirit mediates the Persons and the experience of them to us—‘The Spirit by whom man calls God Father and is transformed into the likeness of Christ, belongs both to the temporal life of the Christian and to the self-manifestation of God, who desires to fill his personal creatures with his presence’. Both the Spirit and the Son bring to us—through the grace of the Father—our experience and knowledge of the three Persons. Thus what we know of God, and especially as Father, Son and Holy Spirit—along with their relational unity—comes to us out of the incarnation, the revealing Son and the revealing Spirit via the revealing word. We thus know what we know by these means.⁴ In practice this means we can draw upon the resources of the sacred text to discover the relationships of the Trinity both in extra and ad extra. By this we will also know the works in extra and ad extra and so have the pattern of true relationships in the context of being indwelt by the Persons.

What we must say regarding Trinitarian relationships as they are revealed by the Son and the Spirit—through the initiative of the Father—is that God is essentially Father, the Son essentially Son, and the Spirit is essentially the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. Thus there is unity in sociality or there is sociality in the unity. We see from Scripture that in the work of creation the Father, Son and Spirit work together⁵ so that whilst they have ontological unity—unity of being—they also have economic unity—unity of doing.⁶ This unity is again shown in their co-operative work of redemption and the renewal of the heavens and the earth—the eschatological rehabilitation of all things when all things are unified by the Father in His Son, i.e. when they reconciled, and all that is lacking in them is ‘filled up’.⁷ It is their indivisible unity which is the basis of all relationships,⁸ since Man is created in the image and

⁴ We have no need to know more, for ‘the things revealed belong to us’ (Deut. 29:29) and we never need to go beyond them. ‘All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ are ‘hid in Christ’, but we need only those which will redeem, sanctify and glorify us to be revealed to us, since it is these-and only these-which fit us for the ultimate ‘liberty of the glory of the children of God’.

⁵ Gen. 1:1-2; Ps. 104:29-30; Job 33:4; John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17.

⁶ For some theologians the work of redemption is not an *opere ad extra* but an *opere in extra*..

⁷ See Ephesians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:19-21; Ephesians 4:7; cf. Colossians 3:14. The unifying (heading up), the ‘filling up’, i.e., of that which is ‘empty’ (cf. Rom. 8:20), the reconciling of all things made disparate by sin, and the harmonizing of the disharmonic situation brought about by angelic and human rebellion are virtually all the one work. God is One, and His creation must be one, i.e. a unity which comports with His unity.

⁸ It is here the whole question of the Unity of the Trinity is raised. Jurgen Moltmann in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* has given an excellent history of the development of ideas regarding the unity of the Trinity. Under ‘2. The Life of the Trinity’ pp. 171-176 he traces the hypostatic union posited by Bothius, who spoke of nature being composed of substance and accident; the relational understanding of the unity introduced by Augustine—‘There are three relations in the Trinity; fatherhood, sonship, the breathing of the Spirit (*paternitas, filatio, spiratio*). The inner being of the persons is moulded by these relationships in accordance with the relational difference.’ He then describes the doctrine of the Trinity of love which has obtained from the time of Augustine to the present, and propounded by Richard of St. Victor that ‘being a person does not merely mean subsisting; nor does it mean subsisting-in-relation. It means ex-isting.’ St. Victor says, ‘A divine Person is a non-interchangeable existence of the divine nature’ so that (Moltmann concludes) ‘every divine Person ex-ists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they ex-ist totally in the other: the Father ex-ists

likeness of God—the Godhead, the Unity of the Three Persons—so that Man is social being. We can then—in this sense—speak loosely of ‘the Sociality’,⁹ ‘Household’, ‘Community or Family of God’¹⁰, but we must define what we mean. We cannot build precisely upon it unless the relationships of the three Persons cannot be rationalized by the principle of ‘the Divine Family’, if indeed the Godhead is not just that.

The social unity is shown by the relationships the three Persons have, one with the other. If we commence with the Word of God who was in the beginning, and by whom all things were made, we find (John 1:1) ‘the Word was with God [‘face-to-face with God’; *pros ton theon*] and the Word was God’. John adds, ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory as the only Son from the Father.’ Here, as in other places, we are pointed to the pre-incarnational being of the Son. He always was the Son, as the Father always was the Father. His incarnation did not and does not alter the nature of that pre-incarnational relationship in the immanent sense, although new elements must have been introduced in the economic sense. When Paul speaks of God being ‘the God and Father of our

by virtue of his love, as himself entirely in the Son: the Son by virtue of his self-surrender, ex-ists as himself, totally in the Father; and so on’. Moltmann shows that Hegel further developed this idea, ‘It is the nature of the person to give himself entirely to a counterpart, and to find himself in the other most of all. The person only comes to himself by expressing and appending himself in others.’ Finally Moltmann describes the nature of the eternal perichoresis or circumincesso with which we deal elsewhere.

⁹ Royce Gordon Gruenler in an interesting exposition of John 17:20-26 (Interpretation, April, 1990) states, ‘All of creation, but especially its highest human level appears designed of God to serve other levels and members of the larger family of creation, and it be interdependent in some way that is analogous to the pattern which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are interdependent and are at one another’s disposal in the most original Household, the Triune Family.’

This article is virtually an abstract of the Preface to Gruenler’s book *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, (Baker House, Grand Rapids, 1986, pp. vii to xxi). Gruenler’s argument is that the social unity of the Trinity—he speaks of ‘the Triune Community’ and ‘the Triune Family’ and ‘the most original Household, the Divine Family’, ‘the divine Society’ and ‘the highest community’—is familial on the divine level, and therefore its relationships and unity are valid for the human level, the human family thus being an analogue of the divine. He speaks of ‘mutual and voluntary subordination among the persons of the Triune Family’ and stresses that ‘Jesus’ claims to equality with the Father (10:30; 17:11) should make it clear that his subordination as the incarnate Son is voluntarily assumed for the work of redemption, and that this voluntary sense may be extrapolated to the equally subordinate role of the Holy Spirit in the redemptive process.’ Whatever this case may be, Gruenler has given an excellent basis for Divine and human relationships as they obtain in the Triune Family. How valid theologically his claims are must be measured by the quality of his theology of John’s Gospel. It is quite a leap from the precise theological formulations of the Ante-Nicenes, the Nicenes, and the later Western Trinitarianism.

¹⁰ There is in Leonard Hodgson’s *The Doctrine of the Trinity* a development of the idea of the Social Being of the Trinity. He is concerned with the unity of the Trinity in its nature, in history, in the revelation of God by Jesus Christ, and in its implicates for philosophy, religion and psychology. He outlines the three classical expositions of the Trinity by Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin by way of comparison with his own theology of sociality.

Lord Jesus Christ', he is not only saying that God has fathered the incarnation¹¹, but that the one who came to be called 'our Lord Jesus Christ' was always His Son¹².

This being so—and other Scriptures attest to this fact—we go back to our saying that the Father was always the Father, and the Son was always the Son. It may well be that we can speak of God as the archetypal Father¹³, but—archetype or no archetype—He is Father! The Son for his part is Son! Together these Two have a relationship which is essentially so and is thus ontological¹⁴, yet we should be wary of reading human fatherhood and sonship and human masculinity back into the Godhead¹⁵. This is the problem which we have with analogies. The Two are not to be thought of apart from the Holy Spirit, who—as we have said, and will further see—is the very Spirit of the Father and the very Spirit of the Son. So then we have the essential Trinity, the indivisible relationships of the three Persons communicated to us via the incarnation, via the works of the Three linked with that incarnation.

The Relationships, i.e. the Interrelationships of the Three

(i) The Mutual Glorification of the Three Persons¹⁶

A vast part of the New Testament is taken up in showing the Father glorifies the Son, the Son glorifies the Father, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the

¹¹ 'Fathered the incarnation' must be understood in the light of Luke 1:35 where 'the power of the Most High will overshadow is almost certainly referring to the shekinah glory of God, out of which the child can be authentically called—indeed must be called—'the Son of God'. The mystery of the birth and so of the incarnation lies in the work of the Most High and the Holy Spirit. Only the effects are observable from the event.

¹² Colossians 1:13-20 makes it clear that it was 'his beloved Son' who is the subject of that passage. In Hebrews 1:1-3 it is again 'a Son' 'through whom also he created the world'. It is to be noted in Colossians 1:16 that all things were created through him and unto him (*eis auton ektistai*), i.e. he is the goal or telos of 'all things'.

¹³ Thus the statement of J. Armitage Robinson on Ephesians 3:14-15 (*Commentary on Ephesians*), 'According to this notable utterance of St. Paul, God is not only the universal Father, but the archetypal Father, the Father of whom all other fathers are derivatives and types. So far from regarding the Divine fatherhood as a mode of speech in reference to the Godhead, derived by analogy from our conceptions of human fatherhood, the Apostle maintains that the very idea of fatherhood exists primarily in the Divine nature, and only by derivation is every other form of fatherhood, whether earthly or heavenly.'

¹⁴ The Athanasian Creed speaks of 'The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate,' and, 'The Father eternal, the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal.' I am aware that the category 'ontological' is not favoured by all theologians, especially those who pursue 'progress-theology', but it seems to me that the immutability of God (Mal. 3:6) demands 'the fixed order' (Ps. 148:6; Jer. 31:35-36) but the immutable order does not mean that God is not dynamic, or that His 'fixed order' is not vitalistic within itself. That God is the living God means He is not bound by a fixed order but works within it to effect His will by the principle that He 'gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that are not' (Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3). God is neither locked into, nor locked out, of His creation: He is its Creator.

¹⁵ It is at this point that the masculinist-feminist debate is on dangerous grounds. Whilst God is referred to in the masculine gender, it does not mean that human gender necessarily has much to do with what we may choose to call 'Divine gender'. We do not know what that is, and this should make us wary of the use of human analogues. See O Kirn on p.2 (above) regarding ancient and modern ideas of personality.

¹⁶ For an expansion of these relationships of mutual glorification of the Three Persons see the paper *The Study of Relationships-Human and Divine*, NCTM Pastors' Study Group, 4/6/90 pages 4-7, or the paper *The Trinity and Relationships* given to the Uniting Church Biblical Exposition and Practice Group 19/2/91. pages 45-12. The latter has more copious footnotes. For extended study see my unpublished Thesis *The Glory of God and Human Relationships* (Adelaide, 1990).

Son, and the Son and the Father glorify the Holy Spirit. The studies referred to in footnote 6 should be closely read to see the extent of this mutual glorification—this ‘other Persons—concentredness’.

(ii) The Mutual Giving and Serving of the Three Persons

The relationships of the three Persons are expressed in three elements—their mutual glorification, giving and serving. In John 17 it can be noted that seventeen times the verb ‘to give’ is used, sixteen of them referring to the Father’s giving. Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus mentions eleven more times things which the Father has given him, such as the Spirit, all things, judgement, authority, the elect sheep, and the cup of death. In Matthew 11:27—the equivalent of John 3:35—all things are delivered to the Son. In Matthew 28:19 all authority is given by the Father to the Son. The Son is not spoken of as giving anything to the Father, but in fact he does what is the will of the Father via the gifts given to him. In that sense he has given everything to the Father. Doubtless the giving of glory to the Father both by the Spirit and the Son is their form of giving. It is also their form of serving, and we need not expand our enquiry.

Honoring man by his redemptive ministry, giving to man the many gifts he distributed, and giving himself up to death for the human race are evidences of Christ’s manward ministry. The Spirit likewise gave power to Christ to effect his ministry in the days of his flesh, honored him by revealing his glory, and served him so that he himself could effect serving. For the rest—the Father, the Son and the Spirit incessantly give to their creation, and especially to the human race until it is ‘grace upon grace’, ‘abundant grace’ and ‘great grace’.

The purpose, then, of this section where we seek to understand the relationships of the three Persons by their interrelating, their mutual glorifying and serving of each other, and their giving to each other, is so that we can understand the reality of these relationships and works—in extra and ad extra—with a view to our own present relationships, and those at the end of the age—in the new age.

A Note on the Perichoresis and Circumincessio¹⁷

This brings us again to the doctrine of perichoresis or circumincessio which is vital for our understanding of the Trinity, and so for human relationships. The two terms generally cover the idea of the coinherence of the Three Persons, i.e. ‘the Persons do not only subsist in the common divine substance; they also exist in their relations to the other Persons’ (Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 174). The perichoresis of John of Damascus spoke not only of the interpenetration of the members of the Godhead but of a circulatory giving—receiving movement. As Persons they are discrete¹⁸, and have their own personal characteristics, but as the Triune God they are one, yet in the circulation of the Divine life they give to one another so that their unity is out of the differentiations and not in spite of them. It means that whilst they retain their

¹⁷ Historical theology shows us that the term circumincessio was used by St. Bonaventure to translate the perichoresis of John of Damascus. The Council of Florence had chosen to use the term circumincession and later than John of Damascus Thomas Aquinas preferred circumincessio. The differences in meaning of the words need not occupy us here. See *The Christian Trinity in History* by B. de Margeria (St. Bede’s Petersham, Massachusetts, 1982), pages 178-186, and Jurgen Moltmann’s *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (SCM, London, 1981), pages 174-176.

¹⁸ Provided, of course, that the use of ‘discrete’ here does not suggest three centres of consciousness-tritheism—instead of one centre-personal montheism.

own discreteness they cannot be other than One together, and so the Spirit must be as much in the Father and the Son as each of them in him—the Spirit.

Relationally perichoresis is highly significant in that it substantiates the ‘other–Person concentredness’ of the Three Persons, and points to Philippians 2:1–9. Moltmann (p.178–179) has this to say,

But in respect to the Trinity’s inner life the three Persons themselves form their unity, by virtue of their relation to one another and in the eternal perichoresis of their love. They are concentrated around the eternal Son. This is the perichoretic unity of the Trinity. . . . The perichoretic unity of the triune God is perceived in salvation history and reflected in salvation history. . . . To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life–stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.

We can see how significant this doctrine of the *perichoresis–circumincessio* for human relations. When man is taken up into the divine unity by adoption he shares this *perichoresis*, so that we can say that the command to love one another simple means to enact the *perichoresis* in the human scene by the grace of the divinely communicated *perichoresis*. Significant indeed!

The Present Relationships God Has With Redeemed God One With Man—the Creation

The statement, ‘Let us make Man in our own image and likeness’ tells of the affinity of the Creator with the creature–Man. Romans 1:21 says clearly ‘they knew God’ and knowing God in the Scriptures always assumes that God firstly knows the person, cf. Amos 3:2; Galatians 4:8–9; I Corinthians 8:3. God’s fellowship with Man and His mandate to him all speak of God relating to Man.

God One With Man–The Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants

The judgement on mankind by the Flood was followed by the promise of a universal covenant, by which the world would not hitherto destroyed by water, and the creational mandate was renewed (Gen. 8:20–9:7).

The Noahic covenant was later followed by the Abrahamic covenant, which was to be universal in its coverage (Gen. 12:1–3; cf. Gal. ch.3). In one sense or another all nations and persons–via these two covenants–could be sure God was relating to the world. Since the Abrahamic covenant was to be not only with Israel, but all the nations (cf. Luke 2:68–79) then it shows God has always had relationships with man. This is clearly seen in the fact that God has always revealed Himself through His appointed media, namely creation, providence, covenants, His word/s, the law, the glory, the prophets, dreams and visions, theophanies, angels, His Son, the Holy Spirit, His people, and the canon of Scripture.

God One With Man–In the Incarnation

Hebrews 1:1 tells us God spoke in one way with Mankind prior to Christ’s coming, and then He spoke through His Son. God became Man in Jesus Christ. What we must recognize is that God not only sent His Son, but also was in him. ‘God was in

Christ' (II Cor. 5:19) means more than simply that Christ was vicariously representing the Father. 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30) means no less than 'the Father is in me and I am in the Father' (John 10:38: 14:10–11, 20). It means 'Thou, Father art in me, and I in thee', (John 17:20). That is, God was present in His Son. Christ was not merely a medium but was Immanuel—'God with us', albeit he was Man present. He was present as the Son of the Father declaring the Father to us (John 1:18). To know him—the Son—would be to know the Father (John 14:7; cf. 8:19).

God One With Man—in the Reconciliation

By 'reconciliation' we mean the whole action of God in the incarnation, in the life of Jesus, in his death, resurrection, and ascension. That God is love is axiomatic throughout the Scriptures. He loves His world (John 3:16) and redeems His elect people (I John 3:16; 4:9–10). The love that the Three persons have mutually is the love that planned redemption (Ephes. 1:4–7; I Pet. 1:18–20; II Tim. 1:9; etc.) and effected it, so bringing about the reconciliation of God and man (II Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:13ff.; Col. 1:19–21), thus bringing Man into righteousness by justification (Rom. 3:21–24; 5:1), and so giving him access to God (Rom. 5:1–2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Heb. 10:19–22). Reconciliation with God is no minor thing. It is indeed all that is Man's being. It is not only that Man is restored (regenerated) to what he was through new birth, but that the teleological thrust is freshly operative.¹⁹

Man One With God through the Reconciliation

Ephesians 2:11–18 shows us

- (i) the reconciliation of all humanity (Jew and Gentile) to God and
- (ii) the reconciliation of all (Jew and Gentile) to one another, i.e. 'for though him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father'.

God has reconciled us to Himself (Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:20) and has given us the reconciliation (Rom. 5:11). Man has access to God (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Heb. 10:22). This access to the Father by the Son and the Spirit [of Sonship] means we have access as sons of God (John 14:6; Heb. 2:10) and this means 'the adoption of sons', something we need to see in depth.

Man One With God through The Power of Adoption²⁰

If we have understood the relationship of the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and Son, then we have understood something of the relationships of the Triune God as they have been revealed to us. Christ's prayer in John 17:21—'that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in

¹⁹ It may be argued that the ontological reality of Man is contained in Genesis 1:26-31; cf. Psalm 8:3-8; Ecclesiastes 3:11; cf. Genesis 9:1-7, and this is surely so. However God's plan for Man from before time was glorification (I Cor. 2:6-10; cf. Eph. 1:3-14), informs us that man is to be understood as a teleological creature. In one sense he has always been becoming what he will be. Salvation ensures that the telos will be accomplished.

²⁰ Because of the limited nature of this paper I have refrained from fully expounding adoption or 'the sonship'. Modern exegesis has tended to place adoption as a natural step beyond justification but some of the quotes above will show its significance in Greek theology—especially in Athanasius—and in Reformed theology—especially in Calvin.

me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us . . .’—is in the Father–Son, Son–Father genre as the full text of the chapter shows. The Pauline teaching of adoption has often been interpreted in a legal sense or in a figurative understanding²¹. The passages of Galatians 4:4–7 and Romans 8:14–17 go beyond these interpretations to show us they are meant in a wholly relational sense. The Spirit has come to give us filial conviction, and familial liberty. The involuntary cry ‘Abba! Father!’ is a direct relational utterance without any recourse to the figurative. We have been adopted into the Godhead, by grace, to be sons of God²². Ronald Wallace says, ‘Calvin brings the Trinity into the centre of his discussion on the nature of God, since revelation admits us into the heart of the divine Being himself.’²³ G.L. Bray says similarly,

But Calvin, following Anselm, who had stressed the fact that the atonement was a work of God inside the Trinity (*ad intra*) were undivided, said that the Christians are admitted through the Holy Spirit, to participation in the inner life of the Godhead. We are sons of God, not as Christ was, by nature, but by the grace of adoption. As a result of this, the Reformed tradition witnessed an explosion of works dealing with the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, in a depth which had previously been unknown.²⁴

Setting aside for the moment the matter of adoption we see that the New Testament speaks clearly of our new relationship to God. We are in Christ, in the Father, in the Spirit; the Father is in us, the Son is in us, and the Holy Spirit is in us. Our lives are hid with Christ in God. We have been ‘called into the fellowship of His Son’, and, indeed, ‘our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ’. Then we have ‘become partakers of the divine nature’. None of this can be called figurative. By grace it is relationally actual, and is the answer to the Son’s prayer ‘that they also may be in us’. Here the locational is the relational. To be ‘partakers of the divine nature’ takes us immediately to *theopoiesis* or *theosis*—the Greek view of the divinization of Man.

Adoption (*huiiothesia*) and Divinization (*theopoiesis*)

In the light of Romans 8:22 which speaks of the teleological–eschatological ‘glorious liberty of the children of God’, I doubt whether we can separate sonship (adoption) and participation in the Divine nature (*theopoiesis*). The Son brought his Sonship to us in the Incarnation, and he brings us into that Sonship by redemption. The work of the Cross is such as to wholly purify us (Heb. 9:14; I Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:4–5) and this make us new creatures (II Cor. 5:17) so that the old things are regenerated and we are ready—and equipped—to be sons. We are incorporated into the Son’s Sonship (Gal. 3:26–4:7), and being taken up into it, are taken up into the Sonship which is part

²¹ By this we mean firstly, that legally God has made us His sons which ensures we shall receive our inheritance (Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:17; Rev. 21:7; cf. Rom. 4:13), and secondly that we are not actual sons, but are metaphorically so. I have never been able to understand the latter, but can understand that when humanity is not consubstantial with the Godhead there can be no natural or consubstantial sonship, but since the sonship is through grace, it does not mean that the elect cannot be true sons. Grace ensures they can, and grace ensures that all the elect will be ‘conformed to the image of his Son’, so how much more could any be a son of God?

²² I am conscious that in these days of inclusivist language the term ‘sons’ seems out of place. II Corinthians 6:18 quotes from Hosea 1:10 ‘You shall be my sons and daughters’, and this certainly obtains for the present temporal state. Teleologically and eschatologically we are all sons by adoption, ‘sons’ here having no gender connotation, and corresponding to the Divine Fatherhood into which we will have been admitted in the telos.

²³ Article ‘Calvin’ in *New Dictionary Theology* (IVP, 1988) p.122.

²⁴ Article ‘Trinity’ in *New Dictionary Theology* (IVP, 1988) p. 694.

of the Triune Godhead. We share thus as true sons of God—not by nature but by grace, the grace of adoption—in the life of the Godhead. We cannot be sons and not partake of the divine Fatherhood. Since we are wholly in the image of His Son—so that His Son is the first-born of many brethren—then we are wholly partakers of the divine Fatherhood. This reality has been assured by ‘the Spirit of His Son’ and ‘the Spirit of your Father’ who brings us into fellowship with the Father and His Son. This, then, is our *theopoiesis*, our divinization which is not deification, but—as been said—the obverse of Christ’s ‘inhomination’²⁵

T. F. Torrance in his book *The Trinitarian Faith* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1988) develops the Greek concept of *theopoiesis* or *theosis*, and in particular at this point, the argument of Athanasius (p. 139),

Jesus Christ is in his incarnate person the unique act of God whereby we are saved and made new, but in the nature of the case we are not we are not saved or renewed by the activity of Christ without being united to him and partaking of him. In developing their concept of theopoiesis, the Nicene theologians took their cue from the statement of our Lord that the Scripture ‘called them gods (theoi) to whom the Word of God came’. They understood this to refer to those who, while created, became partakers of the Word through the creative impact upon them. Christ alone is Theos, true God of true God, he alone is properly (*kurios*) Son of the Father, but through his divine activity (theopoiesis) we are adopted and made sons of God in him, and in that respect, as those who through union with Christ receive the grace and light of his Spirit, are said to be theoi.

T. Torrance (p. 188–89) explains that

there is no suggestion that this interaction between Christ’s deity and our humanity, results in any change in divine or human being (*ousia*), for as he is not less divine in becoming man, so we are not less human in being brought under the immediate presence and power of his divine being. What makes us ‘divine’ is the fact that the Word of God has come to us and acts directly upon us, or more concretely the fact that in Jesus Christ the Son of God has become man and this has brought us into kinship with himself. In other words, our ‘deification in Christ is the obverse of his ‘inhomination’. This is a deification, however, which more than recreates our lost humanity, for it lifts us up in Christ to enjoy a new fullness of human life in a blessed communion with a divine life.

We can rightly ask ourselves whether in fact Man was ever meant for less than ‘a blessed communion with a divine life’, since that must have been his in rich measure as a created innocent being. Being saved by grace and restored to fellowship with God means that now this ‘blessed communion’ is ours in good measure if not in totality.

We must be confident then, not only of our access to God, but of our participation in Him. From this, then all true relationships must follow. Being in the image of God, and being renewed in that image, we are now free to enact our relationships with the community of Christ, and indeed, with all humanity. The divine interrelationships within the Triune Godhead are not only a paradigmatic for us, but they are the only (ontological) way of relationships for the children of God.

²⁵ Torrance (p 189)

The Present Relationships of Redeemed Humanity Within Its Own Community and To The Community of Humankind

We have—generally speaking—developed, through discovery of the relationships within the Triune God, an ontology of relationships. This is most valuable, for knowing—so far as a human being can know—the Divine relationships, we can understand truly human relationships since Man is made in the image of God. If we recognize that the Divine Family is both the source and pattern of the human family, and if we recognize that the human family is what it is because of the Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit, then we can see relationships to be at once paternal—maternal, parental—filial, familial, brotherly—sisterly and of the human race, especially when we think in terms of ‘other—persons concentratedness’. This has deep significance, and such understanding of it should lead us to an ontological praxis, provided we keep in mind the fact that this age is always under grace, and has to be that way, i.e. our praxis is never perfect. Even so that grace is personal, i.e. it is the grace of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and it is relational grace since it is not detached from their Persons, from the Triune relational working of the Godhead.

Note: If we were developing a principle of hierarchy²⁶ we would see that—whilst the membership of the Persons in the Godhead is hierarchical, yet it is the hierarchy of love, each Member being the Others, all being in Each and Each being in all, thus constituting the Unity of which John speaks in John 17: 20–26. Whilst [fallen] human beings live in hierarchies²⁷ they experience the pain and injustice of domination from ‘above’, or their develop domination over those ‘below’. This order does not obtain in the Divine hierarchy because of the mutuality of love, the acceptance of, and delight in the ontological order—the Father being the source of generation, and the Son and Spirit living in its delight.

Conclusion to The Trinity and Relationships.

The purpose of this paper has simply been to argue that the relationships redeemed human beings have with God and with their fellow creatures are those which obtain within the mutuality and sociality of the Three Persons. Reviewing some of the elements of the Divine relationships, i.e. those within the Godhead²⁸, we have noted that all unity, mutuality, and sociality is from and the expression of, Divine love. God is love: hence the relationships. The relationships are ‘other—Persons concentrated’, and operate on the principle of honoring One another, giving to One another, and serving One another. We must also keep in mind that whilst the love—mutuality honors, gives and serves it is via the differentiation’s that it does so.

²⁶ See my Study *The Matter of Hierarchy- Functional and Relational*. Pastors Monday Study Group 6 August 1990

²⁷ I am convinced there are no human relationships outside hierarchical orders. No human being stand alone or is freelance in operations. Sadly enough, there is an inbuilt opposition to hierarchies in fallen human beings, except of course one happens to be at the top of a hierarchy!

²⁸ In this paper we have not discussed the difference of opere in extra and opere ad extra and so have not covered the relationships in extra and ad extra, as I have done in my [as yet unpublished] thesis *The Glory of God and Human Relationships*.

These are precisely the relationships which are ontological to Man who is created in the image of God, and they obtain²⁹ within the community which is in God—in the Father and in the Son and in the Spirit—the community whose life ‘is hid with Christ in God’, which has ‘fellowship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ’, and in which all are ‘partakers of the divine nature’, since all are children of God the Father.

It is not our intention in this paper to formulate the modes of love on the human plane³⁰. These are already revealed in the Divine relations of the Triune Godhead. How they apply in all human life is the happy subject, and also the paranaesis—the exhortation—of the Scriptures. Such relationships are on the basis of the Divine love (agape) which comes to us from the Father (I John 4:7) in Christ (I John 4:9–10) and through the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). ‘We love because he first loved us’ is the key to true relationships. The love that comes to us is the love that works through us. We can only truly love with the Divine love that floods us. We can only ‘walk in love’ (Eph. 5:2), and ‘do all things in love’ (I Cor. 16:14) when that love is His, in us. It is then the Divine relationships—so to speak—are recapitulated in us. As in heaven, so on earth the Divine perichoresis of love has its expression in interpenetrative relationships and the honoring—giving—receiving—serving relationships that flow from it, and have their true being in it.

The Pastoral Application of the Divine–Human Relationships

This really requires a paper on its own, for it’s outworking is so vast. However, it need not be complicated. Pastorally—especially in the context of eldership leadership and loving oversight—the personal action of love in honoring, giving and serving will determine the actions—the praxis. No methodology is required. It love is to live in the Spirit and to work in the Spirit. Even so, the congregational perichoresis—circumincessio relationship will work out in that interpenetration of persons, and the circulatory movement of love—the giving, and serving that comes from the differentiations.

Most of all, relationships work in the context of worship, and only properly in this context. The Divine perichoretic relationships are worshipful, and all worship of God—as also honoring of others—is by the grace and inspiration of the Father (John 4:21–24), of the Son (Heb. 8:1–2; 13:15–16; I Pet. 2:5), and of the Spirit (John 4:21–24; Phil. 3:3; cf. Rom. 1:9)³¹,

²⁹ I have sought to evade stressing what Helmut Thielicke calls ‘ontological necessity’, i.e. the ‘oughtness’ which comes from our ontological being. We are not exhorting the community of Christ to come to these relationships which parallel the Divine ones. Rather, we are saying they ‘obtain’, that is the they are, and so can be. In addition, we have seen that Man is teleological. He is not caught in an iron cage of his own ontology, but moves forward to the desired and promised telos—true perfection and fulfillment.

³⁰ For the working out of these modes on the human level see my *The Constraint of Love* (NCPI, 1985 pp. 40–51). Whilst the divine modes are honoring, serving, and giving—as indeed they must be on the human level—yet these three elements express themselves in ways not required on the divine level, e.g. forgiveness which although it come from the divine level is not required within the relationships of the Three Persons.

³¹ See my *The Way and Wonder of Worship* (NCPI, 1990) especially the Section, ‘Christ the True Worshipper’.

but this grace works out in the most down-to-earth details, worship always being at the same time service to others.

When we speak of worship we are—at the same time—speaking of union and communion with God and so with the Three Persons. Our union and communion with others is dependent upon our union and communion with God. This, then, is the one-perichoretic action, the one circulatory movement of love.

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The Glorious Giving—I

Introductory Note: *This material came to mind when I was preparing a sermon for 'Glorious Giving', and I thought I would capture it in an article. Thinking it over I thought it could be a useful Study for our Monday Pastors' Study Group. I hope you will forgive the change in style and approach.*

My visits to Jon the Dentist are virtually ended since I said goodbye to my last remaining eleven teeth, and obtained my two full grinning dentures. One does like to say farewell to his or her dentist, professionally and this, perforce, was the case. What I regret is that I shall no longer look at print-reproductions of Jon's uncle—Ainslee Roberts—whose paintings adorn the waiting room and surgery. Most intriguing of all is a bird painting—not by Roberts—of two black cockatoos, wild, stubby, red-tailed and yet aristocratic in a banksia tree. When Jon the dentist has you lie back in his dental chair, you look up at the ceiling into the eyes and mandibles of the red-tailed cockatoos. One of them has a large gumnut in his beak. Having been a worshipper of parrots for many years I had read widely, and knew that certain of the parrots relish eucalypt flowers especially those those of the West Australian flowering gums. I had not read that cockatoos relish the gumnut—the natural home of such mythical creatures as 'Bib' and 'Bub'.

In our home property we have a few of these beautiful trees, and one of them has rapidly grown tall and delights us, yearly, with its massive production of pink blooms—relished by bees and insects, but never visited by parrots, because it is so close to the house. Over the years it has accumulated masses of gumnuts which it never seems to shed. The last year or so the tree has lost its symmetrical beauty. Limbs are so laden that they angle downwards towards the ground. I have never seen a tree with so many of the hard fruit, but something within me has stirred time and again at the burden of the branches. Yesterday I went with long-handled branch pruning-shears and clipped off the massive crop of nuts. I watched the branches relax upwards as they were lightened. It was as though their limbs were grateful to be released from their burden. I almost heard their expressions of relief.

I kept thinking, 'We have yearly visits of black cockatoos. They give their wheeling cry as they flap into the *pinus radiata* and nibble out the nuts from the cones, and they explore the tall stringy barks—maybe for blossoms—but they neglect our pink flowering gum. Yet there is the tree, waiting and wanting to be relieved of its nuts.' The strange thought struck me that planting a flowering gum, so near the house had deprived it of its natural predator—the Black Cockatoos. With my pruning shears I was snipping where those birds should have been eating.

At that moment there slipped into my mind the story a friend had told me recently, of having been out in the desert above Port Augusta and Whyalla. In this dry place, burning with the high heat, there was little but mulga and saltbush. Imagine his surprise when he found a crevice of soil—partly shaded by nature, in which was

growing a tomato bush. It was small and meagre, but it had grown one tomato fruit, and there it was—red and gleaming. My friend took it in his hand, marvelling as to how a seed could have found its way into that desert.

‘What I did,’ he said, ‘I have regretted ever since. I took the tomato and ate it—ate it in one sweet juicy bite. But I’m sorry I did.’

‘Why should you be sorry?’ I asked him

‘I’m sorry,’ he said, ‘because I stopped the continuity of the tomato plant. It was reproducing itself. It would have gone on—year by year—reproducing itself remarkably in the harsh desert.’

I am no romanticist when it comes to what humans call ‘Nature’, but I said, ‘Maybe the tomato plant didn’t see it that way. Maybe it was grateful for the grand moment when someone came to eat its fruit so bravely born.’

He looked at me with amazed eyes. ‘You reckon a tomato could be like that?’ he asked.

I wasn’t sure. Both thoughts seemed good to me. I began to wonder a lot about flora and fauna. I even wondered whether it is not inbuilt into all plants and creatures to give of themselves—if not to give even themselves. I wondered fancifully if the deer that the jaguar pursues and kills does not—in the last moment—surrender itself to death to the predator with some unconscious thought that it is fulfilling its destiny as a deer. Fanciful indeed, but I am told that animals in this state do not—at the very last moment—feel pain, as though some kind of an anaesthetic is provided for that moment. Human beings who have been near to death from a lion-attack have spoken of a strange painlessness that comes.

Now I want to come back to the point of my essay which is to ask—and if possible to answer—the questions, ‘Is it inbuilt into all things—by nature of creation—to give themselves utterly? Is this the kind of glory made innate by the Creator of whom it has been written, “He who spared not his only Son but gave him up for us all, shall he not also—with him—freely give us all things?”’

My mind is omnivorous. It consumes and stores massive memories—pictures which I cannot obliterate. Some of these concern people in pain and suffering, in war and peace, in famines and plagues, times of poverty and wealth, situations of danger and destruction, and even halcyon days of prosperous life and balmy weather. In all of these I have seen amazing actions of self-giving. Indeed the history of the world is filled with strange and beautiful offerings—heroic self-giving in saving those ill with plagues, those starving in famines, those wounded in war, and tortured by insane cruelty. I could quote names now world-famous, but that would seem to narrow the special events down to them when the number is legion. Whilst some of these events are recognized, and even rewarded with honours, many more happen unseen, and medal-winning is not their motivation. An emaciated woman holds her hungry child to her withered breast, and dies trying to sustain it. Noble sacrifice is made by a soldier or a sailor in war, giving his life that his comrades may live. In freezing cold that is lethal parents give clothes to warm their children, in poverty give their food, and in danger give their lives to protect their young. Often animals often do the same—fearless for themselves in time of danger.

Of course the statistics are strong on the side of self-saving—refusal to save others and die oneself. The time-old cries are, ‘Blow you Jack, I’m all right!’ ‘Every man for himself!’ ‘I’m in the boat: push off!’ I’ve seen plenty of that. Self-saving panic when a grandstand collapses brings horrible deaths: and so on. Even so, why is it that the world strongly applauds self-sacrificial actions—some even in the face of

panic—and never nominates them as foolishness? Why do the selfish acknowledge, with some sense of guilt, the nobility of those who give everything? Is it not universally recognized that creatures are their best selves when they are not trying to save themselves at the expense of others?

To persons of faith there is the recognition that all self-giving comes out of God. The hardened and cynical amongst us question pure motivation in those who sacrifice themselves. We suspect there is a desire for posthumous glory that drives the hero to his death in saving his section in battle, that the mother who renders the last drop of milk in her all-but-dried breast to her starving child is aware of the audience who silently regards her act. It may well be that some glory-hungry person rushes on death to seal his own honour, but who can tell? And who needs to be cynical? It is often because we have been embittered, not only with the selfishness of the world, but own our own inner failure, that our spirits shrivel into meanness and become poverty-stricken.

All this given in, the human race knows what is good and what is right. Jesus said to certain men, ‘You, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children.’ He meant that parents know what is good for those they bring into the world, even if they do not always go about good giving. Our evil can blind us to what is good, but even behind that evil we know what is right. It is the good that angers us, since we succeed so little in doing it. We are governed by our guilt into bitter criticism. We know we are wrong even as we say the word of incrimination.

Where does it come from then—this glorious giving, this glory of giving, this giving of glory? From God, of course. From the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. From the personal heart of the living God, who taught the human race the nobility of self-giving, and in creating it implanted the heart with it. To give is to be God, and no less to give is to be truly human. Man is made in the image of God, and the gold of the image is its gleaming glory of self-surrender.

We may think, ‘What could God give that would leave Him bereft, that would take away from what He has and leave Him bereft?’ History answers, ‘His beloved Son.’ We might argue with history and tell it that what God gave He received back, that the loss was temporary, but then loss is not measured in units of time. Time is a measurement that cannot be used to compass pain. The only way to understand the matter and the glory of giving is to begin with God.

James—the noble elder of Jerusalem, and the brother of Jesus— said,

All good giving and every perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of the lights of heaven. With him there is no variation, no play of passing shadows. Of his set purpose, by declaring the truth, he gave us birth to be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures¹.

He was saying that the only genuine giving, and the only perfect gift, i.e. a giving that is pure and a gift that is wholesome, is effected by God, and God alone. What He says is true, and His word brings human beings into a new birth, so that they represent to other men and women what it really is to be truly human: they exhibit the greatest gift God gives to Man—utter newness of being. Without being cynical, and yet being realistic, we have to say that all gifts and giving of human beings—i.e. human beings working from themselves and not from God—are imperfect, not purely

¹ Translation of the New English Bible (Oxford, England, 1961. The quote is from James 1:17–18.

motivated, and often dangerous and enslaving to the receiver, if not to the giver. Hence the warning, ‘Beware of Greeks coming to you, bearing gifts.’ It scarcely needs to be said that ‘bearing gifts’ is not confined to Greeks! Whilst the giving of gifts is universal, so also is the wariness with which recipients view such gifts. Gift-giving—pure gift-giving—is an art. In fact, such giving is artless since it comes from God Who enslaves no one with His gifts or by His giving.

God, then, is the True Giver. Jesus once said, ‘My Father is always working.’ He was telling us that God was always giving of Himself in creating the world, sustaining it, and providing for all its needs, whether physical, emotional, psychical or spiritual. God never wearies in His servanthood, in His ‘not looking in His own things, but the things of others’. Indeed, it is His nature to care for others. In that sense we might say He puts others before Himself, yet to put others before Himself is to be His true Self.

It is exactly in this image that He made us in the human beginning—the time of Man’s creation. Man deviated from this when he sought to be independent, and to set up his own human system. The Apostle Paul puts it simply, ‘Man did not honour God: neither was he thankful.’² Thanklessness requires an exposition. It needs to be said that to be thankless is to refuse to attribute perfect giving and wholesome gifts to the True Giver. It is to assert that one is not so much a recipient as a creator of gifts: that one is self-sufficient.

Idolatry is linked with ingratitude. A person makes his or her idol and so is a creator. In fact one cannot create an idol: one can only devise it. The person sets out for his or her idol the requirements regarding this surrogate God, and says that it must provide such-and-such pleasures, necessities, fulfilments and the like. Idolatry is in the beginning a fascinating experience, full of promise and pleasure, but it ends in dismal—even horrific—disaster. The idolater becomes the slave of the idol. The devotee becomes twisted in personality and character. He has planned unconscious revenge upon himself for his rejection of the truth.

Servants of idols feed all into their idol—hoping for a return. They give to no other. They lose the glory of true humanity. As Wordsworth put it, ‘**Getting and spending we lay waste our powers.**’ The psalmist said of idol-makers, ‘They who make them are like them: so are all who trust in them.’³ These words are not simply a criticism: they are a kindly warning also.

There is a giving which is purist without being pure. It is meticulous but calculating. It does not sound like God’s word to Hosea, ‘I will love them *freely*.’ He had said, ‘Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone.’ He knew that until Ephraim was disillusioned regarding his idols, weary of their enslavement, and hungry for reality that he would not turn to God. When he would dare to do that, then it would be because God had proclaimed that He loved him freely.

So then, there is also a giving which is pure without being purist. It begins within the Godhead. The Persons of that Godhead give themselves one to the other. In particular, the Father gives out of His Fatherhood to the Son, who gives out of his Sonship to the Father. The Spirit gives by his serving the other Two, and they honour and give to him that which dignifies him—his high servanthood to Father and Son. Within that Godhead is the *perichoresis*—the interpenetration of one another out of the love which they are, and the circulatory movement which constantly distributes the gifts

² See Romans 1:21.

³ Psalm 115:8. The Jerusalem Bible has, ‘Their makers will end up like them, and so will anyone who relies on them’.

they have. Yet, were the Godhead not turned outwards, and were it not to create, redeem, sanctify and renew wherever evil has atrophied the good, then the Godhead would die! This statement seems so radical, so seemingly opposed to the will of the transcendent and impassive Godhead, that many would protest on theological and philosophical grounds. 'God must be left to make His own decisions of grace,' thoughtful persons might cry. 'To create is His grace, as is also to redeem and regenerate,' they would insist.

There is a weakness in this thinking. Creation is not the expression of God's grace, even though redeeming it is. God out of His great love created the universe, and was pleased with it. Its rebellion against Him was not unanticipated. It is true that prior to creating it He planned to show His grace by redemption, but whilst we may speak of the grace of redemption we cannot rightly speak of the grace of creation. Creation is a gift—a pure gift, unprompted by anything other than the nature of God. If we see humanity as innately faulty and intrinsically morally weak, then we demean the glory of God as well as that of Man. Man must come by his will to worship God, not by some innately placed predeterminism. Love may well be obedience, but it is voluntary obedience, if not in fact, involuntary.

To give creation as a gift, to breathe into the primordial clay the breath of life and to make Man 'a living being' is pure gift, the true expression of Godhead. Father, Son and Spirit work in this event, as also in the continuing event of sustaining that life and creation. As for redemption: God loves His world and gives His Son to redeem its people, and to liberate it from the futility of the curse on sin. As the Father loves all, so does the Son. Both see the tragic poverty of autonomous man, and the Father sends the Son. As for the Son—'Though he were rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich.' Nothing less than this will be the ultimate gift—the unspeakable gift.

So then the Son divests himself of all that will prevent him taking on true humanity. He counts others better than himself in that he places them before himself. He looks not on his own things primarily but on the things of others. In fact, it is his true 'own thing' to first look on the things of others. In taking the essence of the Godhead to Man through his flesh, he intends to liberate Man from his selfishness so that 'they which live should no longer live unto themselves but unto him who died for them and rose again'.

He takes on no *ersatz* humanity but the true one. The true one is without sin, but it is more true humanity for that! At the same time he takes on the frailty and weakness that have resulted from Man's separation from God and he bears them in his own humanity.

Not only in the streets of Jerusalem, in the towns, hamlets and villages of Judea, Galilee and Samaria, is he impoverished with our poverty, but on the Cross he goes to the depths and dregs of all humanity for all time. He draws upon the resources that are available to any true human—the resources of the Divine Fatherhood and the Divine Spirit as he ascends to the Cross and descends into the hell of fallen humanity in its hour of dereliction and judgement. All evil laves over him as the dull waters of a dead sea, and as a sterile desert is the place of his affliction. In all their afflictions he is afflicted. He is wounded for their transgressions. He bears their griefs and sorrows. He moves out into the beginning of sorrows and then plunges into their depths and he is there when the end of sorrows comes. His poverty is total. He has no purple robe to clothe his nakedness, and his resources are drained to nothingness so that he cries, 'I thirst!' The loneliness of the limbo of the lost is such that from it he cries for the terrible separation that it is.

If he has given all in that universal event, no less has the Father given. He withheld not His only Son but abandoned him up for us all. Such abandonment was via the Spirit of life who must share in bringing the judgement of death to the Son. ‘He offered himself through the eternal Spirit’. So the impoverishment of the Godhead was completed.

So too, the revelation of true giving. No ‘shadow caused by turning’ falls across the pure gift. The enlightened apostolic band is amazed and is in wonder, not only by the resurrection from the dead of the victorious Lord, but by ‘the unspeakable gift’ that the Father gives, and the Holy Spirit communicates. Now they see the gift of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Now they penetrate to the heart of the mystery—the mystery of true giving.

Jesus had told them to give in full measure, pressed down and running over, not insisting that they should receive again what they had given, but giving, not hoping for any return. This is the giving of the free Godhead. This is the Self-surrender of God for His fallen humanity and His creation in the bondage of corruption.

Now the human *perichoresis* begins. From the moment of the Spirit’s coming there is high praise and thanksgiving, and there is the beginning of giving. As at Macedonia⁴ later, so at Pentecost. So rich was their love, and so warm their fellowship. that they sold what they possessed and shared it as need arose. The circulatory movement of material gifts was the expression of the giving on every score—material, emotional, intellectual, psychical and spiritual. It was a relational giving, a relational interchange of the differentiations which were—and are—needed to cover the whole community.

In other words—as within the Godhead, so within the community: as going out from the Godhead so going out from the community of Christ to the community of all humankind. If God would not withhold His most precious thing of all—His Son—then His new children—those sons of God by adoption—could not withhold the things given them. And such things as love, joy and peace, gifts of ministry, and gifts to meet special needs in all departments of human living. Living is by receiving and using, but living is primarily by giving since this is God’s primary action.

In saying ‘All things are yours’⁵, Paul was telling his friends that God withheld from them nothing that was essential to full living. ‘The world, or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours’. Most of all, God withheld—and withholds—not Himself but gives Himself. Thus in the deepest regions of a human being, and in the whole society of Christ dwells God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Within the deepest regions of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—dwells the new person as God has received him or her, and the new Society of the Beloved who find their home in the Godhead.

All this explains the statement of Jesus in His High-Priestly prayer⁶, ‘Father, the glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.’ The most God can have is His glory, and the most Man can have is the glory God has given him—the glory which is wonderfully unitive. The Son delighted in the

⁴ See II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. The Macedonian Christian gave according to the measure of their ability, and then beyond even their ability, apparently trusting that God would supply their needs—whatever!

⁵ See I Corinthians 3:21-23 (cf. Rom. 6: 23; 8:32; II Cor. 9:15; Eph. 1:3; I Tim. 4:4; 5:17; James 1:17-18).

⁶ John 17:20-26. The verse here quoted is 22. In this 17th. chapter Jesus speaks sixteen times of what the Father has *given* him.

fact that God had glorified him⁷, i.e. had given him His glory, so that his was a given glory which was nevertheless his own glory. In glorifying God or a person one simply ascribes to that one what is already so. No glorification can take one beyond what one is, but is a revelation of what one is. When God ultimately glorifies Man He takes him beyond what he has ever been, but not what God has always intended he should be.

The ultimate glory of God is that He gives of Himself so that Man can share in what He is. As in eternity such was planned⁸, so in eternity it will be fulfilled at the time of the *telos*—the goal of history. Such glory as man has now will be a giving–glory, for such is God’s. The glory Christ has given his people is a glory which makes them one. God gives Himself to Man and so Man first gives himself to God, and then goes on to give himself to the human race. The tree laden with gumnuts awaits its appointed predator, and the tomato in the desert its appointed recipient. Giving is living, and living is both receiving and giving—in humility. This is not only the joy of life but its sustaining pleasure and surprise.

When I had written the above and thought the Study was completed I felt much had not been said which needed to be said. One saying of Jesus kept niggling away in my mind, namely, ‘If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him⁹.’ What struck me previously was that all human beings know what is good to give, and so what is not good to give. They have an image of what is right and what is wrong. They know they could and should give gifts. If my reasoning is correct then the principle of giving is known to all, and—in one sense—is innate to all. Only deliberate withholding prevents us giving. To go back to our eucalyptus bowed down with gumnuts, and our tomato plant in the desert, we see giving is a principle of life.

I thought—with a sense of shame—that there is giving everywhere we look. Jesus said, ‘Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and abides alone, but if it die it brings forth much fruit.’ The seed loses its identity as a seed but finds a new identity as a plant. The plant gives all that it has—i.e. to its death—in order to give further life. I thought again of the mother in famine time giving the last drops of her life to the needy baby, and my mind spread out to so many other examples. As a former farmer I have many times marvelled at the calf an old cow produces. It is fresh and full, vital with power, and grows into a fine beast even though its mother was almost past bearing. Scraggy beasts bear beautiful progeny, and trees almost devoid of foliage and life bring their last fruits to fulness. There is a Mother Teresa in Calcutta with the pitifully poor, and a Father Damien in the leper colony. Even mentioning this brings to memory the woman–missionary I met on the field who confided to me in shame, ‘I am dreadfully scared I’ll catch leprosy [Hansen’s Disease], but yet I feel I must go on nursing these afflicted with it.’

As I thought of Mother Teresa and her ilk I also thought of mothers of children. How they lose their youthful virgin figures, become aged, grow white-haired, wrinkled in skin, and seem to lose all the beauty they had. Yet how rich they grow, in knowledge, in understanding. How they go on giving and giving, and they are never rid of their children, never independent at last to enjoy what life is left to them—either married or widowed. Likewise with men. Both go on being parents, caring for their

⁷ John 8:54; 13:31-32; 17:5, 22, 24.

⁸ Passages such as Romans 8:17–30; I Corinthians 2:6–10, Ephesians 1:3–14 and Philippians 3:21 show that the glorification of Man was something planned prior to creation.

⁹ This text is in Matthew 7:11, and there is a parallel saying in Luke 11:13 where Jesus said, ‘how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?’

children and then their children's children. They have to give sympathy and understanding in times of waywardness of their offspring, times of sin and rebellion, and they must pray and watch for the younger ones. Until the day of their death they cannot relinquish the ministry of giving.

Of course they receive back. The grain of wheat that became lost into the plant, is ultimately lost as a plant. It is straw and nothing more, but it has multiplied itself. It has good grain to show for its work, and for its self-dying. The parable of a seed dying fails to show that the dead plant rises to a glory than never plant has known. All the time—beneath and behind the giving—the self-giving creature has been going from one stage of glory to another. At the moment of its physical decease—as we will later see—it rises to a glory it has never known, although it has hoped for it.

When we go back to the saying of Jesus— 'If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him?'—we discover that the principle of receiving is related to the principle of giving. Whilst God is prodigal with His gifts He is also desirous that we ask for them. 'He will give good gifts to those who are Him.' We need not be afraid the gifts will not be good. But are we too proud to ask? Does it involve some dependence we do not wish to have?

I have on my shelves books I have written which will not see the light of day for years at present rate of publication. Are they not good books—good gifts for fellow-human beings? I am sure they are. Should I then not ask God to raise up givers and helpers so that these books bring life and light to readers who will need them. Did not Christ tell his disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his vineyard? Not even he could do that in his state as a human being. He needed others to pray with him and for the harvest-field. So I bow my head and say gently, 'Father! You have given me the ability to write these books, to think the thoughts you deem necessary for me to think. You do not want to boughs to break with fruit too heavy to be borne. Send men and woman and resources to let these words flow out into society which needs them.'

So it goes for all things. We must ask, and he will give. James said, 'If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.' James knew—as did Solomon—the value of such wisdom. He knew it is 'first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or sincerity.' The aged ones who have this are a blessing to the community. The givings of youth are fresh and beautiful, but often riotous and untamed. The maturity wisdom brings to society is most valuable. Older ones are often wiser, knowing they cannot produce from themselves the resources that are required. They have learned the humility of asking.

With the humility of asking there is also a humility of receiving. God is saying, 'Take,' just as the fruit tree whose branches are almost broken, so laden they are with fruit. It is not merely a mercy to take: it is the acknowledgement of what something else has done for us. We are niggardly and surly if we refuse the offer. Sometimes we rationalize the free gifts of others by thinking we do them a good turn by taking! If we are not grateful to the tree which has borne its fruit for us, neither are we thankful to God who bore fruit out of a dry and bloody tree—a pain-timbered Cross! Christ will see the fruit of the travail of his soul and he will be satisfied, but we grudging receivers will fail to see free grace, and we will live in the sad twilight of 'neither grace nor law'. This is the inversion of giving, the perversion of taking.

Paul and others treasured the saying of Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Often *getting* is not *receiving*. It is Man gathering from every corner for himself: sometimes snatching, sometimes earning, and sometimes stealing. Receiving gifts from the Father is a blessed thing, and then distributing them even more blessed—if that were possible. What we receive must needs be given. The Dead Sea encapsulates its receivings and they lie sterile and dead. A true sea is living, rich with fish and weeds and other creatures. The Lake of Galilee is open at both ends. It receives and then gives and so it never dies. It dies only to itself—to give—but lives by the giving.

We learn it all from the Godhead. We have spoken of the Divine *perichoresis*, the interpenetration of the Three Person which have one centre of conscious being. They share their differentiations. None is too proud to receive, none too proud to give. The Father fathers the Son and the Son gives filially to the Father, whilst the Spirit receives His being from the Father through the Son and gives to them both. He is glad to glorify Father and Son, and indeed this is his glory—glorifying. We have seen that this honouring, glorifying and serving—One of the Others—is not confined within that Godhead, but has turned outwards to create, to provide for the life of all things, to redeem rebellious man and set the creation free to give full expression to its adoration of God and its total enjoyment of all things.

In this latter action we saw that God gives His Son all he needs—sixteen times in John chapter seventeen. We saw that the Father abandoned His Son up to the terrible action of the Cross, and the Son likewise gave himself to it. Yet, in another way it was not terrible for it was a 'fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' reminiscent of Noah's post-flood offering to God yet far transcending it. It was as Abraham's offering of Isaac, but transcended by the Father in the giving of his beloved Isaac.

When, then, the Divine *perichoresis* moved out into the creation—first founding it, then sustaining it, and finally redeeming it and renewing it—then redeemed humanity cannot forbear from sharing in that Divine giving, that circulatory movement which keeps bringing life to all things. The Divine *perichoresis* became flesh in the Son, and the Father and the Spirit aided him in giving their treasures to the human race. Because Man is created in the image of God then he will never be truly himself until—and unless—he constantly gives. In giving we lose of false and sinful selves and find our true selves.

It is incumbent upon us then to receive from all men that which they would give us. We must never be too proud for that. We must give all we have and they must not refuse it. No one may dam up the outflow of his brother or sister. Jesus said torrents of living water would flow from us. Such will flow out to dry ground until it is soaked and the water table in the depths is renewed and rises to bring forth a rich harvest in what was once a dead and sterile desert.

This, then, is the principle of glorious asking, receiving, giving and asking afresh. This is the Divine *perichoresis* become flesh and Spirit amongst the human race. It is this for which he died, and lived again. It is by this we also die and live again—not to ourselves and for ourselves, but for him who died for us and rose again. We thus think not on our own things, but the things of others. We count them better than ourselves as the Father did us, as He gave His Son, and His Son as he counted us better than himself. This is the true 'mystery of godliness'.

When we have learned this—even in the small measure and practice that we have in this world—we have been inducted into the mystery of the Godhead. Our *perichoresis* is in Their *perichoresis*. We are one with the Godhead, and the Godhead one with us. This is the Divine-human interdwelling which settles history for all time,

drains from it the acids and diseases of selfishness, and established love as the one eternal principle—even Man and God become one.

This, then, is the inheritance God has promised His people from of old. He has heaped up the treasures of this inheritance by the processes of history and the kings of the nations shall bring their glories into the Holy City, and when they arrive they shall see the same treasures of wisdom and knowledge to be those from which they have drawn for the processes of history. Christ is the glory, and in him were once hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, but now they are uncovered, exposed, given to the sight of all inheritors. The Kingdom has come in all its glory at the end-time. It now awaits further history, further action of love as the kingdom of priests bring to bear upon the new creation—the new heavens and the new earth—those resources which will prove even more than required for the task of glory ahead—the form and shape of which we now only dimly discern, but which excite every fibre of our beings.

The Pastoral Application of Glorious Giving

The application is surely obvious—as we give, so we lose the tensions of self-seeking and self-extending endeavours—the endeavours which arouse deadly competition and divisions. We enter into what is most natural of all for the community of Christ—the Divine *perichoresis* translated into human understand and human action. Undoubtedly *perichoresis* begins at the top of the love-hierarchy—with the Father. He has eternally generated the Son, and so the Spirit, and because the movement is circulatory it might be called ‘ever-giving’. Take the Pastor who is always expecting an upward movement in the pastoral *perichoresis*, but who does not initiate it—in the Triune Godhead—so that his action is both the witness to and expression of the Divine *perichoresis*. This one who takes from below as his due, is no trail-blazer of the ministry of glorious giving.

To many of us receiving is often humiliating. It is much a command to ask and to receive as it is to give. Asking-receiving is a witness to the goodness of God, and induces the humility which expresses itself in creature-dependence and in fervent thanksgiving—a principle powerfully tied in with all giving. Thus with the Pastors and the Elders sharing this natural *perichoresis* the movement is always outwards, always a giving and sharing of all the resources, a receiving of them, and thus the life of God flowing out to and through the congregation.

It scarcely needs to be said that this is no system, no methodology, no way of going behind God to ‘get it better’. It is more blessed to give than to receive, but even so the two are inseparable. Here is much food for thought for us all, and vast room for action. May we learn glorious giving, glorious asking, glorious receiving and so—even more glorious giving!

The Practical Perichoresis

Perichoresis–Circumincessio

In previous study we have seen that these two theological terms mean

- (i) the interpenetration of the Three Persons of the Triune Godhead and
- (ii) the circulatory movement of the relationship of the Three, and their giving to one another out of the differentiations which are theirs, i.e. the Three Persons though of the one substance (*homoousios*) are different in themselves.

Each is discrete, but the Three have the once centre of consciousness, i.e. are the Triune God, so that neither Tritheism on the one hand nor Modalism on the other hand are intruding heresies.

The purpose of this Study is to examine the fact that when Man is in union with God then the Divine *perichoresis–circumincessio* enters the life of the people of God and so a human *perichoresis–circumincessio* obtains, is in action, and resistance to it must bring guilt of a certain order, e.g. the parable of the talents where one man hid his talent and did not allow it to reproduce itself.

The Gifts and Differentiations Which Form the Basis the Practical Perichoresis

As endowed by creation Man has innumerable gifts, powers, capacities all of which help to form the true and unique being of each person. These gifts, powers and capacities relate to him in vocation. This creational vocation is set out in Genesis 1:28f. and reiterated in Genesis 9:1f.¹ Willingness to obey the mandate must bring a great sense of fulfilment, joy and fulness of human living whilst refusal or neglect to do so must bring elements of existential guilt. The uniqueness² of each persons means there are multifarious differentiations. As we will see these differentiations provide the materials for dynamic and fruitful perichoresis. For Christians there is a second mandate from God, namely that of proclaiming the gospel in all the world. Whilst the one message is given to all Christians, the communication of it is via the gifts of creation and the gifts of grace.

What special gifts are given to Christians to effect an outgoing to fellow-believers and the world of men, woman and children? Passages such as I Timothy 4:4; 6:17; I Corinthians 10:26 and many others show us that God is the great Giver of all creation's

¹ The Latter text shows that whilst the creational vocational mandate had not altered the fall of Man had altered his relationship with creation. It is evident that all human beings have some existential guilt when they oppose God, refuse the vocation, and selfishly set out to utilize he gifts for themselves or are too lazy to do even this, and so waste what God has given them, allowing it to atrophy.

² Just as no two leaves on a tree are identical, so no two humans have ever been identical. The thrust of intelligent man to define his differentiation is universal.

gifts, and these we use not only for ourselves but for others. Again, passages such as II Corinthians 9:15; Romans 5:5; 6:23; Ephesians 1:3–14; 4:7–15; I Corinthians chapters 12 to 14 cf. I Corinthians 4:7; James 1: 5–8; 3:15–18—amongst others—tell us of what we may call the spiritual gifts. They consist of the Holy Spirit, eternal life, repentance, forgiveness, new birth, regeneration, sanctification, adoption, vocation and ultimate glorification. These gifts are to transform and enrich us, and bring us to the fulness of our being. At the same time they are for others—a matter we will presently discuss.³ What we might call ‘the ministry gifts’ (e.g. Eph. 4:7–11) and ‘the spiritual gifts’ (e.g. I Corinthians 12:4ff.) are gifts firstly to the church, and then to those outside the church—i.e. to general humanity (cf. Gal. 6:10). If we think in terms of person-differentiations, the variety of creational and spiritual gifts, then we realize that the human race has enormous resources at its disposal. If humanity would allow God to direct the use of these gifts—especially for the good of the human race, and so to the glory of God—then perichoresis would prove to be a most dynamic operation.

Later we will look especially at the statement of Paul in I Corinthians 3:18–23, namely, ‘For all things are yours,’ particularly as these ‘all things’ are the ministries of the teachers, the world, the present the future, life and death—all being drawn from the source, ‘You are Christ’s and Christ is God’s’.

The Paradigm of Perichoresis

Surely this is found in the action of the Godhead, not only internally but externally towards the world in creation, redemption, and the ultimate regeneration of all things. The nature of God as Giver (see Pastors’ Study of 4/4/91; James 1:17; Rom. 6:23; 8:32; II Cor. 9:15)), as the One Who relates intimately, Who serves, and Who honours His creation, certainly indicates to us the nature of perichoresis. God is Self-giving, always, and this without surrendering His sovereignty or infringing what we call His ‘attributes’. It is this paradigm we should seek to follow. Inhabited by God we do not so much imitate it, as its produces itself in us.

The Effecting of the Perichoresis

The teaching of the believer’s union with God (John 17:3; I John 5:13, 20), of God’s dwelling within him/her (John 14:15–23; I John 3:24; 4:12, 13, 16) as Father, Son and Spirit, and then the indwelling of God by the believer, all speak of the relationship which liberates the Divine perichoresis into the human scene, especially within the people of God. Thus the perichoresis—circumincessio becomes a Divine-human cooperative operation. That is, the action emanates from the Divine-human union. There can be no talk of a human-independent operation for God. It can only be with God, i.e. from God through us and with us.

This brings us to the matter of love—agape. We do not simply say that the Members of the Godhead love one another and so their unity is assured, that is, unity, fellowship, and love are all of the one piece. That is how the Godhead is, and when we say God is love we are saying all that. Perichoresis is the expression, the mode and the goal of that Being of God as love. Love in humanity when it is true, is derived from

³ See our last Study (8/4/91) The Glorious Giving.

God and I John 4:7 says 'Love is of God', i.e. not from any other source. I John 4:19 is an important principle: indeed it is primary. 'We [only] love because he first loved us.' That love is not human reciprocal love to God, but love which comes from God (Rom. 5:5) and then circulates to Him and to all humanity. God's love is His personal being, in action, and His love in us can be no less and none other than this.

Thus perichoresis–circumincessio–the action and outworking of love–is an ontological necessity as well as an ontological insistence. Without it Man is bereft: with it, Man is under an irresistible compulsion. To live in it is to be free, is to be vocationally satisfied and fulfilled, and is to be truly human. Thus when Paul says, 'The love of Christ constrains me,' he is not saying 'My love for Christ constrains me,'–however much that may be the case–but, 'Christ's love for me: Christ's love working in me, constrains me.' I think the translations for 'constrains' such as 'controls', 'motivates', 'overwhelms' are only aspects of constraint. Jesus' statement, 'I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it be accomplished!' probably shows the strong controlling force of constraint.

To seek to avoid, neglect, dam up, misuse or abuse this love can only result in guilt for being other than what one is ontologically. Love is commanded (John 13:34; I John 2:7ff.; 4:21–5:3), and obedience from the heart (cf. Rom.6:17; Deut. 30:6) is required, i.e. Man aligning himself with the will of God–God Who is love. Our conclusion, then, is that love is not only perichoretic but perichoresis itself.

The Circuit of Perichoresis

We have said that perichoresis is the circulatory movement of the Three Persons Who are wholly interpenetrated and have one centre of consciousness. They both receive and give to One another. It would seem there is no giving without receiving, no receiving without giving.

Element One: Asking

For us to be on the true human level–i.e. the human level as it is in union with the Divine–means we must first of all receive from God. God is more ready to give than we are to ask (Eph. 3:20), and He knows our needs before we ask, but then we are also commanded to ask. 'Ask and you shall receive.'⁴ 'Shall not your heavenly Father give good gifts [the Holy Spirit] to them that ask him?' 'If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him, but let him ask in faith, with no doubting.' 'Whatever you ask from, God, God will give it.' 'Whatever you ask in my name I will do it.' Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive.'⁴

For some, asking is a humiliating exercise, an admission that one does not have of oneself what one needs, and that one is dependent upon another. That is, in fact, the case of Man with God. If we refuse to ask then we do not receive: the Lord's Prayer is surely an evidence of this. It is not that God does not give without our asking, but when–confronted with a situation–we refuse to ask, then that is a form of disbelief in Him. Asking is a rich form of creaturely dependence. This is shown in the passage of Matthew 6:25–34 where Jesus says the Father knows the needs of His children and will supply them, but they must first seek His kingdom. Anxiety is disbelief in God's

⁴ Matthew 6:8; 7:7-11; Luke 11:13; James 1:5; John 11:22; 14:14; 16:24, 26.

goodness and his willingness to give. We must ask of God, and we must ask of one another. In some cases we must ask for another, even from another for yet another. This is seen in Luke 11:5–13 in the parable of the friend who asked a neighbour at midnight for food for his friend who had just arrived.⁵

Asking, then is, part of the perichoresis, especially when what we ask is with a view to helping others, or helping ourselves to be more understanding, more functional, more helpful, and more mature. We do not, of ourselves, have all the resources required for certain situations and we must apply to God or others who have those required resources. Even so, we repeat that God for the most part gives where there is no asking, but in some sense this must be where there is a spirit of receiving even though that be mostly unconscious.

Element Two: Receiving

To ask and refuse to receive is illogical and probably irrational, especially where there is pride and anger. The Greek word *lambano* can mean both receiving and taking. One can take illicitly or one can receive properly. Man is really a receiver of gifts: he is built for receiving. Paul asked the Corinthians, ‘What have you that you did not receive. If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?’ John the Baptist made the personal, and yet general statement, ‘No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven.’ This sounds very much like Jesus’ saying, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by my Father,’ and is similar in vein to what he said to Pilate, ‘You would have no power over unless it had been given you from above.’ Of the beast of the Revelation it was said, ‘And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for twenty–two months.’⁶

James 1:17 makes the definitive statement that ‘Every good endowment [act of giving] and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.’ James means that no giving is true and no gift is perfect except it comes from the Father, no matter who or what may be the agency used to bring it to Man. No human giving is authentic and so no gift is perfect. This being so, receiving must accord with the giving. One must receive purely, as one has been given purely. This is true perichoresis. The measure of our receiving is determined by our wills in relation to the giving. When we say, ‘Both must be by love,’ then we are stating the obvious, the axiomatic.

Element Three: Giving⁷

It can be seen that in some sense asking, receiving, and giving are elements in a circular and circulatory movement. From God’s point of view his giving must not destroy the recipient unless He is on a mission of judgement, such as we read in Psalm 106:15–‘He gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them [leanness into their souls].’⁸ The whole principle of true giving is seen in the quote of James 1:17. We have spoken of it in our previous Essay (4/4/91).

⁵ There is an evil asking, very aptly described by James in 4:1-3, and also see Psalm 106:15 and Numbers 11:4-34.

⁶ I Corinthians 4:7; John 3:27; 6:65; 19:11; Rev. 13:5

⁷ Hearer see the Living Faith Study 3-The Giver: the Gifts: the Giving (NCPI Vol. 1).

⁸ Cf. Numbers 11:4-34. The place of this incident came to be called Kibroth-hattavah, i.e. ‘Graves of craving’.

Jesus taught much on giving⁹ not only by his words on giving, but by his whole life and death which was a giving. The saying of the Lord preserved for us through Paul was, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ Paul also had much to teach on giving, and his chapters 8–9 of II Corinthians are the classical teaching for us. One gives ‘according to one’s ability,’ and then ‘beyond one’s means’. One truly gives when first one gives oneself to the Lord and to others.

In the Godhead giving is an action of each Member. In John chapter 17 there are sixteen mentions of what the Father has given the Son. Whilst little is said about what the Son gives the Father his love for the Father is evident—he gives of his Sonship which in turn fulfils the Fatherhood of God. Likewise the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son and he gives glory to them both (cf. John 16:12–15). All give glory to one another. In the Divine–human perichoresis the Father gives the Son up for us all and—with him—freely gives us all gifts. The Son gives himself up for Man, and then gives gifts to the church, including his fulness and the ministry gifts. The Holy Spirit is given by the Father and the Son to believers, and in turn the Spirit gives love to the believing heart and the ‘spiritual gifts’ such as are mentioned in I Corinthians chapters 12–14. The giving of God is prolific. In fact it is overwhelming when it is properly seen.

Element Four: Thanksgiving

The mention of this element may come as a surprise to some of us. Whilst we cannot penetrate the mystery of the Divine perichoresis within the Godhead, we can see its manifestations in the life of the Son in his incarnation. In Matthew 11:25/Luke 10:21 (vb. *exomologeō*) Jesus thanked the Father for what He had done in revealing the truth to those who were babes. The well-known Greek verb *eucharisteō* was used of Jesus’ characteristic blessing over food, as in the feeding of the 5,000, the Last Supper, and almost certainly in the post–resurrection events of Luke 24:30 and John 21:13–14.

Thanksgiving was a rich teaching of the Apostolic church.¹⁰ In fact, thanksgiving was commanded. This should not be thought unusual since loving is also commanded. These things need not necessarily be spontaneous. The reality is that thanksgiving is a conscious recognition of the richness of giving. It is commanded because it is good for the soul: the unthankful one is worse off in his/her un–thankfulness. Blessings are taken for granted. Un–thankfulness accompanied the fall (cf. Rom. 1:21). Failure to give thanks is to claim all things originate with one, or—at best—that gifts are not gifts but necessities which ought to be accorded to the selfish one. The elements for which thanksgiving are made show the immensity of the gifts.

Conclusion to the Elements of Perichoresis

We could easily nominate other elements—such as truly know, honouring, and serving—but then these are all in the giving. All–in–all, so much is covered in these elements with the Godhead, from the God, and then in the human perichoresis to the community of Christ which then extends to the community of all humankind. We are ready now to see the pastoral–ecclesiastical application and operation of the Divine–human perichoresis.

⁹ As in Matthew 5:42; Luke 6:38.

¹⁰ See Ephesians 5:4; 5:20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 2:7; 4:2; I Thessalonians 3:9; I Timothy 2:1; 4:3–4.

The Operations of the Practical Perichoresis

The primary unit—if we may call it that—in which perichoresis—circumincessio operates is the human family. It is from the Divine Family of Father, Son and Holy Spirit that the human family derives its being, has its functional pattern, and is humanly ontological. Ephesians 3:14–15 indicates this since every family in heaven and earth is named by the Father, i.e. derives from Him. It is known, biblically, that the true family unit where the father is head of Christ, Christ is the head of the man (husband) and the husband is head of the wife that the Divine–human hierarchy is one entity, and out of this the whole family lives in love. I John 3:10ff. seeks to indicate this.

It also indicates that a human family—because of the fall—can produce dissonance, division, hatred, jealousy, aggression and rivalry. In the Old Testament the people of God lived under covenant and were a holy community—a kingdom of priests. In the New Testament they also live under covenant and are likewise a kingdom of priests. The families of covenant people found—and still find—themselves protected, energized, and matured by their participation in the full community of God.

We have only to look at Pentecost and its fruits to know that the Divine–human perichoresis has its initiation and launching on that day. We trace the whole of the New Testaments especially Acts, and the Epistles and so see the asking, receiving, giving and thanksgiving—elements of the circulatory movement of the love–perichoresis. The principles set out in Philippians 2:1–9; I Corinthians 10:24, Ephesians 4:1–6; I John 3:16–18 and Romans 15:1–9—to name but a few references—are generally as follows,

- (i) believers are not to look on their own things, but the things of others,
- (ii) they are to count others better than themselves,
- (iii) they are not to seek their own good but the good of others,
- (iv) they are not to please themselves but to please their neighbours,
- (v) they are to become servants one of another,
- (vi) they are to discern the needs of others, and where possible, supply them,
- (vi) they are to become poor that others may become rich as they give
 - (a) according to their means and (b) beyond their means.

When these things are taken thoughtfully into consideration—and they all issue, and only issue from love—we can see the necessity to receive all we can, ask all we need, give all we can and serve wherever that need is discerned to which we are directed.

Perichoresis and Hierarchy

We may be forced to see and understand that asking, receiving, giving and thanksgiving are mostly—if, indeed, not always—in the context and operations of hierarchies. The Triune Godhead is a hierarchy.¹¹ The Father is *primus inter pares* ('the first among equals') because the Son derives from Him via eternal generation, and in a

¹¹ The word 'hierarchy' is one of those which has unacceptable connotation to many. It is linked in many minds with 'authority', 'law' 'superordination' and 'subordination'-to name but a few-and so the very mention of it makes for difficulty in discussing anything under this heading. This ought not to be the case: nor need it be. Hierarchy, properly seen, is the true functional order of eminently acceptable relationships. Only the abuse or misuse of it is properly unacceptable.

tertiary sense so does the Holy Spirit. The Father has what we call ‘the principium’. What saves hierarchy from being a descending order of quality is

- (a) the Three Persons are of the same ‘substance’ (*homoousios*),
- (b) the Three Persons are in one another, i.e. the Father in the Son and the Spirit, the Son in the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit in the Father and the Son,¹²
- (c) the circulatory movement of the perichoresis which shares the differentiations of the Persons.

The classic example of a hierarchy is to be found in I Corinthians 11:3 where God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the man (husband), and the man is head of the woman (wife). At first sight this would seem to a hierarchy only of authority, but headship contains both the ideas of authority and origin. Yet it contains more because it is a relational hierarchy. That is to say the Father is in Christ and Christ in the Father, Christ is in the man and the man is in Christ. The man is in the woman, and the woman in the man. Then the circulatory movement of the four means that the woman is in the Father and Christ, and the man is in the Father and Christ, and each is in all others, so hierarchy is an intimate, dynamic and relational thing. It is in this context that Man asks, receives, and gives. Without the gifts—both creational and redemptional—which spring from God there could be no perichoresis, and there could be no functional hierarchy. It would simply be a rigid, wooden order of law and authority.

Note: Whilst it would seem that some hierarchies are celestial, i.e. commence in heaven and are complete there, and other hierarchies are terrestrial, i.e. commence on earth and are complete there, yet it would seem that all true hierarchies commence in heaven—i.e. with God—and are completed on earth. I Corinthians 11:3 is evidence of this. To put it in a human way—the incarnation has meant that the heavenly hierarchy is the basis of the earthly hierarchy. Since true hierarchy is only so where there is perichoresis then how richer is this when the Divine perichoresis enters the human one, and then become one in union!

Using the Resources

We have already seen the resources available through the flow of the gifts that come to us from God. There can be no fear of such gifts being exhausted—of giving out. The talent buried brings judgement. The talents used bring increase and commendation. It goes on being more blessed to give than to receive but we go on receiving in order to give.

We need to see the gifts, talents, abilities, and resources which lie within the local church. By this we do not mean an organizing of them, or even looking upon them as utilities. Rather we need to seek the constant flow of love, recognizing that as ever it will be through pain and suffering that the fruitage matures (cf. John 12:24; Isaiah 53:11). We saw in our April study that Man is made to bear fruit and to give, and that receiving from our fellow—creatures is also a ministry to them. It is a glorious thing to see the flow of love, the true perichoresis, the true ‘rivers of living water’ issuing from the local congregation watering not only it but the parched deserts of human habitation.

¹² This can be shown from Scripture. See my-as yet-unpublished thesis *The Glory of God and Human Relationships* (1990).

The Pastor and the Resources

It does not matter if our ministries never have special recognition. It does not matter if we are not considered great, successful or famous. If it is only a matter of 'fame is the spur', then we are not in true perichoresis for we are circulating nothing but our egos.

As I see it the most precious and powerful thing we have is the word of God. As it is given out so all the gifts of God proceed to willing hearers. What saddens me is the waste of its substance by many preachers. I mean they have worked hard over a sermon or study, even to weeping over it, living in it, and so powerfully proclaiming it. Yet they do not write the material, have it recorded, and then have it further shared with others. It is true that its immediate hearers are benefited, but I believe each local church should be a great resource centre, a great teaching unit, as well as a rich entity of spiritual sociality.

My purpose in writing this paper is to show that it is not simply a good idea to husband and develop resources, but it is essential for true Christian living. In this respect I set out some salient points,

- (i) We are not our own. We are bought with a price. This means we must glorify God in our bodies.¹³
- (ii) We have been given gifts, talents and abilities by creation. These include everything that we are—by creation. I Corinthians 4:7 holds good for these gifts.
- (iii) We have been given those gifts of redemption which enable us to become and remain new creations. I Corinthians 4:7 holds good for these.
- (iv) We have been given those gifts of Christ which are called by some 'ministry gifts' e.g. those found in Ephesians 4:7–11 (cf. I Cor. 12:28). I Corinthians 4:7 holds good for these.
- (v) We have been given those gifts of the Spirit sometimes called charismata and 'spirituals'.
- (vi) We have been given the gifts of living which Paul speaks in I Corinthians 3:21–23,¹⁴ i.e. the ministries of the teacher—leaders, the world, life, death, the present and the future. Certainly I Corinthians 4:7 holds good for these.
- (vii) We must value—even if we do not always have to evaluate—these gifts.¹⁵ We must see that our whole lives are thus ones of stewardship (I Cor. 4:1–2; II Cor. 4:1ff.; Rom. 12:3ff.; I Tim. 1:16; Eph. 3:7ff).
- (ix) All these resources, plus the material resources which are ours, ought to be used in a perpetual perichoresis—circumincessio as we are the community of Christ. The

¹³ I Corinthians 6:19–20.

¹⁴ These, amazingly enough are the teachers—Paul, Apollos and Cephas—the world, life and death, the present and the future. Of course, they are only gifts we can use when 'you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' Union and communion bring dynamic action in response.

¹⁵ It ought to be noted that very little research has been done on the whole matter of gifts. Some writers seem fascinated by the charismata, to the neglect of natural gifts and talents, ministerial gifts, and the unusual gifts under Paul's caption of 'All Things Are Yours' (I Cor. 3:21–23).

church is hierarchical—Christ the head, the eldership his delegated Headship expression, and all members of the church in ministry—and so the circulatory movement is mandatory as it is essentially functional.¹⁶

- (x) A study of the early church will show us that not all ministries within the local church were of the local congregation. A case could be made out for showing that the ministry of the apostle, the prophet and the evangelist—if not in some cases the pastor—teacher—were visiting ministries. Unfortunately we talk today of ‘freelance’, ‘independent’, and ‘itinerating’ ministries. The local church is not only enriched by visiting ministries but such are indispensable to life and growth of the local community of believers.

Today we have ministries called ‘para-church’ ministries. This may or not be a fitting description of them, but there were no ‘para-church’ ministries in apostolic times, for the very term is self-contradictory. Some Bible Colleges, Seminaries, Christian Resource Centres—and the like—may well have a value, and may have immediate aid for local churches, but primarily the churches should build themselves and require visiting ministries to assist in this building.¹⁷

All of this prompts me to say that there is enormous wastage on the part of us who are pastors. We put much effort into preparing sermons, addresses, studies and having given these that is an end to the matter. We may file our notes or written studies for use at a future time, but apart from the immediate hearers no one else benefits. For the most part we will not go back to the time of preparation, of research, of inspiration, and it will be lost. The apostles and leaders in the early church wrote well—hence the whole of the New Testament, and other post-apostolic writings. The early fathers wrote well, the Reformers on a grand scale, to with Luther and Calvin. Calvin wrote commentaries on all the book of the Bible apart from the Revelation and his Institutes of Christian Religion is a monumental work. The Puritans were voluminous and all to great purpose. They believed all that wrote was of immense significance and relevance. Charles Wesley wrote his thousands of hymns. The 19th. century Tractarians turned the tide in their favour against great odds. All of these writers had substance to what they said and wrote. Why then not at the heart of the Christian community—the local churches?

We are glad to note that many fine works are being turned out on our presses today, as well as helpful audio— and video—cassettes. Some churches are using modern media, are good at promotion, and have learned much about organization from their more secular brethren, but this is not what true practical perichoresis is about, essentially. What must be ministered is the truth of the word. What must be shared is true worship. What must be proclaimed far and wide—at least to the perimeters of the parishes is the gospel. It, too, must be carried to the ends of the earth.

As pastors we must note three things, (i) we can never livingly communicate more than we know in our lives, not only theologically, but in our heartwise. True theology is that of the heart, (ii) if we are true preachers and teachers we cannot but communicate what is living truth to us, (iii) we must every means possible to extend this ministry. This may mean extra work in having studies recorded, in getting them on

¹⁶ Acts 5:4 shows the utter freedom that exists in perichoretic decision-making. II Corinthians 1:24 and I Peter 5:2-3 show us that none in the church can dominate the faith of another.

¹⁷ We cannot afford to purist in our view of the church—especially the local church. The churches have always had to adapt but there is enough in the N.T and early church history to indicate generally the nature, roles and functions of the local churches.

to computer disks,¹⁸ in publishing them, even if only for the local congregation. Nor is there anything sinful about building up files of true theological and devotional value. It may mean drawing on resources within the local church to type, proof-read, correct and to print. There are Christian Resource Centres, and they may well be used—especially where their materials are relevant, understandable and usable. It is best for the local church to collect its own and other resources. A resource centre in every church would not be too much. When Christians become serious in this way, locally, then local interest in the gospel also becomes enlarged.

A living church situation helps to build up living resources. Hymns and songs grow out of genuine church life and worship, articles become relevant, members seek to equip themselves with a minimal Christian library, i.e. a Bible Concordance, a one-volume Bible Commentary and a good Bible Dictionary. This should be encouraged, and such personal libraries added to, whilst a local church library is a good thing and recommendations can be made for reading in other Libraries and Resource Centres, provided each has ‘its own head of steam’.

Utilizing all resources should be our aim, and doubtless this is part of practical perichoresis, but perichoresis is primarily relational—as the Godhead well shows. It is all the action which springs out of love, which demands asking, receiving, thanksgiving and giving. When we think of practical perichoresis, we must think of the word being proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, being received wholeheartedly so that out of the proclaimed gospel will come transformed lives which manifest what began so dramatically on the day of Pentecost.

Conclusion to ‘The Practical Perichoresis’

Pentecost teaches us that there was a movement into the stream of humanity by the Divine perichoresis. Believing man—in that day of the Spirit became come into union with the Triune Godhead, and the Divine–human perichoresis became one. Down through the Christian centuries the saints have been asking, receiving, giving thanksgiving and giving. There is a vast treasury into which all their gifts have been stored, but since gifts are dynamic—not static—those gifts have gone on furnishing the community of Christ with riches immeasurable—the inexhaustible riches of Christ’. Believers all acknowledge they cannot boast in themselves. Whatever they have received is of grace, and whatever they have given is of grace, but the receiving and the giving is their joy.

We do not seek to utilize these gifts in a calculated way. He do not wish to corral and herd them and drive them for our own benefit, but we wish them to be shared with all the community of God and thus with all the community of Man. The divine perichoresis is amongst us. The Divine–human perichoresis is the richest reality of love that has become incarnate.

Thanks and praise be to God for His unspeakable gift!

¹⁸ Some pastors have that form of modesty which precludes them from recording and printing their messages. This modesty should be disposed of as foolish and unreal. If we are not too modest to preach, then we should not be too modest to record and print, or we will be foolishly inconsistent. Being recorded on audio- and video-cassettes not only extends the ministry, but it also makes us think more clearly. Learning materials for teaching is what teaches us.

The Way of Wisdom—I

Why Study Wisdom?

Recently I have been studying the various systems of psycho-therapy (there are over 100 of them), and have been struck by the fact in this and other studies that human beings seeks to assist others to become healthy in mind and body and to live enjoyable lives. This is to be commanded. Probably most scientists have this in mind. What struck me is that we accumulate that amount of wisdom in life which enables us to help others. Yet there is certainly a *limit* to what we can do. Our wisdom is limited. The sort of wisdom is the kind we develop, generally without recourse to God. Is there wisdom beyond possible human wisdom, which might take us further in helping others? Without odiously comparing general wisdom with biblical (Godly) wisdom is it possible we have mostly mistaken the first for the second—we who are Christians, leaders and pastors? **Do we have the idea that biblical wisdom is for matters theological and devotional and not—in the best sense of the term—practical?** We need to consider this deeply.

Everyone knows it is a desirable thing to be wise, even if only for self-benefit. We need, however to define wisdom. Most of us have some idea of the nature of wisdom. We trust we can pick out a wise person. We hear a statement and reckon it to be wisdom. Most of us would like to be wise. Our motives may differ, since to be wise is to have a handle on those who are not. To be wise might mean to be successful. Anyway, most of us would like to acquire wisdom. Indeed, we are sure that as the days pass we are acquiring some kind of wisdom. We learn by our mistakes. We have a certain kind of valuable knowledge which we lacked in more youthful days. Even so, we trust that our elders, the leaders of our society and others in authority will have sufficient wisdom to cope with the problems confronting them—and us—so that there may be an intelligent and useful outcome to our human situations.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary has as one of its descriptions of wisdom, ‘1. Capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends; sometimes, less strictly, sound sense, esp. in practical affairs: opp. *To folly*.’ This is how most of us would understand it.

Another fair description of wisdom is one by S.H. Blank in the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Abingdon, New York, 1962, Vol. IV, pp. 852–3), ‘A quality of mind distinguishing the wise man, by ‘Virtue of which he is skilled and able to live well and both succeed and counsel success; also a quality of itself apart from man, above and beyond man, existing ideally with God and imparting form to creation.’

In most of our minds wisdom has to be do with a special ability of personal skill and intellectual apprehension and application. Most of us link it with the idea of success and of personal acumen and authority.

It may well be that these two descriptions have a certain merit, but they are a long way from a true understanding of wisdom. We will see that not only does wisdom have to do with God creating this world, and with upholding and ruling it, but that

wisdom is always ‘forward-looking’, i.e. it has a goal of its own as designed by God and we do not understand wisdom until we see what creation, redemption and glorification are all about. He—or she—who has this wider vision knows the glory of wisdom. It is no wonder the Scriptures and wisdom itself as personified by the Holy Spirit all urge us to ‘Get wisdom; get insight,’ and that writer of Proverbs says, ‘The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom and whatever you do get insight,’ and later on comments, ‘To get wisdom is better than gold; and to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.’¹ Any worldly-wise person might agree with this in principle.

For the Christian believer the getting of wisdom is not gaining advantage over another person, but to be a person ‘fully equipped’ as 11 Timothy 3:17 has it, and to be mature so that we can gain further wisdom which fits us for life, not only for ourselves, but so that we may serve others, that we may be worthily occupied. We need to keep on saying that wisdom is not a commodity, not something we accumulate but a way of living in the richness of God, in His will, **in** His purpose, His gifts and the goal to which He is moving, and to which He is taking us. This fact will be seen more clearly in our second study.

The Getting of Wisdom.

Assuming, generally, that each of us desires to obtain wisdom² –, then how to get wisdom is both our question and problem. Generally we trust it would come, gradually of its own accord, and to a certain degree this is the case. Most of us believe we accumulate wisdom. We look with some envy on the granting of great wisdom to Solomon—as an answer to his prayer. To us it seems a like a fable or a fairy story. We just opt for obtaining wisdom by a slow process and consider it might be a somewhat painful one. This may be well-founded for time and again the Scriptures inform us, ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.’³

The Fear of the Lord, that is the Beginning of Wisdom

Here the term ‘Lord’ is ‘Yahweh’—that name of God which brought tremendous awe to the truly pious of Israel. In one sense it was God’s only name. To stand then before Yahweh was to be in great reverence for Him. We know the fear the patriarchs, the judges and the prophets had in the presence of a theophany—a manifestation of God. Jacob was greatly awed at Bethel. Moses lacked awe before the burning bush but was soon shocked into it. The presence of God at Sinai was little less than a horror to the people of Israel. Job 37:23–24 says, ‘The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate. Therefore men fear him; *he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.*’ Taking God for granted is perhaps the greatest of sins: certainly it is the sin of dishonour. Sometimes this awe is called ‘Fear of the numinous,’ i.e. fear of something outside of normal human experience. This may well be, but some cases are of the imagination.

¹ Proverbs 4:5, 7; 16:16, to which 8:10-11 adds ‘Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

² Helpful to this study would be LFS 35 *The Wisdom of God and Man* (NCPI, 1980) and the book *The Wisdom of God and the Healing of Man* (NCPI, 1990).

³ This statement is found in Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 8:10; 15:33, but there are kindred ideas in many places, especially the book of Ecclesiastes.

It is the reality of God confronting a person of which we speak. Man easily is absorbed back into himself—'curled into himself', as Luther put it—and he thinks to evade God. Psalm 29 is a great antidote to them. So also Psalm 99:1–5,

The Lord reigns; let the people tremble!
 He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
 The Lord is great in Sion, he is exalted over all the peoples.
 Let them praise thy great and terrible name! Holy is He!
 Mighty King, lover of justice, thou hast established equity;
 thou hast executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.
 Extol the Lord our God; worship at his footstool.
 Holy is he!

In some older translations the word 'terrible' was used of God, His name and His works (as above. cf. Exodus 15:11) but in later editions has become 'awesome'. 'Awesome' is certainly a fine word, but 'terrible' is more true to Man's experience of Him in His vast majesty. A reading of Isaiah 6 will show us that: Isaiah was in great shock then he was in the midst that holy vision of God.

It is worth noting that a true fear of God—i.e. a redeeming fear—is generally absent when God does His great works. During the ten plagues in Egypt Pharaoh may have had momentary fear but he hardened his heart against God. In the book of the Revelation, with only one notable exception⁴ the signs and judgements of God, although they strike terror into the heart of the recipients, these do not come to that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. To the contrary: they are further angered against God.

If we lack the holy fear that should grip the heart at the thought of God, then we lack understanding as creatures of the Creator, as subjects of the Great King, and as children of the exalted Father. We lack the humility which alone allows us to learn. We are out of the sphere of true reverence. What God says is taken casually and His words are as wind and vapour—without sense. In Isaiah 66.2b God says,

But this is this man to whom I will look,
 he that is humble and contrite in spirit,
 and trembles at my word.

Paul, in one of his accounts of the depravity of Man said what to him must have been the utmost of human evil, 'There is no fear of God before their eyes,' (Rom. 1:18; Psa. 36:1). Not to fear God is put one's self outside the wisdom of God, for—as we shall see more fully later—wisdom is simply walking in the directions God has given, the true way of life. We know that true fear of the Lord is not slavish or servile. It springs from a revelation of holiness, his power, and His love and compassion. In a very powerful statement—Psalm 130:1–4 the Psalmist cries, 'But there *is forgiveness* with thee, that thou mayest *be feared*.' So then the fear of the Lord is that which takes us out of our sinful carelessness, passive rebellion, selfish indifference and our lack of true awe. It places us in the presence of God so that we know Who He is and hear what he is saying, and we understand our creatureliness, and the lofty nature of our Creator. We are now ready to understand wisdom. Hence the author of Proverbs can say that the fear of the Lord causes us to hate evil, leads to life, is a fountain of life, prolongs life,

⁴ Cf. Revelation 10:11. Some readers may not count this as actual repentance, but the giving of *glory in spite of* themselves.

gives strong confidence to the fearer and brings instruction in wisdom 8:13; 19:23; 14:27; 10:27; 14:26; 15:33.

So then, the fear of the Lord is not a tyrannical thing, but a liberating one. It is useful to note that fearing the Lord, or not fearing the Lord, is a matter of human will, ". . . *they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord*". Later we will see that it is the gospel–revealed by the Holy Spirit–which brings us back to a wholesome fear of the Lord, and so into a life of true wisdom. For those of us who are pastors and leaders and desire that our people should know the fear of the Lord and so enter into wisdom, it will be our responsibility first of all to have such fear. In being familiar with ‘holy things’ we often lose our own sense of holy fear.

Man’s Wisdom⁵ an Impediment to Understanding God’s Wisdom

There are two elements which make it difficult for Man to understand God. The first is a simple one: Man is not God. So Isaiah 55:8–9 God explains that His thoughts are not human thoughts, nor His ways human ways. His thoughts are higher than human ones. Even in its context the plain statement may not mean that God is immeasurably higher in *His ability* to think than human beings are, but rather than the way Israel has gone is because of a different level of thinking to that which is God’s, and in fact that Israel’s thinking has been wrong. Long ago God had given Israel the assurance that it has all revealed to it that it needed to know, as Moses assured his listeners, ‘The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.’ We may say that what is revealed is not simply for *cogitation*–as such–but for *action*. Hearing God is a matter of the will, and he who has a will to hear will hear, i.e. hear all he needs to know. The people of God have always been warned against diviners, false prophets and their ilk, which must mean they are warned against anything that is not the true utterance or communication of God.

The **second** element which prevents man knowing the truth of God and so acquiring true wisdom⁶ is that man rebelled against the knowledge of God, and therefore against all the wisdom of God.

In Genesis 3:1–6–the *first of three passages*– we will study–we have the account of the primal temptation and primal fall. In 2.9 we are told that every tree was ‘plants to the sight and good for food.’ There were 2 other trees,

- (i) the tree of life, and
- (ii) the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil as the woman saw it was ‘good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree, was to be desired to make one wise’. "To be desired to make one wise was’ was not said of other trees. To be wise seemed a good and legitimate thing and so the woman took and ate.

⁵ By ‘man’s wisdom’ we simply mean the wisdom a human being develops without any particular reference to God. Later we will see the concerted wisdom of evil powers and man included in this system (*aeon*) called ‘the world’ from which worldly wisdom derives.

⁶ In fact, wisdom is not necessarily an accumulation or deposit of the best, richest and most powerful ideas, so much as it is an attitude of mind, a disposition towards living by which one becomes wise, i.e. wise towards Gods, Man and creation, and learns how to live most properly and usefully in these. Whilst the Wisdom literature–both in Israel and elsewhere–is a kind of deposit of what thoughtful and wise people have left to us as a heritage–a kind of available treasure–yet the one reading it and utilizing it has to have a *wise* approach to it, a humility of perception and use of it. One lives wisely, rather than one is wise, although God is called wise and often certain persons are called wise persons .

The question is, ‘Were not the man and the woman already as wise as they needed to be?’ To know God is to have all the wisdom one needs: innocence perhaps being the best state of knowledge.⁷ The serpent had said that eating of the tree would make them as God, i.e. ‘knowing good and evil’. Surely knowing good and evil is part of great wisdom! The account in Genesis 3 shows that the kind of knowledge they had, far from being a benefit to them, was one of the reasons they were sent out from Eden. It was not a good knowledge: it certainly not wisdom as true wisdom is.

In addition to the Genesis 3 passage there are two other passages which seem to speak of man’s rebellion against God and his refusal to know Him, thus entailing the loss of true wisdom. The most powerful is Romans 1:18–32 and the second Job 15:17– 35. *This second passage–Job 15:17–35* is a passage uttered by one of Job’s self– appointed counsellors, Eliphaz the Temanite. The problem with such utterances is that we can never be sure that the utterances of the counsellors are to be taken as truth since, God rebukes them, ‘You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has,’ (42:7–9).⁸ Even so, the essence of Eliphaz says has some validity especially as he claims that what he says is ‘what wise men have told, and their fathers have not hidden,’ namely that Man [Adam?], ‘Because he has stretched forth his hand against God, and bids defiance to the Almighty’ comes into perpetual calamity. Of him– Man–Eliphaz says, ‘Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself; for emptiness will be his recompense.’ Certainly verses 17–35 are very powerful.

The third passage–that of Romans 1:18–32–is immensely powerful. In fact it is difficult to understand much of the Scriptures without it.⁹ What it tells us in strong terms is that man knew God and refused to give Him both honour and thanksgiving, and as a result cut himself off from God, at the same time creating surrogate gods so that he could go on worshipping, go on having some kind of a rationale to his changed situation. Paul speaks bluntly of what happened to Man, ‘they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools ... they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.’

When we take statements,—(i) ‘they became futile in their thinking’, (ii) ‘their senseless minds were darkened’,(iii) claiming to be wise they became fools’, (iv) they exchanged the truth of God for a lie’, and (v) ‘they served the creature rather than the Creator’– then we have the picture of Man following the fall.

It is a terrible picture and predicament. ‘Claiming to be wise’ is a preposterous claim, but Man–without–God thinks he is wise. He seems to have every evidence about him that he is wise. Yet he utterly lacks that wisdom which is called ‘the wisdom of God’. Of course he has a human wisdom. ‘To say his thinking is futile only makes sense when it is put beside God’s thinking. To call Man a ‘fool’ and to say ‘his senseless mind was darkened’ sounds like some terrible indictment on the human race that is utterly without foundation. History proves man is intellectually brilliant, functionally apt, technologically competent, capable of examining ‘everything under the sun’, and of

⁷ In the Scriptures true knowledge of God and others is primarily a relational thing. In relationships we know what we do not know outside of them.

⁸ Elihu–the fourth counsellor–was not rebuked by God. He seems of a different ilk.

⁹ Scholars debate whether Paul is pointing to the fall of Man as we find it in Genesis 3, or whether he is speaking of some specific–even historical–net of the Gentiles in which they set themselves against God, e.g. the building of Babel and its tower, or whether he intends it to mean that each person deciding against God does it on the grounds Paul here describes. 11 may refer to all these situations, but in principle it is the act of Man rejecting God, and this he did as one being in the garden of Eden, as Romans 5:12ff. indicates.

utilizing all the elements created by God. The words ‘futile thinking’, ‘fool’, ‘Senseless mind’, seem not only inept but downright derogatory. Was not Paul out of his own mind when he said these things?

No. For the human creature to reject the one who created him, to make himself equal with God, the claim that he could discern good and evil as the Deity does, to reject the Holy God and make gods, lords and idols in His place and give them the worship due to God is to have one’s spirit deranged in more ways than one. Man is only Man when he is one with God. His only wisdom is the wisdom God gives him. Living and operating by that wisdom is true wisdom in action: otherwise not. No: the statements are correct.

One proof of the correctness is the explanation or narrative Paul enters into from verses 24–32—some of the most terrible statements ever written about the human race. All this ‘knowing’ of Man and his actions are un wisdom. If we link Romans 1:19ff. with 1 Corinthians 1:18–25 we find the two virtually coalesce. In time Man has so rationalized his idea of wisdom that the matter of the Cross could be a thing neither of wisdom nor power, when, in fact, Christ crucified is both the power and wisdom of God.

The Wisdom of God

In Romans 11:33–34 Paul exclaims, ‘O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!’ He then quotes Isaiah 40:13–14, ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?’ God is unique in regard to wisdom: His wisdom is not Man’s as we have seen in Isaiah 55:8–9. Daniel said of God, ‘To whom belongs wisdom and might’ (2:20–23; cf. 11 Sam. 14:20; Prov. 21:30). Job 12:13 states ‘With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding.’ Job is, of course, stating that God is unique in this respect. He then goes on to show (12–14ff.) that all action belongs to God,

With him are strength and wisdom;
the deceived and the deceiver are his.
He leads counsellors away stripped,
and judges he makes fools.

This thought is repeated in Isaiah 31:2.

And yet he is wise and brings disaster,
he does not bring back his words,
but will arise against the house of evildoers,
and against the helpers of those who work iniquity.

There are many texts which speak of the wisdom of God, especially those in Proverbs where—as in 8:1–9.6—wisdom is personified or even is made into a hypostasis¹⁰. To us it is axiomatic that God is wise but if we are thinking in human

¹⁰ Whether wisdom is personified or made into a hypostasis it is still not an entity on its own. It is the wisdom of God. When it speaks, God speaks. In Jeremiah 8:9 the word of the lord is virtually equated with wisdom. Not to hear the word is to be bereft of true wisdom. It is pointless to look at wisdom in the

terms of using human wisdom as an analogue then we are far wide of the mark. Karl Barth describes God's wisdom,

God is wise in so far as His whole activity, as willed by Him, is also thought out by Him, and thought out by Him from the YM outset with correctness and completeness, so that it is intelligent and to that extent a reliable and liberating activity. We have to say that His activity in His works, and also of his inner activity, of the essential actuality of His divine being, that God is wise, than in Him is wisdom. God Himself is wisdom.¹¹

To be frank we are only interested in God's wisdom in that it relates to us and our creation, and, in fact all of history—those things we call covenantal, salvific, eschatological and teleological. All of these must stem from His wisdom. It is not possible in this paper for us to look in detail at all these elements. We must, of course, commence with creation.

The Creation and God's Wisdom

God's seeing of His completed creation as 'very good' (Gen. 1:31) is enough to authenticate it. 1 Peter 4:19 says God is a faithful Creator, i.e. will accomplish with it what is His will for it: He will not abandon it. Jeremiah 10:12 (51:15) said,

It is he who made the earth by his power,
who established hie world by his wisdom,
and by his understanding
stretched out the heavens.

The same thought is in Psalm 104: 24, 'O Lord, how manifest are thy works! In wisdom thou hast made them all.' Proverbs 3:19ff. repeats the idea,

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens
by his knowledge the deeps broke forth,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

There is much more material of this kind in the text of Holy Writ yet, whilst the modes of creation were undoubtedly in wisdom, it is God's purpose and *telos* (*goal*) for creation which concern us. We have seen in Romans 1:2Iff that Man in rejecting God subverted his entire understanding of God's wisdom, i.e. not only regarding the creation, but the what the 'faithful Creator' was—and is—about in all His, actions and intentions for 'all things'.

The Covenant and God's Wisdom

The goal of God's covenant with Abraham was the blessing of the nations, and the ultimate inheriting of all the earth by His elect.¹² Whatever may be the relationships

¹¹ *Church Dogmatics*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1976, Vol. 11, Part 1, pp.425-26.

¹² See the Genesis passages of the covenantal promises and compare with Matthew 5:5; Romans 4:13; Galatians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 5:10.

between creation and covenant¹³, it is clear that in *the covenant with Israel* the wisdom of God was linked with the law.

Wisdom literature as though it is a being which has innate qualities of its own: it is still ‘the wisdom of God’. In Deuteronomy 4:6,

Keep them and do them: for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who, when they bear all these statutes will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’

Deuteronomy pursues the idea of fear of the Lord within covenant and as pertaining to the law. So see 4:10; 6:2; 10:12; 10:20–21. The covenant *is* the wisdom of God and this thought is pursued vigorously in other wisdom literature, e.g. Psalm 111:10 is representative.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

Ecclesiastes not only emphasizes the fear of the Lord but concludes that the whole of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (12:13). Much is said about the Wisdom literature, and in one sense there can be no doubt that in it there is an accumulation of generations of wisdom, but much—if not most—of it is simply obedience to God’s word, His commandments, statutes, precepts, His law, and these are of the one piece. They cannot be thought of apart from covenant, as covenant cannot be thought of apart from them. At the same time law and covenant cannot be thought of apart from creation. To be wise is to be obedient: to be obedient is to be wise. It can be argued that since all this is the truly ontological way of life, corresponding to the ontology of creation—as to the ontology of covenant—then of course this is the wise way. Certainly in Proverbs wisdom personified is communicating this.

Furthermore, covenant cannot be thought of apart from redemption for covenant is redemption. It is not redemption by law and obedience for these are the fruits of redemption, the obedience which springs from grace¹⁴.

The Covenant, Redemption and Wisdom

Creation was God’s gift. It may well have been *with a view* to grace as shown in Ephesians 1:3–11; 2:4–10; 11 Timothy 1:9; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7, but it was in itself the pure action of God’s creative love. Covenants as God made them with Noah, with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and the elect of the ‘new covenant’ were all of grace, and that grace was redemptive. Christ—who is filled ‘with all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ was made to be wisdom for us in righteousness, sanctification and redemption¹⁵, and in that sense he is our wisdom, i.e. we have none other than him and his. In fact, the passage of 1 Corinthians 1:10–3–23 discusses the matter of human and

¹³ We mean that what we call ‘creational law’-though not ‘natural law’-was extant from creation. The basic law of Israel may well be seen to the creational law as God stated and expounded it for the nation of Israel, not only as a nomadic people in the desert of Sinai, but also for its living as the domestic family within Canaan.’

¹⁴ In Titus 2:11-14 it is clearly shown that godliness springs from the experience of God’s grace- His redemption in Christ. As in the new covenant so in the covenant with Israel. The commandments in Exodus 20 are given on the basis of redemption. God has brought them out of the bondage of Egypt into the grace of freedom, therefore they were obligated to obey God through the responsive love and gratitude that 5 rings from such covenant freedom.

¹⁵ Some translations of 1 Corinthians 1:30 follow this line e.g. RV, NIV.

divine wisdom—the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God—God’s wisdom being that of the Cross, and the world’s wisdom—as Jewish—being signs and—as Greek being intellectual wisdom, but Paul asserts salvation as true wisdom. The doxology in Romans 11:33 for the full display of salvation as found in Romans 1:15– 11:32 praises ‘the wisdom and knowledge of God’ as do also the soteriological doxologies of Revelation 5:12 and 7:12.

The Wisdom of God is Teleological

1 Corinthians 2:5–10 makes it clear that God’s wisdom for His elect and His creation is one of glorification, and that this was planned prior to the event of creation. This, of course, involves not only man’s glorification (cf. Rom. 8:17–30; Eph. 1:17–19), but also the consummation of all things (Eph. 1:9–10) and the reconciliation of all things (Col. 1:19–20).

We can conclude—even this early in our study—that the wisdom of God encompasses creation, covenant, redemption and glorification—the consummation and reconciliation of all things—i.e. the renewal of creation. To see any of these elements atomistically and not see them as a whole is to miss the wisdom of the component parts and fail to see the overall nature of God’s wisdom.

The Pursuit of Wisdom

The pursuit of wisdom in the light of our discuss immediately above means that we are not striving to gain knowledge for personal benefit, and wisdom to ‘get us ahead’ of others. for that is the nature of worldly wisdom. We need to pursue wisdom because it is wrong to live in ignorance—‘for fools despise wisdom and instruction’ (Prov. 1:7), hence the injunction of personified Wisdom in Proverbs 8:5ff, ‘O simple ones learn prudence; O foolish men, pay attention ... for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.’ The invitations to pursue wisdom are many, and the commands to do so no less, in both Old and New Testaments. ‘The reason for this can be seen in **Karl Barth’s** comment on wisdom (p. 440),

Divine wisdom is obviously the meaning and ground of creation and therefore the sphere in which man can live. The whole art of living and understanding life consists in heeding and accepting divine wisdom and in this way becoming wise.

Wisdom literature points out that there is only authentic way although men devise other ways. We have seen in the fall that the serpent suggested a way beyond the Creator’s way, and in Romans 1:18ff. that this way has brought endless calamities and disasters. Proverbs call this ‘the way that leads to death’. It is as though fallen humans and fallen angels believe they can wrest wisdom from God or better it out of their creaturely powers, i.e. go beyond the Creator.

The Desire of Fallen Celestial and Human Powers to Know Wisdom

It would appear that the idea ‘The wisest wins,’ is mainly the driving force to obtain wisdom. We often say that ‘knowledge is power’, but knowledge *per se* does not

always yield results or the encyclopedic mind would rule the world. Knowledge and wisdom are linked, but wisdom is the ability to assess, to be sagacious about situations and persons, and to know what to do. We will see that there is a wisdom of the world which is quite opposed to the wisdom of God but thinks it can obtain its goals through its own operations. This sort of wisdom is in opposition to, as also in conflict with, the wisdom of God. The principle of this heady wisdom can be seen in Isaiah 14:12–14 and Ezekiel 28:1–11 ff. where the prince mentioned was said initially to be, ‘the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty,’ but became ‘proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour’. It is the drive for one’s own splendour and position that corrupts true wisdom. By comparison true wisdom is a selfless matter, and springs from the true knowledge of God.

By the time of the New Testament we find that both fallen celestial and terrestrial creatures are involved in a system called ‘the world’ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 2:1–3; 6:12; Gal. 1:4; 6:14; 1 John 2:15–17) whose ‘prince’ or ‘god’ is Satan (John 12:31; 14:30–31; 16:11; 11 Cor. 4:4) and that this system has its own ‘wisdom’ called ‘the wisdom of this world’ (1 Cor. 1:17–3:19). Worldly wisdom is life lived and life interpreted apart from God. Romans 1:19ff. indicates that Man devises his own so-called wisdom, and does not allow the knowledge of God to interfere with this. Some understanding of this comes from reading Ecclesiastes, where the Preacher investigates life lived on the horizontal plane—i.e. life lived with a view only to ‘everything under the sun’—and then life lived in the fear of God, i.e. in the true horizontal–vertical perspective.

The Preacher and the Matter of Wisdom

The Preacher—Koheleth—the author of ‘**Ecclesiastes**’ was a wise man. In many cases this book is utterly misunderstood. Briefly we should see,

(i) Koheleth sought deliberately and intelligently to understand ‘**everything under the sun**’. He sought fullness of satisfaction in pursuit of all that the world—‘everything under the sun’ could yield to him. It yielded nothing. He discovered it was incapable of doing so, by nature of the case. His conclusion was that everything was ‘vanity, and a striving after wind’. People have said that Koheleth was pessimistic. Neither pessimism or optimism have anything to do with ‘things as they really are’. Koheleth was realistic. He could not devise a rationale of ‘all things under the sun’. The valuable conclusion of the Preacher is that ‘all things under the sun’ have no true rationale as they are seen solely on the horizontal level. Many have sought to develop a useful rationale or philosophy of ‘everything under the sun’, i.e. a horizontal philosophy.

(ii) Koheleth does not believe that creation and the action of human beings was ever intended for the horizontal level, yet he does not oppose the vertical to the horizontal, or see it as a dimension on its own. There are those who reject what is horizontal—“everything under the sun” for some supposed vertical dimension which exists on its own, i.e. the supernatural, the occult, the superior religious, the spiritual—as against the material—the platonic reality of which this world is but the shadow. Koheleth is very much down to earth, but the earth in which *the fear of God* figures largely. This fear of the Lord is a constant theme of the Wisdom books, and we have partly dealt with it above. If we look at 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12; 8:13 and 12:13 we will find there is quite a dynamic principle of fear. In fact, the whole of Koheleth’s wisdom is summed

up in 12:13, ‘The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole [duty] of man.’

There is nothing new about this teaching for it is the very essence of what Moses taught the people, constantly, in the Book of Deuteronomy. It was always a principle in Israel. As there, so here, there will only be true meaning to creation and life where there is fear of the Lord and obedience to His commandments, i.e. to His will. To seek to use ‘everything under the sun’ for one’s own benefit means one has no fear of the Lord.

(iii) *Along with this necessary dimension or experience of fear is the knowledge that nothing happens haphazardly or arbitrarily in history.* 3:1–15 may be summed up as saying, ‘Nothing happens by chance. There is a season (*chronos*: general period) and a time (*kairos*: a point in time and living where something definite happens, generally as a fruit of the season (the *chronos*), and nothing happens apart from these appointments of God. God does not leave human beings to find their way through a maze, or even through the determinations of their own wills. He gives them a business to live, ‘I have seen the business that God has given the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful (appropriate for its own time); also he has put eternity [the world] into Man’s mind, yet so that he cannot find out the end from the beginning’. Man does not have the blue print in his hand. Seeing this Man may relax and enjoy this world and the good things God has provided him with. What God does He does, and He does all and it is enduring, so that it is never incomplete—Man may add nothing to it, or take anything from it—and God has done this ‘so that men should fear before him.’

(iv) We thus conclude that life lived in the fear of God is pleasurable and proper, and all that we need to know is revealed to us: so we are informed on all that is necessary or us to live. Fearing God and keeping His commandments is the whole of Man, but the working out of that is life lived under the sun, but all in the sight and fear of God.

Conclusion: Wisdom is that Which is Lived

Much is written about the universal wisdom of Man—Man coming to terms with the world about him, the *corpus* of humanity—of which he is part—and the place of lords and gods and idols in all of this, i.e. the formation and maintenance and *praxis* of culture in general and cultures in particular. Some scholars see Israel as drawing from the general wisdom of other cultures. Some see this general appropriation as being refined and rationalized in the light of Yahweh and His covenant¹⁶. Our paper does not intend to deal with this matter apart from what we have said, that wisdom was undoubtedly linked with covenant and the law as we saw above in Deuteronomy 4.6 and kindred passages. The rich treasure of the Wisdom literature—including the Apocryphal Books of *Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus*¹⁷ are ours to ponder, to learn and to us.

¹⁶ It is not, a matter which is easily resolved. What matters most is that this wisdom is incorporated in the Canon, and is available to us, even if the thought patterns from which it derived differ somewhat from our contemporary ways of thinking. Excellent material on this can be found in Graeme Goldsworthy’s *Gospel and Kingdom* (Paternoster-Lancer, Exeter-Sydney, 1987)

¹⁷ *Wisdom* is also known as *The Wisdom of Solomon*, and *Ecclesiasticus* as *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*. Whilst these books are not canonical they are rich in teaching and helpful for us in studying the development of Wisdom literature.

It has been observed (Goldsworthy, 1987) that whatever may have been the value of the Wisdom literature to Israel, it is a wisdom which we can now relish afresh because of the advent of Christ as God's wisdom, and our enlarged knowledge of that wisdom. If we add to this the wider understanding we can gain of God's wisdom as creation, covenant, law, redemption and glorification—with all its elements of consummation, reconciliation and the regeneration of creation—then we have indeed been liberated into this wide understanding of the wisdom of God.

If we say that wisdom is something which is lived rather than the accretion of a useful commodity, then we should expect that wisdom to be working out not only in personal living, and not only in the living of the community of Christ, but also to working out in the whole of human society as we can contribute to its way of being and doing. The New Testament shows us that in the early church there was an unending battle between human and godly wisdom, and it is to this we will look in the second part of our study.

The Way of Wisdom–II

Paul on The Wisdom of God and of the World

Paul's main discussion of this theme is found in the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, and in particular 1:10–4:21. Briefly the argument is as follows: Paul has heard that at Corinth some members of the congregation–if not all–are forming themselves into groups or parties who line up behind one of three known teachers, ie: Paul, Apollos and Cephas. It is not simply that they acknowledge all three men but have a preference for one, but that they see their favourite person as the only one to acknowledge. The reason for this is that the one they espouse alone–they think–has the true power and teaches the true wisdom of God to the exclusion of others. What now follows in our study is Paul's argument against this line of thinking. The value of the argument for us is that we can easily apply it to our present ecclesial situations.

Paul, Apollos and Cephas Defined in Their Ministries

In 1:13 Paul asks why they should follow any person such as himself, since he– Paul– was not crucified, for if that had been the case then baptism would be in his name and not in Christ's. In 3:5~9 he shows that Paul Apollos and Cephas are but 'servants of God through whom you believed'. Speaking of their ministry as agriculture Paul says one plants, another waters but God gives the increase. The teachers are 'God's fellow-workers' so that the Corinthians are the field, of–to change the image–God's building. In 3:21–22 he shows that Paul, Apollos and Cephas belong to the Corinthian Christians, i.e. they are servants to them! Thus on the one hand they are servants to God and on the other servants to the congregation. How ridiculous for anyone to line up behind one teacher because he was considered unique. Later we will see that this was human wisdom. Paul is refusing to agree that godly wisdom begins and ends with any one of the teachers. In fact no teacher has, of himself, true wisdom. God alone has true wisdom. What is more, and what is most, His gospel is that wisdom.

Paul's Seemingly Simple Argument

In this section of his Epistle Paul draws in his readers by showing them that there are two wisdoms–the wisdom of this world, and the wisdom of God. All his readers would agree heartily with him, especially since they believe they have only the wisdom of God. Paul's clear argument is that the wisdom of the world is opposed to the wisdom of God, and the wisdom of God is 'the word of the Cross' or 'Christ crucified'. Both are synonymous. In 1:17 he says that if he has preached the gospel with 'eloquent wisdom' then he would have robbed the Cross of its power. He must

surely mean that if he had argued the death of Christ in an eloquent way and changed its nature from being ‘an offence to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek’ (1:23) then it would no longer have been the gospel, i.e. the true word of the Cross. The word of the Cross is always ‘folly to those who are perishing’ and always ‘the power of God to those of us who are being saved’. If it were not the true gospel, then it would not have true power.

It is this word of the Cross which is out to destroy ‘the wisdom of the wise’, and ‘the cleverness of the clever’.¹ There can no longer be a worldly debater who can debate wisely, for by the gospel God has made foolish the wisdom of this world (1:19– 21). He has done this by His gospel, His Cross. 1.:21 says categorically that God’s wisdom is that He does not allow the world to know wisdom. Wisdom, ultimately is the Cross. Worldly wisdom can save no one! There is only one way to save a person– it is by the Cross. Even the worldly wise would wish to save themselves, yet they cannot–by nature of the case–ever discover a way. Only when the gospel is believed–scandalous and foolish as it may appear—can a person be saved.

Paul then opens up the Jewish idea of power–wisdom², namely that of God giving signs. God had given signs at various times in history and Israel had always looked back to those signs with gratitude and pride. God had visited His people and taken them out of slavery in Egypt. He let them know He was the living God by the signs He did, and He himself reminded them of them many times. This is seen often in the Book of Deuteronomy. What, then, is wrong with seeking signs? For Israel God’s signs had signified His power in history. Who, then, would see power in a criminal’s cross? Many had flocked to Jesus and believed on him because of the signs that he did (John 2:23–25) but Jesus rejected what we might call ‘sign–faith’. He knew the depravity of the human heart and would not trust ‘signs–persons’. In Matthew 12:38– 42 (cf. 21:23ff.) he told the Pharisees, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for sign.’ In the Old Testament sign–seeking was tempting God, tempting Him to prove Himself by visible acts. The very suggestion that God should justify Himself was evil in that it was seeking to put the initiating power in the hands of human beings. In John 6:30 the Jews asked Jesus ‘What sign do you do, that we may believe you?’ He had just done the sign of the feeding of the 5,000 and they had missed the significance, since Jesus’s signs were meant to reveal his being as ‘the Christ, the Son of God’ so that those reading the signs and believing in him ‘might have life in his name’ (John 20:31).

At Corinth some of the Christians were ‘power–people’. Whilst they may have loyally accepted the fact of the Cross, they were really absorbed in power–actions, i.e. signs and wonders. Paul was saying that Jews looked for such things, but such things would not save men and women. Of course, the heart of the matter was that Jews had no place for a human sacrifice for sins, and they saw the act of crucifixion as a thing of shame, and a thing of abject weakness.

Again, the Greeks sought wisdom. Their philosophers had developed a system in which God was in some sense subject to the world which He had created. In one sense, He was so involved in it, that He could not exist and operate apart from it. The more esoteric and occultic Greeks had ‘a hidden wisdom’ a gnostic accumulation and in no Greek thinking was there a place for a man being hung on a gallows for the salvation of

¹ Note that in our second section of this paper we show God’s animosity to worldly wisdom and His ruthless intention of destroying it, so dangerous and evil it is!

² We mean, of course, the current idea of those Jews who rejected Christ, and who saw his crucifixion as a scandal.

the world! Greeks also had an eye to power³, and the Cross was an idiot thing in their view. To sum up, the Jews looked for power, but did not see it in a cross: the Greeks looked for wisdom but could find no wisdom in the event of Christ's cross

Christ Crucified the Power of God and the Wisdom of God

What the Jews looked for—power—was what Paul claimed was in the Cross and the Cross only! The Greeks looked for wisdom and Paul claimed God's wisdom was in the Cross, and the Cross only—'Christ crucified the power of God and the wisdom of God'. He explains, 'For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.' 1 Corinthians 1:18–25 has strong overtones of Romans 1:18–25. Man who rejects God thinks he is powerful and wise, but in fact he is foolish, mind-darkened, morally insensate and evil. Of course God looks foolish and weak in his eyes!

Paul now corrals the Corinthians congregation—the party—people—in his continuing argument. 1:26–31 may be paraphrased as follows: 'Think how you were, brethren, few of you being intellectually brilliant, or socially successful, or vocationally prominent. You were all run-of-the-mill persons, yet when you believed the word of the Cross you outshone your intellectually, socially, vocationally and positionally 'superiors'. You were saved. New wisdom came to you. You had been nothing but you outshone all that was 'something'. So then such a transformation did not come from your natural positions or abilities—in fact, to the contrary. You had nothing to boast of, but "He [God] is the sources of your life in Christ Jesus whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption." ' The Corinthians were forced to agree with Paul as to the Cross being the power and of God and the wisdom of God for

- (i) it was the power which initially saved them (1:17; 2:5) and which continued to save them (1:18) and
- (ii) likewise this wisdom of God was what had brought them into the transformation they has experienced, and were continually experiencing. Nothing else had—or could have—saved and transformed them. 1:17 and 2:1–5 showed that Paul did not adorn or intellectualize the gospel but told it in unadorned fashion, and it was 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power', i.e. the word of the Cross effected its own work. 'Lofty words of wisdom', 'plausible words of wisdom' and 'eloquent wisdom' were rejected by Paul.

The Wise and Powerful Party—Men of Corinth

Paul now returns to his polemic. He has the party—men where he wants them. They espouse one or other leader (Paul, Apollos, Cephas) as being either powerful or wise or both. They do not espouse '**Christ crucified**'. Already they are falling away from the dynamic of the gospel. They are developing a 'power—wisdom' or a 'wisdom—wisdom', by taking what their leader says and/or does and by making it their thing, thus they are feeling safe, and secure and wiser than the others. They are lining up behind the special leader, and then inferring that other leaders—and so those leaders' followers—do not have the power and wisdom which they—as a party—possess. Like the Jews some of

³ Not in the Jewish sense. It was the mind which related to power, to knowledge, and not to strange signs and wonders, for they had no place in Greek thinking.

them are for signs and wonders, or like the Greeks they want a fool-proof wisdom. Whatever it is they do riot wish to appear weak or foolish.

Such people Paul calls ‘men of the flesh’ (3: 1 f.). Those whose faith initially did not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God have reverted to resting in the power of men and the wisdom of men. So then, Paul, Apollos and Cephas are no longer themselves for they have been changed into leaders of power and wisdom in themselves. Thus their followers cannot hear what they are saying. They have made their teachers obstructions between them and Christ who alone is their ‘wisdom, sanctification, righteousness and redemption’. They do not rest on Christ or live in him, but in these transmogrified teachers. Each party-person has confined himself to his transmogrified teacher, and refuses the teaching of the others.

In 1:18–23 Paul exhorts his readers to escape from their party-mindedness, and expand. Everything is theirs—if they will only see it—i.e. Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life, death, the present the future: all are theirs! That, is because ‘You are Christ’s and Christ is God’s’. What a statement! If they will come this way in their thinking, then Paul can give them solid food and not ‘party-pap’. He will take the hidden wisdom ordained from before the world which is for their glorification, i.e. by it will aid them in being glorified now, and in giving them a view of their ultimate glorification. In doing this the Holy Spirit will be the one who opens God’s age-old wisdom to them.

It only remains for Paul in 4:1–21 to shame the party-people. They criticize or idealize him, but all they have is what has been given to them by God. They think themselves wise and powerful, regard themselves as being something, ‘We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ,’ is a saying in irony that should shame his readers. The apostles ‘have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscourings of all things’.

Today’s Power–Wisdom and Wisdom–Wisdom

As pastors and people we have to look today to see whether or not we have fallen into the same pattern as the party-people at Corinth. To seek signs and wonders is to seek to have God continually manifest Himself—as though He were not always working. It is to seek to draw others to the church by such means. It is to prove that one is not foolish. Likewise the wisdom–wisdom—that which persuades others that we are not intellectually deficient, but is, in fact, a wisdom of a higher nature.

How often do we feel we must evidence as much power as the world, and—if possible—even more? How much do we seek to convince the world by our intellectual powers, absorbing the world’s wisdom and seeking to outface it? How powerful are we in our oration, how brilliant in our planning? We seek to do it honestly for Christ and for the church. We seek to enlarge our numbers, gain power and position and prestige. All of this is the world’s ‘power’ and ‘wisdom’ and there is not an ounce of the spiritual in it, not a particle of God’s action.

God’s Action Regarding Human Wisdom

We have already observed that there is a wisdom of man which is not necessarily evil, i.e. the wisdom the world acquires in regard to living within this universe. Some, even some who do not approach the subject theologically, might not call it wisdom in the

highest sense of the term—whatever that may prove to be—but it is working wisdom— a sensible way of going about life. What we have called ‘general wisdom’ obtains throughout our cultures and nations, and even the kind of biblical wisdom we find in the canonical books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes may **find** general acceptance—to say nothing of the apocryphal books of **The Wisdom of Solomon** and **Ecclesiasticus**.

The human wisdom of which we speak is set out strongly by James in his Letter, who, at the same time, contrasts it with true wisdom.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where jealousy and ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty and insincerity.

Without entering into a full contrast of wisdom which is meek and is spiritual and wisdom which is from below, not from heaven, we can see the origin of human wisdom that is opposed to God—such opposition as we have touched upon in such passages as Genesis 3.6; Romans 1:18–32; 1 Corinthians 1:18–3:8. James says this wisdom is ‘earthly, unspiritual, devilish’. This kind of wisdom needs to be understood for what it is.

- (i) To be ‘earthly’ means mean that it is derives not from heaven—from God— but from the earth, i.e. of Man. Just as in Ecclesiastes human wisdom concerns those things ‘under the sun’, so this wisdom—so-called—does not derive from the whole range of God’s nature and His actions. It derives from man’s view of them. Not only is it horizontal, and therefore deficient, but it refuses the vertical—the heavenly— dimension, and is therefore horribly perverted.
- (ii) When it is said to be ‘unspiritual’ it is ‘natural’ (psyche) i.e. psychical, and parallels Paul’s use of the word in 1 Corinthians 2:14, i.e. ‘the natural person’ (*psychikos de anthropos*) , and Jude’s in Jude 19 ‘worldly people’ (*psychikoi*). Such are not just mildly a-spiritual, but in each case quoted are anti-spiritual and anti- God. In 1 Corinthians 2: ‘14 ‘the natural person’ is incapable of receiving the things of God—so what then does that one know of reality, of Godly wisdom, and the answer must be, ‘Nothing!’ Jude’s ‘worldly people’ are those who set up divisions’, and are ‘devoid of the Spirit’ (*pneuma me exontes*).
- (iii) To be ‘devilish’ (*diamoniodes*) means not only that it is like the demonic, but derives from the demonic. Man apart from God is not Man in a place of his own. Whilst Romans 1:22–23 tells us the birth of idolatry happened when human beings rejecting God ‘claiming to be wise ... became fools’, 1 Corinthians 10:17–22 tells us that demonic powers are linked with idols—such idols are their habitations—so to speak. Whilst human beings may think they act alone—being autonomous of God or Satan—they are deluded. Humanity confesses its need of idols when it devises them. Supernatural powers have humanity in thrall, whether it believes that or not (cf. Eph. 3:1–3; 1 John 3.5ff.; 11 Timothy 2.26).

These three elements, then, comprise what Paul calls ‘the wisdom of this world’, ie: that system whose ‘prince’ or ‘god’ is Satan and who is aided by fallen celestial powers, and who has conscripted fallen humanity to be part of his anti-God System.⁴

⁴ See John 12:31; 14:13-31, 16:11; 11 Cor. 4:4 (etc) for the leader of this world system. For a wider examination of the world-system including principalities and powers (fallen celestial creatures) See my book *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989).

What we now look to see is how God views such earthly, unspiritual and devilish wisdom.

The Judgements on Worldly Wisdom

What we must not ignore is the fact that the wisdom of the world aims to destroying all that is godly, surmounting it, and reigning over the creation. If we have doubts this kind of thinking then the Scriptures will quickly enlighten us on the aims which Satan has in history, and the constant attempts of principalities and powers to rule the affairs of the nations. If we remind ourselves that God's wisdom encompasses the nature of God, and His plan or 'counsel' for all creation, including His initiating it, sustaining it, and redeeming it with a view to its glorification. What God is about, and what He therefore does, is His wisdom. When God inducts us into knowledge of His wisdom, as well as participation in it, then it is through His word that He does this, and the word is through the Spirit, including the Spirit's incription of the word. That is why the giving and getting of wisdom is associated with the Spirit. Worldly people are those who lack the Spirit and the gifts of understanding that are given through the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6–16; Jude 20; James 3:15).

When we keep in mind that rebellious powers—Satan, his forces, and rebellious humanity are seeking to destroy what is true—or as, Romans 1:18 reminds us, suppressing the truth in acts of unrighteousness—then God must surely be implacable in His intention to destroy evil. With the destruction of all that worldly wisdom, then worldly counterparts to God and His wisdom, must perish. This may sound to us fantastic and bizarre but that is the battle that is constantly going on in history, and it takes many forms and modes. For example, humanism is an endeavour to live without God. It does merely attack the idea of God which atheism does, but it bent on accrediting man with all that is successful in history and keeps insisting that, given time, many will conquer all things and set up an ideal kingdom in this universe. This ignoring of God and the gross claims to supersede God is an arrogance for which we cannot find sufficient adjectives to describe it.

One of the most powerful forms of worldly wisdom is religion. Its diversity of forms and expressions are astounding, yet the reasoning, and the appeals to the mind, soul and spirit of man are profound. So are the brilliant forms of philosophy which the human race devises. One only has to live where philosophers live and talk to find oneself in an area and environment which chokes the spiritual reality of biblical faith, and makes to appear most foolish, indeed. Worldly wisdom takes many fascinating forms. The early church no sooner proclaimed the gospel than it was beset with confusing heresies and forms of philosophies. These elements did not so much seek to make the gospel foolish as to blend themselves with it, this adulterating the purity of the word. Of such Paul says, 'See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human traditions, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ' (Col. 2:8).

Does God, then, tolerate the foolishness of Man, and the devilish wisdom of the world? No: He does not. He hates all that opposes His wisdom and sets out to destroy it. Romans 1:18–32 is a powerful statement regarding Man's rebellion against God so that Man thinks himself to be wise. The whole passage needs to be read keeping in mind this principle that God is destroying the (so-called) wisdom of the now foolish humanity that sets about its idolatry. He firstly gives humanity up to its immorality by judging them into their 'dishonouring of their bodies amongst themselves', following

this up by judging them into homosexuality, and further judging them into a base or reprobate mind which carries with it the utter fragmentation of moral conduct and which is the source of all forms of evil in human relationships—the sort of thing that Jesus mentions in Mark 7.21–23, 3:14, Paul in Romans 3:9–18 and Titus 3:3, John in 1 John 3:10, 12, 13 and Jude in 12 and 19(a).

What we must comprehend that the evil that humanity does in its own wisdom is a dynamic anti-wisdom—against God’s wisdom— and must not only be judged and destroyed, but is, itself, God’s very way of judging and destroying it. It is not that God allow humanity—so to speak—to ‘stew in its own juice’ but His ‘giving them up’ to their evil is His personal judgement upon human wisdom—know to Him as human foolishness. Now we can look at warnings against being foolish—i.e. being anti-wise, against God’s wisdom.

*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart. (1 Cor. 1: 19)*

Let no one deceive himself. if anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness, ‘and again, ‘The Lord knows that the thought Of the wise are futile’. (1 Cor. 3:18–20)

And the Lord said,
‘ .. I will again do marvellous things with
this people,
wonderful and marvellous;
and the wisdom of the wise men
shall perish,
and the discernment of their
discerning men shall be hid. (Isa. 29:13–14)

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nought
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
The counsel of the Lord stands
for ever,
the thoughts of his heart to all
generations. (Psa. 33:10. cf. Psa. 2:1–3)

How can you say, ‘We are wise,
and the law of the Lord is with us’?
But, behold, the false pen of the scribes
has made it into a lie.
The wise men shall be put to shame,
they shall be dismayed and taken,
lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord,
and what wisdom is in them? (Jer. 8.8–9)

An example of God refusing to tolerate the so-called wisdom of a particular nation, Egypt, is spoken of in Isaiah 19:11ff..

The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish.,
the wise counsellors of Pharaoh
give stupid counsel.
How can you say to Pharaoh,
‘I am a son of the wise,

a son of ancient kings’?
 Where then are your wise men?
 Let them tell you and make known
 what the Lord of hosts has purposed against Egypt.
 The princes of Zoan have become fools,
 and the princes of Memphis are deluded.

Worldly history is very much about the ignoring of the wisdom, plan and counsel of God by the system of worldly wisdom, but true history is the story of God fulfilling His plan and purpose, and—along with this—constantly bringing to nothing the wisdom of the [worldly] wise. The fulfilling by God of His own plan for history is a vast subject on its own.⁵ This leads us to the primal situation of Eden when the serpent beguiled the woman into thinking **she** should eat of the tree which was ‘to be desired to make one wise’, part of that wisdom being the ability to discern between good and evil. Separated from God no creature can have authentic discernment of good and evil, although all human creatures believe they possess this ability! We notice the judgement which came upon the foolishness of the woman and the man in the fall, namely being barred from the paradise of God, and suffering the change in the husband–wife relationships, increased sorrow at childbirth, and the curse on the land. None of this has yet been lifted, although the living in it has always been made more than tolerable by the warm grace of God towards man. History—seen from another vantage point—is the story of two families, i.e. God’s family and the family of the Devil. Again we see the wisdom of the world operating in the evil family, and the wisdom of God in the family of the Father.

The Eschatological Judgements on Worldly Wisdom

If, as we have claimed, history is a battle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world—Satan being its ‘prince’ or ‘God’—then two things are made clear throughout Scripture regarding the destruction of false wisdom,

- (i) all creatures celestial and terrestrial will fall in their wisdom. All of **it** will come to nought: it will accomplish nothing, and
- (ii) all creatures of the kingdom of Satan will come under judgement and execution of that judgement will ensue.

That has always been known in what is called ‘the eternal gospel’⁶ the news that God punishes the impenitent, but forgives the penitent. There are preparatory judgements—judgements meted out in history as shown in the actions of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven vials of wrath—and these have been exercised, the **end** comes in which the red dragon, the beast and the false prophet meet their judgement in the lake of **fire**, along with all other impenitent creatures.

Later we may discuss the subtleties of human wisdom taking on guises of God and spiritual wisdom. Here we simply note that there is no so-called wisdom more dangerous than these forms.

⁵ For example in Isaiah 46:8-13 and 48:3--8 God’s sovereignty over history is affirmed. In Isaiah 43:1-7 (cf. Prov. 16:4) God’s plan for His children—that they be to His glory—is stated, and this is enlarged upon in Ephesians chapter one, where also God’s plan to sum up all things in Messiah is a plan only comprehended when God gives a human being the wisdom to do so. As my book *the Clash of the Kingdoms* shows history is the attempt of Satan to win the nations, and the victory of God over Sat and his forces. This scenario is played out powerfully in the Book of the Revelation. For an overall view of God’s history as being wholly the work of salvation see my *Salvation History* (NCPI, n.d)

⁶ Cf. Revelation 14:6-7.

Conclusion: the Church is Bound to Know Only the Wisdom of God

We need to go back to our first section on the wisdom and power being sought by the party people of Corinth, and see that God does not look with a kindly eye on those who reject—even if unconsciously in ignorance—the word of the Cross as the power and wisdom of God.

When we see in fullness this wonderful truth, and when we come back to the humility of being saved by power and wisdom of the Cross, then it is with gratitude and joy we will proclaim the good news of the Cross. Then it is we will reject worldly wisdom—even though it be cleverly disguised under ‘power and signs’ wisdom and ‘wisdom–wisdom. We will openly declare the Cross, even in the face of despisings and scorn, and will see that word bring salvation to this world.

The Way of Wisdom—111: The Wisdom of Love: The Love of Wisdom

The Love and Beauty of Wisdom

James' description of true wisdom (3:13,17,18) is beautiful.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom ... the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Someone has remarked that this short passage resembles 1 Corinthians 13—that remarkable chapter on love. The passage in James tells us that the wise man lives a good life, a life that issues in meekness. One is reminded of the 'poor wise man' of Ecclesiastes 9.13–18,

I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few men in it. and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded.¹ The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war ...

The truly wise man is meek, and gentle. Paul says something similar to James and Koheleth (11 Tim. 2:23–26), 'Have nothing to do with stupid senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.' So then the wise man is a man of peace. Certainly what James says of true wisdom adds up to nothing less than love.

In Proverbs 4:8–9 wisdom personified is depicted as a gracious woman,

Prize her highly, and she will exalt you,
she will honour you if you embrace her.

¹ I am aware that some think some commentators think the poor wise man did not actually deliver the city, and that his words which would have affected deliverance went unheeded, but I doubt this conclusion. It seems that that the text is saying he did deliver the city, but that his wisdom was not appreciated or acknowledged, which as we know is often the case in life.

She will place on your head a fair garland,
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.

In Proverbs 8:17–21 wisdom declares,

I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
Riches and honour are with me.
enduring wealth and prosperity.
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness,
in the paths of justice,
endowing with wealth those who *love me*.
and filling their treasuries.

Wisdom is then linked with love. One loves wisdom and one is loved by her. As against impure love Solomon enjoins his son,

Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,'
and call insight your intimate friend;
to preserve you from the loose woman,
from the adventuress with her smooth words.

The Innate Wisdom of the Wisdom Literature

Throughout our studies we have been indicating that wisdom is simply the outworking of God's plan in history, and our part in it—i.e. our life within it—is, in the subjection and obedience of love, the wisdom we experience. We will see that in both the Old and New Testaments that obedience to the law *is* love. It is the peculiarity and richness of the Wisdom literature that it gives detailed directions for living in wisdom—details which are not explicit in the law of the Pentateuch, although it might be able to be argued that such directions are implicit in the law. The principle on which the Wisdom literature proceeds is, 'Listen to advice and accept instruction that you may gain wisdom for the future' (Prov. 19:20). This advice is in regard to innumerable things. For example a father warns his son (Prov. 5: 1, 11–14),

My son, be attentive to my wisdom.
incline your ear to my understanding, (1)

at the end of your life you groan,
when your flesh and body are consumed.
and you say, 'How I hated discipline.
and my heart despised reproof!
I did not listen to the words of my teachers
or incline my ear to my instructors.
I was at the point of ruin
in the assembled congregation. (11–14)

Take, again, the matters of anger and hatred. Obviously these are the antithesis of love (Prov. 14:17; 14:29–30; 15:1; 15:2,18; 29:8; Psa. 34:11–14; Eccles. 7:4, 9).

A man of quick temper acts foolishly,

but a man of discretion is patient.
 He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
 but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
 A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,
 but passion makes the bones rot.

A soft answer turns away wrath,
 but a harsh word stirs up anger.

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,
 but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

Scoffers set a city aflame,
 but wise then turn away wrath,
 Come, O sons, listen to me,
 I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
 What man is there who desires life,
 and covets many days,
 that he may enjoy good?
 Keep your tongue from evil,
 and your lips from speaking deceit.
 Depart from evil and do good;
 seek peace and pursue it.

The heart of the wise is in
 the house of mourning;
 but the heart of fools
 is in the house of mirth.

.....

Be not quick to anger,
 for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

These injunctions are to keep humanity within the bounds of love, and out of the involvements of anger, sin and the like. It is because they are practical injunctions we can live in practical obedience and life when we obey them.

Love and the Law

We have already seen that wisdom is always connected with righteousness, but is it forcing the text of Scripture to identify wisdom with love? Certainly wisdom is not *love per se*, but wisdom is not true wisdom without love, and true love is eminently wise. The parallel of James 3:13–18 with 1 Corinthians 13 is certainly valid, and there is no less a parallel with Galatians 5:22–23 which speaks of the fruit of the Spirit. Then when we see that wisdom is the keeping of the law, and know that to love God is to keep His law, and that the keeping of the law is the very action of love we know that love and wisdom are inseparable. Both Paul—in Romans 13:8–10 and Galatians 5:13–14—and James—in 1:22–25; 2:8–13—equate the law with the outworking of love, and since such is the action of wisdom, then our claim to their mutual inclusiveness is confirmed.

Love is Knowing and Living According to the Mystery and Mysteries of God

Given the fact of the law being love, I believe the presentation of wisdom as the outworking of love is one which needs to be understood in the light of the statements we have examined such as ‘the purpose of his will’, ‘the mystery’, ‘the mystery of his will’, ‘the counsel of his will’, ‘the mystery of Christ’, ‘the plan of the mystery’, ‘the eternal purpose’, ‘a plan for the fulness of time’, ‘the mystery of God’, ‘the revelation of the mystery’, ‘the mystery of the gospel’, ‘the mystery hidden for generations’, ‘the riches of the glory of this mystery’, ‘the knowledge of God’s mystery,’ the mystery of Christ’, ‘the mystery of the faith’, ‘the mystery of our religion,’ ‘the mystery of the seven stars’ and even ‘the mystery of lawlessness’, and ‘the mystery of the woman’. Also Paul speaks of the apostolic messengers as being ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’, and says in another place, ‘we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God’. In one place he says, ‘Lo! I tell you a mystery, ‘and in another that even if one were to ‘understand all mysteries’ and not have love, then he would be as nothing, since love is essential to knowing all mysteries.

It is this last statement of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:2 which is most important. ‘And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith, so as to remove mountains, *but have not love* “ *I am nothing.*’ ‘*If I understand all mysteries . . .*’ Paul may well be talking of the charismatic ‘words of wisdom’ and ‘words of knowledge’, but it is doubtful that he would include in ‘all mysteries’ the ones we have nominated above. He is saying, in short, that to know such mysteries and then not to love is a fierce contradiction. The ‘mysteries’ constitute the wisdom of God that are communicated by the Spirit, and they have endless depths, as such, so to know them is to be wholly involved in love.

It is clear from 1 Corinthians 2:6–16 that Paul sees the unfolding of ‘a secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glorification’ is of such quality and depth such as ‘no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.’ Yet it is this which ‘God has revealed to us through his Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.’

Wisdom and Love Eternal

‘A secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification’: is where we begin understanding, our research of wisdom and love, or, we might say ‘wisdom–love’. We begin, of course, with the Godhead, the ‘triune Godhead. It would seem a matter of deep human pride to claim we can in some way examine the Godhead, and if God had not given revelation of Himself then it would be pride, but if He has revealed Himself, then it is arrogance not to look to that revelation and to use the wisdom He has given to us. To know God is life eternal.. indeed life is nothing other than knowing God for ‘this is the true God and eternal life’ (1 John 5:20: John 17:3). As we have said, ‘This is true theology and true anthropology.’

Wisdom–love is Man Coming to the Godhead According to the Will of God

In the Godhead are the three Persons. God is Father, and eternally generated from Him is the Son, and eternally with them both is **the** Holy Spirit, also deriving

from the Father and—some say—the Son. By nature there is one God, and God is love. The Father is love. the Son is ‘the Son of His love, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love². That God is love must mean the Three persons are one. The Godhead consists in the communion of the three. If we seek theologically to understand this unity we might think of the Three ‘coming together’, but then they were never other than one. If we use the human analogue of three persons existing in unitive love our analogy could be greatly deficient and deeply misleading. True being lies in *communion*. The Three Persons are one in communion, but they never *came* into communion. We come into communion when love—so to speak—is at its best. The glory of God is His unity and Jesus said to His Father—regarding his disciples—‘The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one.’

Man, originally created in the image of God, knew this unity with God in its primal untested form: he was in communion with God. His fall consisted in refusing communion with God, and seeking to maintain himself/herself [themselves] over and against God. The love which constitutes *communion* was rejected for the individualism. Each human being sought to exert against the created order of things. Since the fall it has been difficult for members of the human race to even begin to contemplate the authentic nature of *communion*. Whilst sympathy and even empathy are not wholly absent from human beings full communion is impossible. Humanity undoubtedly has **in** ontological sense of the need of communion³, and many attempts are made, at it, but since communion may come only from being one in God, as God must be one in it, the human race has never succeeded.

Another way of saying the material of the last paragraph is that God’s glory is His Being, His innate unity, His being love. It is this glory which Jesus gave to his disciples ‘that they might be one even as we are one’. Now in his incarnation Jesus spoke as a man, whatever it may have meant for his deity to have been present. In His ,manhood he was one with the Father, so he was revealed *practically* what it is true ,*theologically and [so] anthropologically—that* Man is only truly Man when in —communion with God. Human beings can only by one by the glory of the Triune Godhead, and having that glory cannot be other than one, i.e. their *communion* — *even on the human level—derives from that glory, that love.*

Contemplation of what we are saying—and what we are saying derives only from God’s revelation ‘tells us that if God had left the human race—in Adam—to its own devices, then it would have never been more than an atomistic humanity, an aggregate of self—units, each seeking its fulfilment in its individualism, and mistaking that individualism for the success of maturation.

The wisdom of God, as we keep saying, lies in the mystery of the plan, in the counsel of God’s will, in the mystery of godliness and the faith. Its beginning is ‘the secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glorification’. What is our glorification? Is it just the liberation of the body—and the creation—from the bondage of corruption? Is it just the glorification of the body so that it shall be a body of glory like unto his body of glory? It is surely these things, but more. It is the coming to ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God.’⁴

² See 1 John 4:8, 16; Colossians 1:13; Romans 15:30. For material which constitutes the remainder of this Section see my unpublished thesis *The Glory of God and Human Relationships*.

³ Be this we mean that ‘oughtness’ or ‘ontological necessity’ which every human being feels. Reams could be written on this drive in Man, and the deep disappointment when it does not succeed. We can have nothing anthropological which is not first theological.

⁴ Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:6; Romans 8:18-25; Philippians 3:21.

Living in Hope of the Coming Glory

We do not understand the New Testament if we fail to see that the church as a body and believers as persons look forward to sharing the glory of God' (Rom. 5:2; cf. 1 Cor. 15:51–57; Eph. 1:18; Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:18–25; 1 Pet. 1:13). It is because all are its 'the Lord of glory', are 'filled full in him' with 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge', and being transformed within this Man (11 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3.9–10), and presently 'growing up into him' (Eph. 4:15), that they know they will be conformed to his image (Rom. 8:29–30) that they 'share the glory of God', i.e. they come into 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'.

What then is 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'? It is participation in the Triune Godhead: it is fellowship with the three Persons in their unity. It is Man sharing the unitive glory of God. It is Man being one with the glory of God. In theology—especially Eastern Orthodox theology—this has been called *ilieosis*, often called 'the deification of man'. Orthodox theology does not understand by deification Man actually attaining to and obtaining deity, but Man attaining to oneness with God, i.e. being admitted to the mystery of the Trinity, whilst still remaining Man, albeit glorified Man.

If we are shocked by such high claims then let us see that the New Testament speaks on the most preliminary level in the words, 'in Him we, live and move and have our being'. On the level of regenerated Man the believers are said to be 'called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ'. Their lives are said to be 'hid with Christ in God', and their 'fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ'. They are said to be 'partakers of the divine nature'. Jesus' high-priestly prayer was 'that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us.' John 14 speaks of the Spirit coming to be in the disciples, and of the Father and the Son taking up their abode in them. Believers are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and Epistles abound in statements that the believers are in the Father, in the Son and **in** the Holy Spirit, and that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are in the believers.

The use of the term 'in' may be generally taken as locative, but the heart of its meaning is *communion*. We have yet to fathom the depths of the statement of 1 Corinthians 10.16–18, particularly verses 16 and 17,

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation⁵ in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread.

and this passage must mean that as one people we share in Christ, we have *communion* in and with his body and blood, and so have communion with one another: indeed, all together. It is in the Lord's Supper that we are one with him, and in the Messianic Supper—that grand eschatological feast—we shall participate with him together before the Father, and in the presence of the Spirit. This admission into Godhead does not make us gods in the sense that we have, each one of us, deity after the manner of the Triune Deity, but we do have fellowship with the God Who is love. We are one in His love. This is the goal of God.

⁵ 'A participation'-*koinonia*-means 'a communion', and is sometimes translated this, also 'a sharing'.

Conclusion: Wisdom is the Outworking of Love

The Divine counsel, planned before time in the heart of the ‘Triune God. The Son being generated from the Father, and the Spirit likewise in concert with Father and Son. The three Persons planned that their love should climax in the admission into their Society of Man–Man who created became Man fallen, and through–the Cross and Resurrection Man redeemed, and through the *telos* Man glorified.

This is the reality of love, and this is the meaning of its wisdom. He who does not understand the mysteries of God does not understand the love of God. He who understands those mysteries has apprehended the wisdom of God, and in such he lives–now, and for– ever.

The Pastoral Understanding and Praxis of God’s Wisdom

We keep warning ourselves against abstracting from the Scriptures the principles of theology and attempting to formulate some practical methodology by which we can enliven the congregation, the pastoral flock. It is wisdom for them to live in the will and plan of God. It is wisdom to teach and explain that plan, and to exhort hearers to understand and live in it. There the pastoral matter of wisdom has to be left.. exhortations may well be necessary, but they must be preceded by opening up ‘the ,mystery of godliness’, ‘the mystery of faith’, and ‘the mystery of the plan’. Whilst there must be objective teaching by pastors it is primarily required of them that they as shepherds be an example to the flock in living in the wisdom of God.

Human Love and 'The Song of Songs'

When we read *The Canticles* we are confronted by the fact of the uninhibited love of a man for his woman, the woman for her man. In some ways—especially in our modern Western climate, and particularly *so* because of the feminism—masculism debate—the book *is* somewhat scandalizing. I suppose this *is so* because it seems to make the man—woman thing central to our human thinking and thus central to human living. Marvin Pope's extraordinary Commentary on *The Song of Songs* has a fascinating section entitled 'The Song of Songs and Women's Liberation', in which Pope quotes Professor Phyllis Tribble¹, who denies that the Bible *is* sexist. She *is* able to

affirm the intentionality of biblical faith, as distinguished from a general description of biblical religion, is neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but rather to function as salvation for both men and woman. The Women's Movement errs when it dismisses the Bible as inconsequential or condemns it as enslaving. In rejecting Scripture women ironically accept male chauvinistic interpretations and thereby capitulate to the very view they are protesting. But there is another way to reread (not rewrite) the Bible without the blinders of Israelite men or Paul, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and a host of others. The hermeneutical challenge is to translate biblical faith without sexism.

Tribble's view *is* that the Bible *is* not sexist and whilst her arguments may or may not find acceptance with all scholars it has to be a basic assumption for *us* to enter into *The Song* and seek to understand it. Whether Tribble's view *is* a correct one or not—and *I* believe it *is*, though *I* would personally approach it from another angle—we are faced with the general problem of human views of gender², of what it *is* or means to be male and female. These views may be many and varied, but *I* believe they are not *ad hoc* nor that there *is* not some particular—and even universal—drive which causes *us* to have such views.

¹ 'Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation' JAAR 41: 30-38 see Pope pp. 206, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, cf.285.

² This is not the place to enter into the whole question of gender, although it is pertinent to the whole of our Essay. To work from human masculinity and liken it to God's 'masculinity'-recognizing that the male pronouns and adjectives are always used for him—would be a major error. God is ineffable, and so we cannot read human masculinity into Him, anymore than we dare read human femininity into Him. Making man in His own image as 'male and female' tells us that both these elements issue from Him who is uniquely Creator. They issue as one entity—Man—and Man is a male-female entity. Thus God's so-called masculinity subsumes both human masculinity and femininity in it. This gives us a wider reading of what we might call 'Divine masculinity'. Certainly—we repeat—we cannot read human masculinity or human femininity—or both together—back into God. Nor—for that matter—may we ever view Man apart from God and know him truly as Man. We dare not look at the male apart from the female, and the female apart from the male. The word 'gender' is not strong enough to carry the weight of the differentiations

I am convinced that we have not approached the matter of relationships fully from a biblically ontological point of view. I am sure that relationships can only be understood when we view them as arising from the nature of God as Creator, but then God as Rinitarian. In other words the relationships between the three Persons of the Trinity—they *having the one centre of consciousness*³—are the key to human relationships, Man⁴ has such union or unity in himself as man–woman as do the Persons of the Godhead. If this is so, then the fall of man is not one incident which happens along the path of history. It is the prime tragedy the human race can know because of the ontological unity of man–woman which is innate in the creation of Man. This unity was in some sense fractured⁵, and so the basic ‘one–flesh’ unity is never fully achieved in the whole stream of human experience. That is why I think *The Canticles* constitutes a beautiful and brilliant demonstration of true human–[male–female]–unity⁶. It is the closest one comes to seeing the creational relationship of man–woman. In this sense this book is unique amongst all others.

I believe that the ‘one–flesh union’ of the man and the woman is the most psychodynamical union the human race can know—if ever it does! I don’t think we can understand the statement, ‘Love is as strong as death’ if we are outside that man–woman union. When love is perverted into sexual passion, then it can be ‘strong as death’, especially because it ceases to ontologically true and becomes irrational: the drive of created human nature is still there. That is surely why so much deep sin and heavy crime is linked with passion—especially illicit passion. When we realize that the quest for pure love is the deepest drive in humanity—and this because love is the true ontological order—then we understand that when love is perverted the damage done by

³ This raises, of course the question of modalism, i.e. God having one subject-centre of consciousness but three modalities of action or expression, nominated as ‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Spirit’. The counter-argument-Tritheism-gives the three Persons separate subject-centres of consciousness which appears to make them into three Gods. How the Persons can have one subject-centre of consciousness and yet be Persons is not a principle that can be explicated by an analogy of the anthropological, especially as it is understood today. It has to be seen theologically, i.e. by a revelation of God. To experience God as one is to experience the unity of the three Persons as one, i.e. their ‘onespirit’ union. If we go back the anthropological argument we may argue that a man and a woman have separated centres of conscious and not the one centre. Genesis 2:24 is surely asserting they have the one centre in their union. Is there then any true autonomy of a male or a female, or do they each find themselves being truly themselves only in union? This, of course, leads us on to the further question of whether a daughter is ever a separate entity when under the union-coverage of parents-and so on. Indeed it leads us on to the wider matter of whether persons are truly persons when seeking to exist within themselves, and to develop a discrete identity when their discrete identity may only develop in the context of [all] other persons.

⁴ By the use of the word ‘Man’ we mean man-woman=Man. This is more than a mere generic use of the term. It is the only authentic use when it insists that the man and the woman together constitute Man, i.e. that it is sexist to think of the man apart from the woman, and the woman apart from the man. They are not two ‘races’ but one male-female entity. It may be called a dual-entity, but it is one which is an ontological unity. In this sense the psycho-dynamics of humanity are seen rightly and their value preserved. If this is so ontologically, then the union that is Man-male-female-is only truly so where there is *communion*. *Communion* is the basis of the one-subject consciousness of the Triune Godhead.

⁵ I confess that the term ‘fractured’ is inadequate. The division between male *qua* male and woman *qua* woman has nothing basically to do with the differentiations of the two, but rather has come from the fall. Differentiations *per se* are not divisive, but rather unitive. Division between the man and God and the woman and God is what makes division between the man and the woman. The NT teaching of the extraordinary unity of all in the church does not simply transcend the basic disunity caused by the fall but brings as a gift to the community the essential unity of the Triune Godhead.

⁶ Whilst agreeing in principle with Phyllis Trible—that the Bible is not sexist—I wonder whether Trible is still not caught in the principle of equality of both ‘sexes’—a term I wish we could avoid. It may be that Paul and other theologians who she nominates were not seeing Scripture from a male dominating point of view but from a point of view entirely outside the present feminist-masculist debate.

it is enormous. This is, generally how love—so-called—has been since the fall of Man, and so a true view of love is most difficult, if indeed, possible. Impossible as it may seem to go back to a pre-fall relational situation of the man and the woman, we nevertheless derive some understanding of it when we are told, ‘Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.’⁷ When we remember that the temptation to the woman was, ‘You shall be as Elohim⁸, knowing good and evil,’⁹ we have to ask whether the woman saw herself as becoming a god (*elohhn*) and her husband (also) becoming a god (*elohini*), and both constituting a unity—achieving this without Elohim himself. Genesis 1:26–27 tells us they were already *like* Elohim, but were not as Elohim. In separating from Elohim they did not achieve god-head and they badly damaged their unity as Man—i.e. as the entity man–woman.

The Aversion to, or Ambivalence of, Sexual Experience

It is interesting to note that most commentators agree that the sexual language of the man and the woman in the Song is unusual, and often even an embarrassment to western readers¹⁰. In an age when ‘sex’¹¹ has been ‘unmasked’—if ever it was masked—one wonders why anyone should be embarrassed. Modern emancipation from sexual bondage by the sexual revolution forms the whole issue which journals like ‘Cleo’ and its brother journal ‘Playboy’ are always renovating to their reading public,¹² I think it is not over-stating the case to say that the human race is much embarrassed by what it calls ‘sex’. It is so intimate a matter¹³ that it has either to be ‘demythologized’ and made a utility for all, or it has to be played down by a romantic view on the one hand or by vulgarity on the other—this latter being a hardening of

⁷ ‘One flesh’ here does not mean ‘one-body’ but a union which includes sexual union but is not only that or wholly that. Paul’s statement of I Corinthians 6:15-19 are pertinent. Joined to a prostitute the man becomes ‘one body with her’. Joined to Christ he becomes ‘one spirit with him’. The man and woman in authentic union are ‘one spirit’. Whilst this may appear to be mystical it is eminently practical.

⁸ The word ‘Elohim’ can be used for high celestial creatures as well as for God. It has a plural sense which make be taken either as an intensifier of the word ‘El’ (God) or as an indication of some plurality and so (perhaps) of some sociality within the being of God. Doubtless the woman was excited by the prospect of, ‘being-in-autonomy’ as against the creational order ‘being-within-God’.

⁹ ‘Knowing good and evil’ must in some way be connected with the quality of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—‘a tree to be desired to make one wise’. Wisdom that is true wisdom never comes from below, from Man, especially as he lives and thinks on the horizontal level, but comes down from God (cf. James 1:5;3:15f.). Man cannot have true wisdom when he is autonomous.

¹⁰ It was not only so for western readers. Had the allegorizing view not been accepted by Jewish scholars it is almost certain the Book would not have been canonized. Similarly the Christian canonization of the book was linked with its-supposed-allegorical nature.

¹¹ I don’t believe it is true to say that this is genuinely sex or sexuality.

¹² It is interesting that such journals—and other forms of media—are seeking to emancipate their readers and hearers from old inhibitions in regard to sexual behaviour, when in fact they address that public which is for the most part prurient and—by nature of the case—cannot understand pulchritude as such, i.e. they cannot appreciate beauty in pure ways, thus missing the reality of that which is beautiful.

¹³ True sexual experience is wholly private, wholly confined to marriage and so, to the marriage partners. The moment it is taken out of this private situation its essential nature is subjected to elements which destroy its intimate communion. The present custom of explicitly exposing the act of cohabitation conceals rather than reveals the true nature of sexual experience. Such exposure makes a travesty of authentic sexuality. In the **The Canticle** the sharing of the couple is a beautiful revelation of man-woman love but does not break the true privacy of their union since it points primarily to communion.

our opposition to having a reverence of it—or by relegating it to the realm of the unknown, the unclean and mere biology.

What we call 'the romantic' can be over-idealistic or idealistic in an irrelevant way, can build images and make demands which are impossible. There is the 'Mills and Boon' mentality on the one hand or that of the age of chivalry—knights in armour and swooning maidens—a plethora of Sir Galahads and Lancelots, along with Elaines. The romantic view¹⁴ helps to shape impossible images in the minds of both men and women, and these images can spell disaster in marriage.

Probably the opposite view to this is the cynical one—those who have been disillusioned about the matter of sexuality through unfortunate experiences or the inability to find or have experiences. What we call 'the sexual drive' seems present in most of us, and the lack of fulfilment—even in the midst of sexual happenings—can contribute to cynicism. Both the romantic and cynical views are probably related to an high view of sexuality, but both—it seems to me—make emotional and functional demands incapable of fulfilment.

More to be deplored is the prurient approach to the matter. Sexuality is surely the sane and natural gift for the procreation of children, for emotional, spiritual, social and biological fulfilment and satisfaction—especially where it has expression within marital—familial relationships¹⁵. Prurient approaches to the fact of sexuality¹⁶ work in a number of ways. Humorous vulgarity makes a mockery of sexuality, giving it a depraved element, and insinuating that genuine satisfaction cannot be obtained from it. Linked with this is the degrading habit of giving the genitalia certain names¹⁷—sometimes pet-ones—in a patronizing manner which demeans the creation of God. This is seeing humanity with an evil eye, with a twisted anthropology. Perhaps it partly springs from fear of something quite holy and wonderful—a sense of inferiority in the presence of something they cannot understand. Often those who have this approach find themselves impotent and unfitted for proper sexual experience. Persons in these

¹⁴ It is a curious thing that modern exposure of sex—so called—is nevertheless thought to be romantic. The terms 'fornication' and 'adultery' are looked upon as impossible in this 'enlightened age'. The media do not speak of 'fornicators' but of 'lovers'. This 'loving' is supposed to arise from 'personal chemistry of the two', and is gloriously fulfilled in any bed around the place. Films are said to be exciting in romance when a couple mouth their kisses in the sight of vast audiences, and have tongue-to-tongue and other practices which, if they are valid, are reserved for the intimacy of true union and proper privacy. It is said, even by some whose views on sexuality claim to be 'normal' that in the love of spouses 'any-thing goes', i.e. nothing is 'kinky' provided it happens in the marital bed.

¹⁵ Not all sexuality gets its fulfilment in physical sexual union. Many never marry, and sexual acts take up a very small portion of time in even the most ardent of practitioners. Sexuality embraces all the elements of husband-wife, parents-children, inter-family, and inter-society relationships. The restricted and constricted view of sexuality is that the gifts of femininity and masculinity are only for **the man and** his wife. Maleness and femaleness have a dynamic polarity about them which makes for rich enjoyment of society. Wrong use of it can cause much damage, but that does not invalidate the true expressions of our sexuality.

¹⁶ There is a certain kind of comedy which is quite humorous, but its resources in pure fun seem to be few. There is always a quick resort to smutty humour. It is interesting to listen to the kind of laughter which comes from rich humour, and that which comes from unclean humour or the degradation of the human body and its biological actions. It should be recognized that behind this humour is fear of creational reality, anger at God and hatred for the world He has made. Bitter and cynical humour also has its devotees.

¹⁷ This giving of names has the effect of turning biological genitalia-functional members of the body-into personal beings, which they are not. It then allows an intimate or making relationship to be established with the genitals. It is somewhat akin to depersonalizing women by calling them 'blondes': women may be blonde in colour but a characteristic is not the full person. The curious habit of calling a mature woman 'baby' or 'babe' has the effect of divesting her of maturity. To be consistent the same term ought to be applied to a grown male, but this is not the case. In all the cases mentioned it gives the person using these terms power over the subject of the statements.

states of mind are not simply to be rebuked and criticized but attempts to teach the beauty and power of true sexuality should be made.

When, in accordance with troubadours romantic singers and those bellowing and screaming out their protestations that love is it! , those who hear them do not find fulfilment, they think it must be a matter of the right partner, the right chemistry, the right conditions, the right performance—and so on. Seemingly lacking these elements they may feel themselves to be failures. Many are the manuals which profess to have the answer to a person's lack of satisfaction both inside and outside of marriage. When disappointment comes then couples think that there is something missing in their biological make-up or actions, hence the introduction of deviant and 'kinky' actions called 'sex'.

Having said all this I am still unable to convey my understanding of genuine sexuality. Perhaps I err in even using the word 'sexuality'¹⁸ since it has a certain limited connotation. It might be better to talk of 'true humanity' and 'true relationships'. Certainly we ought not to read *The Song* as an exercise for imitating the two players. *The Song* is not even there to train others in genuine loving. I believe that so far as the 'one-flesh' union is concerned, the more unselfconscious¹⁹ genuine love is, the more natural and satisfying it will be.

The real point to which I have been trying to move is the revelation in *The Song* that human love is really beautiful, that the human form is in no way unclean²⁰, but is wholly pure and rightly functional²¹, that there is a love which need not lead to disappointment, disaffection, bitterness, and cynicism, but which can lead to reality which does not have to be romantic as some understand that term, ideal as some demand that level, or simply gloriously satisfying *as an end in itself*. In other **words human love** can be very down to earth, very reassuring regarding the human body, can give its delights, as it also can call upon the genuine feelings and desires of our humanity. I believe this is what the Song is about—and nothing else. Yet this does not mean that the principle which obtains in human love does not obtain in divine love, in divine-human love and in human-to-human love²².

¹⁸ For example, whilst male and female can be named by their genders, and there is polarity of the male and female, yet the actual sexual acts do not constitute the whole of sexuality. Some males and females never have such acts, even though biologically capable of them. This does not mean they are less sexual than others. Nor do sexual actions—especially those of intercourse—constitute a major portion of any life. When we see Man as a male-female entity, and recognize that being a male is always in context with femininity, and being a woman is always in context with masculinity, then we realize our modern use of the word 'sexuality' has to be defined as far as possible.

¹⁹ Commentators on *The Canticles* rightly note that the two in the book are wonderfully self-conscious yet all this is in 'other-person centredness'. Each sees the glories of the other, and there is mutual admiration which is beautifully expressed. This is surely the nature of true love

²⁰ Of course, here we are faced with differing world views, and dualism—particularly as in gnosticism—sees the body as evil. Anything material is on a lower level than spirit. The OT and the NT have a view of man which is not dualistic, i.e. man is not flesh and spirit, but man is a spirit of which flesh is one component, a component which is mortal but will be transformed by resurrection into 'the body of glory'. Romans 12:1 (cf. I Cor. 6:19) makes it clear that the body—especially when offered to God—is holy.

²¹ Paul goes to some length to emphasize this fact. In I Corinthians 12:23-24 he says, 'Those parts of the body which we think less honourable we invest with greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty . . . God has so composed the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior part'.

²² Here I am saying that all love is *agape*, especially in its proper practice. This being the case the principle of the union in love will obtain in all situations of loving. This helps to explain something of the joy of the mystics, especially those who view union with Christ to be thing of great joy.

We have mentioned above that some persons fear sexual union. There may be many reasons for this and we are not seeking to cover them all in this essay. Children may have been warned against 'sex', may have heard it discussed scornfully, mockingly and pruriently, in which case they may have developed a jaundiced view of it. Those who have suffered child molestation or rape may have an understandable fear of it. There may be fear of the act of sexual intercourse because of misunderstanding of the act, or associations arising from having viewed parents or others in that act²³. A deeper reason may be that spouses may fear having children, not feeling competent to handle the relationships that result from children being born. This is often the case in de facto relationships.

In Genesis 2:18–24 it seems evident that premarital intercourse is not envisaged. The man does not 'cleave' to his wife, until he—and she—has left the parents and this is what happens only in the marriage service. Death of parents does not constitute 'leaving', nor does geographical separation from them constitute 'leaving'. Marriage is the time for leaving and for authentic cleaving. Those who have intercourse before marriage—either with their partner, or with some other—set up difficulties in genuinely 'leaving' their parents. Since biological satisfaction in intercourse is not true relational union nor true 'one-flesh' fulfilment, partners are cheated of the genuine act of union, which, once having happened, is then indissoluble. This causes deep anger in many and a dislike of sexual intercourse though often—perversely—a sort of slavery to it²⁴.

Sexuality Not a Mockery

In any study of human love we must include the fact there is such a thing, and that it is not only wholesome but it is essential to human living. It is not simply of the *bene esse* but of the *esse* of true human living. By this we mean that sexuality is ontological, it is indispensable to human living and the pressure of ontological necessity²⁵ is always present to the human person—to heart and conscience. I believe *The Song of Songs* is a reminder and an assurance to us that true love—genuine sexuality—is a reality, a gift given in creation²⁶, and that there is no need to fear it, utilize it lustfully, or be disillusioned in regard to it. At best we can pursue it with assurance that even in a sinful world it can better and more than Hollywood would assure us it is. By 'sexuality' I do not only mean the coming together of a man and woman in marriage, but gifts of femininity and masculinity given to all members of the human race so that all men

²³ This is especially the case where cruelty or deviation has been viewed.

²⁴ Disappointment is often levelled at God because He seems not to have made all things well, nor to have done all things well. This disappointment arise from love in this case so-called-not fulfilling the person. His can happen within marriage, especially when the couple do not come together in chastity. There is always the thought that 'One day it might happen,' or 'When I find the true partner, then it will happen'. That is why some persist through as many as three divorces.

²⁵ By 'ontological necessity' we mean that the human heart knows what truth is, i.e. that God is, that His law is functional and so not optional, and that pressure is always there-to live in accordance with that law. It does not mean that fallen sinful man-or even Man, or even redeemed Man will always fulfil the law, but his joy will ever be in the endeavour to render 'ontological obedience'.

²⁶ Being a male or being a female is what God made each of us-'male and female made he them'. If the question of sexual deviancy and perversion is raised it must not first be examined along psychological or even biological lines but along theological lines, i.e. a person's rebellion against God can cause him or her to reject the *modes* of humanity and to opt for another mode. Just as people can reject the 3 causes for marriage as set out in the marriage service, so they can reject the modes and forms of true sexuality. Perversion and deviancy have their own inbuilt emotional excitement that attends things illicit, but because they are anti-ontological they must end in misery and non-accomplishment..

and all women can relate as one across the board, not even in order to have biological intercourse but in order to fulfil the whole of the creational mandate given in Genesis 1:28. Masculinity and femininity are not only sexual but wholly relational.

Now I am sure that the human instinct that tells a person he or she will reach the highest in the love that *The Song* portrays are not at all wrong. As I keep saying in this essay, if we put the fulfilment of love as a demand or requirement on another, or if we go about the action of loving in a self-centred way our efforts will be counterproductive. I am trying to say that there is nothing greater or more powerful than love if it is genuinely love, i.e. love that 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things [and] endures all things'²⁷.

I am also trying to say that since love is the greatest thing then a failure to achieve a proper experience of it will sometimes bring the most terrible backlash in human relationships and human experience. Grand opera is not altogether wrong in its portrayal of this fact, and—for that matter—neither are soap operas wholly wrong. What is wrong is the judgement of love by the disappointment of these who will harshly criticize, reject or mock the matter of love and this generally from irrational anger.

Love and the Effects of the Fall

When the first couple had their eyes opened by eating of the forbidden tree and so came into 'a knowledge of good and evil'²⁸ we have to see that this knowledge was not an authentic one. Paul's statement, 'To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving, nothing is pure; their very minds and conscience are corrupted', must obtain in regard to all things, sexual activity included. With the loss of true knowledge of God came also loss of true understanding of humanity and of creation²⁹. Thus the human race lacks a true understanding of its sexuality. I am sure this is the basis for what I call 'irrational views of sexuality'. Whatever they term themselves as being, i.e. 'romantic' or 'realistic', human beings only fully understand sexuality by grace. I think that is what Paul is saying in Ephesians **5:21–33**. All the matter of Israel being God's wife, and the church being Christ's Bride teach us what Paul calls 'a mystery' (Eph. 5:32), but the mystery helps us to understand the human situation of man–woman love.

When we come to the outcome of the fall it is clear that some change has taken place in the original creational relationships indicated in Genesis **1:26–28 and 2:18–24**. The woman is told that the man is to rule over her, and this statement must indicate something of a change in the order of things. That the woman will desire her husband may mean either that she will still desire him even though he rules over her, or that she will seek to rule over him³⁰. Whatever the case it is clear that total amity will be difficult to establish. I am suggesting then that ambivalence on marital relationships cannot be traced back to local or psychological causes alone, but must have its genesis in the fall

²⁷ I Corinthians 13:8. The whole chapter shows the nature of what love is as well as what it isn't.

²⁸ See Genesis 2:17; 3:5; 3:22.

²⁹ I have always found it strange that some commentators on Genesis have linked the fall with the act of sexuality. I cannot see how they arrive at this conclusion exegetically. Furthermore the idea is often presented that a person is 'innocent' until that one has sexual intercourse, after which they are presumably no longer innocent. This is a strange conclusion. One can go through marriage and sexual relationships without losing purity. Sexual intercourse is not impure.

³⁰ This latter idea has arisen by comparing Genesis 3:16 with 4:7 where 'desire for you' in the latter reference must mean 'rule over you'. It is probably that if this is the case then Genesis 3:15 means the woman will seek to rule over the man.

of the race³¹. In other words the cause of disaffection with sexuality is not primarily psychological but theological.

What I called idealistic advice has been written regarding relationships in marriage, especially in Christian marriage. Models are presented—e.g. Christ and the Church—and readers are urged to follow these models. Grace has virtually removed the curse, so that now relationships can be as they were in the pre—curse period. Of course the curse has not been removed: women still have pain in birth, husbands rule their wives, and wives seek to rule over husbands or—at best—desire them in intimacy. There are always those in the church who seek to fashion the penultimate age as though it should—and could—be the same as the ultimate age.

I am sure the best we can do—and that is the proper thing to do—is to live wholly under grace, and thus have the very best possible in this age in human relationships. This principle carried out in marital relationships should bring much relaxation, peace and enjoyment, even in a world which is painfully sinful³².

We come then, in our essay to the final point—in fact that which motivated the essay— namely, ‘What has *The Song of Songs* to say to us in our human situation of man—to—woman love, woman—to—man love’? I think the book is important for it is saying—curse or no curse—that a beautiful and natural relationship can—and does take place. It is not the relationships which the world of Hollywood offers us—for that is a travesty of the true. In fact the *The Song* is saying—all unconsciously—‘Set about loving and love: that is all. The rest will follow where there is mutual love.’ If love is strong as death and if many waters cannot quench true passion, then human beings can be about this.

I have no desire to modify or even qualify this message that comes from the book. We do have to look at the fact that whilst it seems idyllic it is not so; the woman—lover is beaten and wounded and her mantle is taken away—all in the cause of love. Certain conditions are ideal for love. Love must not be stirred up prematurely. Loving does not prevent the woman loving her sleepy luxury, thus losing him at the precise moment of his love: and so on. The usual weaknesses of humanity may still be present, no matter how strong the love of the couple.

What I would say is that this is a book for all lovers—young and old, but the heart of it is not sexual passion. Certainly this may well be present. What is primary is love, and love is filled with admiration and concern for the other. Each wishes to be attractive to the other and each extols the other’s virtues, but what is primary is the wonder with each views the other. This need not be limited to any age or stage of human living. It need not even be dependent upon sexual stimulation and fulfilment through this is more than an acceptable ingredient in the Song. No, it was what one sees in the other, and the natural union of their excellencies. If true romance exists then this is it! Each is desirous of seeing the other, living with the other and all nature is not only at their feet but shares with them in their glorious miracle.

In human loving of man and woman it is often—as Martin Buber revealed— not a ‘I—thou’ relationship but an ‘I—I’ one. The relationship is wholly selfish. The idolizing of the other is the making of a false image of that one. An ‘I—I’ relationship is a person living to himself—or herself—and so a contradiction of true maleness and true

³¹ In this whole matter of human sexuality I suggest the reading of my books *God’s Glory, Man’s Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988) and *The Heavenly Vision* (NCPI, 1987). Also my-as yet-unpublished Thesis *The Glory of God and Human Relationships* (1990).

³² when in Romans 12:18 Paul says, ‘If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.’ must mean that no matter how good your intentions and actions complete relationships will depend upon the willingness of others. You can only go as far as you are able.

femaleness. The other persons is used without being known, without true union. This, then, shows prostitution is simply the 'I-I' with an 'I-I' and the attempt to have sexual action within oneself (masturbation, mind-fantasy, and the like) are shown to be wholly out of order.

When the person—for some reason or another—is awakened out of the 'I-I' relationship to begin an 'I-thou' relationship, then the other spouse—or person—may appear as a stranger, an unknown entity. The true action of love has then to begin and develop, with the acceptance of differentiations and even idiosyncrasies. The relationship of the man and the woman in *The Song* is richly an 'I-thou' one. That is why it is so valuable as both a witness and a paradigm. The Christian teaching is that no true 'I-thou' relationship can be really so apart from the 'I-Thou' relationship with God by each of the two persons, so that the direct relationship with God brings true union and communion to the two lovers. In *The Song of Songs* this relationship with God is not mentioned, but since the love-relationship is within the covenant of Israel with God it can be presupposed.

It is easy, then, to see that thoughtful readers of *The Canticles* can scarcely believe this beauty of love is limited to this special pair. No wonder they have been seen as types of God and Israel the Bride. No wonder Christians see them as Christ and his Bride. Perhaps more wonderful than all of these—wonderful as they are—is the message to the human race that love can be like this *now*. 'I sought him whom my soul loves,' is worthy of seeking Christ the divine Lover, yet one human can love another with this kind of love. Knowledge of this fact destroys the cynic, illuminates the dull, gives sight of something wonderful to the blind, rouses the lethargic from their torpor and stimulates the spirit of a man and woman to know they do not have to look beyond their spouse to see the excellencies they desire, to honour the person of the other, and to know such love, even if the fires of youth are not blazing merrily, yet the evening of life can know a love no less wonderful where beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder, but has been placed there by God in creation, albeit the body is ageing and weakening. It is here love accepts this reality with joy and even looks to the greater glory into which the beloved shall enter.

Certainly *The Song of Songs* has a rich message for the world and for couples in particular. It shows that sin has not irreparably devastated the human scene and that human selfishness cannot be overcome by that love whose fountain is God, and at which all true lovers must drink.

'The Great Mystery'—the Eschatological Man and the Eschatological Woman³³

What we need to understand—as we have been seeking to do above—is that what Man is, as a male-female 'one-flesh' entity is a mystery, i.e. truth that is hidden until God brings revelation of it to the human heart. For a man to seek to understand what a woman is, and woman what a man is, is virtually impossible, especially if each views the other objectively, i.e. subjects the other to intellectual scrutiny. In the Scriptures all true knowledge is relational.

³³ Here I would recommend a close study of my *The Heavenly Vision* (NCPI, 1987) *God's Glory: Man's Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988), and also my, as yet unpublished, thesis *The Glory of God and Human Relationships*.

What we first need to see is that the Man and the Woman were not created in the same manner. God created Man and then withdrew from him the woman. If they had been created in the same manner, then it would be difficult to speak of a polarity, and of a complementarity of the two. They could not become one. Because of creation they are in fact, one—

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.

When we remember that ‘there is one God, the Father’, and that the Son proceeds from the Father, then in a somewhat similar way the Woman proceeded from the Man, and that meant they could have the one centre of consciousness, even whilst being discrete persons.

Even so, the man and the woman cannot be satisfactorily scrutinized, since Man created as the man–woman entity whilst being creationally complete were as yet untested, as yet unfallen, and as yet unredeemed. Man is not simply ontological in his creaturehood, but teleological. That is, he is moving forward to his ultimate or eschatological being. When Man is glorified then we will see what Man is. When all are conformed to the image of the Son and all are his brethren, and all have ‘the body of glory’ and enter into ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’ then we will know what Man is. As things stand it is impossible to know Man as he will be in the ultimate.

Even so, when Paul speaks of the union of the husband and the wife he calls the matter a mystery. Primarily the ‘mystery’ is that of Christ and his church, i.e. the Eschatological Man and the Eschatological Woman. The Man is the Bridegroom and Husband, the Woman the Bride and Wife. When we ultimately see the Bride and the Bridegroom—‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb’ then we will understand in all fulness what is true femininity and true masculinity, and what is true union, true communion and true love. Until then we must rest on the intimations the Spirit gives³⁴.

We must then confess that in the present we do not fully know what is Man; we do not fully comprehend what is a woman and what is a man. This is because they are made in the image of God and whilst we may say that ‘male and female’ derive from God—as we have said—we cannot read human sexuality back into him, whether we call it ‘male’ or ‘female’ or even ‘male–female’. The reality of God cannot be grasped by analogues.

When we come to the truth that God is love, that the Triune God is One and that that oneness is love, then we begin to understand ‘the great mystery’, i.e. the man and woman are one in love. They are not this because they ‘come together’ and have union in this manner, but because already in the Triune God they have been created as one, so in that marriage they can express that oneness, just as in the Trinity the three Persons do not join to be one, but are essentially one. Man made in their image and likeness must be one. What we must keep firmly in mind is that God did not create a man and a woman as separate entities, and then bring them together, since they would thus constitute two separate races—a male one and a female one—but He created Man and then drew the woman out of him, so that their centre of consciousness was one. They derived from the one source, and the man recognized the woman was indeed very much

³⁴ In I Corinthians 2:6-10 Paul speaks of the glorification to come, the ineffability of all that, but the revelation of it to redeemed man—even in the present—of what is to come.

bone *of* his bone and flesh of his flesh so that the coming together *of* a man and woman constitutes the expression and reality of the original creation of Man. Only in this way could they be one flesh, and they could not be otherwise.³⁵

When we apply this principle to *The Song of Solomon*, then we see—almost uniquely—the purest love that a man and a woman have mutually, and it is a rich revelation *of* what true human love can be. The revelation comes through human actions and expressions. We are not elevated to some celestial sphere where all is ideal. The glory *of* the Canticle is that portrays, reveals and demonstrates the love that is profound, the love that is ‘a great mystery. So great is this love as to be called indescribable. It is no wonder that is for many unbelievable, although the songs and sonnets *of* the ages have always lauded it as such!

The Pastoral Value of The Song of Songs

It has been an old custom among Jewish people for the husband and wife to read this Book together. It has its own immediate impact. All poetry has the value *of* communicating into the depths of a person what mere discursive writing cannot accomplish, since poetry speaks to the heart, though never apart from the mind. The reality of a true love is surely what folk need to see in these days *of so* much shamming *of* love, so much singing without sincerity *of* love—as though it were the cure—all when a man meets a maid. We have seen a steady decline in purity, the rise *of* a false romanticism, the lack *of* dedication and application in the matter *of* building up relationships, a superficial view *of* the nature and endurance *of* marriage—and so on.

This Book—as we have said—presents both a witness to true love and a paradigm for us to follow. We need to study it closely to detect our own relationship with our spouses. It is a pity that we have not stuck to the term agape for all love, even though there are the useful nuances *of philein* and *eros*. Eros was not necessarily sexual love to the Greek: it seems we have taken over that word and used it mainly for that. All love, whether it be divine, sexual—so called—brotherly and sisterly, is truly agape. Wonderful man—woman love is possible, even if not in utter perfection. It is deeply, satisfying, wonderfully rich, but it requires us to live in the very love of the Triune Godhead, and that we may live fully—in communion—with all humanity.

This is the hope we can bring to our spouses, our families, to all our people.

³⁵ It is only from this understanding that we can see the utter perversity of deviant forms of sexuality. Homosexuality is a contradiction of, and an attack upon the created unity of Man.

NCTM Monday Pastors' Group, 7th. October 1991. © G.C. Bingham

Human Love and The Song of Songs –Addendum

Introduction

In our last study (2nd September 1991) we reached page 8. The following is an addendum and is numbered front page 11.

A Study of the Love of God and of Man

We have looked a little at the terms *eros*, *philia* and *agape*¹. C.S. Lewis adds the extra Greek word *storge*, and suggests it is 'affection, especially of parents to offspring' and gives us the picture of 'a mother *nursing* a baby, a bitch or a cat with a basketful of puppies or kittens; all in a squeaking *nuzzling heap* together; purrings, lickings, babytalk, milk, warmth, the smell of young life'. He then talks of 'need-love' of the young and 'gift-love' of the moth (parents). Lewis speaks of *philia* as the affection of friendship, and of *eros* as the relationship of man and woman, not limited to sexual experience but basically linked with it. It is really the giving and receiving of pleasure in a relationship. Nygren traces *eros* back through history and sees it essentially as rising in Greek thought to the highest form of love, i.e. altruistic love. *Agape* is recognised by all writers as Divine love, i.e. love which springs from God, is for Man, and it is the love which also fills redeemed Man thus releasing human beings into love for one another.

One way of seeing *storge*, *philia*, *eros* and *agape* is to include all under *agape*,² i.e. all forms of love stem from God who is love. 'Love is of God', and 'God is love' (I John 4:7; 8, 16) are statements saying that love comes *only* from God, and God is love. From the New Testament we perceive that the Father is love (I John 4:7–10), the Son is not love but 'the Son of His love' (Col. 1:13–14), and the Spirit is not love but 'the Spirit of love' (cf. Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22)³. If love derives from no source but God, then that love must be divine and so its human forms of expression should be forms of expressing divine love. It is fair enough to use *storge*, *eros* and *philia* as terms for various forms or modes of divine love, but because of the fall of Man the expressions

¹ Books recommended for this reading are *Agape and Eros* by Anders Nygren (SPCK, London, 1957), *Testaments of Love* by Leon Morris (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981), *The Four Loves* by C.S. Lewis (Fontana, Collins, London 1960). There is also a good section Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics Vol. iv*, Part 2 (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1958) pp. 727-840).

² The word *agape* is one of those words chosen because it was not directly related to the ideas of *philia* and *eros*. Whilst it is true that Jesus uses *agape* and *philia* interchangeably in John 21:15-18 yet this was prior to the word *agape* becoming the central word for divine love.

³ It could be objected that the Son and the Spirit are both love but even though the statement in I John 4:7-16 is 'God is love', yet the context shows this is the Father. Since the Son and the Spirit proceed from the Father they proceed from His essential Being, love.

of love are also fallen. We can say, roughly, that *eros* is [a] fallen expression of divine love–agape.

Love is a Gift of God

Creationally, Man being in the image of God would have known and reflected agape. His fall would have made agape appear as *eros* because

- (i) Man has a [ontological] drive to be like God who is love,
- (ii) he will always wish to show his love as pure.

Hence it is not strange that Man’s love will often appear altruistic, but within such love will be self-seeking, giving in order to get, loving love, loving loving, and this even to the point of sacrificial giving and resultant acts. Romans 12:9; II Corinthians 6:6, and I Peter 1:22–23 demand ‘genuine’ or ‘sincere’ (*anupokritos*) love, inferring that love can be hypocritical, i.e. insincere. I Corinthians 13:1–3 shows that what looks like love is not true love. It is possible to live most—if not all—of one’s life in *eros* and not agape. It is essential that we detect self-seeking love (*eros*) and express all that agape truly is (cf. I Cor., 13:4ff.).

I John 4:7 states simply that love comes from God, i.e. from no other source. I John 4:7–19 develops the fact that God is love, that we know God as love when born of Him, that His love is shown in sending His Son into the world that we might have life through him (v.9) and that the love is in making the Son the propitiation for sins. As a result love floods the person who has a revelation of the Cross (cf. Rom. 5:5–11) when the Spirit reveals and applies that agape of God. Hence the statement, ‘ We love because he first loved us’.

In marriage, family, the community of the Father and towards all humanity this love obtains. In regard to the *Song of Solomon* we say that the love the couple portrayed was agape, and not *eros* as such. We can still use the terms *storge*, *philia* and *eros* and understand they are all expression of true agape, providing they come from God. Marriages can be changed and enriched when what is commonly called ‘love’ is really agape.

Present Society and the Pastoral Ministry of Love –1

Genuine Love in Human Relationships

In Romans 12:9 Paul said, 'Let love be *genuine*.' In II Corinthians 6:6 he spoke of one of the drives of ministry as 'genuine love', and in I Peter 1:22 the writer speaks about 'a *sincere* love of the brethren'. The three references use the Greek word *anupokritos*, i.e. without hypocrisy. Evidently it was a problem in the apostolic church. Perhaps the case of Ananias and Sapphira is an example of insincere love. J.B. Phillips used the term 'imitation' in his Letters to the Young Churches. The problem of 'imitation love' is still with us. We need to know the origin and meaning of the word love as we used it in the Christian church.

The Way we Use the Word 'Love'

Down through human history the theologians, philosophers and practitioners of life have devoted themselves to the idea of love, and have formulated various words to cover their concepts of love. Hence we have such words as passion, adoration, fondness, tenderness, infatuation, affection, affinity, oneness, amity, friendliness, affability, amiableness and so on. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (London, 1956) has more quotations on the noun 'love', the adjective 'loving' and the verb 'to love' than of any other word. It is certainly a word used more in modern songs than any other.

In our day one of the simplest treatments of the word is given by C.S. Lewis in his book *The Four Loves* (London, 1960)¹. His is by no means the most important treatment of the subject, but it is simple and easy understandable, and has made its impression upon many since its first printing in 1960. For wider comment the reader is referred to other titles in the note below.² Lewis takes the four Greek words for love—

¹ Over all a fuller treatment is given by Leon Morris in his Testaments of love. The books quoted immediately below fill out the meanings the Greek words for love.

² *The Philosophy of Jesus: Real Love*, J.A. Delanghe (Philadelphia, 1973). C. Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament*, (St. Louis and London, 1963), *Love Declared*, Denis de Rougement, New York, 1963); *Love, Power and Justice* Paul Tillich, (New York, 1960); *Agape*, Gene Outka (New Haven and London, 1972); *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, D.D. Williams (Welwyn, 1968); *Agape and Eros*, A Nygren (London 1953); *Love in the New Testament*, James Moffatt (London, 1932); *The Mind and Heart of Love*, M.C. D'Arcy (London, 1962); The Testaments of Love, Leon Morris (Grand Rapids, 1981). Especially valuable are the articles in *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Ed. Colin Brown, (Exeter and Grand Rapid, 1978), by W. Gunther (pp. 538–549); *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Kittel, Grand Rapids, 1964) article by E. Stauffer (pp. 21–55). Karl Barth's valuable section on love in his *Church Dogmatics* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1958) Vol. IV, Part 2, pp. 727–840 is immensely valuable. Other articles on love in Histories and Theologies of the Old and New Testament are also valuable. See also my *Constraining Love* (Adelaide, 1985) and *Where I Love I Live* (Adelaide, 1986).

storge, *philia*, *eros* and *agape*—and treats them for their different values. Roughly speaking he says that *storge* is that form of affection found amongst newly born animals and children and their parents. He shows that affection has many modes and many situations. *Philia* he sees as being along the lines of friendship with all its variations, whilst *eros* is primarily related to the love known in man–woman relationships. *Agape* is Divine love, the love of God which comes to humanity, and when a person is redeemed sets that one loving others.³

Perhaps this classification of the words is not strictly correct. Leon Morris in his *Testaments of Love* points out that *eros* is not used in the New Testament, possibly because of its contemporary connotation with human man–woman love. Nygren in his *Agape and Eros* claims that *eros* was used for forms of love which transcend even man–woman loves, and reach highly altruistic goals. Theologians differ on their views of how *agape* came to be used for the Christian idea of love, and most simply say it was the word which was available, which did not have connotation with *eros*.

Without wishing to side–step the linguistic issue, it seems clear enough that the word *eros* was not thought suitable, whilst the word *agape* was a more neutral word, and since it did not have the meaning of *eros* it was one which could be taken and used by the Christians who infused it with the concept of Divine love.⁴ What we have to see is that no word could, of itself, convey the love of God as it is found in the gospel simply because that thought–content was new. That is what we mean by talking about infusing a word with a new content. It is simply a matter of communication. Whilst a language may have acceptably good words for theological and philosophical reasoning yet the words may have a different content for different users of them. For example, Islam has ideas of sin, repentance, law, propitiation and the like, but the same words have a different meaning and content for Christians who use them. Thus a Christian and Muslim using the same words would have different ideas—different contents to their words—hence they would not be communicating their ideas to one another.⁵

When Christianity came with its gospel of love it came with a radically new concept of love⁶, and no word was able to support that concept because such a revelation of Divine love had not come to the human race prior to the incarnation of Christ, his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Thus the word *agape* had to take on board—so to speak—the new luggage of the gospel, i.e. the revelation of Divine love. Doubtless a great deal of the meaning of God’s love is found in the Old Testament, and the use of *agapan* in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the LXX) to translate such love at least gave a beginning to its New Testament usage. Certainly *eros* was avoided

³ Some writers include the Greek words such as *epithymia* which is linked with desire, but desire in a good sense such as Paul’s desire to depart and be with Christ, and in a bad sense, i.e. it has a lustful use as in Colossians 3:5, ‘evil desire’. Paul Tillich uses the word *libido* which can mean lust, but in Freudian psychology has the idea of a strong sexual drive. It is not used in the New Testament.

⁴ I do not mean that the Christians set about to change the contemporary meaning of *agape*, but that for them the word would contain the concept of Divine love. Constant use would infuse the word with that meaning, as has, in fact, happened in history.

⁵ I found this to be the case when I learned Urdu in Pakistan, and had to teach it to Bible College students. Their ideas were unconsciously Islamic so far as I could understand their use, although they took them to be wholly Christian. For me it raised the whole matter of communicating the gospel in an Islamic land. Many have claimed that Islam is a heresy of Christianity, in which case the difference in meaning of the theological terms used is understandable.

⁶ We are not saying that the love of God in the Old Testament was less than His love in the New Testament, but the full understanding of His love awaited the coming of the Son, the establishment of the New Covenant, the work of the Cross and Resurrection, and the ascension of the Son to the right hand of God. As a result a revelation of God’s love was given—and received—which had not been given before in this way.

as an unsuitable word, and even *philia* was not greatly used. It is best then to say that the Christians took over a rather harmless word and poured into it the new understanding of Divine love. Doubtless wherever truth comes through to a person as a revelation, the words used for that truth are then part of the new communication.⁷

In John's Gospel, chapter twenty-one Jesus appears to use the two verbs—*agapao* and *phileo*—interchangeably.⁸ It was possible that *philia* could have become the Christian word for love, but then it was not strong enough to convey God's love for man.⁹ What is certain is that the term *agape* came to be the word most prominently used for love. In the New Testament the verb *phileo* and the noun *philia* are scarcely used whilst *agape* is the strong word for love that is continuously used—utterly divorced as it was from the connotation of *eros*.

Having said all we have about words for love, yet the heart of the matter is the fact of true love, Divine love, as against all forms which are not genuine love. What, then, is this genuine love? In order to understand what is genuine *agape*—as we have said—we must know and experience the nature of God. It is also necessary to recognise what is not *agape*, i.e. that which goes by the name of love, but is not Divine love, as such. We have seen above, briefly, the meanings of the words *storge*, *philia* and *eros*. It is to this last word that we turn in order to understand more fully its use.

The Nature of Eros

Philip S. Watson who writes a Translator's Preface to Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros* points out that Plato spoke of a 'vulgar eros' and a 'heavenly eros'. The latter was 'a human love for the Divine, a love of man for God'. Watson says 'Eros is an appetite, a yearning desire, which is aroused by the attractive qualities of its subject; and in Eros-love man seeks God in order to satisfy his spiritual hunger by the possession of enjoyments of the Divine perfections.' This should tell us that eros was not used only for the love between a man and a woman, although that was one of its uses. Leon Morris (op. cit) says *eros* is 'love of the worthy, and it is a love that desires to possess'. Ethelburt Stauffer sees *eros* 'in its highest sense is used of the upward impulsion of man, of his love for the divine'¹⁰ Paul Tillich calls *eros* 'aspiration towards value'¹¹ whereas *agape* is 'indifferent to value' (Watson. p. ix). Watson adds, '*Eros* does not seek to be accepted by its object but to gain possession of it.' Paul Tillich comments that *eros* 'is considered the lowest quality of love. It is identified with

⁷ This raises the whole matter of communication. The thought of a culture is expressed in its own words, and other meanings cannot be immediately imported into its words. The Holy Spirit is the Agent by which words are given the content the speaker hopes to convey. For further reading see my book *How, Then, Shall We Tell?* (NCPI, Adelaide, 1981).

⁸ The verb *phileo* is used in John some 12 times for loving in much the same sense as the verb *agapao*. It is also used in the synoptic Gospels in much the same way. Some see Jesus asking Peter whether he merely had *affection* for him, and yet did he not also have *love* for him. This is a permissible exegesis, but as Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic probably there was no fine distinction between the two words, if indeed two different words were used. Whoever reported the event probably did not see much difference between *agapao* and *phileo*. In the Epistles and the Revelation *phileo* is used only four times, and the use of the term 'brotherly love' (*philadelphia*) is used only four times in the Epistles.

⁹ Leon Morris (op.cit) notes that in the New Testament *agape* seems to be used 116 times and *philia* once. The total for *agapao* words is 320 and the *phileo* words, 55.

¹⁰ TDNT, I, p.37

¹¹ *Systematic Theology* (Chicago 1963) Vol. III p.137.

the desire to sensual self-fulfilment.’¹² Stauffer says, ‘Eros is determined by a more or less impulsion of man towards its object . . . seeks in others the fulfilment of its own life’s hunger.’¹³

These various comments tell us that eros is a self-centred, self-seeking form of love, which, even if it has high aspirations has them on its own behalf. D.N. Morgan says, ‘Eros inescapably remains *self-fulfilling, self-rewarding, self-possessive*’ (his emphasis).¹⁴ To this Paul Tillich adds, ‘We have, following Plato, defined *eros* as the driving force in all cultural creativity and in all mysticism. As such *eros* has the greatness of a divine-human power. It participates in creation and in the natural goodness of everything created.’¹⁵

We can see, then, the vast scope of *eros* from its ‘vulgar’ forms in selfish sexual expressions to its highest attainments in human life. At the heart of it all is the ego of Man, the determination to attain to the best, and do the best, but always with a desire to possess it. Whilst Karl Barth does not—as such—name *eros* explicitly early in his essay ‘The Problem of Christian Love’¹⁶ (p. 734f.) but leaves that for a later discussion (p.747ff.), yet he speaks of ‘this other kind of love’, saying,

It does not have its origin in self-denial, but in a distinctively uncritical intensification and strengthening of natural self-assertion. It is in this the loving subject finds itself summoned and stirred to turn to another. It is hungry and demands the food that the other seems to hold out. This is its reason for its interest in the other. It needs it because of its intrinsic value and in pursuance of an end. As this other promises something—itsself in one of its properties—there is the desire to possess and control and enjoy it. Man wants it for himself: for the upholding, magnifying, deepening, broadening, illuminating or enriching of his own existence; or perhaps simply in a need to express himself; or perhaps even more simply in a need to find satisfaction in all his unrest.

On pages 745–46 he adds,

While *agape* transcends humanity, the man who loves in this way is genuinely human; he gives a true expression to human nature; he is a real man. The same cannot be said of *eros-love*. In most cases this does, of course, consist in an address to one’s fellow, and perhaps with considerable warmth and intensity. But as in relation to God, so also to his fellow, the man who loves erotically is not really thinking of the other but of himself. His fellow is envisaged only as an expected increase and gain for his own existence, as an acquisition, a boot, a prey, to be used by him in the pursuance of some purpose. In these circumstances how can he really be a comrade, companion and fellow? . . . In the duality apparently sought and found by the one who loves erotically there lurks the isolation which he has never really left and in which he will finally remain. Erotic love is a denial of humanity.

Eros and Agape

In many ways we may say that *eros* is the antithesis of *agape*, and if this is the case then *eros* must be rejected and *agape* accepted. But perhaps the matter is not as simple as that. When we recognize the nature of creation, that it was created by God who

¹² *Love, Power and Justice*, p.28.

¹³ TDNT p. 37.

¹⁴ *Love, Plato, the Bible and Freud*, Englewood Cliffs N.J., 1964).

¹⁵ Op, cit. p.117.

¹⁶ *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1958) Vol.IV, part 2, p.734.

is always *agape*, then the very structure of creation must be agapitic: its essential nature must be love, and no less Man who is part of that creation. Man, then, always has upon him the ontological necessity to love. There is a sort of universal recognition that love is right, love is *it!* Just as Man recognizes that righteousness is primary so he will endeavour to appear as righteous and so always will be seeking to justify himself. Likewise he will always desire to appear to be loving. If my thesis is correct—i.e. that *eros* is fallen *agape*—then we cannot write off *eros* as simply an antithesis of *agape*, but as a departure from it, an heretical form of *agape*. This is what makes it so dangerous. It poses as *agape*, and is not always easy to detect. This is surely the *agape* that *anupokritos*.

As for *agape* itself we must hear the apostle John again, ‘love is of God’, and ‘God is love’. It must never be said that love is an attribute of God, any more than is light (I John 1:5). ‘God is love’ stands on its own ground. Ultimately nothing can succeed which is not love. All power-systems fail because they are not love. *Agape* is free; *agape* is liberating; *agape* is liberty; *agape* is life. When Paul said, ‘Let all that you do be done in love,’¹⁷ he was not simply calling for a loving situation. He knew that without love nothing has reality, and we will examine this further in a few moments. If we truly hear John then he is saying, ‘Outside of God there no love. No love is authentic unless it *is* him.’ We are constantly driven back to God himself, and we have to understand that there is no love that comes from God without God himself coming to us. For example, when the love of God is flooded into our hearts (Rom. 5:5) then this is by means of the Spirit coming to us giftwise and dwelling in our hearts, giftwise (Rom. 5:5; II Cor. 1:22; II Tim. 1:14, cf. Eph. 3:16–19)¹⁸.

In What Manner Do We Love?

Personally and pastorally we need to discern what is true love, what is *genuine*, what is *agape* and not *eros*. *Eros* is self-seeking, self-giving in order to get and in its highest forms seemingly altruistic, but when fallen man does anything it is never *agape*. The ontological pressure of the *imago dei* may drive him towards perfect love, but because he is not God (*agape*) and not in fellowship with God (dead in Adam (Rom. 5:12ff., and dead in trespasses and sins, Ephes. 2:1ff.) he cannot truly love. His love will be ego-centric, no matter how much he may seek to disguise it.

The question is, ‘How can we pastorally minister to our congregations if we ourselves—perhaps all unconsciously—are loving the *eros* way?’ This calls for thought. Our ministries can be ego-centred, ego-extending, seeking to use others, whilst—perhaps—giving ourselves in remarkable ways. We are more dangerous than others in that we know the form of *agape* but may imitate it have love which is *anupokritos*. We must also look to our people as see whether they have been deceived into such thinking and action. We need, then, some kind of form of *agape* to measure the quality of our love. One of the passages which helps us is I Corinthians chapter thirteen, and we will look at it amongst other statements of the New Testament.

Before we do that we must look at the reprehensibility of not loving. In Revelation 2:1–6 the church has abandoned its first love. Unless it repents and turns and does the first works Christ will take its candlestick away. In I John 2:15–17 if there is love for the world and not for the Father, then those loving the world will pass away.

¹⁷ I Corinthians 16:14.

¹⁸ We will later see that the Three Persons of the Trinity—in their Tri-unity—come to dwell in the heart of the believer, and their coming is essential to the full experience and practice of *agape*.

In Matthew 24:12, ‘because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold’. To hate is deadly: it is to be as a murderer (I John 3:15).

Pauline Teaching on Love

One of the matters we have to resolve in studying this chapter is whether Paul is talking about love as it is in God, or love as it is expressed in life by believers. For example, verse seven says, ‘Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.’ It is clear that only God’s love does this, and so some theologians take it that it is only God who ‘bears all things’ (etc.). At the same time the chapter is in the hortatory mood, i.e. Paul is exhorting his readers to love in the way set out. We will later see more fully that there is an order in *agape* and the way it works. We can say here, briefly, that we love because God first loved us, but that the love with which we love is God himself. Thus, in the Corinthian chapter the person is loving with God’s love or—rather—God is dwelling in that one and loving through that one.

I Corinthians 13:1–3

At the end of the previous chapter Paul has told his readers, ‘Earnestly desire the best gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.’ We might think there are two ways (i) the way of using gifts, and (ii) the way of love. In fact ‘the still more excellent way’ is (a) using the gifts in love and (b) loving in every way which is not necessarily connected with gifts. So in the first three verses Paul speaks of those who use gifts but without love. Without love both the gifts and the use are nothing. True giving is love as true loving is giving, but here an *eros* situation can easily arise.

I Corinthians 13:4–8b

Without going into a lengthy exposition of the text¹⁹ it does not take much for us to compare ourselves with the statements of the text. In this section we see (i) in verses 4–6 what *agape* is *not*. In verses 7–8b we see what it *is*. It is certain that *eros* cannot come up to *agape* in practice. Unless we penetrate the text we may think that we do cover it, when in fact we do not.²⁰

I Corinthians 13:8b–12

This section shows that the gifts will one day be unnecessary and having served their purpose. If gifts are primary and not *agape* for which the gifts are used then we will be bereft. It appears that Paul thinks the use of gifts is a primary stage which will be outmoded, and that what matters now is love itself, for by it—its practice and its action—we are all being matured, and in fact will one day be perfect and will know even as now we are known. He thus concludes in verse 13 that for the present the triad of faith, hope and love is operative, but the one to consider wholly is love for its is the greatest. A simple reason for it being the greatest is that it can be said ‘God is love’, but it cannot be said ‘God is faith,’ or ‘God is hope.’

¹⁹ Such as in Leon Morris’s *Testaments of Love*, Lewis B. Smedes’ *Love Within Limits*, and Jonathan Edwards *The Fruits of Charity*. These are excellent references for homilies and sermons on *agape*.

²⁰ We mean that an examination of the text will show that in reality we are generally impatient, unkindly, arrogant, rude, overriding others, irritable, resentful and glad when calamity happens to others. These things all override *eros*.

Other Pauline Passages

Romans 12:8–10, Galatians 5:13–14; 5:22–23; Philippians 1:9–11; Colossians 1:8; 3:3:14 speak of the ways of love. Romans 14 and 15 (cf. I Cor. ch. 8) speak of building up in love the brethren who have weak faith and consciences. The contexts of these references show us the nature of love—the true *agape*. Everything must be done in love.

Johannine Teaching on Love

This most of us have seen in some measure—Christ’s loving of his disciples and his commands to them to love one another. Time and again we see it is the Father who loves the Son John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17 and the context show the manner of that love as also the reason for it. The Son responds to the Father’s love, loving him²¹. To lay down one’s life for one’s friends is love²². That true *agape* is obedience is pointed out in both the Gospel and the First Epistle (cf. John 14:15, 20–21, 23; I John 2:3–6; 5:2–3). The *practice* of love is described in 2:7ff. and 3:10ff. The latter is especially important:

- (i) one loves by laying down one’s life for another,
- (ii) one loves only when one having this world’s goods gives to the brother whom he sees to be in need. The *revelation* of love—which we will further treat—is shown in 4:7–21, i.e. God gives and so redeems.

In 4:7 John says, ‘Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.’ John is saying that loving one another should not be difficult for the love they are expected to show to one another is *of* God, i.e. *from* God. The one who loves has been born of God, and so knows God. That is, he knows God is love. Knowing God is love he must love others: we would add, ‘Not in the way that human beings love, i.e. the *eros*–way, but the way God loves, the *agape*–way.’ In verse 8 it is said that if he does not love others it will be evident that he does not know God. He will not have been born of God. Many times in this Letter John refers to being born of God²³ and that new birth should be understood in the light of John 3:1–14. As in John 1:12–13 the birth is not from human sources—as is ordinary human birth—but it is from above from the Father, by the Spirit and through the Cross, the death of Christ.²⁴ I think that pastorally we often assume the new birth has happened in our congregations when that may not be the case. We often assume repentance has taken place even though we do not see the fruits of repentance,²⁵ and so folk bring forth *eros* rather than *agape*. This is why there is a heavy pastoral strain in ministry.

²¹ We must not only say that recognition of the Father’s love brings the response of the Son’s love. It is because the Father dwells in the Son that the Son can and does love in his humanity (John 10:38; 15:9–10).

²² It is true that here and in other places (e.g. 21:15–17) in John the word *philia* is used, but it is almost—if not wholly—synonymous with *agape*. The separation of the two words is sometimes artificial. Perhaps one would lay down one’s love through sheer affection, but would not this affection be within *agape* (cf. I John 3:16)? I think it is over-meticulous exegesis to differentiate between the use of the two words in 21:15–17. I am aware that some exegetes draw special meaning from this differentiations, but I wonder whether it is really tenable.

²³ See 2:29; 3:9; 5:4; 5:18 and possibly 5:8, as well as here—4:7. Note the effects of being born of God.

²⁴ It is notable that John 1:14 refers to the death of Christ as essential to new birth. One must believe in him as ‘the snake lifted up’. In Paul, too, the new creation is always linked with the Cross; cf. II Corinthians 5:17–21; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 6:14–15.

²⁵ Cf. Matthew 3:8–9; Acts 26:20.

God is love, but new birth is essential to knowing He is love. To know God is to know He is love. Even so, new birth, of itself, is not the *way* of knowing God and knowing He is love. God has shown—manifested His love—and it is seeing the manifestation which brings one to knowledge of God as love, and to new birth. Doubtless seeing the revelation and being born anew are in the one act, but there is no birth that of itself brings us to knowing God as love. Central to all is the Cross. It is the Father sending His Son into the world in order that we may live through him that is the act of God's love. That act of sending leads to the act of causing His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.²⁶ When we see God has dealt with our sins on the Cross by means of propitiation, it is then we receive the gift of life. Without the propitiation of our sins we cannot have forgiveness and cleansing of our sins, and we cannot have life. When we receive these we know by this act of love—the death of the Cross and the fruits of it given to us gift-wise—that God is love, i.e. that He is *agape*.

We know He is love because He has loved us in and through Christ. His practical acts of sending His Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins and through propitiation giving us life are the acts which show us He is love. The effects of cleansing, forgiveness, and receiving new life are the way in which we know that love. When we experience them, we experience God as love.

The Experience of God as Love

The Fact of Love

If anyone thinks that by nature²⁷ he—or she—is alive and needs no life from God, and if that same person does not think his—or her—sins need propitiation, then that one will never know God as love. This has to be stated categorically. Every human being is dead—dead to God—because of the fall of the race in Adam. Every human being is dead in his—or her—sins: the existence we lead is a death one, terrible as that may sound. If we do not think Jesus came to give life which abundant to replace our death-existence, then we will not see and know God's love. If we think that God could deal with our sins—i.e. their power, penalty and pollution—without propitiation then we will not know His love for us. Propitiation is an act which God does because all human beings are under His wrath because of their sins. Every person is a sinner, has guilt, is under judgement, and must suffer punishment for his—or her—sins. The passage we have been studying above tells us that the Father sent the Son into the world: the Father made him to be the propitiation for our sins. In practical fact it meant that

²⁶ Rather than interrupt our discourse above let us look at the meaning of the statement 'the propitiation for our sins'. Some translations have 'expiation' rather than 'propitiation', but whilst expiation refers to the working out of penalty caused by crime or sin, propitiation refers to the averting of the wrath of God which is upon sins. Leon Morris in his book 'The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross' (London, 1965, pp.144–178) has shown convincingly that expiation and propitiation differ, and that only propitiation can set the sinner free from God's wrath. This is done when Christ bears the wrath on sins, but his bearing of them is his doing the will of the Father. It was the Father's intention to show His love by propitiation.

²⁷ When we use the term 'by nature' we mean 'by natural birth', i.e. by the mere fact of a bring a human-being in this world. When we use the term 'by grace' we mean God has done something which could not happen 'by nature'. To be 'born again' means one has already been born, i.e. 'by nature' and now one needs to be born anew 'by grace'.

the Father took the initiative²⁸ in the act of the Cross which was an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The Experience of Love

As true pastors we take the above paragraph almost for granted. We believe many in our congregations also agree with this theology, but the first step in knowing love by experience is to repent, have faith in the work of Christ, receive the gift of grace, and so be forgiven, cleansed, justified, sanctified and begin the processes of glorification (II Cor. 3:18).

As true pastors we also believe that the experience of love lies in I John 4:19—'We love because he first loved us', i.e. his great love has drawn out love from us, and this is true, but the real key to the experience of love lies in the coming of the Triune Godhead to the heart. 'Love is of God' or 'Love is from God' means love comes from nowhere else. The statement, 'God is love,' tells us that love is not something which flows downwards from God but is God himself *inhabiting* us. When we remember 'For us there is one God, the Father,' that the Son is 'the Son of his love' and that the Spirit is 'the Spirit of love', and read John 4:7–14 we are faced with the fact that the Triune Godhead is of that order—

- (i) the Father is love,
- (ii) the Son is not love but the Son of his Father's love and
- (iii) the Spirit is the Spirit of the love of the Father and the Son of his love, then we see the Triune God must come and dwell in us, and in that way—and only in that way—do we
 - (a) experience love, and
 - (b) begin to love God and others. This—in effect—is the circumcised heart in which the Godhead dwells.

The inter-dwelling of the Father and the Son and the Spirit we have dealt with in many of our studies. We have also dealt with the inter-dwelling of redeemed Man with God and God with Man, all stemming from the prayer of our Lord in John 17:20–24,

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.

²⁸ In the Old Testament propitiation is made by an atoning sacrifice. Leviticus 17:11 gives us the heart of the matter, 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life'. Note that God creates the provision for atonement, for propitiation. In the case of Christ's death it was He who made the provision of the blood of Christ to effect our reconciliation with him (cf. Rom. 5:10–11). P.T. Forsyth commented on the word 'given' in Leviticus 17:11, 'Given! Did you ever see the force of it? "I have given you the blood to make atonement. This is an institution which I set up for you to comply with, set it up for purposes of My own, on principles of My own, but it is My gift." The Lord Himself provided the lamb for the burnt offering.' *The Work of Christ*, London, 1948. p.90).

Jesus' statement 'I am in the Father, and the Father is in me,' (John 14:10) gives us the key to all true relationships, i.e., mutual indwelling, or, if we may use the phrase, 'the mutual inter-dwelling'. In John 10:38 he said, 'the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' This is the equivalent of John 10:30, 'I and the Father are one.' When God and Man are one and inter-dwell one another then love is present for God who is love is present, love is dynamically active. We can do no better than

- (i) recognise that inter-dwelling is not only *union* but *communion*, and so
- (ii) quote the following scriptures which confirm this, 'No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit'. 'So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.' 'He who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son'. 'Your lives are hid with Christ in God'. 'Christ lives in me'. 'Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ'. 'We are partakers of the divine nature'.

Love, then, has come to dwell in us. God who is *agape* is the One by whom alone we can love, and must love: rather he is the One who loves *through* us as our wills are one with his. Pastorally such love begins with us, and pastorally it is the true order of the life of the flock.

Conclusion: Faith and Hope Abiding Because of, and With Love

Love is not simply a means to life, but is also its goal. The inter-relationships of the Triune Godhead are always with a view to the *telos*. Creation was always with view to the *telos*. Present working within the will of God, and building up by love is with a view to the *telos*. The *telos* is the Holy City, the place of God's people in which God himself is the temple, and where the people of God see God and Lamb face-to-face. The working of love in the present is not simply the best way of living, or even the only true way of living. Our present dwelling in the Triune God and he in us, is not all God has for us—wonderful as it is. It is the thrilling goal of God conforming all of his elect to the very image of his Son so that all will be the Son's brethren, and he—God—their Father. This is admission into the mystery of the Godhead: this is full fellowship with the Triune God.

It is 'faith working through love' which has brought us to redemption, and which is our life in redemption, i.e. the life of faith. The gift of God is 'love with faith'²⁹, and with faith is also hope and 'hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.'³⁰ The hope of love is the hope of the *telos*, when love will have triumphed over all evil, and we will be one with God in the eternal inter-dwelling. To quote the words of Jurgen Moltmann

To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole creation, into the life-stream of the divine God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.

This is why 'faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love. Faith believes in God as life; Hope looks to the *telos* of that love. Love is that *telos*. Rightly understood we have the true power of pastoral ministry in this understanding and its *praxis*.

²⁹ Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 6:23.

³⁰ Romans 5:5; 8:18–30; Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 6:13–20; 10:23; 11:1–40; I Peter 1:3–5; 3:15.

Present Society and the Pastoral Ministry of Love—II

Introduction: Petrine teaching on Love Within the Community of Christ

In our last study we looked—in brief—at the Pauline and Johannine presentations of *agape*. There are valuable practical insights in the Petrine presentation of God's love and we will proceed to these in the hope that they will be of personal and pastoral value.

It would seem that the natural apostolic order in regard to love was

- (i) the revelation of the Father's love through the Cross,
- (ii) the response to that love in faith and repentance, receiving forgiveness and justification, and so receiving the love of God,
- (iii) the reception of love was also the response of love to God's love, i.e. love that was evoked, so that the Father and his Son were now loved,
- (iv) with this love—*agape*—the believers loved one another, this being the community of love,
- (v) their love then turned outwards to the world, seeking to bring the love of God to all.

If we take the references to love in their order in Peter's First Letter then it is love for Christ (1:7–8)¹ which is first mentioned—'Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him your believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy'. This is a good place to commence understanding love from the Petrine point of view. God's love for Man is not explicitly mentioned although it is surely wholly assumed. The statement,

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope² are in God.

is certainly a profound expression of the love of God, and is in the same tone as 2:24—'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed'. No less powerful a presentation of the Father's love is 3:18—'For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteousness for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God'. There can be no cause for for a person to love Christ unless first Christ has loved him—or her—and if

¹ We to see that the apostles were not trying to develop a theology of love—as such,. They were writing to believers who knew the order of the points of love we have outlined above. They needed constantly to be exhorted along one or other—or all—of these points. So it is not surprising that Peter begins his letter with the fact of their love for Christ.

² Throughout the New Testament faith, hope and love come as an inseparable triad. Love is not mentioned in this present context but surely it is assumed. 'Faith and hope in God' can scarcely be present without love *for* God.

Christ the Son has loved then no less has the Father whom the reader certainly invokes (1:17), and trusts as ‘a faithful creator’ (4:19)..

It is this deep love for Christ which forms the basis for Jonathan Edwards’ great book *A Treatise of the Religious Affections*. Commencing at I Peter 1:8 Edwards says strongly that true religion consists in affections, and without these any religion is false.³ His first proposition is, ‘True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections’. In pursuit of this he says, ‘That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consists in weak, dull and lifeless wouldlings [weak inclinations which are not genuine intentions], raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God in his word greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion: “Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” . . . If we ben’t in good and earnest religion, and our wills and our inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great, there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing, is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious.

Peter—and after him, Jonathan Edwards—sees love for Christ as living and powerful *agape* for the one who bore our sins in his own body on the tree. There can be no talk of love for the brethren without first love for Christ, and prior to that Christ’s love which evokes ours in response to his. Likewise there can be no failure to love the brethren if one loves Christ.

Loving the Brethren

The remarkable statement of 1:22 follows on the act of love of the Father in making Christ manifest at the end of the ages for Man’s sake (1:18–21–22),

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

Note the order;

- (i) purification of your souls, by your obedience to the truth,
- (ii) for a sincere love of the brethren,
- (iii) love one another earnestly from the heart.

‘Obedience to the truth’ means ‘believing the gospel preached to you’⁴, so that purification came to those who believed (cf. Acts 15:10; Heb. 9:14; I John 3:3; James 4:8). I Timothy 1:5 speaks of ‘love that issues from a pure heart, and a good conscience and sincere faith’. This purification through obedience was ‘for [i.e. *with a view to*] a sincere love of the brethren (*eis adelphian anupokriton*)’. ‘Sincere’—as we have seen—is the term used by Paul in Romans 12:9 and II Corinthians 6:6 for

³ Men such as Jonathan Edwards and Peter Forsyth use the term ‘religion’ to mean the gospel—the truth and practice of the word of God. It is a specific use which today is not always appropriate, as ‘religion’ is used for many things such as pietistic religiosity, various forms of cults and sects, and even includes some Christian systems that have become stale and moribund. The New Testament terms ‘mystery of God’, ‘mystery of Christ’, ‘mystery of the faith’ all seem to me to equal ‘the mystery of our religion’ as in I Timothy 3:16 (*eusebeias*). The practical aspects of that are given by James (1:27), ‘Religion (*threskia*) that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unstained from the world’.

⁴ As in 1:11, ‘those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven’. Obeying the gospel is a strong theme; see Acts 5:32; Romans 10:16; II Thessalonians 1:8 and I Peter 1:2.

‘genuine love’, i.e. ‘against hypocrisy’. We have seen that *eros* can be mistaken for *agape* and *agape* can be mistaken for *eros*. The word here is not *agape* but *philia* (*philadelphia*) but it has to be sincere, and it is some sense the basis for *agape*⁵. All of this having happened, Peter now enjoins, ‘Love one another earnestly from the heart.’ This is of course the heart that has been ‘cleansed from its old sins’ (cf. II Pet. 1:9) and so is clear of all elements that were once against others—bitterness, rancour, hatred, malice—and so on⁶.

Loving Earnestly from the Heart

If we are not careful we will miss what Edwards so insisted upon, i.e. fervency in our Christian living, especially in our community. The word ‘earnestly’ carries the ideas of ‘at the stretch’, ‘fervently’, ‘extended’, ‘assiduously’, ‘intensely’, ‘intently’ and ‘deeply’. So in Matthew 8:3 ‘Jesus *stretched* out his hand’. In Acts 4:30, we have ‘thou *stretchest* out thy hand to heal’, in 12:5 ‘*earnest* prayer’, in 26:7 ‘*earnestly* worship’, whilst in the now omitted text of Luke 22:24 we see Jesus praying ‘very earnestly’. If we carry this idea to our present text we find a love that is of great concentration, intention and performance.

It is then ‘a love from the heart’. ‘From the heart’ is a term that is not often explicitly stated even though it is expected in the faith of Christ that believers will work from the heart.. It is used in Romans 6:17, ‘You have obeyed *from the heart* that form of teaching to which you were committed.’ Israel was expected to love God from the heart (cf. Deut. 6:4; 30:6). The heart is extended to cover ‘the brethren’ but there is no need for us to limit it to the community of Christ. In 2:17 Peter exhorts, ‘Honour all men. Love the brotherhood⁷. Fear God. Honour the emperor’. He is facing the community out to the world, and whilst love within the community of Christ is essential, the actions of love such as honouring all men, the emperor, and fearing God are all part of love.

Love that Covers the Multitude of Sins

Undoubtedly 1:22 and 4:8 go hand in hand, but we should see the full context of this second reference—4: 7–10,

The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailling love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

⁵ See II Peter 1:7 where *agape* is added to *philadelphia*—much in the same way.

⁶ The cleansing of the heart is a large subject on its own. God’s forgiveness sets us free from the past, and so free from all the ill humours and other habits, customs and dreads which formed a great part of our behaviour, thus setting us wholly free to love.

⁷ There can be no doubt that in this Epistle ‘the brotherhood’ does refer to the church. The very word ‘brotherhood’ presupposes the Fatherhood of God. Throughout the Acts and the Epistles the term ‘brethren’ is extensively used, more or less replacing the term ‘disciples’. In 5:12 Silvanus is ‘a faithful brother’; in 2:17 all are required to ‘love the brotherhood’, and in and 5:9, ‘the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world’. Even so, love is to be extended to all (cf. I Thess. 1:12; Gal. 6:10; I Tim. 2:1–4).

This sounds familiar. Indeed it is much the same as Paul's exhortations in Romans 12:3–13, the passage in which Paul says, 'Let love be genuine'. 'Unfailing love' here is the same as 'Love earnestly from the heart'. Some translate⁸ 'Above all, remain constant in your love,' 'Above all, never let your love grow insincere', 'Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength', 'Above all, love each other deeply'. These translations tell us the matter is serious: love is 'above all'—something which Paul emphasizes in Colossians 3:14, 'And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony'. In a slightly different sense he speaks of the highest of all things; love., when in I Corinthians 12:31, he says, 'Set your heart on the higher talents [gifts]. And yet I will go on to show you a still higher path' and he means 'the way of love'⁹.

According to Peter—as to Paul—if love is missing then the other actions are without their driving force and true quality. The use of gifts here—as in I Corinthians 13—is pointless without love, but when used in love then the gift conveys true love.

How, then, does love cover the multitude of sins? One thing we do know is that the atonement—God's great action of love—has already done that¹⁰. Is Peter then saying, 'Look at the tree where he bore our sins in his own body, and so never see another's sins except as they are nailed on to that tree'? Is he perhaps saying that 'whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin' (I Pet. 4:1) must mean that the love of God has taken away the attraction of sin?¹¹ Whether or not he is saying this, it is nevertheless so, but the meaning seems to derive from Proverbs 10:12, 'Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences'. Hatred stirs up the sins of another and makes them public, but love has the opposite effect. It does not stir people up to sin, but encourages holiness, part of which is cessation from acts of sin. It does not broadcast another's sins in the same way that Paul says love 'does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.' In other words, the critical, fault-finding, nit-picking spirit is absent. It is not that sin is overlooked but that the grace and love which have covered them is understood by the Christian brethren who do not accuse and make heavy and painful the conscience of an erring brother. Love does not make light of sin, but in the face of forgiving grace it aids the needy brother to peace and confidence.

Doubtless all these elements are present and they show us the wonderful power of love towards us. Titus 1:15 is perhaps the best commentary, 'To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted'. The sense we gain from Peter's teaching on love is that *agape* is fervent, steady, all-embracing, active in deeds, and whilst Peter does not actually say, 'God is love,' yet the whole action of love can stem and derive only from God, i.e. from his indwelling the believer and working love through him.

The Kiss of Love

The 'kiss of love'—*philemati agapes*—is a term equivalent to that used by Paul—*philemati hagio*—'holy kiss' (Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5.26). It seems the kiss of *agape* was a salutation of love whereas *shalom* was the salutation of peace.

⁸ J. Ramsey Michales (Commentary on I Peter in the *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, 1988); Jerusalem Bible; New English Bible; New International Version).

⁹ The Translation is from Moffatt's *A New Translation of the Bible* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1948).

¹⁰ The Hebrew verb 'kippur' is to cover. So in Palm 32:1 the man is blessed whose sins are forgiven and whose transgressions are covered.

¹¹ There are many ideas of I Peter 4:1-2 as though one has been crucified with Christ and is in this sense dead to sin, or one has so suffered from sin that he—in Christ—is finished with it.

Its use was wide, perhaps welcoming new believers or in hospitality to those from afar. Probably it was just a common form of affection, which was holy, and without the elements of *eros* which so often characterise it today. In 2:11 and 4:12 the readers are addressed as ‘beloved’, and all this fits with 1:22; 2:17 and 4:8. The ‘kiss of love’ would be the natural normal expression of unity and affection, much as a warm hug would be today, i.e. a loving greeting of some kind or another.

This kiss, then, provides a fitting close to a Letter whose broader actions and theology of love we have scarcely touched upon in this brief survey of the Petrine expression of *agape*.

Conclusion: The Practical Nature of Love in the Christian Community and Beyond

We have seen that the Pauline, Johannine and Petrine presentations of love are a good resource for personal and pastoral living in love—the ultimate in this age and the age to come. In our November study we saw the matter of human relationships as they related to man–woman relationships.

I have thought that to add an addendum on that introduction to the Song of Solomon would also be most useful for personal and pastoral ministry, especially if we m the substance of that November Study with the October and December ones. This should help to draw together all our Studies.

Addendum: Conclusion to the Song of Solomon

A Postscript to the Postscript

The close of our commentary *Love is Stronger Than Death* in its ‘Postscript’ does not draw all the conclusions we might make. Doubtless after many readings we may make many more conclusions, but certainly we can learn a lot from the book. We remind ourselves,

- (i) The Song of Songs is a part of the Canon of Scripture, and as such must be taken seriously—like all Scripture.
- (ii) It confronts us with the difference between *eros* and *agape*.
- (iii) It encourages us to constant renewal in our own marriages.

Enlarging on this we look at the following points,

1. Generally *The Song* is read from an *eros* point of view—*eros* giving but giving in order to get. Giving is the essence of *agape*—God’s own love (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32). *Agape* is (a) a revelation (I John 4:7–18) (b) a gift (Rom. 5:5), (c) a surrender to God, (d) the indwelling of God and God indwelling us (I John 4:16). When these principles are understood and followed then marital [and all] love accords with them—not as a legalistic law but as a relational principle that operates and is functional.

Note 1: if ‘(a)’ and ‘(b)’ are known but the person does not go on to experience ‘(c)’ and ‘(d)’, then *agape* will not be God Himself but something we seek to abstract from Him and try to use ourselves.

Note 2: if the person operates only in *eros* then God to him will have the *eros* configuration, modes, etc. An *eros*–person can only see an *eros*–God. Also he will see an *agape*–person as an *eros* one.

2. Love is a matter of the will since it is commanded, and true love will be the person’s alignment of his—or her—will with the will of God. In this way as God wills to love through the to others so the wills of those in *agape* gladly comply with God’s will and thus love operates.

3. Man a woman were created as one at the beginning and so *agape* is ‘natural’ to them both. Spiritual regeneration restores to this ‘natural’ (creational) state. The exercise of *agape* is normal to humanity , so that this kind of love is not a high summit to be aimed at, but the mode of life to be followed.

4. Since we are all sinners, and since God shows his love (*agape*) to sinners, we can show our love to sinners, and receive it as sinners. *Eros* is negotiable on its own give–take terms. *Agape* is not negotiated—it gives, and not under the ideal conditions of he other person being in *agape*. This has to be understood as all mankind is still under the curse—the woman being ruled and suffering in childbirth whilst the man has to rule and earn the living by the sweat of his brow. His ruling should be in *agape*, and her being ruled received in *agape*. Both should see that *agape* is for sinners, i.e. it does not have to have ideal conditions under which to work.

5. If *The Song* is looked upon only as premarital emotional joy and fore–play, and if married love is looked upon as simply for the young and infatuated, then we have missed the heart of the Book. It is for always. Whilst romance may be an invention of *eros*, yet true man–woman love under *agape* is for all of married life—i.e. ‘unto the end’.

6. *The Song* tells us the physical elements of man–woman love are essential to true marriage. The physical *union* in intercourse is a sacrament of the *communion* of the two. This is an accomplished *communion* which adds greatly to the marital relationship. We have to keep the ideas of *eros* and *agape* in mind. Any downgrading of the physical elements in marital love is a denigration of God’s creation, and God as a faithful Creator.

Note1: I Corinthians 7:2–5 speaks of the conjugal operations of the husband and wife and they are, at the least, physical.

Note2: our bewilderment in the Christian life is often because we slip from *agape* to *eros*, or mistake the one for the other. If we keep I Corinthians 13 before us we can recognize what is and is not true love.

7. In *The Song* the vocational elements of life are recognized. She recognizes he has his work to do as king, and she has in every way to be a queen, and yet must not deny the richness of rustic life. He, for his part, must share with her both as his queen and as her bring the rustic maiden.

8. If there is a complaint that human love is weak then *The Song* tells us it is ‘as strong as death’ and ‘many waters cannot quench it’. When we understand *agape* then we understand the power of love in relationships.