

THE LITTLE BOOK OF PROVIDENCE

by

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CHAPTER ONE

God's Secret Plan

Divine providence may be defined as God's foreseeing protection and care of His creatures, and in the case of those created in His own image, their anticipated *eternal* wellbeing. To begin to understand how and why the munificent nature of God's providence has long been obscured in traditional renderings of the gospel we need to examine more carefully what the apostle Paul wrote on the subject – daring to believe that he meant exactly what he wrote, including some seemingly extraordinary statements in Romans chapter eleven¹. The apostle makes a more cryptic reference to this mystery in the third chapter of Ephesians, translated in some versions as “the fellowship of the secret (or mystery)”. That happens to be the title of my previous book, for although Paul's revelation concerning God's salvific plan for the Gentile nations is by no means the only biblical doctrine that needs to be revisited, a coherent synopsis cannot be provided without it.

On a number of occasions Paul described his evangelistic message as “my gospel”². That was appropriate for it contained aspects that had not been revealed *to anyone* until his conversion:

*The mystery which has been hidden from ages and generations but has **now been revealed to His saints**, to whom God willed to make known the riches of the glory of this **mystery among the Gentiles**, which is Christ in you, **the hope of glory***³

The apostle was referring to a dispensation of heavenly grace that was to be made available to Jew and Gentile rather than exclusively to Israel, God's first-choice nation. It would be provided to those “*predestined to become conformed to the image of God's Son*”⁴. As Paul himself affirmed (but few appear to have grasped), such privileges were not envisaged for members of the Gentile nations in the current epoch and resulted from the disobedience of the Jewish nation:

*“What I am saying is this: Was this stumbling to lead to the Jews' final downfall? Out of the question! On the contrary, **their failure has brought salvation for the Gentiles**, in order to*

¹ Especially vv11,12,15 &30

² Greek: *to euaggelion mou* – Rom2:16; Rom16:25; 2Tim2:8

³ Col1:26,27

⁴ Rom8:29

stir them to envy. And if their downfall brings great riches⁵ to the world, and their loss has brought great riches to the Gentiles – how much more will their restoration bring!"⁶

And later in the same chapter:

*"For you (Gentiles) were once disobedient towards God but you have now obtained mercy **through (the Jew's) disobedience**"⁷*

Paul is referring to the same mystery below, confirming that it was *new revelation*:

*"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that **by revelation there was made known to me the mystery**, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, **which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men**, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the **Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promises in Christ Jesus** through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to **bring to light the fellowship⁸ pertaining to the secret (plan) which for ages has been hidden in God** who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with His purpose for the ages which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him"⁹*

Saul of Tarsus - The thirteenth faithful apostle

Jesus had called twelve men to the apostolate, partly for symbolic reasons:

*And Jesus said to (His disciples), "Truly I say to you who have followed Me, in the Regeneration when the Son of Man will sit down on His glorious throne, you also shall **sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel**"¹⁰*

The symbolism pertained to the reconstitution of God's chosen people: the twelve tribes, only two of which had survived at this point. Judas was replaced by Matthias who was

⁵ Greek: *ploutos*

⁶ Rom11:11-12

⁷ Rom11:30

⁸ Or "administration" (Greek: *oikonomia*) – textual variant utilized in some Bible versions

⁹ Eph3:1-12

¹⁰ Mt19:28

added to the eleven faithful apostles¹¹ to witness to Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Saul of Tarsus on the other hand was appointed out of due time¹² having been commissioned by the risen and ascended Christ as the thirteenth faithful apostle now that gospel salvation was to be made available to the Gentile nations. It becomes evident as one reads through Acts that in spite of the Great Commission to baptize and make disciples of all nations, it is not until events recorded in the eleventh chapter that any of the original twelve fully grasped that anyone who was not a Jew, Samaritan or proselyte could be granted the same gift of salvation as that intended for the Jews:

*I (Peter) realized **then** that God was giving (the Gentiles) the **identical gift** He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and who was I to stand in God's way? This account satisfied them, and they gave glory to God, saying "God has clearly granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that **leads to life**"¹³.*

It needs to be understood that references to "eternal life" or "life" in the New Testament relate to being re-united to God in Christ:

*And **this** is eternal life, that they might know You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*¹⁴

*And: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood **has** (present tense) eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"*¹⁵

*And: "No murderer has eternal life **abiding in him**"*¹⁶

Eternal life (literally age-life) is something to be experienced now; a higher form and quality of life than that which one can naturally know as fallen human beings. It should be noted that even the sinless Saviour asserted that He "**lived by the Father**"¹⁷ in the same way "*those who eat Me shall **live by Me***"¹⁸. It affirms that "life" as Jesus, Paul and others speak of it does not refer to avoiding perdition or "going to heaven when you die" for that was hardly an issue for Jesus, yet even He "*lived by the Father*". It relates rather to a present empowering relationship with the divine; "death" being the deprivation of such.

¹¹ Acts1:26

¹² 1Cor15:8

¹³ Acts11:17,18

¹⁴ Jn17:3

¹⁵ Jn6:54

¹⁶ 1Jn3:15

¹⁷ Jn6:57a

¹⁸ Jn6:57b

The mystery revealed to Paul was not apprehended even by Peter until he received a vision of the sheet of unclean animals that he was told to kill and eat¹⁹. Paul had to rebuke Peter for his reluctance to fellowship with Gentile Christians²⁰, again affirming that the mystery Paul was disclosing was not something that Jesus had made clear to the twelve.

Why Old Testament prophecy has been subverted

The subversion of Old Testament prophecy that is to be outlined in this chapter resulted from a two-stage rejection by the Jews of their Messiah, the first during His life, the second pertaining to their response to the apostles' teaching after Jesus had been resurrected and had ascended to heaven. The first rejection may be perceived in Jesus' lamenting of Jerusalem:

*"If you had known, even you, especially in this your day the things that **make for your peace!** But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you and your children with you, to the ground, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, **because you did not know the time of your visitation**"²¹*

Whilst many ordinary Jews would welcome Jesus to their city with palm leaves their leaders were indignant and already plotting His downfall. This was the first rejection culminating in the crucifixion and as Jesus stated it put paid to the hope that the coming of the Messiah would *bring an end to Israel's political and military problems*. The promise of peace and security for Jerusalem, evident in much prophecy including the recent angelic annunciations concerning the birth of John and Jesus, would not be secured by Jesus in His earthly lifetime, indeed worse was to come for Israel in about a generation's time as Jesus had warned in His Olivet sermon²². However, this is not what resulted in the rejection of the Jewish nation as *sole inheritors of the Kingdom* that Paul refers to in Romans 11 and Ephesians 3. Such is affirmed in Acts where the apostle indicates that even after Pentecost it was *still* the Jewish people's "day of visitation" and they were still not appreciating it. Paul had warned certain Jews at Antioch:

Be careful! – or what the prophets say will happen to you: "Cast your eyes around you mockers; be amazed and perish! For I am doing something in your own days that you would never believe if you were told of it"²³

¹⁹ Acts11:1-18

²⁰ Gal2:11-14

²¹ Lk19:42-44

²² Mt24

²³ Acts13:40-41

The warning was about what will or might happen to the Jewish nation, not what already had happened. Their day of visitation did not end when they crucified Christ: that event that Jesus referred to as His other baptism had been both divinely planned and prophesied²⁴; what was shortly to occur was undoubtedly planned or foreknown by God and also hinted at in some of Jesus' parables but it had not been foretold within the Old Testament. It concerned the establishment of an international messianic community, a plan hidden in God the Father²⁵ even from earlier prophets. For the Jewish leaders had refused to acknowledge that the resurrection and the miraculous signs were the vindication of Jesus' earlier claims. They still rejected His Messiahship even now that He had been raised to the highest heavens and empowered His disciples to work miracles in His name. The Jews had already forfeited the prospect of political peace and security through their rejection of Jesus in His lifetime, now something even more radical was at stake: *Kingdom inheritance*. The next Sabbath, these same leaders "filled with jealousy" towards the apostles, just as they had been toward Jesus used blasphemies to contradict everything Paul was telling them which prompted the apostle to add:

*We had to proclaim the word of God to you (Jews) first, but **since you have rejected it** since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, **here and now we turn to the Gentiles**. For this is what the Lord commanded us to do when He said "I have made (Israel) a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach the remotest parts of the world"*²⁶.

The prophecy from which Paul quotes (Is49) declares Israel to be God's servant, through whom He would manifest His glory and by whom He would bring saving enlightenment to the whole world. They as His chosen people, being the first fruits of His increase²⁷ and heirs of the world²⁸ would have come to know eternal life (as previously defined) through sanctification in Christ blood²⁹; but as the same prophet foretold this had been prophetically linked with the restoration and liberation of their nation and holy city through the direct intervention of a returning Messiah, who as well as residing with his people would act as judge and arbitrator with opposing nations³⁰. As a result of their rejection, the universal enlightenment would go ahead without them by means of a newly formed universal

²⁴ Acts2:23; Is53:5

²⁵ Paul's references to "God" always refer to the Father. The economy of the Godhead is a mystery but the Father's monarchical status is a biblical reality that needs to be recognized in order to understand aspects of what is being presented in this document, in particular the fact that the *timing* of events is under the Father's authority (Mk13:32; Acts1:7; Eph3:9; Rev1:1)

²⁶ Acts13:46,47

²⁷ Jer2:3 cf. Jam1:18

²⁸ Rom4:13

²⁹ Zech13:1

³⁰ Is2:4; Mic4:3

assembly founded by their Messiah and His apostles, none of whom would be drawn from the ranks of the Jewish sacral hierarchy. Although it is only briefly alluded to in Scripture, the longed-for national liberation and the re-instatement of Israel to “the Kingdom” would now have to wait³¹. Shortly afterwards at Corinth, preaching in the synagogue, more Jews turned against Paul and started to insult him. Paul took his cloak and shook it out in front of them, saying:

*“Your blood be on your own heads; I am clean; from now on I will go to the Gentiles”*³².

But why should Paul *not* be clean (or innocent) if he brought such a message of salvation to the Gentiles and the Jews had not rejected it? Was not such salvation envisaged for all? Clearly not: *“For **as a result of the Jews’ rejection**, salvation has come to the Gentiles to provoke them to jealousy”*³³. It was not a matter of protocol or order it was a transfer of privilege. This will make more sense once it has been demonstrated that there is salvation and there is SALVATION. The latter was earmarked for the Jews alone in Old Testament prophecy but was to be made available to the nations through Paul’s revelation concerning the Gentile inheritance. “Salvation” as foretold for the Gentile nations meant one would be enlightened, pardoned in the name of Jesus if one acknowledged Him as Lord, leading to acceptance as a subject in God’s Kingdom, for all who call on the name of the Lord would be spared from perdition. SALVATION on the other hand was to be born again by water and Spirit, delivered from corruption by means of sanctification in the blood of sprinkling³⁴ resulting in eternal life, being an interior communion with Christ and the Spirit whilst still in mortal flesh, participation in God’s royal priesthood and a joint inheritance with the Lord of Glory.

In the early chapters of Acts, everything appeared to be following prophetic expectations: Messiah had come, been rejected, executed, raised and ascended. The Spirit had been poured out upon Jews and proselytes on Pentecost, the dead were being raised; demons expelled, numerous miracles being performed, not just by apostles but deacons as well³⁵. Even items of the apostles’ clothing or handkerchiefs were taken to people and they were healed. Multitudes came to the apostles for healing, and again, all were healed. The Good News about Jesus was being preached as a result of which Jews, Samaritans and proselytes were receiving the gift of the Spirit, such that at that point Peter could say:

³¹ Acts1:6

³² Acts18:6

³³ Rom11:11

³⁴ Heb12:24 cf. Heb10:29

³⁵ Acts6:8

*All the prophets that have ever spoken from Samuel onwards have predicted these days*³⁶

But they had not predicted what was about to follow: Gentiles were to be granted “eternal life” and have equal status with elect Jews as joint heirs with Christ in His Kingdom.

The change of plan

There are plenty of examples in the Bible of God appearing to change His mind or plan in response to events or regretting decisions He had made. At least, that is the way it is presented in Scripture³⁷ even if from the theological standpoint God foreknew everything in detail. But since He never goes back on His unconditional promises of blessing, His assurances regarding places and people, even if re-ordered will be fulfilled. What for practical purposes might be referred to as Plan A (i.e. what the prophets foretold in the Old Testament) regarding the restoration of the world based on the Jews inheriting the Kingdom is set out most clearly in Isaiah:

*It will happen in the final days that the mountain of JHWE's house will rise higher than the mountains and tower above the heights. Then all the nations will stream to it, many peoples will come to it and say, "Come let us go up to the mountain of JHWE, to the house of the God of Jacob that He may teach us his ways so that we might walk in his paths". **For the Law will issue from Zion and the word of JHWE from Jerusalem. THEN He will judge between the nations and arbitrate between many peoples. They will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, **no longer will they learn how to make war.*****³⁸

God's Plan according to the Old Testament was to establish a holy nation of kings and priests amongst whom He would personally reside, initially through His spiritual presence in the Ark, later through the physical presence of His Son Emmanuel (God with us). The nations who had oppressed His people were to be judged, but as outlined in Joel, the Spirit would be poured out and the Good News of the Kingdom proclaimed as a witness to all nations before the final judgement came. Many Gentiles *would come to Israel's light and their kings to the brightness of her rising*³⁹. At such a time *"ten men from different nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"*⁴⁰ In God's plan as revealed in the Old Testament, the Jews were to be the world's enlighteners whilst the holistic package we know of as gospel salvation was not intended for Gentile nations at all in the current age. As confirmed in the eleventh chapter of Paul's letter

³⁶ Acts3:24

³⁷ E.g. Gen6:7; Gen18:21,26; Ex32:14; 1Sam15:11,35; Mt2:19-22

³⁸ Is2:1-4

³⁹ Is60:3

⁴⁰ Zech8:23

to the Roman Church it is only through the disobedience of the Jews that Gentiles have any immediate part in it⁴¹.

This is not so extraordinary as it may appear for internal sanctifying communion with Christ was not possible even to God's chosen people before the Saviour was incarnated, shed His blood, was resurrected and made way for the Holy Spirit. Whilst sin could be forgiven it could not yet be taken away⁴² for a fountain had yet to be opened for sin and uncleanness⁴³. Salvation in the gospel sense is healing of the soul⁴⁴ resulting in life of an eternal quality⁴⁵ even whilst the soul still resides within the "body of this death"⁴⁶ as the apostle aptly describes the earthen vessel inherited from our father's loins corrupted through "original sin". The purpose of this salvation is for a people to become "*holiness to the Lord and the first fruits of His increase*"⁴⁷: the people the Jewish nation were prophesied to become for the enlightenment and healing of the world. Then, in the age to come, having shared in His suffering, such would share in His glory⁴⁸, having been conformed to His image and likeness through spiritual gifts, cruciform service and personal discipleship.

The Jew's intended role as God's original choice to establish His Kingdom on earth should be equally clear concerning how Jesus regarded His own ministry:

*And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from the district and started shouting, "Lord, Son of David take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil". But He said not a word in answer to her. And His disciples went and pleaded with Him, saying "Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us. He said in reply. "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.**" But the woman had come up and was bowing low before Him. "Lord", she said, "Help me." He replied, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs"*⁴⁹.

Jesus makes it clear that He had been sent to the Jews (the lost sheep of Israel) so that they might be fitted for the Kingdom role promised for them in Scripture; that is why He initially refused to heal this Gentile woman's daughter. What He had spoken He had spoken and confirmed it with His disciples: "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel*". Because of His great compassion He was prepared to help such Gentile folk who came to Him. But it is

⁴¹ Rom11:11-13,30

⁴² Heb10:4 Greek "*aphairein*"

⁴³ Zech13:1

⁴⁴ cf. 1Pet1:9

⁴⁵ Jn17:3

⁴⁶ Rom7:24

⁴⁷ Jer2:3

⁴⁸ Rom8:17 (cf. Greek); 1Pet5:10; 2Thes2:14

⁴⁹ Mt15:22-26

obvious if one reads carefully through the gospel narratives that John the Baptist, Jesus and initially His disciples ministered and preached almost exclusively to the Jews⁵⁰. Through their avoidable failure, the privileges they were to inherit are to be shared with elect individuals drawn from every nation through elective grace.

The Jewish religious elite had expected to be leading the work of God's coming Kingdom under their Messiah, but the Kingdom role was *taken from* them and given to a people "*who would produce its fruit*"⁵¹. The leadership would be handed over to His personally trained squad of twelve intimate followers. But these were still exclusively Jewish; it was the Jews who were the natural branches whereas elect Gentiles were later grafted in against nature⁵². Jesus had come "*as a minister of the circumcision for the truth to confirm the promises of the fathers and also that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy*"⁵³ The Gentiles being the "*and-also's*" were to be shown mercy under Christ's rule with His people and glorify God for it, but now they could be the equals with that same people and share the inheritance reserved for those who *were to be sanctified*⁵⁴. Once one grasps (i.e. takes literally) what Paul was saying in the eleventh chapter of Romans, particularly vv11, 15 and 30, it explains the opaque nature of our Lord's eschatological narrative (especially the Olivet discourse) in which He appeared to link the destruction of the temple within a generation to His second coming. For the expectation had been that having carried out retribution to Israel's enemies and destroyed the wicked, the Good News of Jesus Christ's kingship referred to as "this gospel of the Kingdom"⁵⁵ would be announced as a witness to the Gentile nations so that if they acknowledged Him, at His coming they could be shown mercy through His name and become citizens in His Kingdom. But that is not what we have come to understand as "gospel salvation". It is not a restoration of the soul for immediate intimate divine communion⁵⁶. It is not the *same gift* of eternal life⁵⁷. Although absent from Old Testament Scripture, such fulness of salvation *had* been anticipated for the Gentile nations in the parables of Jesus – God's vineyard taken from the Jews and given to another "nation"⁵⁸ and the wedding feast to which the intended guests failed to turn up⁵⁹. So whilst the Gentile nations' Kingdom inheritance had been foreordained by God before the

⁵⁰ cf. Mt10:5-6

⁵¹ Mt21:43

⁵² Rom11:24

⁵³ Rom15:8-9

⁵⁴ Acts26:18

⁵⁵ Mt24:14

⁵⁶ Col1:27

⁵⁷ Acts11:17-18

⁵⁸ Mt21:43

⁵⁹ Mt22:1-10

foundation of the world⁶⁰, both Jesus and Paul inferred that the only *historical* reason the Gentiles were to be offered eternal life and a role as priests and kings in God's Kingdom was because of the intended nation's unworthiness and unbelief. Such was God's secret plan, the profound *providential* implications of which may be beginning to filter into the reader's mind, in which case congratulations are in order for it had eluded the most influential formulator of Western biblical theology.

The Mystery of Augustine

For much of the Church's history the understanding has been that God's *benign* providence is restricted to faithful Jews and those subsequently elected to Christian salvation; the prospects for the rest of humanity being worse than oblivion. That is in stark contrast to what is being presented here, namely that God's elect people are, under Christ, the *agents* of restoring and reconciling the world back to God, not the sole beneficiaries. Humanly speaking it was the Roman African Aurelius Augustinus (AD354-430) and his especially forthright and uncompromising manner in defending the catholic faith against potential heresies together with the extraordinary regard with which he has been held in the Western Church that has resulted in doctrinal errors being incorporated in their understanding of God's intentions for wider creation and the nature of the human condition. Pelagius, a contemporary of Augustine, was understood to have taught⁶¹ that human nature had not been profoundly wounded by Adam's sin, so humans were able to fulfil the law without divine aid. Augustine, still more perversely came to affirm that fallen man could not so much as do, think or desire any good at all apart from the grace of the gospel. The heretic Manes had propounded a dualistic view of the cosmos impacting upon human anthropology, leading Augustine to insist that Paul could not possibly have been saying that human nature comprised opposing moral influences from flesh and spirit. The millenarians (chiliasts) of his day were carnally minded so the whole system should be repudiated and man's future destiny be understood as fulfilled within the spiritual sphere. Though sainted by the Roman Church, Augustine's insistence that God intended to damn the bulk of humanity was undermined fifty years ago by the Vatican Council's pronouncements on God's broader providence regarding His dealings with those outside the Church. Yet the foundational biblical theology underpinning the earlier narrower conceptions has largely remained intact. One has only to contrast Augustine's grim eschatological montage as depicted in his "City of God" with the relative inclusivity of Vatican II's "*Lumen Gentium*" to see how the Spirit has

⁶⁰ Eph1:4-5

⁶¹ Because Pelagius came to be denounced as a heretic little of his work remains. We are largely reliant on Augustine's account of his teaching and manner of life, the latter of which even Augustine acknowledged to be saintly. As Wikipedia affirms (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelagius>), more scholars are coming to the view that this British theologian had been more faithful to the teaching of the earliest fathers than had previously been asserted.

enlightened the Catholic Church through the centuries. But to attain coherence one cannot avoid revisiting many of the theological assumptions that led to Augustine's treatise, culminating as it does in a cosmic horror story of breath-taking proportions⁶², albeit one which many Evangelical Christians have come to take for granted.

Augustine placed fidelity to Scripture as he interpreted it above regard for the more philanthropic and open-minded reflections of earlier Fathers who had perceived more than a vestige of God's image being retained in fallen man's nature and perceived a role for natural law within a multifaceted economy of grace. "*Let us reflect how free from wrath God is toward all His creation... He **does good to all** but most abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to His compassions through Jesus Christ*". So wrote Clement⁶³, fellow worker with Paul; whilst his namesake Clement of Alexandria (2nd century) enquired "*What is loveable that is not loved by God; and man has been proved to be loveable, consequently man is loved by God*"⁶⁴. Justin Martyr (2nd century) spoke of God's benevolence towards those who walk uprightly and in accordance with right reason⁶⁵; a God who accepts those who imitate His own qualities of temperance, fairness and philanthropy and who exercise their free will in choosing what is pleasing to Him⁶⁶. Irenaeus, also 2nd century, recognized that God in His providence is present with all "who attend to moral discipline"⁶⁷ paying heed to the *natural precepts of the law* by which man can be justified⁶⁸. These sentiments might be expressed in more biblically recognizable terms as responding positively to the light of Christ in the conscience so as to be justified by faith through the merits of Christ's faithfulness⁶⁹, for such is the esoteric undercurrent to the teaching of Paul as will shortly be demonstrated.

Apart from being supported by the testimony of those who had been trained by the apostles or their immediate successors, such a benign outworking of divine providence is in accordance with God's Scripture-defined nature and intentions "*I act with faithful love, justice and uprightness on the earth, and **these (qualities) are the things that please Me***"⁷⁰. It affirms JHWE to be wonderfully kind; He is a philanthropist⁷¹ who loves fellow philanthropists as Justin Martyr observed. He delights in those who strive to lead a good life utilizing the light of Christ provided to everyman, especially through the faculty of

⁶² *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God) Book XXI <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120121.htm>

⁶³ [Letter to Corinthians of Clement \(c. AD30-AD100\) chaps. 19 & 20](#)

⁶⁴ "[The Instructor](#)" Book 1 chap. 3

⁶⁵ [The first apology of Justin chaps. 43 & 46](#)

⁶⁶ [ibid. chap. 10](#)

⁶⁷ [Irenaeus against heresies Book III chap. 25 \(para 1\)](#)

⁶⁸ [Ibid. Book IV chap. 13 para 1](#)

⁶⁹ Greek: *ek pisteos christou*

⁷⁰ Jer9:24

⁷¹ Titus3:4 Greek "*philanthropia*"

conscience. The Bishop of Hippo on the other hand vehemently ruled out such a benevolent view of the Creator or the idea that He had any positive regard for human integrity, perceiving all humanity to be a *"massa damnata"* (condemned crowd). Man, in his natural state, he believed, was instinctively opposed to what is good and never disposed to do what he knew to be right except for selfish reasons. By implication, man was neither capable of genuine compassionate love toward his fellow man⁷² nor was he in possession of any good unless he had or would be saved by "apprehending the grace of Christ". He understood that God's love (*agape*) in contrast to love as it is defined in Scripture⁷³ would not extend to making allowance for ignorance or human weakness and by implication that such intolerance would be reflected in the Son of Man's final judgements. He asserted that God's vengeance and hatred for Adam's offspring was such that He held each child personally accountable at birth for the disobedience of their first parents such that infants dying without baptism must endure an eternity of mild sensual pain⁷⁴ to pay for Adam's sin and their own innate depravity. Given humanity's utter dependency on celestial grace, God's reconciling purposes were confined to those destined to be saved through the sacraments of the Catholic Church. Yet such fortunate, undeserving folk would very much be in the minority: *"Many more are left under punishment than are delivered from it, in order that it may thus be shown what was due to all"*⁷⁵.

This was neither the Ancient Church's understanding nor that of his Church today:

"Divine providence (shall not) deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who without any fault of theirs have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life" (Vatican II – *Lumen Gentium* 16)

Augustine undoubtedly articulated plenty that was thoroughly orthodox and seemingly supremely spiritual, especially regarding the Christian's inner life of devotion to God and the sanctity of the Eucharist. He had also tirelessly defended the Catholic Church from fatal heresy. Yet he concluded from his interpretation of Scripture that Satan's Eden offensive had been such a triumph as to result in God punishing the beings He had wished to unite to Himself by leaving them devoid of any effectual faculties to know Him, seek Him or please Him. Likewise, the eschatology that resulted from it was the antithesis of *"euaggelion"* (Good News) apart from for the proportionately few favoured souls who were to be shown

⁷² Augustine interpreted 1Jn4:7 to mean that only a baptized Christian has the capacity to love since love is from God and no one outside the Catholic Church could be "born of God". Augustine's teaching that man is innately incapable of love also affirmed in Anti-Pelagian writings; ["On grace and free will" chap.37](#)

⁷³ 1Cor13:5

⁷⁴ Latin: *paena sensus* . (cf. New Advent: Catholic Encyclopaedia under headings "Unbaptised infants", "Limbo" and the "Teaching of St Augustine").

⁷⁵ [\(De Civitates Dei XXI chap. 12\)](#)

undeserved mercy and spared eternal misery. Ascribing such incomprehensible barbarity and unintelligible justice to the One whose kindness, philanthropy and compassionate nature Christian people are called to imitate⁷⁶ is a travesty, especially in light of what had been previously understood⁷⁷ and is being presented here. A diabolical origin for such teaching is suggested by the pleasure and satisfaction the prince of that realm is bound to draw from it, in particular the draconian way the Creator is portrayed with respect to His human creation, only a small proportion of whom are deemed to benefit from His Son's saving work - a package then presented to the world as "The Good News of God" and subsequently promoted by its most faithful adherents⁷⁸ as "biblical theology". This has further exacerbated divisions within the Church as many Christians come instinctively to reject such derisory depictions of God's providential care for humanity, trusting instead in their own or their particular tradition's sense of God's goodness and intelligible justice. What is invariably lacking on the part of more liberal Christians is a substantive delineation of their convictions *from Scripture*. Such is surely needed to provide at the personal level the peace and assurance that comes from a hope that is solidly grounded, and corporately the ability to present a clear and coherent Good News message to the world.

The problem has been that the black and white, binary theological system that Augustine constructed from his understanding of Scripture and his rejection of any positive role for natural law does not lend itself to tempering; it must either be taken as read or busted wide open. It shall be the latter, for it is flawed at its theological and anthropological foundation (next chapter). Nor can that Father's assertions concerning humanity's hatefulness and God's harshness towards the creatures created in His image be dismissed as the rhetoric of an earlier age, for as already indicated Augustine's predecessors did not speak in such a way. They had by no means affirmed that man by nature could do "*absolutely no good thing, whether in thought or will, affection or in action*"⁷⁹ except they "*had fled to the grace of Christ*". Likewise in his treatise "On Grace and Free Will" his opening phrase provides a false hope of orthodoxy which is soon dashed: "*We have now proved by our former testimonies from Holy Scripture that there is in man a **free determination of will** for living rightly and acting rightly; so now, let us see what are the divine testimonies concerning the grace of God **without which we are not able to do any good thing**.*"⁸⁰ In other words he

⁷⁶ Eph5:1

⁷⁷ Writings of the 2nd and 3rd century Church Fathers alongside that of 4th/5th century Augustine's can be examined at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/>.

⁷⁸ More especially Evangelical Calvinists. Today, watered down (moderated Calvinist and Arminian) versions of the "Good News" are more often presented, the problem being they move still further away from the biblical realities of predestination and the exclusive, privileged nature of those who shall become the corporate Bride of Christ.

⁷⁹ ["On Rebuke and Grace" – chap. 3](#)

⁸⁰ ["On Grace and Free Will" Chap. 7](#)

affirms as he always does that innately man has no *effectual* free will whatsoever, merely that he is able to determine what he *ought* to do; thus, like Satan, man can only will, think and practice what is evil except he receive celestial grace, for there is no other grace that he acknowledged, either which is innate or imparted except through the sacraments of the Church.

In terms of God's justice, Origen for one had perceived the Creator so very differently; "*a just and good God in that He confers benefits justly and punishes with kindness; since neither goodness without justice nor justice without goodness can display the real dignity of the divine nature*"⁸¹. Phrase by phrase this depiction of a genuinely adorable divinity opposes the later Father's assertions concerning the Creator's nature and its outworking, recognizing along with most of his peers that *God is good* even from a reasoned human perspective.

Through a hyper-allegorized reading of the Old Testament Augustine had misread the role of the Law of Moses. He understood in the light of Paul's teaching that when JHWE had frequently pleaded with His people of the Old Covenant to "*learn to do good, seek justice, plead for widows*"⁸² and the like, He was not directly exhorting them to obedience but wished them to acknowledge their dependence on God's grace to fulfil the command⁸³. Such novelty subverts the teaching of the prophets: Isaiah made it particularly clear in one passage that JHWE was not impressed when His people demeaned their souls in His presence, hung their heads in shame and put on sackcloth to acknowledge their sins and moral impotence; He wished rather that they would do what was perfectly within their power to do: free the oppressed, share their food with the hungry, shelter the homeless: "*Then your light will blaze out like the dawn and your wound be quickly healed; righteousness will go before you and JHWE's glory come behind you*"⁸⁴. Personal righteousness and the establishment of social justice were what JHWE wished His people to pursue so that as His royal priesthood *they could be a light to the Gentiles*. Augustine was also palpably in error when he asserted that the righteous of the Old Testament were saved by "*believing in the incarnation, Passion and resurrection of Christ as a future event*"⁸⁵. Whilst Jesus had confirmed that "many prophets and righteous men" had eagerly anticipated His coming⁸⁶ and that will have included His own disciples, even they had not anticipated or understood the purpose of His death. In the same passage of his writing Augustine insisted that Moses and Abraham were Christians in all but name and had

⁸¹ [Origen de Principiis Book II chap. 5 para3](#)

⁸² E.g. Is1:17; Zech8:16-17

⁸³ Augustine - Anti-Pelagian writings "[On the spirit and letter](#)" [chaps. 22 & 27](#)

⁸⁴ Is58:5-12

⁸⁵ Augustine: "[Against two letters of the Pelagians](#)" [Book III chap. 11](#)

⁸⁶ Mt13:17

received equivalent gifts of grace; a concept refuted most clearly by Peter⁸⁷ and the teaching of Hebrews. He condemned those Jews who had been obedient to God's Law if their obedience were so that they might receive the earthly blessings that had been promised to them, rather than perceiving they related to the promise of their souls going to heaven when they died; moreover that people through the ages who had discerned the principles of God's law through creed or conscience and endeavoured to put it into practice were exercising worldly pride; asserting their own righteousness rather than "submitting to the righteousness of God" and trusting in His mercy⁸⁸. But JHWE had made it very clear to the people of the Old Testament how His chosen people were to be judged and it could hardly be further removed from such paradox⁸⁹. A thousand years later the Augustinian monk Martin Luther drew inspiration from his patriarch's distorted concept of piety and many of his followers for the last five hundred years have come to regard such paradoxical notions as being at the heart of the gospel. In recent times many academics have come to discern aspects of the misreading of Paul within their various traditions but now it must be systematically exposed so that suitably adept believers may review and verify the matter for themselves both from Scripture and the witness of the Ancient Church. Such popular scrutiny would have been impracticable before the advent of the internet. Just as the Reformation was facilitated by the printing press so may a reunion be attempted utilizing the technology of the current age. Regrettably, such a process cannot avoid being deeply perturbing as certain chickens come home to roost. For what has been said in the dark will be heard in the daylight; what has been whispered in hidden places will be proclaimed from the housetops. For whilst the outworking of Augustine's narrow, fatalistic soteriology may have become abhorrent to post-Conciliar Catholic ears, the scriptural interpretations that lay behind it are still evident in the Bible translations utilized by Catholics and in various references within their Catechism, and the man himself is still highly revered. The interrelationship between natural law and Christ's Passion has been obscured, the human spirit maligned and the Creator's beneficence defamed, largely through this Catholic Doctor's influence. Yet ironically his spectre hangs most heavily these days over those Christian denominations whose forebears chose to depart from the Church he had laboured so hard to protect from schism. For without controversy, it was Augustine's distinctive teaching on grace and law that formed the catalyst for "Reformed theology", whilst the gist of his reasoning regarding man's inability to think or do anything pleasing to God apart from gospel grace continues to hold sway for more traditional Evangelicals who continue to keep faith with the medieval Reformers' reading of Paul.

It has all gone according to plan

⁸⁷ 1Pet1:9-12

⁸⁸ Augustine - Anti-Pelagian writings "[On the spirit and letter](#)" chaps. 22 & 27

⁸⁹ Ezek18

It will have been in accordance with God's inscrutable plan that Augustine's intellect, matchless rhetoric⁹⁰, boundless energy and commitment to the Catholic cause combined to make him such a dominant figure in unifying the formation and systemizing the theology of the Western Church during the most formative period of her history. The erudition he possessed can be powerfully persuasive but sound theology being literally a study of God requires first and foremost a contemplative and experiential knowledge of the Subject whose very nature and name is Love, as those within Eastern Orthodoxy have better discerned. A Bible-based articulation of God's munificent providence should taste as sweet as honey in the mouth of every child of God, whilst in the gut there will be a bitterness and an urge to be rid of what had historically been understood concerning the harshness of God's justice and the limited nature of His salvific intentions⁹¹. The *true* scope of God's plan of loving goodness will redound even more to His glory, for it has been achieved in its entirety through the atoning death of the Son He adores, the length, breadth and height of whose love passes all knowledge.

As the Church grew and heresies abounded it became essential for doctrine to be systematized, a task in which Augustine contributed heavily, partly in view of his effective prosecution of the key heresies of the period. That is where certain principles especially relating to natural law became obscured as errors were imbedded; none directly affecting the Catholic Church's ability to fulfil its evangelical mission, "merely" its understanding of the fate of those she was unable to embrace, concerning whom Christ's saving work was deemed to have been ineffectual. Given the so-called Doctor of Grace's extraordinary impact and esteem throughout Western Christendom it is no wonder that only in the last fifty years has God's wider plan of reconciliation embracing those outside the Church been accepted by the Roman Church to the point of being formalized at the conciliar level. Various Catholic thinkers, most notably John Henry Newman were considering and actively debating these issues a hundred or more years earlier and no doubt many before that whose views the Vatican would not have permitted to see the light of day. It is necessary that the enlightened post-Conciliar teaching of the Church be demonstrably underpinned from Scripture if those to whom fidelity to the Book is paramount are to give the matter the consideration it requires.

No apologia

It should already be evident that this document is not primarily an apologia for the Roman Catholic Church, for she historically has much to apologize for: monolithic, tarnished yet

⁹⁰ Two years before his conversion Augustine had been appointed Professor of Rhetoric at the Imperial Court of Milan

⁹¹ Cf. Acts 10:34-35; Rev 10:10 - *koiolos* often translated as stomach is more likely to refer to the abdominal region (cf. Strong's Greek 2836)

enduring. If these findings are valid *all* traditions need to review their doctrines and some their own heritage if the Body of Christ as a whole is to be restored, renewed and reunited to form the Perfect Man for which Paul so longed⁹². A universal need to acknowledge error is actually a more propitious precondition for reunification than if one party or the other had to eat all the humble pie. It is why a conventional apologist with the support of his church could never be utilized to provide what is needed in the leadup to the Parousia. As is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet, *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight"*⁹³. The process must start with a broken spirit and a contrite heart as the various parties discern their own historical misconceptions which, resulting from spiritual wickedness in high places has led to a multiple severing of Christ's Body. Repentance is particularly relevant to Church leaders, for most Christians have simply been serving Christ in the way they were brought up to believe is right. Pastors and priests who seek to dissemble the facts or deceive their flock regarding current obstacles to unity must recognize they face the wrath of Christ. His self-declared wish and prayer is that His Mystical Body on earth be made whole at last⁹⁴, *not* that Christians determinedly defend the tradition into which they happened to have come to the faith. Such partisan apologists frustrate Christ's will and unwittingly do the devil's work, for Satan's dread is a re-united Church and the powerful witness such would provide to the world.

Apostasy foretold

Preaching on the Mount of Olives, Jesus as a Prophet in his own right drew upon the prophecies of Daniel regarding a sacral atrocity which God had revealed to Him would take place at some point before His return. This event is expressed in terms of the Temple, but as a result of the restructured timeline to enable elect from every nation to be brought into the messianic fellowship, certain prophetic promises have been deferred, such as the removal of the wicked from the earth, global peace, security for the Holy Land and universal acknowledgement of Christ's Kingship. These will instead be fulfilled after the Parousia. What was thwarted or not completed at the first coming would be repeated at the second, such as reconciling certain "parents and children"⁹⁵ in time for the Lord to come to realize His Kingdom *"to order it and establish it with judgement and justice"*⁹⁶. That is what John the Baptist believed he was preparing for with respect to Israel. In His sermon Jesus had drawn His hearer's attention to a prophecy in Daniel⁹⁷ which foretold that a man and his supporters would come to *"profane the sanctuary, abolish the perpetual sacrifice and*

⁹² Eph4:12-13

⁹³ Lk3:4

⁹⁴ Jn17:22-23

⁹⁵ Mal4:5-6; Lk1:17

⁹⁶ Is9:7

⁹⁷ Mt24:15

appoint the appalling abomination"⁹⁸. This was directly alluding to Antiochus Epiphanes, outlined in more detail in 1Maccabees¹. The deuterocanonical account, missing from Protestant Bibles, sets out how some renegade Jews collaborated with this evil prince, leading many others to abandon the Holy Covenant and live without the Law as Gentiles, effectively bringing about an apostasy. Antiochus and his men desecrated the Temple, removing the altar with its ornamental trimmings and libation vessels, and installed an idle (a statue of Zeus) in its place. But Jesus clearly had something else in mind, for Antiochus's activities were some two hundred years before Jesus' re-iteration of the prophecy concerning the abomination (or idol) that He said would in the future cause desolation by being appointed a place that was not intended for it (let the *reader* understand)⁹⁹ and would supplant the daily sacrifice¹⁰⁰. Jesus implied it related to an occurrence preceding the destruction of the temple but in view of Paul's new revelation, it would refer to an event in the Church, affirmed by the fact that it is contextually linked with the global distress (tribulations) and the second coming. Jesus' prophecy came very close to being realized in terms of the Temple in the early 40's when self-styled deity Emperor Caligula planned to place statues of himself in the sanctuary and dispatched an army under Governor Petronius to implement his plan, but the Jewish people managed to persuade the governor to countermand his Emperor who was assassinated shortly afterwards. Daniel's depiction does not align with any sacral issues leading up to the Temple's destruction in the 70AD siege of Jerusalem; apart from which, dreadful though the Jewish-Roman war was, it was eclipsed as recently as the last century by the Great War and Jewish Holocaust, and certainly did not threaten the continued existence of mankind¹⁰¹. So, most commentators recognize that the Daniel 12 prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70. It is said to be a sealed prophecy, the meaning of which would be hidden until the time of the end (v4). What we are also told in Daniel is this: "*From the time of the turning aside of the perpetual sacrifice*"¹⁰² and appointing the desolating abomination"¹⁰³ up to the time when the "***fragmentation of the authority of the holy people is over***"¹⁰⁴ will be a period of 1290 days (3.5 years or "times"). *Blessed will be*

⁹⁸ Dan11:31

⁹⁹ Mt24:15; Mk13:14: A unique asseveration; usually Jesus would say, "*He who has ears let him hear*". The comment is unlikely to have been added by the synoptic gospel writers to draw attention to their own text which itself would be an unparalleled occurrence within a gospel narrative. It was therefore Jesus' warning and He would appear to have had future readers of the Scriptures in mind.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Dan12:11

¹⁰¹ Cf. Dan12:1; Mt24:21-22

¹⁰² Daniel's "perpetual sacrifice" as understood to be referring to the Holy Eucharist affirmed in Hippolytus' "Fragment from Commentaries" ["On Daniel" 2nd fragment \(para 22\)](#)

¹⁰³ Dan12:11

¹⁰⁴ Dan12:7 refer to Hebrew text

those who persevere and attain a further 45 “days”¹⁰⁵ up to the resurrection¹⁰⁶. Let those with wisdom seek to interpret this in light of Church history, Paul’s teaching concerning the mystery of lawlessness¹⁰⁷, the unveiling of the Lawless One¹⁰⁸ and the popular defection¹⁰⁹ from the Church that must have occurred before the Day of Christ arrives.

Jesus’ references in His Olivet sermon to God’s people being ensnared and deceived by false prophets, resulting in mutual betrayal and hatred¹¹⁰ also refers to a religious hiatus or apostasy as distinct from the earthquakes and famines that are immediately to proceed the Parousia. In terms of the timing of the latter, Jesus provided a general guideline in form of a parable:

Take the fig tree as a parable: as soon as its twigs grow supple and its leaves come out you know that summer is near. So, with you when you see all these things, know that He is near right at the gates. In truth I tell you before this generation has passed away, all these things will have taken place¹¹¹.

By “these things”, Jesus is referring to the tribulation events He had outlined. By “this generation” He can only be referring to the ones observing and experiencing these events, which He will at that point have understood¹¹² to be the generation being addressed, particularly in view of His statement¹¹³ that some in the crowd would not taste death before they see the kingdom of God established. This is also indicated by His expectation that His followers in the last days “*will be handed over to the synagogues*”¹¹⁴ and that His own disciples “*would not have finished going through the towns of Israel*” *before the Son of Man returned in glory*¹¹⁵; also that some of the people who will be rejected for Kingdom inheritance would be able to plead “*but we ate and drank in your presence and You taught in our streets*”¹¹⁶. Jesus also intended to despatch prophets and scribes to the synagogues¹¹⁷ before His return. He had earlier instructed His listeners to “keep Torah”¹¹⁸ until heaven and

¹⁰⁵ Dan12:12

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Dan12:2

¹⁰⁷ Greek: *musterion anomias* 2Thes2:7

¹⁰⁸ Greek: *apokalupthesetai ho anomos* 2Thes2:8

¹⁰⁹ Greek: *apostasia* 2Thes2:3

¹¹⁰ Mt24:10-11

¹¹¹ Mt24:32-34

¹¹² Cf. Mk13:32 and Acts1:7

¹¹³ Lk9:27

¹¹⁴ Lk21:12

¹¹⁵ Mt10:23

¹¹⁶ Lk13:26

¹¹⁷ Mt23:34

¹¹⁸ Mt5:18

earth disappear, and those who failed to teach it in full would be least in the kingdom of the heavens. Likewise, He had instructed his followers *to continue to obey the Scribes and Pharisees* that taught the Torah because they “*occupied the seat of Moses*”¹¹⁹. Caveat: Jesus effectively confirmed the Scribes and Pharisees to be leaders within the true religion, but He was by no means enamoured with them or their institution; He would go on to replace it and them.

Jesus evidently did not regard Himself at this point as founding a new religion; rather He was encouraging a renewed and spiritual approach to being Jewish in preparation for the coming Kingdom. It should also be noted He was not saying the Jewish leaders were teaching a distorted works-orientated religion; for He said they were to be obeyed. His complaint against these leaders was their legalism regarding the externals of the Law, parts of which were mere human traditions whilst they neglected the heart of the Law which was devotion to God and love for neighbour¹²⁰ leading to social justice and enlightenment for the Gentiles. Jesus also knew them to be hypocrites, hence: do what they say, not what they do¹²¹. Finally, He said that those in Judaea should be ready to flee to the mountains to be delivered from the indignation to come¹²². All this together with the various verdicts to be awarded to the cities that had not responded to His call to repentance¹²³ must have been in the expectation of a reasonably imminent Judgement. It did not pan out in that way or in that sequence for the reason provided most clearly in Romans 11:11 concerning those from the Gentile nations being elected to the royal priesthood “to stir God’s chosen race to envy”, re-affirmed by the same apostle in the third chapter of Ephesians through the fellowship or administration pertaining to God’s secret plan hidden from the previous age. Preaching the gospel of the Kingdom to all nations as a witness to the coming Christ could have been undertaken within a generation; then the rest of the world would be sorted out (i.e. judged) at His coming in accordance with all Old Testament prophecy. The revised plan that had been hidden in the Father would take much longer, for now chosen members from every nation and each future generation would be drawn into God’s Household to be fitted for Kingdom service now and in the ages to come. Of course, the current age does not exist merely to recruit Gentiles to the Kingdom, it has been the age of discovery for the whole human race, *hence its longevity*. It is the period when she would engage in the pursuit of knowledge, gain an understanding of science and the universe, discover new medicines and develop ever more sophisticated means of transport and communication; knowledge and innovation that has progressed exponentially in the last century. This has all been working

¹¹⁹ Mt23:1-3

¹²⁰ Mt7:12

¹²¹ Mt23:3

¹²² Mt24:16-19

¹²³ Mt11:20-21

towards an end, which is not to prepare for global annihilation and a spiritualized eternity but for renaissance and resurrection. In the meantime, the Initiator of that regeneration has become the “long expected Jesus”, currently located where He needs to be to make intercession at the right hand of God for a people who are not only located in the holy city but throughout the world; for -

He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens¹²⁴.

Just as a universal gospel mission was prophesied to prepare those outside the Holy Land who were living at the time of the expected Jewish Messianic Kingdom, so would a *unified witness* be needed for the billions outside the Church in the generation that lives to experience Christ’s second coming; for which reason something radical must happen within Christendom, for a unified gospel message from the churches is currently an impossibility.

The Second Coming

Jesus describes His future return to earth as the renaissance or re-birth¹²⁵, Luke as the universal restoration¹²⁶ and the liberation¹²⁷, John as the millennium of Christ’s rule with His saints¹²⁸ and Paul as the restoration of the physical creation¹²⁹. Whilst Christ has already been raised far above all earthly and celestial authority, at His coming the world will be shown whose authority they are really under. Christ has defeated the devil and will one day subdue all earthly authority. But that cannot occur until He comes with His angels and saints. In the meantime, the darnel grows alongside the wheat. The earthly authorities will never universally take a lead from the Church in the current age: historical religious and cultural formation has seen to that.

A united witness to the world

And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world for a witness to all nations and then the end shall come¹³⁰

The focus of such a proclamation would be the Kingdom to be realized at Christ’s coming and how to be prepared for it. It is to be noted that whenever the disciples were sent out by

¹²⁴ Heb7:25-26

¹²⁵ Mt19:28

¹²⁶ Acts3:21

¹²⁷ Lk21:28

¹²⁸ Rev20:4-5

¹²⁹ Rom8:21

¹³⁰ Mt24:14

Jesus to preach “the gospel of the kingdom” during His earthly lifetime, they will not have made reference to their Lord’s impending death, not least because they were not expecting it nor had they any understanding of its purpose. That of course is not the case for the Church, yet it should be noted that in terms of Jesus’ own preaching, the only passage of substance in which He refers to His Passion and its purpose is in John chapter six. Here the Lord bemuses His Jewish hearers by speaking of Himself as the “bread that came down from heaven”, telling them that His flesh is in some sense food that is to be given for the life of the world (v51) and that only those who eat His flesh and drink His blood can experience spiritual life (v53), know His interior presence (v56) or attain to the first resurrection (v54). In other words, the entire focus of Christ’s teaching regarding His death, as was the case at the last supper with His disciples, was *in the context of the Eucharist*. So must a unified gospel witness to the world affirm the Eucharist to be central to the life of the Church and vital to the lives of Christ’s would-be disciples if they are “*to be accounted worthy of that age*”¹³¹, being the realization of the Kingdom of Christ within a re-united heaven and earth.

The “Elijah” to come

*Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse*¹³²

What has already been disclosed impacts upon prophecies concerning the “Elijah” who was to prepare the people of God for final judgement as Malachi affirms above. Many today are confused about the matter, as were Jesus’ first disciples:

*And the disciples put this question to (Jesus), “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? He replied: “Elijah is indeed coming, and **he will set everything right again.** However, I tell you that Elijah has come already and they did not recognize him but treated him as they pleased, and the Son of Man will suffer similarly at their hands. Then the disciples understood He was referring to John the Baptist*¹³³

Old Testament prophecy envisaged a prophet coming with the authority of Elijah to restore everything so that Israel might be ready to receive their promised Christ, who would exercise judgement, eradicate wickedness from the world and initiate the Kingdom of God within it. Through the prophetically unexpected turn of events, various aspects of these prophecies have been deferred. Although Jesus has already done everything necessary to accomplish it, creation will not be restored until the conclusion of the current age¹³⁴. The

¹³¹ Lk20:35

¹³² Mal4:5-6

¹³³ Mt17:10-13

¹³⁴ Acts3:21; Rom8:21-22

same terminology (*apokatastasis panta*) is utilized to describe Jesus' universal mission and Elijah's ecclesiological mission: Jesus affirms that "Elijah" will restore all things (*apokatastesai* -future verb) and Luke affirms that Jesus will appear at the time of the restoration of all things (*apokatastaseos* - genitive noun). Clearly their respective tasks differ vastly in scope and majesty: the one is to prepare a people, the other has provided in Himself the means for the salvation of all true humanity. Both missions were expected to be fully restorative within their respective spheres of operation. But in what sense did John the Baptist sort everything out or set everything right again? Jesus' assurances concerning restoration through a coming Elijah was made *after John had been beheaded*. In responding to the query from His disciples He had said "*Elijah is indeed coming to restore everything but if you are **willing to receive**, then (John) is the 'Elijah to come'*"¹³⁵. But the Jewish nation was *not* willing to receive either 'Elijah' or Jesus; the bride was not ready for her Husband. The friend of the Bridegroom was unable to prepare the way of the Lord and a make a path straight for Him. The Lord's path proved to be anything but straight, more especially in His dealings with the religious establishment. Through no fault of the prophet who received the greatest commendation from the One he heralded, John had been unable to get very far with the comprehensive commission that had been outlined for him in the subsidiary annunciation; for even the messenger was intended to be a cause of joy to many¹³⁶. The Jewish religious authorities who humanly speaking were the nub of the problem wouldn't accept John's baptism; the Temple establishment rejected his teaching; then he was decapitated by order of the king of the Jews. Would anyone seriously believe Jesus' assessment to be that the Jewish race and its state of religion had been "restored" and "put to rights" through the truncated ministry of John the Baptist? If the answer is in the negative, then according to Matthew chapter seventeen and verse eleven, Elijah had yet to come; particularly as world judgement, the restoration of creation and full realization of God's Kingdom has still to be implemented.

In terms of how the prophet himself regarded the matter:

*They asked (John): "Then are you Elijah?" He replied, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered "No".*¹³⁷

But whether he had regarded himself as Elijah or not, John had come with his authority because Jesus had affirmed as much, although he never got around to invoking Elijah's awesome powers. Part of such a mission was to prepare God's people for judgement but that didn't prove to be necessary in any literal or final sense in John's day. Yet in Matthew 11:10, Jesus quoted from Malachi confirming that John was sent with the intention of

¹³⁵ Mt11:14

¹³⁶ Lk1:14-17

¹³⁷ Jn1:21

clearing the path for the One who was coming to sit as a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap to purge the sons of Levi¹³⁸. By now it should be evident why such prophecies have been subverted. Referring back to the testimonies of the very earliest Fathers, Clement (AD30-100) who had been personally acquainted with Paul¹³⁹ understood the Malachi prophecy to be relating to Christ's second advent¹⁴⁰; likewise, Justin Martyr confirmed that he envisaged another Elijah would herald it¹⁴¹.

Preparing the world

In preparing the World for such events, the Church calls people to repentance and allegiance to the coming King through incorporation into the assembly that already acknowledges Him as such. But many in the churches themselves need to be "brought to the good sense of the upright"¹⁴² as prescribed in the gospels by the Baptist, the Messiah and JHWE before them: *"Learn to do good, seek justice, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow: 'come now and let us reason together', says JHWE; though your sins be as scarlet they shall become as white as snow"*¹⁴³. Likewise, the Baptist prophet, believing the Kingdom and final judgement to be at hand, whilst calling people to receive forgiveness through baptism insisted they must then go on to pursue righteousness, the fruit of repentance: share their food and raiment with the needy; be honest in business and be content with their wages¹⁴⁴. Clearly, Jesus had been more than content with John's preaching¹⁴⁵ and was later delighted with tax collector Zacchaeus when he declared he would pay back those he had swindled: *"Today salvation has come to this house"*¹⁴⁶. Should anyone remain in doubt, such is the nature of repentance.

The ingenious heresy

Taking the teaching of Jesus and John the Baptist at face value will appear facile to many who believe the Saviour's teaching was primarily to show His listeners the impossibility of meeting God's requirements for righteousness. In the Reformers' case it resulted from a misunderstanding of Pauline polemics to be outlined shortly. The ingenuity of such heresy and the reason it has so long persisted is that any attempt to challenge it appears to be an

¹³⁸ Mal3:1-5

¹³⁹ Phil4:3

¹⁴⁰ [First epistle of Clement chap. 23](#)

¹⁴¹ [Justin Martyr dialogue with Trypho chap. 49](#) (ignore editors' heading – read text which entirely contradicts it)

¹⁴² Lk1:17

¹⁴³ Is1:17-18

¹⁴⁴ Lk3:10-14

¹⁴⁵ Mt11:11

¹⁴⁶ Lk19:8-10

act of human pride: the elevation of man and the diminishment of God's grace. But that is a misconception, for anything that is good about man is thanks to His Creator's benevolence, whether it be through a response to the Gospel or via natural precepts and the fact that man's spirit is created in God's image before being planted into a morally disordered procreated intellectual vessel at the commencement of life. Whilst that earthen vessel's control centre or brain is procreated, the faculties pertaining to man's spiritual component being the part of us that survives physical death are from God, resulting in opposing laws governing flesh and spirit within the human psyche (cf. Rom7:23; Eccles12:7). Rejecting such a hypothesis implies *either* that the human testicles/ovaries are capable of producing what is spiritual and eternal *or* that God through Christ directly creates and plants within man a spiritual entity polluted by sin, hateful towards its Creator and deserving of eternal torment from its conception. Paul's "body of this death" resolves the matter, indicating man's moral and spiritual predicament to be temporal¹⁴⁷, as more explicitly does Peter¹⁴⁸. A sinful nature cannot and does not derive from what God has directly provided to man but from the intellectual vessel procreated from our first parents that the God-given soul/spirit currently inhabits. Whilst the devil's desire is to darken man's mind, the Creator's wish has always been to enlighten man - for the benefit of human society, the creative order set under man and the wellbeing of his own soul, and such He does through the Christ-enlightened human spirit¹⁴⁹.

Building on the theological distinctives of Augustine, the Reformers believed that Adam's disobedience resulted in such a triumph for Satan at Eden that what was intended to be the pinnacle of God's creation instantly mutated to the point of becoming innately incapable of escaping eternal punishment at its Creator's hands. On the contrary, the Godhead shall ultimately be worshipped and adored even by the vast majority who are not the saints of God when the One who obtained their pardon comes to be glorified in those who are¹⁵⁰. That will demonstrate the multifarious yet equitable way the God of grace exercises His favour and shows kindness to all who are willing to receive it.

The context of the gospel

Within the apostolic writings the gospel is hardly ever expressed in terms of being the means to get to heaven for that it is not what the gospel, church or sacraments are for. They pertain respectively to the calling, assembling and sanctifying of a people that the Bible

¹⁴⁷ I.e. "the body of this death" unlike the soul pertains to a temporary feature of a person's journey through eternity although its corrosive impact upon the soul can have more enduring consequences (chapter 3)

¹⁴⁸ 1Pet4:6

¹⁴⁹ Jn1:9 (King James Version)

¹⁵⁰ 2Thes1:10

makes clear is a relatively small minority, elected through unmerited grace to become kith, kin and consort to the Lord of Glory¹⁵¹. Matthew's reference to the Kingdom of heaven is synonymous with the Kingdom of God and is not referring to the place spirits go after death. Whilst the soul/spirit when separated from the body by death does go to heaven and some elsewhere, avoiding perdition is not a matter that has ever required special revelation or religious practice but pertains to natural law being intuitive for those having been made in God's own image. For God is and always has been concerned for the eternal wellbeing of *all* true humanity, not just the men and women He has chosen to partner His Son¹⁵². Christians have been called out *from* the world to be a special blessing *to* the world. The fact that many who remain outside the Church or have no religious faith at all are not doomed to eternal misery is something the Catholic Church has only clearly articulated since the mid-twentieth century¹⁵³, whilst Evangelicals' primary concern when presenting the gospel has consistently been to affirm that *all* human salvation is dependent upon Jesus Christ and His atoning death. That incontrovertible truth shall now be *re-affirmed*, albeit within the context of the broader benign providence being outlined.

All human salvation achieved through Christ's Passion

Whilst it would be perverse to regard an instrument of torture as a theological end in itself, the cross is a vital means to an end; that end being glory¹⁵⁴. The Atonement is central to Christian soteriology, not just for the benefit of specific individuals but "*for the life of the world*"¹⁵⁵. Yet it is only those who in some meaningful sense partake of the Victim's flesh and blood that experience its full benefits in the present: "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no Life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood **has** Life of an eternal quality, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me **will live because of Me***". God's plan to restore the world and its inhabitants from the damage of the Fall is entirely dependent upon the Passion of Christ. But as will be shown in chapter seven, those who partake of His body and blood and daily take up their own cross are not merely to be restored to a state of Adamic innocence but perfected for future service and glory in a way that could not have occurred had the events that *led* to the cross not come to pass. That had been the introduction of evil to the world through the permission granted to Satan to test humankind in her primeval infancy. And having failed that test God's seemingly

¹⁵¹ Heb2:10-11

¹⁵² Jn17:6

¹⁵³ Vatican II Lumen Gentium 16

¹⁵⁴ Cf. 1Pet5:10; Heb2:10

¹⁵⁵ Jn6:51

inscrutable decision to utilize our disobedient first parents as the sin-polluted procreative fountain source for future humanity. As will be shown, the resultant suffering, division and ongoing struggle with Evil is no accident but a providential necessity. Christ as human creation's firstborn, in the sense of her representative/leader¹⁵⁶, epitomized such suffering and He did so on the cross; hence Paul's emphasis:

*God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world*¹⁵⁷

Paul could have gloried in his own labour and suffering for the gospel – but he knew it was nothing compared to the munificent sacrifice and undeserved suffering on the part of the Word Incarnate, needed to remedy Satan's treachery and our first parents' disobedience. For as Eastern Orthodox Christians are keen to emphasize, the cross defeated the devil and his hold over death. In fact, that is the sacred Victim's most direct reference to the matter¹⁵⁸; but in view of Paul's revelations the full fruits of that aspect of God's victory at Calvary have been deferred.

The historical reality is that much of human creation has not had the opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom faithfully rendered, particularly as for the last 500 years about a third of the Church has had a substantially different rendering concerning what is required for Christian salvation than the rest. Given that God our Saviour "*will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth*"¹⁵⁹, it is inconceivable He would permit such a situation if avoiding perdition were dependent on a particular understanding of "justification by faith" or whether one has the understanding or more likely the cultural background to receive the sacraments of the Roman or Greek Church. That is not how the perfect justice of God operates, being impartial yet merciful and generous towards all. The next chapter will examine in more detail the biblical account of the incident at Eden that demanded such a drastic remedy, its effect upon the human condition, and how and to whom the fruits of the Passion are applied.

¹⁵⁶ Col1:15

¹⁵⁷ Gal6:14

¹⁵⁸ Jn12:31

¹⁵⁹ 1Tim2:4

CHAPTER TWO

The Lost Covenant

Christians and the Jewish nation before them are members of *exclusive* covenants evidenced at their inauguration when Abraham's own beloved circumcised son Ishmael was excluded together with his offspring¹⁶⁰. Yet Paul will have been aware of an inclusive covenant to which God was being faithful by which the likes of Ishmael and the righteous before him had been accepted on the basis of their "faith" through the merits of Christ's faithfulness. This Universal Covenant of life is more explicitly referred to in the fourth chapter of Genesis to be considered in more detail in chapter six in the context of those who default from it; for it is a key to understanding the mystery of evil. Prior to "the Fall", a short-lived implicit covenant was in place relating to God's instruction to our first parents to make free use of all that had been provided for them in the Garden of Eden but not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is referred to by some as the "Covenant of Works" but really it is also a Covenant of Faith, for acceptance with God has never been on the basis of attaining a standard of worked merit but of the obedience of faith and remaining faithful. Justification will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter but basically it consists of demonstrating that one is a valid participating member of a covenantal community such as the Church, or indeed the redeemable human race that benefits from the Atonement in the context of the eluded covenant being considered.

Covenantal Membership

Everyone in God's covenants *enters* them by grace alone, i.e. divine favour and generosity not dependant on merit. Unmerited grace clearly applied to a Jewish baby born within the Abrahamic Covenant; equally to the Christian baby baptized by the Church and incorporated within the Covenant of Christ's blood; likewise to the adult convert *given* faith to apprehend Christ¹⁶¹ and receive Christian baptism; and the human baby, starting with Cain as the world's first infant, freely incorporated within the Universal Covenant of life through the two-way age-enduring merits of Christ's righteous act that universally nullifies Adam's act of disobedience¹⁶². The issue then becomes how one retains the benefits of that covenant as opposed to defaulting. The answer is faith or faithfulness [same word in biblical Greek] evidenced by fruit. The Jew who turned from JHWE to idolatry defaults his covenantal privileges; those in Christ who fail to produce fruit may remain in the Church but will not participate in the marriage of the Lamb, for every branch *in Christ* that fails to bear fruit will

¹⁶⁰ Gen21:8-20

¹⁶¹ Eph2:8

¹⁶² Rom5:18

be removed¹⁶³; members of the human race who fail to produce any fruit in the form of compassionate love (*agape*) like Cain and the Matthew 25 “goats” remain on earth but become alienated from God’s loving care; they have a new master to look after their interests, and at least as far ahead as Scripture permits us to foresee will not be incorporated within God’s eternal Kingdom but will receive post-mortem punishment¹⁶⁴.

Cain, Abel and what God required of them

The following verse from Genesis is unquestionably covenantal in form, though most theologians for the last two thousand years have chosen not to regard it as such:

*If thou (Cain) doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, Sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him*¹⁶⁵

“Will you not be accepted?” could equally be translated “will your countenance not be lifted?” which is utilized by some versions of the Bible. The King James Version quoted above rightly understands “sin” to be referring to a person (the Sinful One), for he is lying or crouching (Hebrew: *rabats*) at the door and has a desire to control Cain. Sin *per se* could hardly be at the door in Cain’s case, it’s already in Cain’s heart and about to wreak havoc. Cain is described elsewhere as “of the evil one”, confirming that the Sinful One was indeed at the portal of his soul and was able to master Cain and thereby control him, in fact own him¹⁶⁶. From the human perspective, that would not have been so if Cain had responded differently to the challenge JHWE presented to him in Gen4:7, so the verse effectively reflects a Universal Covenant for fallen humanity; for Abel was fallen but he was accepted. The focus of the Cain and Abel story which is drawn upon in the New Testament is not concerning Abel’s salvation but Cain’s reprobation (rejection), indicated by the vital yet typically glossed references to “this day” and “now” regarding the elder brother’s fate. The day he killed his brother he was cursed and entirely alienated from God and not before that day. When God told Cain to “do well”, He was not seeking perfection but to do what the young man intuitively knew to be right: offer like Abel the first fruits of his crop and certainly not go on to slaughter his innocent brother in cold blood. For no one is born devoid of at least one “talent” (the light of reason and a sense of justice) but some choose to bury it in the ground and they will be condemned¹⁶⁷. Cain, an agricultural farmer was not expected to steal from his livestock farmer brother Abel to sacrifice an animal in offering for his sin, as some translations imply (e.g. Young’s Literal). Comparing Scripture with Scripture we see that Cain and his sacrifice were not accepted because his works were evil whilst his

¹⁶³ Cf. Jn15:2

¹⁶⁴ Mt25:45-46

¹⁶⁵ Gen4:7 King James Version

¹⁶⁶ 1Jn3:12

¹⁶⁷ Mt25:14-29

brother's works were righteous¹⁶⁸. That was because the one exercised faith and the other didn't, for one was a child of God, the other as confirmed in later Scripture was or had become satanic. As second century Irenaeus had expressed the matter in this context: *"It is the conscience of the offeror that sanctifies the sacrifice when (the conscience) is pure and thus moves God to accept the sacrifice as from a friend"*¹⁶⁹. Abel showed by his works and a good conscience that he had "faith" so was justified by that faith with reference to works (offering the best of his flock). Through the faithfulness of Christ (*ek pisteos christou*)¹⁷⁰, which some more recent theologians and Bible translators recognize needs to be distinguished from cognisant faith in Christ (*pisteos en Christo*)¹⁷¹, expiation has been provided for the faults arising from human weakness for those who themselves seek to be faithful to God¹⁷². The understanding of some that Cain and Abel were expected to anticipate a future Sacrifice for sin by killing an animal is unsustainable; cultic sacrifices were not clearly established as a religious system until the Law of Moses. Paul, James and the writer to the Hebrews make it clear why Abraham had been counted as righteous, being a belief in the God he had encountered evidenced by obedience, in his case that he would be rewarded with a great family¹⁷³. No one in the Old Testament is declared to be justified on the basis of offering an animal sacrifice, so Abel cannot be an exception. Abel exercised faith and produced fruit in the form of good works. Abel didn't "get saved", he remained accepted (justified) and was acknowledged as righteous within the Universal Covenant; Cain reprobated (became rejected) and was brand-marked for Satan, and as a warning to those who would cross him, but that was not at the point he failed to offer his first-fruit in sacrifice, for although God was not pleased with his offering, He still held out an olive branch. Rather he was called to account immediately he had killed his brother. The issue was never the brothers' religious observance *per se* for as always God delights in compassion more than religious offerings as Jesus Himself affirmed¹⁷⁴.

The Fall and the Flood

Along with what occurred at Eden, account needs to be taken of a related cosmic drama cryptically referred to in Genesis 6:1-2 which impacted upon humanity, but as with the elusive Universal Covenant, in accordance with God's stratagem of progressive revelation it has not been taught or generally understood by the churches, even though the earliest

¹⁶⁸ 1Jn3:12

¹⁶⁹ [Irenaeus against heresies book IV chap. 18 \(3\)](#)

¹⁷⁰ E.g. Rom3:22; Gal2:16; Gal3:22

¹⁷¹ E.g. Gal3:26

¹⁷² Cf. Rom1:17 Faith applied to faith

¹⁷³ Gen15:5

¹⁷⁴ Mt9:13

Fathers refer to it¹⁷⁵. Once clarified, our loving God's decision to flood the earth, obliterate Sodom and Gomorrah and annihilate the men, women *and children* of the Canaanite territories will be better understood, indeed perceived to be essential. It is necessary to refer to the extra-biblical Book of Enoch as it throws considerable light on Gen6:1-2 and matters concerning judgement and the age to come. In recent times fragments of copies were found amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is literature that was regarded as inspired and a genuine work of the patriarch by early Church Fathers such as Clement, Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine and Tertullian since it is directly quoted in the New Testament¹⁷⁶. Tertullian specifically regarded Enoch as falling within the remit of 2Tim3:16 concerning "all Scripture" being inspired and useful. He believed the book had been rejected from the Jewish canon because it contained this prophecy pertaining to Christ:

*And there was great joy amongst them and they blessed and glorified and extolled because the name of **that Son of Man** had been revealed to them. And He sat on the throne of His glory and the sum of judgement was given to the Son of Man and He caused the sinners to pass away and be destroyed from off the face of the earth, and those who have led the world astray¹⁷⁷*

But the more salient reason Enoch was excluded from the Old Testament canon, apart from that formulated by the Coptic Orthodox Church, was because of an unacceptable degree of variation in the manuscript copies available to the early Church councils that determined the composition of the biblical canon. Apart from being directly quoted in the Bible, this Scripture clarifies some otherwise obscure verses which themselves are quite important and cannot be properly understood by comparing canonical Scripture with Scripture. None more so than the opening of Genesis 6, vital to a rounded understanding of God's nature and *modus operandi*, together with the respective culpability of the human and celestial agencies that contributed to the Fall and the Flood. The latter was another reason it was more conclusively rejected by the later Fathers who believed it did not place sufficient emphasis on man's culpability for those cosmic disasters especially having endorsed Augustine's austere take on the matter. It also contains certain prophecies regarding the Mystery of God¹⁷⁸ being outlined in this document that would not have remained such a mystery had the book been received within the canon and historically focused upon within the Church.

¹⁷⁵ E.g. [2nd Apology of Justin Martyr \(AD110-165\) – chap. 5](#); Transgression of angels & Irenaeus against heresies [Book IV chap. 36 \(4\)](#)

¹⁷⁶ Jud1:14-15

¹⁷⁷ Enoch (Charles version) chap LXIX vv26-27 <http://qbible.com/enoch/68.html>

¹⁷⁸ Rev10:7

Enoch's exclusion from the biblical canon will have been in accordance with God's will, for if we do not accept that the early Church councils were infallibly guided in determining which of the alleged "gospels", "epistles" and "revelations" were genuine then we cannot trust the Holy Scriptures at all. Researchers into the matter will note that an agreed canon was not properly settled until the late fourth century, and for some time thereafter very few Christians would possess a Bible, for before the invention of the printing press the complete manuscripts would have been rare and extortionately expensive. Much later the Protestant Reformers relegated seven books classified as deuterocanonical having been included in the Septuagint but not the Hebrew Bible; these have subsequently disappeared from most Protestant Bibles. Yet some of these books are referenced in New Testament Scripture and many were utilized as proof-texts in the writings of the Early Fathers.

There is another reason to believe Enoch was not intended for the Church throughout its history yet is Scripture intended for the *final generation of Christians* – that is the very opening verse:

*The words of the blessing of Enoch, wherewith he blessed the elect and the righteous **who will be living in the day of tribulation** when all the wicked and godless are to be removed*¹⁷⁹

And at the end of Enoch there is a prophecy concerning the book itself and other books:

*But when they write down truthfully all my words in their languages, and do not change or remove anything from my words but write them all down truthfully – all that I first testified concerning them; then I know **another mystery**, that books will be given to the righteous and the wise to become a cause of joy and uprightness and much wisdom. And to them shall the books be **given**, and they shall believe in them and rejoice over them, and then shall all the righteous who have learnt from them the ways of uprightness be recompensed*¹⁸⁰

The idea of books or scrolls being made widely available for distribution is a concept nowhere to be found in the canon of Scripture and was beyond human envisaging before the invention of the printing press. It cannot be referring to the propagation of the Protestant Bible in the Middle Ages, for the Reformers like the Catholic Church did not regard Enoch as canonical, apart from which Enoch's prophecy pertains to the generation living at the time "*when the wicked are to be removed from the earth*" (opening verse). For there will be something quite unique about that final generation: unlike all Christians who have gone before them, they will not have visited Headquarters before the Lord comes to realize His Kingdom. As Peter indicates in his epistle¹⁸¹, those who have died will have had

¹⁷⁹ Enoch1:1 <https://sacred-texts.com/bib/boe/boe004.htm>

¹⁸⁰ Enoch104 vv11-13 [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_\(Charles\)/Chapter_104](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_(Charles)/Chapter_104)

¹⁸¹ 1Pet4:6

the opportunity to be acquainted and prepared for the next age whilst in heaven; not so those alive at His coming.

In terms of the Genesis story, the ultra-metaphorical reading employed by Augustine and many others has resulted in some essential principles and events being glossed. Clearly, he and his contemporaries were right to recognize that the creation story as presented in the Pentateuch was not intended to be a scientific account of the various creative processes, but when the Lord tells Cain “**Now you are cursed**” and Cain replies “**from this day I will be hidden from your face**”¹⁸², that has a theological significance which has been quite eluded. Christians affirm that human history has been tainted by the disobedience committed as an act of free will by Cain and Abel’s parents against their Creator; but there has been a tendency to understate the influence of the third player in this catastrophe, for Satan (the serpent) was its instigator rather than Eve¹⁸³ and this is reflected in the punishments. These are radically different in degree once the prepared remedy is applied, for it benefits the one guilty party at the expense of the other. The eternal Word’s incarnation as a man and His death on the cross would bring about the ultimate destruction of the one guilty party, whilst for the other it would result in forgiveness, salvation and ultimate theosis¹⁸⁴.

Having created what we now know to be a staggeringly immense universe, the Lord through His Spirit prepared this pinprick within space we call earth to receive life. But not just any life; for He had determined to initiate within this perfectly suited physical environment a relationship with beings created to be both physical and spiritual in makeup; made according to His nature so that they themselves could come to share in His divinity¹⁸⁵ and support His activity by subduing the earth. From the outset, man was to act as God’s vice-regent, overseeing and caring for all that had been created on earth. Provided with an equal yet complementing helpmate, Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it. The garden is presented as containing all the trees required for this first couple’s eternal sustenance. It also contained a tree with the ability to give them knowledge of good and evil, intended for their future participation in the divine life¹⁸⁶. Meanwhile they were forbidden to touch it; but having been tempted by the devil to do so, these two children of God who were created innocent yet pliant disobeyed their Father and immediately lost their original state of righteousness. At that very moment they “died” just as foretold¹⁸⁷. That death pertained to their relationship with God, whilst what had been a perfectly complementing union between man and woman became subject to tensions and marked by

¹⁸² Gen4:14

¹⁸³ 1Tim2:14-15 (verse 15 will make more sense once this document as a whole has been understood)

¹⁸⁴ Union with the Godhead

¹⁸⁵ Cf. 2Pet1:4

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Gen3:22

¹⁸⁷ Gen2:17

lust and domination. In terms of their morality, their demise had the effect of weakening the soul's ability to master the latent tendencies of the body, for through a modification of the brain, the latter became subjugated to the pleasures of the senses, covetousness for material goods and ostentatious pride. This is a triple concupiscence pertaining to "worldliness" as summed up by John:

*All that is in the world: the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the ostentation of life is not of the Father but of the world*¹⁸⁸

Through Satan's treachery and our first parents' disobedience, man together with the whole visible creation became subject to physical decay and death, and by procreation the human body became a corrupting influence on the spirit that temporarily inhabits it; what Paul and Peter refer to as our earthly tent¹⁸⁹ or vessel¹⁹⁰. However, just a few chapters into Genesis and already some traditional theological assumptions need to be challenged. Firstly, it is erroneous to intimate that the Fall led to "death of the human soul", for that implies that the whole person including the human's spirit had become alienated from God and no longer has any effectual enlightenment or spiritual capacity. The historical error of mainstream Christian theology since its systemization in Late Antiquity has been a failure to distinguish between disobedient Adam and his psychopathic eldest son. That was not the case amongst the earliest Fathers such as Irenaeus¹⁹¹ and Origen¹⁹² who classified fallen Adam with righteous Abel not Cain. Adam was the first man to be created; Cain the first to be born of woman; the one was the federal head of humanity and the progenitor of "the body of this death", the other was the type of the damned, being those who through an act of free will *leave the intuitive path of sound reason and deference to God's still small voice speaking through the conscience "to walk in the way of darkness, and rejoice in evil and delight in the waywardness of the wicked, whose ways are perverse and devious"*¹⁹³. Sound reason, even the spiritual faculty of conscience will not instruct a man how to be a disciple of Christ - His demands go well beyond such faculties and require special revelation, spiritual empowerment and the means of sanctifying grace. But innate human reason, informed by conscience *is* effectual and normative regarding what is to be pursued and what is to be avoided in the cause of *being humane*, and that is the basis upon which everyman is judged, being without excuse if he has opposed and rejected the light that he has received¹⁹⁴. Cain did just that, killing his innocent brother in cold blood and so was cursed, whilst Adam had

¹⁸⁸ 1Jn2:16

¹⁸⁹ 2Cor5:1; 2Pet1:13-14

¹⁹⁰ 1Thes4:4

¹⁹¹ [Irenaeus against heresies Book III chap. 23 \(5\)](#)

¹⁹² [Origen de Principiis Preface \(4\)](#)

¹⁹³ Prov2:13-15

¹⁹⁴ Mt25:31-46

never received such a curse. Cain became alienated from such light, Adam did not; Cain came under Satan's mastery, Adam did not; Cain was a plant of the devil, Adam a lost child of God; Adam was dead in trespasses and sins, Cain *twice* dead and pulled up by the roots¹⁹⁵. Adam experienced a moral dichotomy between the impulses of spirit and flesh¹⁹⁶; Cain did not - both components being "dead" in his case. Adam typified those on a long and arduous path to theosis; Cain to those who become the children of hell¹⁹⁷. The understanding has been that Abel was the first man to be saved; the reality is his brother was the first man to be damned, the latter also acknowledged by the earliest Christian writers. Nor would such an affirmation of man's innate ability to walk uprightly, attend to morals or observe sound reason have appeared heretical to them, for they recognized that such is quite distinguishable from being soul-healed and raised to eternal life through an interior communion with Christ¹⁹⁸, which is what the Bible actually means by "being saved".

Why the Universal Covenant has been eluded

Theologians cannot rely on a single passage in Genesis but must compare Scripture with Scripture, and the concept of a Universal Covenant for fallen humanity implicit in the Cain and Abel story (explicit utilizing the Masoretic text) does not fit well with much else as it has been historically and universally interpreted ever since Christian doctrine was systematized. Moreover, the Greek Septuagint (LXX) renders the key verse about God's warning to Cain differently and that is the version to which most of the apostles and the early Church referred. The Hebrew (Masoretic Text) is no less reliable but it was not utilized by the apostolic Church, the Greek language being *lingua franca* for the Roman Empire and therefore the Greco-Roman Church. It is therefore no surprise that the apostles do not make direct reference to Gen4:7 in this context whilst the early Fathers always quote from the LXX, which refers to Cain's incorrect division of his offering and that he should "be at peace and rule over him"; the "him" presumably referring to the devil. Such obscurity will have been an intentional veiling on God's part regarding an understanding of a Universal Covenant, yet it is not dependant on this verse alone but can be deduced from Cain's punishment and curse in which he became excluded from the nature of the relationship with God that his brother, his fallen parents and Cain himself experienced before the fratricide¹⁹⁹. But the principle reason for what in a dual sense²⁰⁰ might be termed the Lost Covenant concerns the nature of the Bible itself. This divinely inspired library of books was

¹⁹⁵ Jud1:12

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Rom7:23

¹⁹⁷ Mt23:15

¹⁹⁸ Col1:27; 1Jn3:2

¹⁹⁹ Gen4:11-14

²⁰⁰ It has itself been lost or theologically eluded and it *concerns* "the lost" being the bulk of humanity and their individual acceptance or rejection in the eyes of God

never intended to be a comprehensive account of God's creation, for example relatively little is disclosed about the angelic realm from which evil had sprung and with which mankind will one day participate; rather Scripture's focus is the salvation history for the world centred on Christ and His peculiar peoples (the Jewish nation and the Church). Hence Abraham is a vastly more significant figure than Abel; both were representatives within covenants, but Abraham initiated the exclusive covenant by which God would work from within through an elect people to enlighten and reconcile the world to Himself. The inclusive covenant in which Abel was declared to be righteous and Cain defaulted does not have a direct role in that salvation story, firstly because it pertains to that which is intuitive, so is not dependant on special revelation, and secondly because individuals are not "saved" through it, i.e. they are not cleansed from sin and spiritually empowered to maintain in life the integrity of the intellectual vessel the soul currently inhabits²⁰¹. The Universal Covenant determines a person's post-mortem fate, but also prior to that his involvement or otherwise with Satan as an agent within God's mysterious providential role for evil (chapter six). That is why the *type* of those rejected from it being Cain was brand-marked and protected rather than destroyed. These issues are, as it were, the unilluminated side of the revelation globe, pertaining to the final Mystery of God.

As a consequence, biblical theologians have for ever been attempting to fit three square pegs (soteriological categories) into two round holes (soteriological outcomes); hence the numerous, seemingly intractable tensions in Scripture typified by the "narrow way" leading to life that few will attain on the one hand and frequent intimations, not least by Paul, of God's broader scale intentions to reconcile all redeemable humanity to Himself on the other. It is also to be observed that Adam had *three* sons as did our postdiluvian Patriarch Noah, and from these have sprung all humanity: Adam's son Seth and Noah's son Shem represent the elect line; Adam's son Abel and Noah's son Japheth the "righteous" within the Universal Covenant whilst Adam's son Cain and Noah's son Ham were the accursed defaulters albeit that only one of Ham's sons was cursed (Canaan) as Ham had already received a blessing²⁰². Once we arrive at the Abrahamic Covenant, Isaac represents the elect line resulting in Israel whilst Abraham's other son Ishmael who was also blessed by God²⁰³ and remained in His favour and care²⁰⁴ was not elected to the exclusive Covenant of Promise. Yet such as he, representing the vast majority of humanity, remain within the inclusive Covenant of life from which Cain defaulted provided they do not follow in his way²⁰⁵. Such multi-dimensional effectual grace (innate and celestial) can only be

²⁰¹ 1Thes4:4

²⁰² Gen9:1

²⁰³ Gen17:20

²⁰⁴ Gen21:20

²⁰⁵ Jud1:11

distinguished and systemized within a sacramental and synergetic soteriological framework so it is no wonder that such a schema has yet to be established, for on the one hand it undermines some early (fourth/fifth century) Catholic biblical theological groundwork whilst on the other is incompatible with the Protestant conviction of total depravity, *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. The Reformed concept of “common grace” is not linked to the Atonement, does not pertain to the individual and is deemed ineffectual for forgiveness or the avoidance of perdition. Since Vatican II through the Spirit’s prompting the Catholic Church *has* effectively acknowledged a third soteriological category being the “people of good will” who do not find their way into the Church but will ultimately be accepted into God’s eternal Kingdom. What has been lacking for the last fifty years from the Catholic side is a workable biblical underpinning for such a proposition, for that cannot be provided without substantial doctrinal deconstruction involving contradicting earlier conciliar pronouncements that the Church deems to be immutable.

Even if the Genesis account of the Fall is taken allegorically one must take stock of the events and what they are intended to symbolize given that all the key players in the saga are often referred to in New Testament writing. Augustine’s analysis of our first parent’s disobedience and its consequences failed to distinguish between Adam and Cain’s transgression and their respective punishments, nor did it take on board the extenuations indicated in the Book of Enoch (expanding on Gen6:1,2) in spite of the fact that along with many of his contemporaries he had regarded it as genuine and inspired writing.

The origin of the soul

A creationist understanding of the soul’s origin²⁰⁶ maintains that each person’s soul/spirit, i.e. that which is separated from the body at death, is created immediately by God and planted into the embryo procreated by the parents. Such has been the prevalent view within Eastern Orthodoxy and is also the official teaching of the Roman Church²⁰⁷ albeit Augustine had wavered from it. Through original sin, the divinely created spirit finds itself within a morally sickly environment, or expressed another way is required to operate through an impure medium - the procreated body of death. Physiologically the physical and spiritual entities (body and soul/spirit) are in union, yet they have opposing moral impulses. Augustine, considered to be the first Christian anthropologist had started well, aptly applying the analogy “your body is your wife”: the couple were once in perfect harmony but following the Fall are in combat with one another. Paul however goes further: these two entities are influenced by separate and distinct laws or engrained principles; the body, being

²⁰⁶ Explanation and historical background: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creationism_%28soul%29

²⁰⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church #366 http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P1B.HTM

the corrupted medium through which the soul/spirit (Paul's "inner man") functions, has impulses of its own:

*For I am gratified by the law of God in my inner man, but I perceive **a different law** in my bodily members warring with the law in my mind and bringing me into captivity to the sinful law that is in my bodily members*²⁰⁸

The "law in one's members" refers to the senses perceived through the members of the body processed by the brain, an organ that, it must be remembered, is part of the procreated vessel through which the divinely planted soul/spirit must operate. Like the rest of the body it ultimately derives from fallen Adam's loins and is heading for the grave. The human psyche, emotions and motivations cannot be contained within that vital organ or entirely derived from it, for when the soul leaves the body it is conscious and memory-retaining as Scripture affirms; the rich man wondering why he must experience suffering in Hades was told by Abraham to "**remember** that in your lifetime you received good things and likewise Lazarus evil things, so now he is comforted and you are tormented"²⁰⁹. Paul's reference in this context to the "law of God" is referring to a moral sense of right and wrong, in particular the need to exercise love and consideration for others, which the apostle confirms was always the law's (and the Torah's) heart and purpose²¹⁰. It is intuitive, being the outworking of the human conscience²¹¹ which is clear or "clean" when one obeys that principle, guilty when one does not.

The tripartite nature of man

Primarily through Augustine's influence and his prosecution of the Pelagian controversy, the post-Nicene Church defected from the orthodox tripartite understanding of most earlier Fathers who believed man to be comprised of body, soul and spirit²¹²; the latter being provided directly from God and the means by which one receives sound reason and a pure conscience, the Light of Christ by which little children cannot but "believe" in Jesus the Word²¹³. This has exacerbated difficulties when interpreting Paul's epistles; the "spirit" not being conceived by most readers to be a separate entity (a component of human nature) distinct from the Holy Spirit. Paul refers more frequently than others to the human spirit because of his substantial handling of the inner struggle concept. On one occasion he refers to body, spirit and soul together²¹⁴ in terms of them being sanctified as a whole. Likewise,

²⁰⁸ Rom7:23

²⁰⁹ Lk16:25

²¹⁰ Rom13:9-10

²¹¹ Rom2:15

²¹² Historical background to trichotomy : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripartite_\(theology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripartite_(theology))

²¹³ Cf. Mt18:6

²¹⁴ 1Thes5:23

the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the word of God penetrating between soul and spirit as it does between the joints and marrow²¹⁵. The latter two materials of the body are closely related yet distinct, as are the soul and spirit. Justin Martyr spoke of the soul housing the spirit just as the body houses the soul²¹⁶ the latter being a kind of ethereal interface formed in the outline of the body enclosing the spirit - invisible when it leaves the body at death yet clearly visible in the realm it inhabits prior to resurrection²¹⁷. Irenaeus concurred: the soul possessing the figure of the body in which it dwells²¹⁸ whilst *“the complete man is composed of flesh, soul and spirit. One of these does indeed preserve and fashion the man – this is the spirit; whilst as to another it is united and formed – that is the flesh; then comes that which is between the two – that is the soul which sometimes when it follows the spirit is raised up by it but sometimes it sympathises with the flesh and falls into carnal lust”*²¹⁹. In the New Testament the Greek word for soul (*psuche*) is often translated as “life” for it more often relates to the physical: *“Take no thought for your “psuche” what you shall eat or what you shall drink”*²²⁰.

The nature of “original sin”

Paul in particular affirms that human flesh and spirit have opposing moral inclinations as a result of which the human mind becomes a battleground, receiving conflicting advice or motivations from each: the selfish creaturely inclinations derived from the bodily members processed through the brain on the one hand; the more idealistic sometimes altruistic impulses arising from the conscience that governs the God-planted spirit on the other. It is not that the immaterial part of man (the soul and spirit) is in any Platonic sense generically superior or purer than the material housing or “vessel” (the body) because the former happens to be immaterial. The dualism in the form of moral antagonism arises from the *immediate* source of the component parts; the spiritual components are pure not because they are immaterial but because they are from God; the body is impure not because it is material but because it originates from the loins of fallen Adam and carries the contagion of sin. Paul explains how precisely that affects human morality and how for Christians the matter is partially remedied by gospel salvation, yet not wholly so for anybody until resurrection²²¹. Such anthropological duality was recognized by the very early Christian writers. In the epistle to Diognetus (c. AD130), Mathetes, the anonymous disciple likens the soul’s relationship to the body to that of the Church to the world: the latter (equating to the

²¹⁵ Heb4:12

²¹⁶ [Justin on the resurrection chap. 10](#)

²¹⁷ Cf. Lk16:23

²¹⁸ [Irenaeus against heresies Book II chap. 19 \(6\)](#)

²¹⁹ [Irenaeus against heresies Book V chap. 9 para 1](#)

²²⁰ Mt6:25

²²¹ Cf. Rom8:23

flesh) wars against the former (the soul) and hates it because it is perceived to restrict its worldly enjoyment, whereas the Church (the soul) loves the body (the world) and seeks to preserve and sanctify it²²². Likewise, Cyprian (A.D.200-258) recognized the body to be of the earth and the human's spirit to be from heaven and that through the Fall they have opposing natures. He affirms that Paul's references to the spirit being opposed to the flesh²²³ are not referring to the Holy Spirit but the human's spirit; similarly, the fruits of the spirit²²⁴.

There has been such a spiritual and physical dimension to man since his creation: Adam was formed from the dust of the earth; the Creator breathed into his nostrils and he became a living soul created after God's own nature²²⁵. Dust however reconstituted or developed could never relate to God; man as a whole can for he is body and soul/spirit. Having a body is an essential aspect to being human: the problem is *this* body and from whom it has been procreated. Paul distinguishes between the different inclinations acting upon the mind in view of the different law or principle acting within the material and immaterial constituents of human nature, particularly in Romans chapter seven. He affirms that the disposition of the flesh is death whilst the disposition of the spirit is life and peace²²⁶. The soul is rather like Adam and Eve at creation: pure and innocent but pliant, i.e. liable to corruption, except that in the soul's case it is certain to experience corruption through the intrinsic unrighteous bias of fallen human nature as a whole. God never creates what is evil or impure of itself, so that must apply to the human soul/spirit but fallen man can and does procreate what is impure, and then they are combined in the human embryo. Yet it is not like pouring wine into a bottle: the body, soul and spirit are so closely inter-related that the material soon compromises the integrity of the immaterial, yet they remain separable identities, being parted at death. What was derived from the dust of the ground returns to the ground to await a radical transformation (resurrection) whilst that which was given by God returns to God²²⁷. But the soul will inevitably have been tainted by its association with mortal flesh unless a person has been "saved" (soul-healed) through the gospel. For as a consequence of original sin the physical component's latent instincts as they are processed within the brain are intrinsically corrupting, tending to concupiscence (disordered desire), and will inevitably gain the upper hand over the divinely planted spirit unless aided by divine grace. The inner struggle is not between human nature in its entirety and the Holy Spirit as most have come to understand Paul, for it applies equally to those who do not possess the Spirit. Rather it is a conflict between the inclination of the bodily members (Paul and Peter's temporary vessel

²²² [Epistle to Diognetus chap. 6](#)

²²³ E.g. Gal5:17

²²⁴ The treatises of Cyprian - [Treatise 4 para 16](#)

²²⁵ Gen2:7

²²⁶ Rom8:6

²²⁷ Eccles12:7

or tent) and the influence of the human's spirit; the one governed by concupiscence, the other by conscience; the one having been created after God's own nature, the other created originally from God's good earth but degenerated through the Fall and procreated therefrom. *"O wretched man that I am; who can deliver me from the **body of this death**? I thank God it is through Jesus Christ our Lord"*. Truly, this is the essence of Christian salvation, for in the believer that battle is aided and can be turned into victory by becoming one spirit with Christ²²⁸.

Anthropological dualism in the Gospels and non-Pauline epistles

Anthropological dualism is not exclusive to the writings of Paul. Jesus uses the terminology of the "heart" when referring to what Paul's describes as the "inner man" or "spirit":

*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good*²²⁹

Jesus is obviously referring to the man's heart not God's in which the treasure resides; similarly it is the human spirit not the Holy Spirit that directly produces good fruit, for contrary to the wishful thinking of the devil and the doctrines of some who have been deluded by him, those who do not possess the Holy Spirit can still exercise genuine love, kindness and patience which *are* fruits of the spirit. That is nothing for anyone to boast about for these virtues come from God as the human's soul/spirit comes from Him and is created in His image regardless of whether it becomes empowered by the Holy Spirit. *But then there is "the flesh"*, hence the need for gospel salvation for those who are to serve God in the current age and be fitted to reign with His Son in the next²³⁰.

In the gospels Jesus utilizes metaphorical language to describe the would-be disciple's inner struggle with the spiritual and physical components of his nature, and it is a good deal starker than Paul's but is teaching the same principle. The self-mutilation passages recorded in Matthew 5:28-30 and Mark 9:43-48 are referring to the need to control the bodily members so that the soul or "heart" is not polluted. It is clearly allegorical for it is obvious that cutting off an arm does not make someone a better person: they will still find a way to steal if that is their inclination. Jesus is highlighting the need for a disciple to keep his bodily members under tight control otherwise the whole person will be damaged. Note the reflexives: "If your eye *offends you* pluck it out; if your arm *ensnares you* hack it off" etc. As with the apostle's teaching, this pertains to the disparate moral dispositions of spirit/heart and body. The "you" that is offended, ensnared or led into sin is the spirit/soul/heart, being that which is from God and survives physical death; the offenders or ensnarers are your bodily members driven by the physical senses processed through the brain pertaining to the

²²⁸ 1Cor6:17

²²⁹ Lk6:45a

²³⁰ Cf. Rom8:29; Rev5:9-10

temporary earthly tent. If the latter is not controlled, it pollutes the former and the soul may need to be purged or salted in fire²³¹. Only Jesus specifically alludes to this post-mortem aspect (next chapter) but otherwise Peter teaches the same principle albeit less dramatically than Jesus and with less proneness to being misunderstood than Paul since he refers more inclusively to the “soul” rather than “spirit”, such that there is no ambiguity in translation to confuse spirit with Spirit.

“Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul”²³²

Peter’s “fleshly lusts” equate to Paul’s “flesh”. His “soul” incorporates Paul’s “spirit”, but in Peter’s case it is unambiguous for Bible translators cannot lexically equate “soul” with “Holy Spirit”, yet to be consistent with the way Paul is normally understood in this area Peter might have been expected to write “Abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the Holy Spirit”. In fact, the various apostles’ teachings are consistent throughout: the spirit (or soul or “heart” or inner man) is constantly at war with the earthly tabernacle (or vessel or body or flesh) into which the spiritual essence is diffused and the battleground is the mind that determines the will.

Only sin disables the soul

Apart from resolving a multitude of historical doctrinal contradictions, such an understanding provides reassurance concerning the nature of human disability, especially that affecting the brain or mind. Even in cases of severe dementia or brain damage there is no fear that the real person i.e. their eternal soul/spirit is changed or damaged even though they may cease to recognize their own loved ones or no longer be able to articulate any faith they may possess. The people they truly are is retained and imprinted within the immaterial spirit that returns to God when the body dies. Sickness, aging and accident may damage the body and brain but only sin can corrupt the soul and so it will to an extent for those who are not “saved” through the gospel unless they die in early infancy. Some within the faith who have discerned such a dualism have used it as an excuse for sin, believing it is not they who are sinning, citing Rom7:20. They fail to realize that in so doing they place themselves in a state of bondage²³³ and in continually sinning against the light they fatally disrupt their relationship with God – in Paul’s language they “die”.

Human nature: inclined to sinfulness

Just as Paul has been misunderstood so has the human condition been misdiagnosed, especially within Western Christianity. Eastern Orthodoxy has more fittingly presented the

²³¹ Mk9:49-50

²³² 1Pet2:11

²³³ Rom6:16

matter, being less enamoured with Augustine and careful to adhere to the corpus of Faith as it had been handed down by the apostles. Orthodoxy believes that human nature cannot be intrinsically sinful being created in God's image, but through the Fall has become open to evil intents and actions and so is ever "inclined to sin". More strictly it is the soul or spirit that cannot be sinful in itself; it becomes "inclined to sin" through infusion with that with which it is associated, so human nature as a whole *is* sinful in itself, for the mortal body (flesh) is very much a part, albeit a temporary part of human nature. That is why man has been deprived of the quality of Life and divine communion that God ultimately intends for him whilst he remains in mortal flesh unless he encounters the grace of the gospel. But fallen man is not morally rotten at heart for the core (the spirit/inner man) is directly supplied and enlightened by God. He does not look at the outward appearance of man but observes the heart and finds it to be quite variable²³⁴, or even in accordance with His own²³⁵. Yet neither is mankind morally neutral but has an unrighteous bias, always tending to err unless aided by divine grace. For whilst our Heavenly Father does not create or assign what is rotten and morally degenerate (which many Christians unwittingly insinuate), our human father unavoidably does, and it becomes the spirit's earthly home. The human spirit having been enlightened by Christ²³⁶ has discernible impulses of its own, directed by a body of law²³⁷ referenced by the conscience, which unless it has been rendered inoperable genuinely guides and restrains. In taking heed to his conscience, even an otherwise irreligious man exercises a form of godly fear and does or at least tries to do what God would have him do in any situation. By means of this commonly provided divine enabling a person made in God's image even without the spiritual provision available through obedience to the gospel may live a decent, upright and worthwhile life, leaving the world a better place than he or she found it; even contributing to the building of God's Kingdom on earth, just as the Gentile Cornelius had done before his conversion²³⁸. However, the unconverted have yet to fulfil the *purpose of life itself* which is to be united and in a meaningful relationship with one's Creator. Through original sin and the inherited "body of death", they cannot live a victorious, spiritually fulfilled life, or be "free indeed" from the enslavement of sinful concupiscence which requires not merely the common grace of enlightenment and sound reason but "*the exceedingly abundant grace which is in Christ Jesus*"²³⁹. Those receiving such a "*supreme gift of grace*"²⁴⁰ not only aim for what is right but having been spiritually renewed are provided with the ongoing spiritual resources to

²³⁴ 1Sam16:7

²³⁵ 1Sam13:14

²³⁶ Jn1:9 King James Version

²³⁷ Rom2:15

²³⁸ Acts10:31

²³⁹ 1Tim1:14

²⁴⁰ Acts11:17

*practice it*²⁴¹. The rest of humanity in Pauline language is described as “dead”. Yet those who have been blessed to experience Life with a capital “L” will know why he uses such language and proclaim with the apostle - “*For me to live is Christ; to die is gain*”. Meaningful communion with God *is* life; anything short of it, whilst fine for the animal kingdom, is not worthy of the name for those who have been fashioned in the Creator's image for *an eternal relationship with Himself*. Those who are not in Christ are currently alienated from the life of God; they are dead in that sense. Yet every human life is valued by the One who gave it and each person's experience within the corrupted intellectual vessel inherited through the fault of their first parents provides a test and preparation for the eventual fulfilment of their eternal purpose: to be reconciled to God through an introduction and willing submission to Jesus Christ. In a certain sense they already know Him²⁴² and serve Him²⁴³ whenever they show compassion to anyone in need. Yet such virtue as they do possess is a result of the grace they have received, albeit the universally provided enlightenment provided by conscience with which, unlike Cain, they have co-operated.

Original sin and baptism

Whilst Scripture calls the Christian convert to be baptized to wash away past sins²⁴⁴ and be given a clean slate, baptism does not re-orientate what Paul refers to as the “law of the members” operating within the human body²⁴⁵. This body by nature and inclination remains “dead because of sin” even in the baptized²⁴⁶; that will not be fully resolved until the resurrection. Yet when the soul is spiritually renewed through the grace of the gospel, the mortal body may be presented as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God²⁴⁷ so that the life of Jesus might be manifested even whilst in mortal flesh. Adult baptism is “*the response of a good conscience towards God*”²⁴⁸; a conscience and spirit that inclines to moral truth and through elective grace understands such to have been perfected in the teaching of Christ. It opens the way to that supreme gift of grace by which the spirit of man is united to Christ's and empowered to over-ride the instincts of his bodily members so that in Paul's words he may “*possess his own vessel in sanctity and honour*”²⁴⁹. Through baptism the Christian convert is cleansed and pardoned from past sins, but the ongoing cleansing is provided through Christ's blood (chapter three). In the context of infant baptism, the issues

²⁴¹ Cf. 2Pet1:3

²⁴² Jn1:9

²⁴³ Mt25:40

²⁴⁴ Acts22:16

²⁴⁵ Rom7:23

²⁴⁶ Rom8:10

²⁴⁷ Rom12:1

²⁴⁸ 1Pet3:21

²⁴⁹ 1Thes4:4

of conscience, personal co-operation and pardon for personal sin do not apply; rather it replaces circumcision as the sign and instrument by which newly born infants are united to the Body of Christ and incorporated into the care of the Church. It should be evident from a reading of the gospels that unbaptized or uncircumcised infants were never abhorrent in Jesus' eyes, and He alone determines where they are to spend eternity²⁵⁰. Such innocent souls have not broken a law and where there is no law sin is not imputed²⁵¹; where there is no personal knowledge of evil God does not assign guilt²⁵²; sons may be *afflicted* for the sake of their father's sins (as we are for Adam's) but are only held accountable for their own²⁵³. Apart from which, Adam's act of disobedience has been universally expiated by Christ's Act of righteousness²⁵⁴ within the Universal Covenant under which all infants fall, being at that stage incapable of defaulting. As for the comparison with circumcision, under the Old Law Abraham was justified in God's sight before he was circumcised²⁵⁵. However, babies do inherit the physical and moral consequences of Adam's sin in the form of corruptible and corrupting bodies, which apart from gospel grace are anything but benign; so entirely irrespective of whether infants are baptized they will demonstrate the concupiscent impulses of the "flesh" as their parents soon discover. For many years, the Roman Catholic Church went along with Augustine regarding our Lord's perceived contempt for the souls of little children who die unbaptized. The Church now entrusts such souls to the mercy of God, whilst this document delineates why such God-maligning speculation in this area has long been the devil's ruse²⁵⁶. The Eastern Orthodox Church largely rejected Augustine's theological approach, not a few within her regarding him as a major factor in the East/West schism, indeed "the fount of every distortion and alteration of Christian truth in the West"²⁵⁷; one who in the process of prosecuting the heresies of his day subverted the teaching and tenor of the ante-Nicene Fathers.

Manichaeism – misplaced dualism

One such heresy had been propagated by Manes (third century) who had developed a sophisticated form of Gnosticism, the central tenet being a metaphysical dualism resulting in the cosmos and consequently human nature being divided through the influence of two opposing deities; one good the other evil, neither being sovereign. Before his conversion to the catholic faith, Augustine had been a follower of Manes and like him believed mankind's

²⁵⁰ Jn5:22

²⁵¹ Rom4:15 & 5:13

²⁵² Jn9:41

²⁵³ Deut24:16

²⁵⁴ Rom5:18

²⁵⁵ Rom4:10

²⁵⁶ The discardable intellectual vessel being the infants' problem, not the God-given soul

²⁵⁷ Christos Yannaras: The Freedom of Morality (p151)

sinful inclinations could be explained and partly excused by an alien nature within him. Like many heretical perversions of the faith, an element of truth may sometimes be present, and the danger is a polemical over-reaction, resulting in this case in Augustine's unwillingness to discern the *anthropological* substance dualism in the writings of Paul. For Manes had been right to affirm that there are two opposing moralising agents within man and that Paul had asserted as such in his epistle to the Romans, but was in error concerning its origins, nature and the ethical implications. For the apostle had taught that the components making up human nature derive from the one God, but, the immaterial components (soul and spirit) are directly planted by Him whilst the material component is transmitted in a degenerative state ultimately from fallen Adam's loins. This is a form of dualism nevertheless being the consequence of original sin.

Bodies are to be loved

Paul is nevertheless insistent that this disordered human body is to be loved and cherished by its owner, satisfied by its sexual partner if it has one²⁵⁸ and for the Christian acts as a temple for the Holy Spirit. Even this carnal version is a wonder of science, fearfully and wonderfully made and potentially beautiful to behold, whilst what remains of it will eventually be utilized to create a glorious new body. In a real sense the body one currently inhabits will always remain a part of one's identity. Physical and spiritual have become one but will be later separated and the physical component redeemed and ennobled before being reunited with its eternal spiritual partner such that body, soul and spirit become a holy and inseparable unity. In the meantime, the Christian must pummel the temporary vessel and bring it under subjection²⁵⁹ for the disciple of Christ has been set a course to run; he is like an athlete straining for a prize, which is the high calling of God²⁶⁰.

The body of *this* death

Paul describes this temporary vessel as "the body of this death". Regrettably, "*Somatos tou thanatou toutou*"²⁶¹ is often inadequately translated, such as in the New Jerusalem Bible utilized by Catholics where it is "the body doomed to death". That is not what the Greek relays and entirely misses the point. The apostle is not referring to the human body's fate but its *current condition*, for it is the degenerative procreated intellectual vessel that leads the divinely planted soul into death (i.e. disruption in divine communion). Such deprivation is what the apostle means by "*this* death", i.e. the death the person he was illustrating was currently experiencing: it is not damnation or total depravity, which would pertain to the soul or whole person. The mortal body is indeed "doomed to die"; an obvious fact but not

²⁵⁸ 1Cor7:5

²⁵⁹ 1Cor9:27

²⁶⁰ Phil3:13-15

²⁶¹ Rom7:24

the point Paul was making; for that issue can and will be resolved at resurrection. The body of this death on the other hand requires a more immediate remedy for those who are to relate to God *whilst still in it* so that their soul may be fashioned for a still greater destiny. That remedy is participation with Christ²⁶².

It all stems from the Garden of Eden incident and God's previous warning to Adam:

*You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for **in the day you eat of it** you shall surely die*²⁶³

These children of God would "die" the very day they ate the forbidden fruit, and so they did; their relationship with God was disrupted from that moment. That is the cessation of the Life God has intended for the pinnacle of His creation: intimate communion of the human soul with the Source of its eternal life. This is recoverable only by being "born again" and coming to know the sacred interior presence of Christ who restores life to those who feed on Him²⁶⁴.

The sting of death is sin?

One needs to observe carefully what the apostle writes concerning spiritual death²⁶⁵: "*The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law*". The converse idea, namely that the sting of sin is death is better understood and Paul quotes as much from Hosea. But once again the apostle intends exactly what he writes. It confirms among other things that when Paul speaks of death it is not a reference to a state of damnation for in this case sin results *from* death, not leads to it. Something *being* spiritually dead has resulted in sin, that something being the mortal body and brain. In responding to the body's natural inclinations, the soul rebels against the divine light of conscience and so disrupts the relationship with the Source of its spiritual life. For what had been conceived in sin²⁶⁶ has "died" leading in turn to sin that destroys Life once the "law" (a sense of right and wrong) is perceived and invariably breached²⁶⁷. Hence the need for heavenly grace by which one can be spiritually purified, receiving ongoing cleansing of the soul so that those predestined to it may serve God whilst in mortal flesh. The apostle had further asserted that "*death will be swallowed up in victory*", yet even celestial grace does not fully resolve the problem of mortal embodiment. God intends to save our soul and body, but He does not do so simultaneously. So even the Christian is tempted to sin whilst in mortal flesh which is why it is his body that

²⁶² Rom7:24-25

²⁶³ Gen2:17

²⁶⁴ Jn6:57

²⁶⁵ 1Cor15:54-56

²⁶⁶ Ps51:5

²⁶⁷ Rom7:9

is to be offered as a living sacrifice “so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk after the flesh but after the spirit”²⁶⁸; for it is the spirit that having been supplied by God loves His law and wishes to serve righteousness. Not until “this corruptible” (body) has been transformed at resurrection will death (physical and spiritual) finally be swallowed up in victory when the body itself is redeemed²⁶⁹. The soul’s vessel in its current degenerative state is the cause of the human problem being the outworking of original sin; the final solution will not be for the soul to lose a body altogether and be eternally at rest in the spiritual realm (a spurious dualism), but to be re-clothed in a new body which is *from* heaven²⁷⁰ and to be united to the Man who is God and actively participate within His realm; that will be joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Corruption of the mind

Adam and Eve in their state of original righteousness could not have had a problem with concupiscence for their bodies were created directly by God, not procreated from sinful parents. The pure but pliable souls of these children of God were nevertheless corrupted by a direct assault on their minds through the deception of Satan, as a result of which their perception of the Creator became distorted, leading to their disobedience and punishment. Unlike Adam and Eve in their original state, procreated infants starting with Cain and Abel have an innate tendency to be disobedient, greedy, selfish and the like through concupiscence. Unlike our first parents they do not need to be persuaded by the devil or anyone else to be concupiscent, it is entirely natural to them in view of “the flesh”.

The mystery of holiness

Yet Jesus affirms that the soul needs to be restored to the purity of that of a little child in order to enter the Kingdom of God²⁷¹. Holiness is purity of soul, guarded and preserved by wisdom; not the inviolable perfection which God alone possesses²⁷². He does not expect it or require it as is evident if one carefully analyses Jesus’ dealings with His disciples and JHWE’s earlier interactions with His intimate servants such as Abraham, David, Job, Moses and the prophets who each related to their God as a child to a father. The features of a young child which the Lord would have His disciples emulate are an awareness of one’s need for guidance and provision from Father God and Mother Church, a sweet and intuitive simplicity, credulity, a sense of wonder and a keenness to please. What a young child does not possess is a sense of self-loathing or conviction of moral impotency. And nor should he, for looking intently into the eyes of a young child one is observing the windows of a soul

²⁶⁸ Rom8:4

²⁶⁹ Cf. Rom8:23

²⁷⁰ 2Cor5:2

²⁷¹ Mt18:3

²⁷² Mk10:18

newly supplied by God and enlightened by Christ; not one “formed after the mind and will of Satan” as Augustine and others have asserted²⁷³. Yet still there is the flesh, so to maintain a purity of spirit one has to be enabled to control the concupiscent inclinations of the body, requiring both self-discipline and heavenly grace. Only then can one hope to become worthy to inherit the promises of Christ. Such is the mystery of holiness; it is not one-sided grace but sanctification of the spirit “*by personal obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*”²⁷⁴. Such a symbiosis is affirmed in Paul’s exhortation to believers to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling²⁷⁵. Thereby may a Christian be united to God whilst still in mortal flesh and prepared for Kingdom service. Such privileges are for those who have been born again by water and the Spirit; not “all people of good will” but children of the Church, walking in her light and receiving cleansing from Christ’s blood for those venial sins that beset even the most devout²⁷⁶. For there are not two but three that bear an *ongoing* witness to Christ’s saving work on earth: the Spirit, the water *and the blood*²⁷⁷. No one can be “*saved to the uttermost*” apart from the Apostolic Church where alone are dispensed the mysteries of heavenly grace. Yet there is a broader, communal context to holiness, for those individuals and communities that practice it are as a witness to the world, living and behaving in the present as God would have all humanity to live in the age to come. That is what the world was meant to see in Old Testament times when they observed the nation of Israel living in accordance with God’s Law in righteousness and peace and exclaim “*Surely no other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation*”²⁷⁸. It was not to be. Now wider society is meant to look at the Church and discern such a model of loving fellowship, sanctity and charity. It is one reason Jesus prayed for her to be -

“*...perfected in unity so that the world may believe it was You who sent Me and that You have loved them as You have loved Me*”²⁷⁹.

Truly, the world will be inclined to believe it when they see the Body of Christ united and at peace with itself.

Paul and “original sin”

The apostle undoubtedly affirms the concept of original sin. In Romans 5 he states that “*death reigned from Adam to Moses even upon those who did not sin in the manner of our first parents*” (v14). But whilst Adam’s degenerative body we inherit, his guilt we do not; for

²⁷³ Augustine “Confessions” Book VII chap 21 <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110107.htm>

²⁷⁴ 1Pet1:2

²⁷⁵ Phil2:12

²⁷⁶ 1Jn1:7

²⁷⁷ 1Jn5:8

²⁷⁸ Deut4:6

²⁷⁹ Jn17:23

sin is imputed to the degree that the law known to the transgressor has been transgressed and where there is no known law to defy, sin is not imputed²⁸⁰. So up till the time of Moses and beyond for those outside the Law (the Gentile nations), the law and standard by which people were judged can only be that known to them innately through the conscience once they are of an age to discern it, by which faculty they became a law for themselves²⁸¹.

Flesh, soul, spirit and Spirit in the language of Paul

In Romans chapter seven, Paul's references to the spirit are usually taken as referring to the Holy Spirit rather than an immaterial component within man. Yet in the opening chapter of Romans he affirms: "*I serve God in my spirit in the gospel*"; he writes that as Christians we experience the witness of the Spirit with our spirit that we are already the children of God²⁸²; that ideally women should remain single so that they can focus on being holy in body and spirit²⁸³, whilst in 1Cor6:20 he exhorted Christians to "*glorify God in your body and in your spirit which is²⁸⁴ of God*". The writer to the Hebrews employs *pneuma* (spirit) to refer to individual purified souls in heaven - the spirits of the righteous having been perfected, and likewise Jesus on the cross gave up His spirit after which His body was lifeless. In her *Magnificat*, Mary magnified the Lord in her soul whilst her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour²⁸⁵. Central to Paul's thought is the fact that as a result of original sin, man has become a psychologically disordered union between the flesh (the sensual bodily desires) and spirit or inner man²⁸⁶. Aptly the apostle closes his letter with the benediction: "*May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be **with your spirit***²⁸⁷. The Christian is to follow the dictates of his spirit (walk in the spirit) "*since the disposition of the flesh is death but the disposition of the spirit is life and peace*"²⁸⁸. When the "flesh" is crucified (denied) one can then follow the dictates of the spirit which is guided by the conscience and, in the Christian, aided by the Spirit. Peter writes that only those who "*escape the corruption that is in the world through lust*" may partake of the divine nature²⁸⁹. Paul likewise exhorts us to "*present our bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God*", which is our reasonable service²⁹⁰. Those who continue to live according to the impulses of the flesh rather than the spirit cannot please

²⁸⁰ Rom5:13

²⁸¹ Rom2:14 cf. Greek

²⁸² Rom8:16

²⁸³ 1Cor7:34

²⁸⁴ Greek: *estin* - Wrongly translated in many versions as "which *are* of God", no doubt to obscure the fact that whilst the human spirit is *directly* supplied by God, the mortal body is not

²⁸⁵ Lk1:46-47

²⁸⁶ 2Cor7:1; Gal5:17

²⁸⁷ Gal6:18

²⁸⁸ Rom8:6

²⁸⁹ 2Pet1:4

²⁹⁰ Rom12:1

God. Yet in those like Cain who have given in to evil and the Evil One²⁹¹, the flesh like everyone else's is dead (in the Pauline sense) but the spirit is also dead or non-functional²⁹² such that material and spiritual are no longer in tension. Dead (flesh) versus dead (spirit) results in a chilling serenity in which the soul is unhindered in its response to the instincts of the flesh; it may satisfy its worldly and carnal appetite by any means. Unlike all who are to be liberated as the children of God²⁹³, these desolate ones have no Pauline "inner struggle" for what is dead cannot struggle. They therefore may be cool, calm and at peace with themselves as they pursue evil. *This* is death of the soul; *this* is total depravity, and *these* are the children of hell²⁹⁴. They are the wicked and godless who must be despatched at the renaissance, for they were not planted by God²⁹⁵ but by His enemy²⁹⁶. This pertains to the mystery of providential evil, considered more fully in chapters six and seven.

After the few decades of human life, what the apostles describe as our tent or vessel is discarded: "*Then the dust will return to the earth as it was and the spirit will return to God who gave it*"²⁹⁷. Later that vessel will be mysteriously located, decoded and glorified. But in terms of mankind's guilt and condemnation arising from their association with the sin of their federal head, it is pardoned regardless of individual cognisance or cooperation:

*As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness, there resulted **justification of life** to all men*²⁹⁸

That "justification of life" pertains to the inclusive covenant delineated in this chapter. The doctrine of justification will now be examined in the context of both this and the exclusive Covenant of Promise²⁹⁹ together with the nature of "faith" required to benefit from the blessings of each.

²⁹¹ 1Jn3:12

²⁹² Jud1:12 – the twice dead

²⁹³ Rom8:21

²⁹⁴ Mt23:15

²⁹⁵ Mt15:13

²⁹⁶ Mt13:25

²⁹⁷ Eccles12:7

²⁹⁸ Rom5:18

²⁹⁹ Cf. Eph2:12

CHAPTER THREE

Faith and Justification

Since the Fall, justification in the sense of being accepted by God as opposed to being under His condemnation has been by faith as a result of grace through the merits of Christ's faithfulness [*ek pisteos Christou*]. The meritorious cause of human salvation is not a believer's faith but Christ's own faithfulness even to death. Cognisant faith *in* Christ [*pisteos en Christo*] is required to be saved from the ravages of the earthen vessel that the soul currently inhabits³⁰⁰ so as to be sanctified for divine service within the Covenant of Promise.

Effectual common grace and faith

Faith is man's positive response to God as He is in various ways revealed to the individual. At the universal level it is most definitively a positive response to conscience. Given that the human's spirit is planted by God and will one day return to Him it would be surprising if it did not include a blueprint for human behaviour and so it does: the law of God written on the "heart"³⁰¹ which is also described (but sometimes mistranslated) as the light of Christ that enlightens every man coming into the world³⁰². In terms of the translation, it is hardly likely that John writing in the late first century would be informing his readers that the Light (Christ) "is coming into the world" (some translations). The atheist and agnostic, whenever they perform an action they know to be right because it is right, not merely for the praise of others or to be accepted within society are effectively exercising faith, responding positively to God (actually to the will of Christ as *Logos*) as He has revealed Himself and His law (the principles of sound reason and humane living) in their conscience. In that instant, they are choosing to do a good, for in their innermost being they sense it is good and should be practiced³⁰³. It is not entirely altruistic for they receive inner gratification by performing it, for in their inner being they are concurring with a natural precept, ultimately an eternal law. It is no different from a Christian receiving a measure of peace when he knows he is being obedient to Christ's will; it is how conscience functions. In the language of second century Christianity it is that *common faith* which lies beneath as a foundation that is built upon and consummated in those who come to faith in Christ³⁰⁴. The law is spiritual and so is the human spirit for it *is* spirit. But infused within a degenerative vessel which is ever inclined to concupiscence (worldly lust), the instincts of that earthly tent look to override the inner light

³⁰⁰ Hence "Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God it is through Jesus Christ" – Rom7:25

³⁰¹ Rom2:15

³⁰² Jn1:9

³⁰³ Rom7:22-23

³⁰⁴ Clement of Alexandria (A.D.153-217) [The Stromata Book V chap. 1](#)

of conscience. Having planted human souls in such a disordered vessel it is no surprise given God's compassionate nature that He has made both provision and allowance for the resultant human weakness. In terms of provision, at the greatest personal cost God has provided a means by which our inevitable failures and misconduct might be pardoned through reference to an atoning Sacrifice; and in terms of allowance He is prepared to accept someone as justified on the basis of their exercising faith by responding positively or "faithfully" to the divine light that He has provided to them. A common faith or faithfulness (same word in Biblical Greek) is shown to be present when love (*agape*) is exercised, being a genuine concern and care for another person, which is the heart of God's law³⁰⁵. Since love is the efflux of faith³⁰⁶, faith must be present for that love to flow out from it; love and faith being quite inseparable, faith being the agent of love and love being the product of faith. A person is justified within the Universal Covenant by responding positively to God's witness to them through creed or conscience regardless of the degree of accomplishment. Providing the person demonstrates *agape* they are accepted by God, for He knows that *agape* was derived from Him, being His Own nature³⁰⁷. This aligns with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 concerning the sheep and goats. In serving the weakest of humanity through any act of compassion, the "sheep" are regarded as serving Christ Himself even though they have no personal knowledge of Him:

"In truth I tell you in so far as you did this (act of kindness) to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to Me"

It will appear to some that Jesus is here teaching justification by works. But Matthew 25:31-45 is demonstrating justification through faith *with reference* to works. No mention is made of how consistently or perfectly the "sheep" showed compassion, they just demonstrated they possessed it and were justified by exercising it regardless of measure. They therefore demonstrated they *possessed the quality* called faith whose product is *agape*, being the essence of true humanity. On the other hand, faith alone if it be merely a passive belief, trust or reliance on someone or something is dead if it does not result in positive action. The "sheep" had not been passive; they showed compassion because they had responded positively to their "heart" motivating them to act in such a way out of sympathy, empathy and to be at peace with themselves. Jesus was thereby affirming that final salvation is not all of grace for fruit must be produced, yet it is entirely *dependent on* grace since the "sheep" are accepted by exercising the quality called faith, being an innate faculty provided through common grace, rather than having perfectly fulfilled God's law or lived a sinless life. Thus at the universal level justification is granted on the basis of such common faith, being a positive response to conscience (the light of Christ in the spirit) evinced by compassion,

³⁰⁵ Rom 13:10

³⁰⁶ Gal 5:16

³⁰⁷ 1 Jn 4:7

through the kindly favour (grace) by which pardon for sin has been granted to all producing the fruit of faith through the all-sufficient merits of Christ's atonement.

Some Christians will regard such a testimony to God's loving kindness towards wider humanity as disturbing and heretical; others will have sensed in their bones that it could never really have been the case that many of their relatives, friends and work colleagues who did not share their particular version of the Christian belief were destined for eternal punishment but couldn't have supported such a hope from Scripture. What is affirmed here should provide such people with much joy, without detracting at all from the purpose and urgency of the gospel message. Indeed, if the stupendous nature and benefits of service in God's Kingdom also come to be appreciated, all and sundry may wish to force their way into it once again³⁰⁸. That is why certain inessential mysteries of the Kingdom have been veiled through much of the gospel age even from the Church: so that the rich, the mighty, the proud and the glory-hunters might be detracted by the shame of the cross of Christ and humble cruciform service as His disciples; whilst the humble, the gentle, the poor in spirit and in material possessions who are rich in faith will be the true inheritors of the Kingdom and the earth. Such is the wisdom of God.

The two-fold benefits of the Atonement

The "faithfulness of Christ" in the centre of history is indispensable to both the Old and New Testament periods; it avails for two ages and, since its occurrence within history, at two levels: the forensic and participatory.

*For the love of Christ constrains us; because we judge that if One died for all then all were dead. And He **died for all** that **those which live** should no longer live for themselves but unto Him which died for them and rose again³⁰⁹*

The Bible does not teach a limited atonement in which pardon for the sin of falling short of God's glory is exclusively provided to those He elects to suffer and reign with the Atoner. It is insistent and consistent: all were dead so the One died for all and atoned for all³¹⁰. However, "*He died for all... that those which live...*". He died for all but not all shall "live". For what is limited is those who will be saved by His life by coming to participate in it³¹¹. Note also from these verses that "*those that live should no longer live for themselves but for Christ*"; it is and always has been the small minority who no longer live for themselves and their families but are truly devoted to the Saviour. However, peace, pardon and universal

³⁰⁸ Cf. Mt11:12

³⁰⁹ 2Cor5:14,15

³¹⁰ Cf. 1Jn2:2

³¹¹ Rom5:10

reconciliation has been made available *for all* by the blood of His cross³¹² where Christ *became* sin³¹³. If He *became* sin, it must be human sin in its totality, not an act of substitutionary atonement for select individuals or groupings. That is simply not how Scripture presents the matter. Jesus had come in the likeness of sinful flesh so that sin in the flesh should be condemned³¹⁴. Yet through His resurrection His chosen people can also be set free from the *domination and bondage* of sin by sharing in Christ's life. "*If the Son shall make you free then you shall be free indeed*"³¹⁵. So for the many, including those living before its historical occurrence³¹⁶ the benefit of the atonement is expiatory, annulling the penalty of universal sin; for the few (proportionately speaking) it is both expiatory and cathartic through sacramental participation³¹⁷. For the latter it cleanses from sin's guilt *and* power by being able to purify the soul and unite it with the life of Christ. For Jesus came to save His own people from their sins, not merely from the punishment for sinning³¹⁸, i.e. they are to be cleansed *from sin*, not just the *guilt* of sin. Christ had offered Himself "*in order to ransom us from all our faults and to purify a people to be His very own, eager to do good works*"³¹⁹. Through such good works, the Church as God's instrument of salvation declares His saving intentions for the whole world through its message as well as by the lives of her individual members: "*abounding in love towards each other and all men*"³²⁰. Thereby the Church fulfils its commission to "*announce the Good News to every creature under heaven*"³²¹; for when men and women acknowledge the rule of Christ (i.e. obey the gospel) they themselves become faithful stewards caring for the welfare of all that is set under them, being (for the moment) the natural world.

God's royal priesthood: elected through unmerited grace

In terms of those who have been ordained to receive eternal life³²² and brought into a living relationship with God in the present, fulfilling the role intended according to earlier prophecy exclusively for the Jewish nation, it is a matter of elective grace at the individual level just as it had been for Israel at the racial level. Those predestined to Christian salvation were chosen *to perform* good works and become holy, not because they had *performed*

³¹² Cf. Col1:19-20

³¹³ 2Cor5:21 Greek

³¹⁴ Rom8:3

³¹⁵ Jn8:36

³¹⁶ Cf. Rom3:25

³¹⁷ 1Jn1:7

³¹⁸ Mt1:21

³¹⁹ Tit2:14

³²⁰ 1Thes3:12

³²¹ Col1:23

³²² Acts13:48

good works or were foreseen to be holy³²³. Their *calling* to participate in the royal priesthood of God for the salvation of the world does not pertain to personal merit; justification being a gift. God gives to some the ears to hear and the eyes to see Jesus and proclaim with Peter *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"*. If that has had happened to you then *"Blessed are you, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but the Father who is in heaven"*³²⁴. There can therefore be no cause for boasting; and any who do boast show themselves to be profoundly unholy, as well as ignorant of the fact that:

*(God) has saved us and called us to a holy calling, not on the basis of our works but according to His own purpose and grace that was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages*³²⁵.

Paul is adamant here and elsewhere that election to the Christian faith is *unconditional* – the predestination he speaks of is not a matter of God foreknowing who would respond to the gospel, for there is no greater *work* under the sun than to deny oneself and choose to serve Jesus Christ. Election is a matter of sovereign choice and an abundance of grace - yet those who *are* called must provide fruit in the form of good works; that is *why* they were called, to bring light, healing and truth to the world and become conformed to the image of Christ. Just as JHWE had chosen Isaac's physical descendants to form the nation with whom He would especially relate and prepare for Kingdom service, so it was later disclosed that He had also foreknown and predestined individuals to be drawn from *all nations* to be set apart for sacral service in that same priesthood³²⁶.

Justification under the Old Covenant

In terms of the Jews, their covenantal requirements were entirely do-able, for moral perfection was not expected; provision being made for human weakness through the system of animal sacrifices. Such sacrifices were a figure of the Eucharist to be established under the Covenant of Christ's Blood, but contrary to the understanding of many, the blood of bulls and goats did expiate the day to day inadvertent sin of God's chosen people³²⁷, which is why JHWE commanded them to be performed:

*If through inadvertence you fail in any of the orders which JHWE has given to Moses... this is what must be done: If it is an advertence on the part of the community, the community as a whole will offer a young bull as a burnt offering as a smell pleasing to JHWE with the prescribed accompanying cereal offering and libation and a he-goat as a **sacrifice for sin**.*

³²³ Eph2:8-10

³²⁴ Mt16:17

³²⁵ 2Tim1:9

³²⁶ 1Pet2:9

³²⁷ Lev16:15-22

*The priest will perform the rite of expiation for the entire community of Israelites and **they will be forgiven** for it is an inadvertence*³²⁸

On the other hand, those who sinned wilfully would be treated as aliens and bear the consequences of their guilt, whereas under the New Covenant, “*everyone who believes is justified from things from **which you could not be justified by the law of Moses***”³²⁹. But in terms of that Old Covenant, moving forward in time to some of Paul’s polemics it was not the case that Jews believed they had perfectly to keep Torah in order to be accepted by God; forgiveness for sin was provided. Neither was it their own initiative or sinful pride to endeavour to keep the Law but a response to divine teaching; indeed, JHWE wished they had tried all the harder to honour their side of the Covenant³³⁰.

The teaching of Hebrews

The writer to the Hebrews taught that although bulls’ and goats’ blood could purify the flesh³³¹, and as we have just shown, provide pardon for inadvertent sins, it could not sanctify the soul by *taking away*³³² sin so as to cleanse the conscience from dead works³³³. The shedding of an animal’s blood under the Old Covenant therefore could do nothing to progress the partaker towards moral rectitude³³⁴. The Old Law made no one perfect³³⁵; only the divine blood of sprinkling can save to the uttermost by “*purging the conscience of dead works in order to serve the living God*”³³⁶. Again, note how the faculty of conscience directly impacts upon one’s relationship with God, i.e. with spiritual life.

The nation of Israel had been JHWE’s vineyard; He had looked for a good crop but was receiving only bad. He had looked for justice and righteousness amongst His people but observed only bloodshed and distress³³⁷. What He assuredly did *not* observe were people “desperately seeking to keep the Law in order to justify themselves in His sight”. That is a delusion as even a cursory reading of the Old Testament affirms. God’s complaint was their lack of effort to keep His Laws and be faithful to Him and the prophets and kings he had appointed over them. As with our first parents, privileged individuals had been given their opportunity for a glorious inheritance but wilfully defaulted. Yet this was in accordance with

³²⁸ Num15:22-25

³²⁹ Acts13:39

³³⁰ Ex19:5-6

³³¹ Heb9:13

³³² Heb10:4 Greek *aphairein* = to eliminate or substantively remove, not merely pardon

³³³ Heb9:13-14

³³⁴ Heb10:1

³³⁵ Heb7:19

³³⁶ Heb9:14 “Dead works” are *sinful* activities that result in Pauline “death” as previously defined

³³⁷ Is5:7

God's foreknowledge, and an alternative arrangement was set in place. His Son was always going to be at the centre of His salvific plans; the supporting cast may have to be changed. God's intentions remained the same: the long-term salvation of the world through the redeeming action of His Son, the Saviour of the world, supported by a people God would give to Him³³⁸ cleansed from their sinfulness through His blood. These were no longer to be restricted to the Jewish race:

*And with Your blood you bought people for God **of every race**, language, people and nation and made them a line of kings and priests for God, **to rule the World***³³⁹

So, in the fullness of time the Son of God takes on our humanity, teaches whomsoever will listen about the Good News of the Kingdom, and disciples a group of twelve men to lead His work after Him, knowing He was shortly to die, be resurrected and ascend to heaven. He shed His blood, acting out *within* history the righteous act by which Adam's sin had been nullified *throughout* history³⁴⁰. As Scripture also testified:

*He himself is the propitiation for our sins, **and not for ours only**, but also for the whole world*³⁴¹

Propitiation has been provided for humanity as a whole. Christ's sacrificial act of love at the Place of the Skull acts as a perpetual sweet-smelling savour³⁴² as from the rising of the sun to its setting it is re-presented to the glory of His name through the sacrifices offered by His assemblies in East and West who have remained faithful to His will. Expiation, by which Christ's death alleviates man's guilt through the payment of a penalty, applies to all those remaining justified within the inclusive Universal Covenant of life by demonstrating they are of God (i.e. truly human) and not the seed of Satan³⁴³. Purging or taking away sin was not possible before the historical act of love enacted at Calvary³⁴⁴. Now it has been granted to both Jews and Gentiles who are baptized into Christ and partake of His body and blood, by which they can experience eternal life. That misunderstood quality is something which was "*with the Father*" (i.e. hidden in God) and has now "*been manifested to us*"³⁴⁵. Jesus speaks of it as a "*well of water springing up inside us*"³⁴⁶; rarely if ever is the term used to specify those who will go to heaven. So infrequently is that concept mentioned that some groups

³³⁸ Jn17:6

³³⁹ Rev5:9-10

³⁴⁰ Rom3:25

³⁴¹ 1Jn2:2

³⁴² Eph5:2

³⁴³ Gen3:15

³⁴⁴ Cf. Heb10:4

³⁴⁵ 1Jn1:2

³⁴⁶ Jn4:14

who claim to believe the Bible have rejected the idea of the soul going to heaven altogether, believing that people have no consciousness after death until the resurrection. But Jesus confirmed that the thief next to Him on the cross would that day be with Him in paradise, and Paul wrote that he would sooner be absent from the body and present with the Lord³⁴⁷. Not that he wished to be naked, that is in the spirit, but what he most desired was to be clothed upon with his “house” which is *from* heaven³⁴⁸; not his “heavenly home” but his resurrection body.

Divine theology

It is possible that the very servants of Satan may be transformed into ministers of righteousness and become greatly revered amongst the good³⁴⁹. But there is a benchmark that can be applied if such people happen to be theologians or spiritual teachers in the Church and it is JHWE’s own assessment of Himself:

*“I AM who I am: the **God of tenderness and compassion**, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy, maintaining his faithful love to thousands, forgiving fault crime and sin, yet letting nothing go unchecked, punishing the parent’s fault in the children and in the grandchildren unto the third and fourth generation³⁵⁰*

That is God’s nature; these are His judgements which are evidently right and just and in accordance with human reason. That is, they are exactly how one would *expect* a loving and just God to behave in judgement. There surely can be no better theologian than God Himself, so if anyone presents a markedly different picture, he is no theologian at all however revered he may have become. We may be mystified by God’s *ways* at times, but this is a Being that we as human beings can truly love and adore as well as fear; not just for His grace and mercy *towards us* but because He is genuinely good from the perspective of those created after His own likeness. JHWE is forgiving, tender and compassionate just as a saintly human is consistently tender and compassionate, only more so. Like a good parent He will have a special affection for His own (or His Son’s) immediate family but will show magnanimity towards all, for *that is His nature*. As such He makes full allowance for the human weakness unavoidably inherited at birth; toleration being a vital ingredient of love as any parent will know. At the same time He will take vengeance on behalf of His people³⁵¹, being all who fear Him and seek to do justice in accordance with the revelation they have

³⁴⁷ 2Cor5:8 cf. Phi1:23

³⁴⁸ 2Cor5:2

³⁴⁹ 2Cor11:14-15

³⁵⁰ Ex34:6-7

³⁵¹ Cf. 2Thes1:6

received from Him. Truly, we shall praise God with uprightness of heart when we have learnt of His righteous judgements.

Who may approach God?

Many have come to understand that a godlike perfection in righteousness is the prerequisite for a relationship with God or to enter His courts in eternity. Since such cannot be humanly achieved, they believe such perfection must be credited to a person's moral account through an act of grace. It is linked to the illogical notion just considered that because God who is love personified is also holy, He will not relate in any positive way to anyone less holy than Himself. If that were true it would be the antithesis of love and holiness as Scripture has defined those qualities, as well as opposing what we know from our own human and Christian experience. It also challenges historical and scriptural reality in terms of the relationship JHWE had with His prophets and kings. The holier a person is the more acceptable and forgiving he is of other's faults and shortcomings, especially those of weaker humans; he also tolerates the foibles and is tender hearted towards those lower order creatures over which he has care and oversight, as is the case in man's stewardship of the animal kingdom. This is not sentimentality but a reflection of the divine quality of love, holiness and noble condescension that God Himself possesses and has imparted in measure to those made in His image; and in the Christian these qualities are being perfected through association with His Son. Such is the imparted love of the Father, which far from being sentimental incorporates a measure of holy hatred. That takes the form of a heightened sensitivity towards the cruelty, deceit and wickedness of others, especially towards those weaker than themselves. God and those who partake of His holiness are well able to differentiate between pure evil on the one hand and the imperfection of human weakness on the other. Such are tolerant and compassionate towards the one yet invariably incensed by the other. Examine the Scriptures carefully - this is the reality of God's relationship with His people. JHWE had shown incredible patience towards the human weaknesses of His servants yet does become angry when they wilfully disobey Him or particularly test His patience. Likewise, Jesus with His disciples: review His dealings with Peter on the one hand and Judas on the other. This has nothing to do with "imputed righteousness", it is our God and the outworking of His holiness. The true Christian who already partakes of the divine nature develops an instinctive and intuitive theology which senses the very nature of God. Such thereby discern the quality and outworking of divine love and holiness for they are in measure already partaking of it³⁵². Be it human or divine, Love is love; Holiness is holiness; it is a question of measure, not nature.

Adding to such misconceptions, Christianity has imported a Hellenistic perspective concerning how man is to relate to His Creator through eternity. Albeit unintentionally, it

³⁵² Heb12:10b

can demean the comprehensive divinity of Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man. At least one of His disciples fell into the trap: *“Show us the Father and it will suffice us”*, pleaded Philip. *“Have I been **with you so long** and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father”*³⁵³. Note here that Jesus is referring to His person and nature as revealed during His earthly ministry. The incarnated Jesus and His Father have the same nature. Jesus had never been the “compassionate face of God”, He was the very image (*eikon*) of God: the incarnate Word. Of course, the Father dwells in a *“light that **no man can approach**, whom no man has seen nor can see”*³⁵⁴. Yet man can know communion with the Godhead even now through the Son and the Spirit who are equally holy yet communicable; apart from which man’s destiny is not to be “lost in God” but to resume his existence as a physical entity in union with the Man who is God’s true Son. *“For in Him dwells the **fullness of the Godhead bodily** and (man) is complete in Him - the Head of all principality and power”*³⁵⁵. The Christ (anointed King) is also the Judge of humanity; God the Father judges nobody but has committed the matter to His Son³⁵⁶. It follows that the kind of people who were accepted, albeit sometimes rebuked yet clearly loved by Jesus during His earthly ministry will be accepted by Him at that judgement and rewarded according to their works³⁵⁷, the difference being that when He appears in His unveiled glory those in whom Jesus was profoundly offended³⁵⁸ will be *“consumed with the breath of His mouth and destroyed with the brightness of His coming”*³⁵⁹. These are the children of the devil (chapter six).

Yet it is certainly the case that only the pure in heart may see God³⁶⁰ but that is not a requirement to possess the triple holiness of the Divine Glory. Solomon was told by JHWE he would be blessed provided he walked in “innocence of heart and in honesty” as had his father David³⁶¹. It is that childlike purity required for those who are to enter the Kingdom, not the inviolable perfection of God Himself, for He is superior to His creatures in every way and will continue to be so. A measure of holiness is required even now to be in a living relationship with His glorious Son through internal communion, for He does become spatially intimate with the Christian³⁶². Such is not possible within a sin-prone mortal body without the forgiveness and cleansing of sin through baptism, without which one cannot be

³⁵³ Jn14:9

³⁵⁴ 1Tim6:16

³⁵⁵ Col2:9-10

³⁵⁶ Jn5:22

³⁵⁷ Mt16:27

³⁵⁸ E.g. Mt23:33

³⁵⁹ 2Thes2:8

³⁶⁰ Mt5:8

³⁶¹ 1Kin9:4

³⁶² Col1:27

raised to eternal life. But nor can such be sustained without the ongoing cleansing of the blood. For in shedding that blood Christ had provided *a purification through Himself* (Heb1:3 Greek: *di heautou katharismou poiesamenos*)³⁶³. Once again, this verse deceives through mistranslation in many versions, implying that the sins of the believer were purged at Calvary. They were not, they were pardoned. "*Katharismou* (purification or cleansing) is a noun, not a verb. The New International Version more accurately translates the verse as "(Christ) *provided purification* for sins": we have to avail ourselves of it - the blood must be applied. The writer to the Hebrews refers to the blood of the New Covenant as "*the blood of sprinkling*"³⁶⁴ referring back to the act of sprinkling the blood of bulls on the people of Israel to seal God's covenant with them. Peter refers to the same concept in the context of something that, like the believer's obedience, would be ongoing:

*(To the) elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through a hallowing of the spirit*³⁶⁵ *leading to obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus*³⁶⁶

whereas the once-for-all shedding of Christ's blood on the cross is referred to by Paul in the context of *universal reconciliation*:

*Having made peace through the blood of His cross, God would reconcile all things to Himself by Christ, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven*³⁶⁷

Whilst all true humanity (cf. chapter six) are reconciled to God by Christ's death, the Christian goes on to be "saved" by participating in His life³⁶⁸. And that salvation pertains to a healing of the soul through sanctification of the spirit, requiring the body, soul and divinity of Jesus to be received into the believer so that Christ's spirit is united to his own³⁶⁹. Such purification was not available until the shedding of His blood³⁷⁰ and as God well knew and intended, although the Good News of Jesus' Lordship was to be announced to all, relatively few would rise to the challenge of discipleship and so come to benefit from it. Yet Jesus had said: "*If I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself*" and Paul was later to confirm that it was God's intention to reconcile the whole world to Himself, not holding their faults against them. All is resolved once the three soteriological categories are acknowledged and it is

³⁶³ Heb1:3. - the similarly constructed 2Pet1:9 refers to the purging of *former* sins through the sacrament of baptism, the bath of regeneration (Tit3:5)

³⁶⁴ Heb12:24 (cf. Heb9:13; 11:28 re Old Testament Covenant)

³⁶⁵ Greek: *en hagiasmo pneumat^{os}* (genitive) = **of** spirit, **not by** the Spirit

³⁶⁶ 1Pet1:2

³⁶⁷ Col1:20

³⁶⁸ Rom5:10

³⁶⁹ 1Cor6:16-17

³⁷⁰ Zech13:1; Mt26:28

understood that those who are called to be Christ's little flock³⁷¹ are those whom He sanctifies, disciples and spiritually empowers to play a priestly role within a vastly broader healing and reconciling process:

*It is all God's work; He reconciled (Christians) to Himself through Christ, and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, **not holding anyone's faults against them**, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation*³⁷²

God's reconciliatory strategy for the world has been *to work from within*; firstly, reconciling a particular grouping to Himself (the seed of Isaac) to act as a bridgehead to the rest, who in turn would come to admire their wisdom and their laws³⁷³. Through Israel's failure that preparatory stage has itself been sub-divided and therefore extended by a realignment of personnel. Consequently, we are still in the process of assembling the priestly enlighteners that are replacing the race of Israel, not in the process of fulfilling Old Testament prophecies in a "spiritualized form". So shall the secret of God be brought to pass in accordance with the Good News He has brought to His servants the prophets.

Peter drops a further clue to the mystery when he refers to the Church both as a peculiar people and as a "nation" (Greek: *ethnos*). He is drawing on an Old Testament prophecy to summarize the nature and purpose of the Church; a purpose the prophets had expected to be fulfilled by others who were a nation in the more usual sense of the word:

*But you (the Church) are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light*³⁷⁴

But this time there is no conditional clause as there was with the previous participants³⁷⁵. Christ and His Spirit have promised to see this one through to its completion: individuals may default for sure, but not the entire people – not the whole Church.

The scope of God's salvific plans

*"(I pray that you) may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the **width and length and depth and height** – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge"*³⁷⁶

For most of the gospel era it *has* passed knowledge that Christ's love and sacrificial death have made it possible for all who fear God and endeavour to walk in accordance with the

³⁷¹ Lk12:32

³⁷² 2Cor5:18-19

³⁷³ Deut4:5-6

³⁷⁴ 1Pet2:9 cf. Ex19:6

³⁷⁵ Ex19:5

³⁷⁶ Eph3:18-19

light they have received to be accepted by God and in due time be received into His eternal Kingdom. Only a third of the world's population is nominally Christian; about the same proportion as a century ago. There are now more Muslims than Catholic Christians and nearly as many Hindus. It is an historical fact that a very small percentage of people inhabiting the largest Continent on the planet have been Christian, but we can be assured God loves Asians as much as anyone else; He is no respecter of persons but is preparing them to serve His Son and ultimately be united to Himself in His own way. Those who through elective grace are offered the challenge to suffer and serve with Christ as part of His mystical Body on behalf of their human family are called to a life of self-discipline and self-denial. Those prepared to sacrifice much in this life gain much in the next³⁷⁷. That is intuitive to all with religious faith. Christ's disciples must "*lose their own life that they might save it*". For them "*to live is Christ and to die is gain*". The pros and cons need to be weighed up before making the commitment to Christian discipleship³⁷⁸. Those who by the help of the Spirit and applying all the means of grace rise to such a challenge will be greatly compensated as the sons of the resurrection³⁷⁹, i.e. those who are to be raised up at Christ's coming³⁸⁰. In terms of who will be raised, Polycarp an *immediate disciple of John* understood that we will obtain the first resurrection "*if we do His will and walk in His commandments and love what He loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking and false witness*"³⁸¹. Achieving such a role in the Kingdom of God is not easy "*for many I say to you will seek to enter and will not be able*"³⁸². Disciples of Christ act as the advance guard; those who have fore-trusted³⁸³ in advance of His coming to the praise of His glory. They are the first fruit of His creation³⁸⁴ chosen to show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light³⁸⁵. Christians are Christ's own purchased possession; not the totality of those who will be liberated as the children of God³⁸⁶ but the firstborn of those children³⁸⁷, set apart to act as intercessors on behalf of the whole human family, for such is the role of the firstborn. The firstborn almost by definition are likely to be the minority; the rest are on the broad road to "*apoleian*"³⁸⁸, often translated as "destruction" whereas the Greek actually conveys

³⁷⁷ Mt19:29

³⁷⁸ Lk14:28-33

³⁷⁹ Lk20:36; phil3:11

³⁸⁰ Jn6:39,40,44,54

³⁸¹ Polycarp – [Epistle to Philippians chap. 2](#)

³⁸² Lk13:24

³⁸³ Eph1:12 "*proelpikotas*"

³⁸⁴ Jam1:18

³⁸⁵ 1Pet2:9

³⁸⁶ Rom8:21

³⁸⁷ Heb12:23

³⁸⁸ Mt7:13

the meaning of being severed or cut off from something vital, or being “lost” as per “*the Son of Man came to seek out and save those who were lost*”. What they have been severed from is “*zoen*” (life), that is the Life for which they were created, being a two-way relationship with God that only those on the narrow road can experience whilst in mortal flesh.

There was no fountain provided for sin and uncleanness for the people of the Old Testament³⁸⁹. The forensic benefits of the atoning Sacrifice are trans-historical; the participatory benefits cannot be. Old Testament saints could be pardoned on account of the later shedding of the blood of Christ as represented by the offering of bread and wine by the mysterious timeless priest of JHWE, Melchizedec³⁹⁰. He offered for the world what the Church now offers as God’s priesthood at the Eucharist, but unlike the latter those under the Old Covenant could not *themselves* be spiritually nourished by His body and blood for they could not partake of it. Those who think otherwise do not comprehend the letter to the Hebrews³⁹¹ and are denying the teaching of Christ:

*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in Me and I live in that person... This is the bread that **came down from heaven**; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever*³⁹²

The spiritual food and drink in question “came down from heaven” when the Son of God was incarnated. Internal healing and spiritual empowerment was not available for the faithful Jew until Christ physically shed His blood on the cross so that the Gift may be engrafted and “*the whole spirit, soul and body may be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord*”³⁹³. This is what it is to be “*saved to the uttermost*”³⁹⁴, requiring access to the sacrament by which Christ and the participant become one spirit³⁹⁵ and a partaker of the divine nature³⁹⁶.

The Church as priesthood for the world

Through the sacramental mystery, the Sacrifice at Calvary is actualized and re-presented in pure form for the benefit of the participants and for the glory of the Father who continues to delight in his Son’s faithful act of obedience to death through His love for humanity. *For every chief priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, so it is necessary that this One also*

³⁸⁹ Zech13:1

³⁹⁰ Cf. Heb7:3

³⁹¹ Especially 9:14-15; 10:1-2; 13:11-12

³⁹² Jn6:56,58

³⁹³ 1Thes5:23

³⁹⁴ Heb7:25

³⁹⁵ Cf. 1Cor6:17

³⁹⁶ 2Pet1:4

*has something to offer*³⁹⁷ which is Himself as Victim; an offering in which the whole Church participates. "It is finished" - the Passion itself has been accomplished, and the Church implements its achievement to advance the salvation of the world and for the sanctity of the faithful. Savours are not inclined to linger yet that historical sacrifice is perpetuated through the offering of the Church, propitiating God's displeasure at the world's sinfulness and justifying all those who fear God and seek to do what is right. Each participant acts as a priest joining in the offering of the Eucharist, receiving the sacrament in prayer and thanksgiving, offered in the hands of the celebrant, who *in persona Christi* acts as a high priest of the New Covenant, approaching the holy altar to offer the pure gift with incense³⁹⁸. The Church as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood offers up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ³⁹⁹.

Yet if the Church be a priesthood it cannot be offering sacrifices exclusively for itself. It also exists for the benefit of those "*who are ignorant and have gone astray*"⁴⁰⁰. The Church shares in the sacrificial offering with her Head. Those outside her therefore must potentially benefit; not just from her enlightenment and good works within wider society but through her priestly intercession and sacrifice. Once understood, this resolves many biblical tensions and explains the broader reconciliatory picture painted particularly by Paul.

Justification within the Universal Covenant is not directly linked to association with the Church but through an association with the cross of Jesus Christ (cognisant or otherwise) who has atoned for the sin of the world. That leads to an *indirect* association with the Church for she is God's royal priesthood making present that historical Sacrifice. Thereby all people of good will benefit in an expiatory (guilt removing) and propitiatory (God appeasing) sense from the sacrifice that the Christian faithful as God's nation of priests offers on the world's as well as its own behalf at the Eucharist. But only those partaking of the body and blood may benefit in a salvific or soul-healing sense, for which reason they say, "*Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul **shall be healed***". Likewise, as Jesus offered His body for the good of the Church so the believer having been spiritually nourished by partaking of that body may in turn offer his mortal body as a living sacrifice⁴⁰¹, primarily to God but also to benefit the world. Though already raised to heavenly places in Christ⁴⁰², like His Master before Him the Christian disciple is to offer his life in the body in humble service for the good of humanity. Just as Christ came not to be served but to serve, so the Church is currently serving with Him. As His future partner

³⁹⁷ Heb8:3

³⁹⁸ Mal1:11

³⁹⁹ 1Pet2:5

⁴⁰⁰ Heb5:1-2

⁴⁰¹ Rom12:1

⁴⁰² Eph2:6

she is destined for the Monarchy but for now, far from “ruling with Christ” she is His suffering Body, Servant to the world.

All doctrinal and biblical tensions become resolved once the historical misunderstanding concerning the outworking of original sin and the bi-fold nature of the benefits of the atonement are acknowledged. The Catholic Church’s reluctance to acknowledge doctrinal error pertains to her ecclesiology and the scope of her self-perceived infallibility. Yet that Church’s ability to have fulfilled her historical and universal primary obligations is not compromised, for the Lord has never ceased to gather a people to Himself so that from the rising of the sun until its setting a pure sacrifice is offered to His name. As universal sacrament for the world, the Catholic/Orthodox Church (West and East) has ensured that the fullness of sacramental provision necessary for gospel salvation has been provided, such that the ones called out to be the people of God may be supplied for divine service now and in the ages to come.

The Eucharist – our sanctification

Those who respond positively to conscience demonstrate they are “of God” as opposed to being like Cain “of the Wicked One”⁴⁰³. However, agnostics and those of other faiths cannot be presented “*faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*”⁴⁰⁴. That requires one to become a disciple of Jesus Christ and a partaker of Jesus Christ so as to become conformed to His image. One must draw on His spiritual life-force by eating His flesh and drinking His blood, for “*whoever eats Me will draw life from Me*”⁴⁰⁵. Receiving this Sacrament might be likened to the body’s blood flowing through the heart and being renewed and cleansed by it: spiritual life is renewed and refreshed by participation in the Eucharist. Yet it is no mechanical process even for those regularly attending this means of grace: faith is required just as it was when Jesus was physically present on earth by those who would be healed by Him. The pupil of the apostle John (Ignatius) affirms this Sacrament is the medicine of immortality; yet it is more than a salve it is a Saviour (i.e. a Person). The Eucharistic meal possesses the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ, not through the magic of a priest but by the Holy Spirit imprecated by him. One must have faith to regard it as such if one is fully to benefit from its transforming power for one is not merely receiving medicine for the soul but a Person to relate to it. The analogy within the liturgy recited communally by the participants refers to the idea of Christ “coming under our roof”, drawing on the Roman Centurion’s words to Jesus in Luke 7:6. That Gentile soldier sponsored by his Jewish friends (v3) did not feel worthy that the Saviour should enter His home “*but only say the word and my servant shall be healed*” (v7). In the Eucharist,

⁴⁰³ 1Jn3:11-12

⁴⁰⁴ Jud1:24

⁴⁰⁵ Jn6:57

unworthy though we are, the Lord enters our eternal spirit's earthly home and wishes to engage in meaningful communion with His host: *"Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice I will come into him and will sup with him, and he with Me"*⁴⁰⁶. The context of that invitation is not evangelistic, it was addressed to Christians in Laodicea. So "supping" in this context is not just eating but communing together and reasoning together. Such communion is challenging, intimate and potentially transformative: Jesus Christ wishes to unite His spirit with ours and thereby empower us and remain with us to direct the life-changes that are needed for our inner sanctity. For in Paul's words: *"He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit"*⁴⁰⁷. Hence priest and people exchange the greeting: *"God be with you" - "And with your spirit"*. He is received not *by* faith but *with* faith: it is not faith alone for He must be received. Indeed, Christ is received at the Eucharist regardless of the faith of the priest or the recipient⁴⁰⁸, yet the fruits of the sacrament depend on the disposition of the one receiving it, remembering its purpose is not to deliver the many from hell but to sanctify those being prepared for glory - not a place or realm but the unspeakable privilege of partnering Christ, the head of all principalities and powers⁴⁰⁹. But many again will ask *"How can this man possibly give us His flesh to eat?"*⁴¹⁰ The answer pertains to a profound mystery which is not scientifically explainable, which is what can happen when the Holy Spirit is at work; for not many rationalists can explain creation from nothing or the feeding of the five thousand either. Its heart is an interior union with Christ: *"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood **abides in Me and I in him**"*⁴¹¹. Such are the participatory benefits of the Atonement for those incorporated into the Body of Christ – our Holy Church from which are dispensed the mysteries of heavenly grace.

Yet all people of good will shall be subjects of God's eternal Kingdom:

*The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the Day comes, that great and terrible Day. All who call on the name of JHWE will be saved for on Mt Zion will be **those who have escaped**, as JHWE has said, and **in Jerusalem a remnant whom JHWE is calling***⁴¹²

Under Plan B⁴¹³ the location and logistics will have changed: the secure Jerusalem remnant will be the called, chosen and faithful gathered to Christ; those escaping on the mountain equate to those calling on the name of the Lord for mercy. Only the former shall through

⁴⁰⁶ Rev3:20

⁴⁰⁷ 1Cor6:16-17

⁴⁰⁸ *Ex opere operato*

⁴⁰⁹ Col2:10

⁴¹⁰ Jn6:52

⁴¹¹ Jn6:56

⁴¹² Joel2:31-32; ch3:4-5 some editions

⁴¹³ I.e. the replacement of Israel by a universal Church as royal priesthood to God (c.f. Eph3:3-6)

rapture escape the mayhem of the Day of Wrath⁴¹⁴ and only they will have been prepared to receive an immediate inheritance and intimate association with their Bridegroom at His coming⁴¹⁵, whereas in view of the corrupting nature of original sin the unsaved soul will be tarnished for it cannot be made whole except Christ had first been admitted to the vessel. Even disembodied and re-clothed in an incorruptible body, a soul will not by nature be disposed, disciplined or formed in the ways of righteousness to serve in intimate communion with the Lord of Glory, for *everyone must enter eternity as themselves or else it is not their life*. Nevertheless, all are to be subjects of God's eternal Kingdom providing they have evinced "faith" through love⁴¹⁶ and will be forever re-united with those they have loved and lost.

Special grace and faith

Common grace has been provided to all, and those who are of God co-operate with it, endeavouring to live uprightly and in accordance with sound reason, taking heed to conscience and producing the saving fruit of compassion. The *"exceedingly abundant grace which is in Christ Jesus"* is a gift freely provided for the last two thousand years to those whom God has called to form the sacred assembly of the firstborn ones (the Church) as part of His adapted strategic plan to reconcile the scattered seed of God. Coming to share His nature and being called to suffer with Him in the present so that they may reign with Him in the future⁴¹⁷, the elect are meant to be a blessing for the whole human family, for that is the privilege and responsibility of the firstborn, just as their Master and Saviour is in turn the Firstborn amongst them:

*For whom He did foreknow, He did predestine to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren*⁴¹⁸

The Creator's methodology is undoubtedly inscrutable, but in terms of His nature, *God is good, desires the long-term wellbeing of humanity and acts with fairness and generosity towards everyone*. So, in the religious sphere, individuals who are being prepared for a glorious future inheritance with Christ by being associated with Him in the present, are called in the meantime to self-sacrifice and divine chastening⁴¹⁹. They are to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice with all the discipline and self-restraint that requires. Others order their lives as they see fit: disciples of Christ will not have had that luxury, having

⁴¹⁴ Mt24:31,40,41

⁴¹⁵ Col3:24

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Mt25:40

⁴¹⁷ 2Tim2:12

⁴¹⁸ Rom8:29

⁴¹⁹ Heb12:6

travelled the way of the cross⁴²⁰. Not many wise, not many mighty or noble are called, for God has chosen the foolish of the world to confound the wise so that no flesh should glory in His presence⁴²¹. Christians are drawn by the Father to Jesus Christ; go on to love Him; wishing to serve Him and enjoy close communion with Him for ever. To that end they are willing to forsake everything that detracts from that goal for they have discovered the pearl of greatest price, have sold all to buy it and will go on to demonstrate their love for Him by keeping His commandments. They are “justified”, that is marked out in the present as accepted members of the redeemed community of Christ by exercising faith in Him and staying faithful to Him; there was no need, as some of Paul’s detractors in the Galatian churches were insisting, for fulfilling the works (deeds) of the Jewish Law such as circumcision and fasting.

Special Covenants in the context of universal enlightenment

Abraham is the father of faith as it pertains to an elective or exclusive covenant, but Abel, Enoch and others had earlier been justified, effectively within a Universal Covenant for there was no other in operation at the time. For given that Abel was “reckoned to be righteous” there must have been a covenant in operation for justification is *always in the context of a covenant*. God had spoken to Abraham directly; he believed God concerning His promise of a son in old age, and this was credited to him as righteousness. But as is made clearer in Hebrews 11⁴²² it was Abraham’s earlier obedience to God’s call to leave his home country that first evinced his faith. This undeniably virtuous quality is also described in Scripture as “godly fear”. Peter concluded on the matter once he had grasped that Gentiles were eligible for gospel salvation:

*“I have **come to understand** that God has no favourites but that anybody of any nationality who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him”⁴²³.*

For “*faith is that which of itself and from its own resources chooses at once what is best*”⁴²⁴. It is a positive response to God’s will for humane living, truthfulness and integrity as it is perceived through a religious creed if one has one or the dictates of one’s conscience. Through such common yet effectual grace, many will instinctively go on to perform acts of charitable love (*agape*) towards their fellow man. In so doing they confirm they are of God, since:

⁴²⁰ Rom8:17

⁴²¹ Cf. 1Cor1:26-29

⁴²² Verse 8

⁴²³ Acts10:34-35

⁴²⁴ Clement of Alexandria (2nd century) <https://www.earlychristianlife.com/2015/09/quotes-from-titus-flavius-clemens.html>

*“Love (agape) is from God and **everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God**”⁴²⁵.*

Referring back to Abraham, it was not *how* positively he responded to God, it was *that* he responded positively that led to him being counted as righteous. Faith is a quality which is either present or absent whereas works pertain to achieving a standard or complying with statutes. Unlike faith, such a measure is “analogue” and worryingly uncertain. Faith is a virtue for sure, but it has not been worked for or earned but simply possessed and utilized. Justifying faith always pertains to evincing the continued presence of a divinely provided quality by producing fruit. One who is of God evinces the fruit of love to some measure; he can be justified, i.e. marked out in the present as a valid member of the human race, one who has retained his Creator’s image, for God is love and man reflects His image and a measure of His glory⁴²⁶. The children of the devil on the other hand are “*trees whose fruit had withered, **now devoid of fruit, twice dead and plucked up at the roots***”⁴²⁷. Such may give a fortune to charity and the like, but it will be for the praise of their fellows, never genuine philanthropy, divine duty or faithful reparation⁴²⁸.

No case for human boasting

The “natural faith” which those who are of God exercise is a formed faith; it results in action. Love or the lack of it is what separates the sheep from the goats. But unlike the perfect completion of a divine law of which man has become incapable, it can be no cause for boasting, being merely the exercise, however feeble, of an innate God-given quality, which God counts as righteousness:

*What have you got that was not given to you? And if it was given to you, **why would you boast as though it were your own?***⁴²⁹

The fact that a person is justified in the present does not mean they will not be subject to judgement in the future. Final judgement may involve chastisement or purifying but most especially rewarding. Justification is a gift, not a wage or reward⁴³⁰; final judgement *does* involve reward for it pertains to how that which has been freely provided has been utilized. In Paul’s chronology the Christian has been reconciled and was justified by Christ’s death but will be saved to fulfil his eternal destiny through participation in Christ’s resurrected

⁴²⁵ 1Jn4:7

⁴²⁶ 1Cor11:7

⁴²⁷ Jude12

⁴²⁸ Lk11:41

⁴²⁹ 1Cor4:7

⁴³⁰ Rom4:4; 5:18

life⁴³¹. The apostle's perspective on final judgement as distinct from justification is summarized in the second chapter of Romans:

*God will repay everyone as their deeds deserve. For those who aimed for glory, honour and immortality by persevering in good works, there will be eternal life, but for those who out of jealousy have taken for their guide not truth but injustice, there will be the fury of retribution. Trouble and distress will come to every human being who does evil - Jews first but Greeks as well; glory and honour and peace will come to everyone **who does good** – Jews first but Greeks as well. **There is no favouritism with God***⁴³²

The potential need for final purification

The soul possessed at physical death is the soul which will be resurrected or if alive at the time, face Jesus at His coming. Paul's vessel, tent or body of death is replaceable by a glorious new body; the soul/spirit cannot be replaced for it pertains to one's identity. No one is to be "clothed in righteousness divine": the Father already relates to His Son; both now wish to relate to human beings – the real us. All Christians must stand before the tribunal of Christ "*so that each person can be paid back for the things that were done whilst in the body whether they were good or bad*"⁴³³. Christians who after being baptized into the faith wilfully continue to do wrong will be repaid accordingly. Every human being is to be judged impartially and rewarded according to their works⁴³⁴, potentially placing the Christian at a great advantage if he has taken heed to divine teaching, walked in the light and received ongoing cleansing in the blood of Christ. Yet the writer to the Hebrews warns even more starkly of the fallacy that Christians who continue to live sinful lives will escape condemnation; Christ's blood will not avail for them⁴³⁵.

There is only ever one foundation the Christian can build his life on, which is Christ. However, one may build with gold, silver precious stones, wood, hay or straw, and the "Day" will reveal which it is because it will be tested by fire⁴³⁶. God is described as a consuming fire; the Holy Spirit appeared as fire at Pentecost, so biblical fire is not always hurtful or destructive, but it purges and consumes the dross: that which is worthless. Every positive contribution a Christian makes to the building of God's Kingdom on earth will be of lasting value for that is the nature of gold, silver and precious stones; but the rubbish will be

⁴³¹ Rom5:10 note tenses

⁴³² Rom2:6-11

⁴³³ 2Cor5:10

⁴³⁴ Mt16:27; 1Pet1:17

⁴³⁵ Heb10:26-29

⁴³⁶ 1Cor3:11-13

burnt and the builder, having built on the right foundation but with the wrong materials will be saved, but as through fire.

Assurance of salvation

As Scripture makes clear, perseverance in the faith is not guaranteed, yet personal assurance of salvation is attainable – ultimately communicated by the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit⁴³⁷; the Holy Spirit being given to us to enable our hearts to become filled with love for God, and others⁴³⁸. Paul's reference to the "**love of God poured out in the heart**" is a genitive of origin. It refers not so much to God's love for us or ours for Him but to the impartation of the divine quality of love⁴³⁹ engrafted by the Spirit such that we come to love others more as God loves them⁴⁴⁰. It is in the context of partaking of the divine nature by which we come to possess more of what God possesses: especially holiness aligned with love; God *being* love and thrice holy. Loving the Lord in our hearts, thrilled by His goodness and coming ourselves to possess the love of the Father towards the rest of humanity, we may be confident we are being saved and heading for victory. Yet even this is subjective; assurance of salvation in Scripture is more often expressed in terms of actions rather than feelings:

*Now by this we know that we know Him, **if we keep His commandments**. He who says, "I know Him" and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. **By this we know we are in (Christ)***⁴⁴¹

*We know we have passed from death unto life **because we love the brethren**. He who does not love his brother **remains** in death*⁴⁴²

*Little children let no one deceive you: he who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous*⁴⁴³

Truly, personal righteousness must wholeheartedly be pursued and practiced. As for the reality of one's faith, anyone may extol the Being whom they believe is going to bless them eternally. John confirms that all who claim to love God will demonstrate it by their love for

⁴³⁷ Rom8:16

⁴³⁸ Rom5:5

⁴³⁹ Cf. Jn17:26

⁴⁴⁰ 1Jn2:5 cf. v15 "those not having the love of the Father **within them**"

⁴⁴¹ 1Jn2:3-5

⁴⁴² 1Jn3:14 – the expression "remains in death" again affirms "death" (like eternal life) refers to a current state – *not* "going to hell (or heaven) when you die"

⁴⁴³ 1Jn3:7

humanity⁴⁴⁴ and by keeping God's commandments, the heart of which is love for neighbour. That is Christ's commandment and it is not burdensome⁴⁴⁵.

Salvific synergy

The process of salvation requires human effort and cooperation; Grace replacing grace as the Christian works out his own salvation with fear and trembling. In Paul's words:

*If you live according to the flesh you shall die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you shall live*⁴⁴⁶

It is the human's spirit or "inner man" that is in action in this context, not the Holy Spirit as many infer from this verse. For we do not operate the Holy Spirit; *He cannot be a faculty*. The spirit is a part of us; the Holy Spirit is with us; the One witnesses to the other⁴⁴⁷. The Spirit is the God who guides instructing us to control our fleshly inclinations by responding to the inclinations of the inner man rather than the desires of its temporary housing. That is how we "crucify the old man" to preserve the soul⁴⁴⁸. Paul's "old man" and "new man" is the before and after of the soul. The old man was being "*corrupted according to the deceitful lusts*" arising from the concupiscence of the "body of this death" or flesh. Now through the means of grace and with the mind renewed both by the Spirit and divine teaching, the Christian is to "put on the new man". He himself has to do it: "*Therefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; be angry and sin not.*" Now the "new man" the heart, soul and spirit of the Christian can be recreated in righteousness and true holiness. It is a virtuous circle: *Charin anti charitos* (Grace for grace). "*Assuredly the same spiritual grace that is equally received in baptism by believers is subsequently either increased or diminished according to our conversation and conduct*"⁴⁴⁹. And all for one purpose:

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know **how to possess his own vessel** in sanctity and honour*⁴⁵⁰

Peter's teaching is in the same vein: the Christian has died to sin and now lives for righteousness⁴⁵¹. In the current age it is the soul that is healed through the sacraments, not

⁴⁴⁴ 1Jn4:20

⁴⁴⁵ 1Jn5:1-3

⁴⁴⁶ Rom8:13

⁴⁴⁷ Rom8:16

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Heb10:39

⁴⁴⁹ The [Epistles of Cyprian – Epistle 75 \(14\)](#)

⁴⁵⁰ 1Thes4:3-4

⁴⁵¹ 1Pet2:24

the body, either physically (as a norm) or in terms of its moral inclination: *For if Christ be in you the **body is dead** because of sin but the spirit is alive because of righteousness*⁴⁵². Paul would hardly be asserting that the Holy Spirit is alive *because of righteousness* (*dia dikaiosunen*); He could never be other than alive or righteous. The Christian's spirit is alive because it is intrinsically sound and enlightened, unlike the body which remains disordered and inclined to sin. The Christian is no longer under obligation to his degenerative vessel to satisfy its whims and desires but needs to deny them by his spirit which has been united to Christ. For, says the apostle, to be bodily-minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace:

*Therefore, do not let sin **reign in your mortal body** so that you obey its lusts*⁴⁵³

If the Spirit were the Operator and salvation all of grace, such an exhortation would be superfluous. Rather He is the Comforter and Facilitator – the spirit/will/inner man must apply itself, then the Spirit will provide aid. The evidence for such a symbiosis is our fellow Christian: each believer does not achieve the same degree of sanctification in his lifetime and it is clearly not perfected in all. For the believer is required to purify *himself*:

*Having therefore these promises dearly beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves** from all defilements of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting sanctification in the fear of God*⁴⁵⁴

The Christian is to become perfected or complete through personal effort and endurance aided by grace, perfected that is in love such that we become *“like God in the world”*⁴⁵⁵.

Salvific synergy in the language of Jesus

Jesus is equally clear that those who are to enter the Kingdom of God do not rely on grace *alone*:

*If your foot should be your downfall, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye should be your downfall, tear it out; it is better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, in which their worm will never die nor their fire be put out. For **everyone will be salted with fire - salt being a good thing** but if salt has become insipid, how can you make it salty again. Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another*⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵² Rom8:10

⁴⁵³ Rom6:12

⁴⁵⁴ 2Cor7:1

⁴⁵⁵ 1Jn4:17

⁴⁵⁶ Mk9:45-50

Jesus' teaching has a timeless quality and value, yet one must remember it was addressed to the fellow Jews of His day. Just as we saw Paul speaking of the necessity to put to death the deeds of the body by "*crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires*"⁴⁵⁷ so Jesus was referring to the need to control those bodily members relating to sight and action which might result in mortal sin⁴⁵⁸. But in the language of Jesus, there is no confusion about who is to exercise the control. For those who physically die in a state of mortal sin would have to be "salted in fire". Purgatory is indistinguishable in Scripture from Gehenna; something that, for example, someone who seriously insults his fellow believer may be required to experience⁴⁵⁹. The burning away of dross necessary for purification cannot be measured in earthly time or degree; such concepts have led to deformed practices packaged as indulgences, something which helped trigger Luther's revolt and were rightly condemned. In reality, the process of purgation can commence during one's earthly life and be completed within it; the need for such arising from the fact that even freed from the mortal body, a soul may be polluted with *sins of the mind* such as pride, resentment, jealousy, prejudice or an unwillingness to forgive. Such dispositions have no place either in heaven, where only the pure in heart may see God, or in a glorified body; they must be dealt with if the soul is to be redeemed and play a part in a "*new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells*"⁴⁶⁰. That is why it is better to keep one's body and mind in check and "have salt in oneself"⁴⁶¹. Jesus and Scripture are unambiguous that all mortal sins apart from that against the Holy Spirit can be forgiven in this age and the next⁴⁶². Confusion has arisen here from the fact that those who continually practice mortal sin will not inherit the Kingdom of God:

*Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God*⁴⁶³

Inheriting the Kingdom of God is not referring to the spirit going to heaven after separation from the body but to inheriting everything Christ is to inherit within a new body. Those who continue to practice the above will not be amongst the latter, even if currently incorporated in the Church. The one mortal sin that will not be forgiven as can be discerned from its context⁴⁶⁴ relates to knowing or sensing in one's conscience that something is of God working through His Holy Spirit yet asserting it to be wicked or satanic as certain Pharisees

⁴⁵⁷ Gal5:24

⁴⁵⁸ 1Jn5:16

⁴⁵⁹ Mt5:22

⁴⁶⁰ 2Pet3:13

⁴⁶¹ Mk9:49-50

⁴⁶² Mt12:31-33

⁴⁶³ 1Cor6:8-10

⁴⁶⁴ Mt12:22-32

did regarding Jesus' miracle which they maligned for their own ends in order to preserve their own status and traditions. One may well have challenged the working of the Spirit in ignorance, but what is done in ignorance cannot be the unforgivable sin which is why even blasphemy against Christ can be forgiven but not what is said against the direct working of the Spirit where that is perceived within the conscience. Final purification is an act of love, enabling morally damaged souls to become fitted for the eternal glory of God's Kingdom, but clearly it is best avoided by having salt in oneself⁴⁶⁵.

*"The fury of God's vengeance is profitable for the purgation of souls. That the punishment also which is said to be by fire is understood to be applied **with the object of healing** is taught by Isaiah: "The Lord will wash away the filth of the sons or daughters of Zion and shall purge away the blood from the midst of them by the spirit of judgement and the spirit of burning...**The Lord will sanctify in a burning fire**". [Origen - 3rd century]⁴⁶⁶*

It should be evident from another passage in which Jesus refers to hell that he could hardly be referring to eternal torment:

But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with their brother without a cause will be liable to judgement; and whosoever shall say to his brother Raca!⁴⁶⁷ shall be in danger of the Sanhedrin; but whoever shall say Moros!⁴⁶⁸ shall be in danger of hell fire⁴⁶⁹

The idea that calling one's brother vain, a Jew may still go on to enjoy eternal bliss after a hearing with the Sanhedrin, whereas calling one's brother stupid or foolish may result in eternal torment is clearly absurd. Given the gradation of insults outlined in the passage and the fact that Jesus is adamant about the reality of punitive fire, it is indicating the need for final purification for those who grossly insult and belittle a fellow Jew. Even where hell or punishment is specified to be eternal in the Latin Vulgate or English translations, the Greek text reads "*aionian*", referring to an age – and there are to be numerous ages. Such linguistic issues may be studied in more detail on the internet.

Redistributive Justice

The one reference to an individual's experience of the afterlife in the New Testament concerns the rich man and Lazarus, the text of which requires careful attention. The one stated criterion distinguishing these two men was that one had had a life of ease and

⁴⁶⁵ Mk9:50

⁴⁶⁶ [Origen de Principiis Book II chap. 10 \(para 6\)](#)

⁴⁶⁷ Vain fellow

⁴⁶⁸ Idiot, dullard or moron

⁴⁶⁹ Mt5:22

comfort whilst the other had been poor and wretched⁴⁷⁰. It can be deduced⁴⁷¹ that the rich man was suffering partly because of the way he had utilized his wealth; failing to show care and compassion to the likes of Lazarus. Yet no reason is provided as to why Lazarus should be comforted after his death other than that he had experienced a life of poverty and sickness; so had he been salted. The redistributive and compensatory aspects of judgement at death are also emphasized in the letter of James who exhorts the oppressive rich to weep for the miseries that are to come upon them⁴⁷², and by Jesus, particularly as recorded by Luke:

*How blessed are you who are poor; the Kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are hungry now: you shall have your fill. Blessed are you who are weeping now; you shall laugh*⁴⁷³

Whereas -

*Alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have plenty to eat now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who are laughing now: you shall mourn and weep*⁴⁷⁴

As well as redistributive justice this also relates to the role and necessity of human suffering outlined in chapter seven. Luke's interpretation of Jesus' teaching needs to be taken alongside Matthew's emphasis on more spiritual and moral qualities: poverty of spirit, hunger for righteousness, kindness, compassion and purity.

The nature of eternal privileges

Life experience, moral and spiritual integrity and especially how one has treated the poor with whom Christ as Son of Man personally identifies will determine how one fares once Christ's Kingdom is consummated. It will be a Kingdom in which the status of many will have altered⁴⁷⁵. As for the called, chosen and faithful disciples of Christ:

*He who overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him I will give power over the nations. "He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels". As I also have received from my Father; and I will give him the morning star*⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁰ Lk16:25

⁴⁷¹ Lk16:27-31

⁴⁷² Jam5:1

⁴⁷³ Lk6:20-21

⁴⁷⁴ Lk6:24-25

⁴⁷⁵ Mk10:31

⁴⁷⁶ Rev2:26-28

It is to be observed that whenever Jesus specified the nature of a reward for loyal service, it is nearly always expressed in terms of greater authority or responsibility⁴⁷⁷. Such applies to those who already have responsibility in the Church:

Who then is the wise and trustworthy servant whom the Master placed over His Household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant if his Master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. In truth I tell you, He will put him in charge of everything He owns⁴⁷⁸

All who are to form part of the mystical Spouse of Jesus Christ must reasonably expect to share in His activities, which are bound to involve exercising authority:

*For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end**, upon the throne of David and over His Kingdom, to order and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, **even for ever⁴⁷⁹***

The concept that the Jesus people are to judge, rule and enlighten others is not restricted to Old Testament prophecies, it is evident in the gospels, epistles and Revelation. The qualities required for those who are already reconciled to God as His children are faithfulness, humility and self-discipline. That is why Jesus taught that it is next to impossible for the rich and powerful of this age to enter the Kingdom of God⁴⁸⁰ for they don't have the humility and, ironically in view of what is being disclosed, believe they have too much to lose. Relatively few from the higher ranks of human society have come to gospel salvation. The weak and foolish of this world will put to shame the wise and mighty⁴⁸¹ so that no one may boast in God's presence.

People of good will

Such a description has been utilized by the Catholic Church and can now more clearly be defined from Scripture. As is the case for the Christian, their eventual deliverance from the bondage of sin so as to be united to God will have been made possible by divine grace and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, for these are the core elements of *all human salvation*. People of good will may participate even now in the building of God's Kingdom, for anyone who seeks to reconcile and bring peace between nations, families or individuals is acting like a child of God⁴⁸²; anyone who contributes to alleviating the plight of the poor and needy will

⁴⁷⁷ E.g. Lk19:15-27; Lk22:28-29

⁴⁷⁸ Mt24:45-47

⁴⁷⁹ Is9:6-7

⁴⁸⁰ Mk10:25

⁴⁸¹ 1Cor1:26-27

⁴⁸² Mt5:9

be judged as having succoured Christ Himself⁴⁸³. He who accepts and acknowledges someone righteous *as* righteous is himself accepted as righteous⁴⁸⁴. Those who pursue truth and justice for its own sake show themselves to be of the Truth⁴⁸⁵. Indeed, anyone who desires from the heart to do anything good and acts upon it is demonstrating they will one day adore Jesus Christ, the summit and perfection of all that is good.

The universal benefits of Christ's faithfulness

To be clear how Jesus Christ's atonement avails for those outside the Body of Christ it is necessary to understand what Paul was writing in Galatians 2:16, firstly by discerning how it is best translated:

*Having known that a man is not declared righteous by the works of the Law but **through the faithfulness of Christ**; we (Christians) **believed in Christ Jesus** that we might be declared righteous **by the faithfulness of Christ** and not by the works of Torah, therefore no flesh shall be declared righteous by works of the law*

This translation resolves the more usual version's triple tautology and shows how Christ's faithfulness in terms of His saving work on humanity's behalf benefits those who do not have a personal knowledge of it yet instinctively fear God and "attend to moral discipline" as some early Fathers refer to the matter. Countless billions who have lived have not benefitted from hearing a faithful account of Jesus' teaching and the Good News of His Kingdom. Most Church Fathers before Augustine's fearsome assertions recognized that man in his natural state, although unable to raise himself to eternal life had effectual free will to choose and practice what is just and in accordance with sound reason⁴⁸⁶. Likewise, man may equally choose to reject the light of Christ provided to all men and become a godless unbeliever who is devoid of faith. Romans 1:17 summarizes what Paul is saying regarding Christ's faithfulness and human faith:

*For in (the gospel) is revealed the saving justice of God; a justice based on faith **and addressed to faith**. As it says in Scripture, "Anyone who is upright through faith will live"⁴⁸⁷*

In the universal sense the object of faith is something innate, which is the inward eye of the spirit⁴⁸⁸, referenced by the conscience. Jesus described the little children who were brought to Him as "*little ones who believe in Me*"⁴⁸⁹ and the context makes it absolutely clear that

⁴⁸³ Mt25:40

⁴⁸⁴ Mt10:41

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. Jn18:37b

⁴⁸⁶ e.g. [Irenaeus against heresies Book IV chap. 37 para 1](#)

⁴⁸⁷ Rom1:17 New Jerusalem Bible

⁴⁸⁸ Mt6:22-23

⁴⁸⁹ Mt18:6

Jesus is not on this occasion referring to His adult disciples that He also sometimes describes in such a way; nor was He anticipating those infants who would go on to “receive Jesus as their personal Saviour” or become baptized Catholics, for it was an inclusive observation concerning all young children who were placed into His loving embrace⁴⁹⁰. Their belief in Jesus refers to what is innate to all very young lives – the internal witness of the light of Christ (the Word/Reason – *Logos*) through Whom their souls were created, guaranteed in their case not (yet) to have been obscured or distorted by the lusts of the flesh or impurities of the mind, which when combined with a growing awareness of transgressing God’s law defiles the conscience and extinguishes Life⁴⁹¹.

What the Bible means by righteousness

References in the Old Testament to “uprightness” or people who are “righteous” are not referring to moral perfection but a life of integrity or faithfulness. JHWE’s verdict on His servant King David was that he had walked before Him in “*innocence of heart and in honesty*”⁴⁹². That is not moral perfection but purity of heart. Likewise, the New Testament: in the account of Paul’s ministry recorded in Acts, Lydia the purple-dyer⁴⁹³ and numerous other Gentiles were recorded as God-fearing folk before they responded to the gospel. But many Protestant Bible translations such as the New International Version have inserted a comma at Rom1:18 where Paul is talking about God’s retribution being revealed against men “,” who suppress the truth by their wickedness and go on to be sexual perverts (v27), rotten, greedy, malicious, envious, murderous, treacherous, spiteful (v29), libellous, slanderous, God-haters, rude, arrogant, rebellious to parents (v30), brainless, loveless and pitiless (v31). The translators make this out to be Paul’s description of humanity by means of their punctuation⁴⁹⁴. The apostle is not here referring to all mankind or all Gentiles but is linking together various Old Testament scriptural texts which highlight a particular group’s wickedness to set out a typically Jewish critique of the pagan world and the inevitable consequence of idolatry. He recognized that many Gentiles, though not possessing the Law, do by nature the things contained in it in response to their conscience⁴⁹⁵. The context of his tirade against ungodly Gentiles was that those who are righteous live through an underlying faith whereas the ungodly do not, hence: “*We are sure that the judgement of God is in accordance with the truth against those **who commit such things***”⁴⁹⁶.

⁴⁹⁰ Mt19:14

⁴⁹¹ “*For at one time I was alive without the law, but when the commandment came, sin came to life and I died*” - Rom7:9 cf. 1Cor15:56

⁴⁹² 1Kg9:4

⁴⁹³ Acts16:14

⁴⁹⁴ The Greek text of the Bible contains no punctuation

⁴⁹⁵ Rom2:14

⁴⁹⁶ Rom2:2

He continues in the next two chapter of Romans to challenge the Jews who would go on to pass judgement on these Gentiles but who behave in a similar way yet take comfort in their heritage. He employs a similar method of critique, linking together passages from Scripture, in these instances where God's own people are being chastised. In Romans 3:10-18 he states that "not one (Jew) is upright, no not one (v10); not one of them does right (v12); their feet are swift to shed blood (v15) and there is no fear of God before their eyes (v18). Did Paul actually believe that no Jew ever feared God or ever did anything right? Clearly not, likewise with his depiction of the Gentile nations in the previous chapter. It is a literary technique to adduce universal sinfulness, i.e. that all are under the reign of sin⁴⁹⁷; he is not intimating that it is in everyone's nature to act in the depraved manner described in these concatenated prophecies. It is those who as individuals suppress the truth God has revealed to them who are to come under condemnation. The fact that references to righteous individuals in the Bible does not indicate perfection, still less "Christ's personal justice being imputed" can also be demonstrated from verses such as –

*If a righteous person **turns from their righteousness** and does evil, they will die for it*⁴⁹⁸

A righteous person as Scripture defines them can fall into sin and spiritually die for it; clearly therefore it is their earlier righteousness that was being referred to⁴⁹⁹. David, king and psalmist asked JHWE to "judge him as *his righteousness and integrity* deserve"⁵⁰⁰. That was his *own* righteousness: but in Psalm 32, penned after his grievous sin against Uriah to gain his wife Bathsheba, he says "*I confessed my offence to JHWE and He took away my guilt and forgave my sin*". For "*blessed is the man to whom JHWE **does not impute guilt** and in whose spirit is no deceit*". God forgave his sin, accepted him as righteous or vindicated him because he made confession of it from a pure heart, although he was punished through the death of Bathsheba's son which caused him considerable grief. It is not God imputing His own righteousness to another but His declaration that an individual or group are vindicated and accepted by Him, or in the formulation of the Psalmist God no longer imputes guilt to them for a specific offence. Had David not confessed such a mortal sin, his spirit would have been tainted; his guilt would have remained as would his broken communion with His Lord and the Spirit that he enjoyed as anointed king. Likewise, under the New Covenant forgiveness of a sin that leads to death; mortal sin as opposed to venial sin⁵⁰¹ requires the sacrament of reconciliation to restore Life, i.e. fellowship with the divine:

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. Rom 3:9

⁴⁹⁸ Ezek 33:18

⁴⁹⁹ Also Ezek 18:24

⁵⁰⁰ Ps 7:8

⁵⁰¹ 1Jn 5:16

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*⁵⁰²

Paul and Justification

The background to Paul's polemic against "deeds of the Law" in Romans and especially Galatians was that some Jewish converts to Christianity were insisting that Christians needed to be circumcised in accordance with Jewish Law to be justified or marked out as a Christian in God's sight. *"You foolish Galatians: Having begun in the spirit, are you to be made perfect by the flesh?"*⁵⁰³

And again: *Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law (i.e. circumcision etc.) or by the hearing of faith?*⁵⁰⁴

Those who complied with this false teaching, Paul declared, had "fallen from grace"⁵⁰⁵ for as he had preached to Jews and God-fearers at Antioch in one of the few references to justification within the evangelistic preaching of the New Testament:

*Through (Jesus), justification from all sins which the Law of Moses was unable to justify is being offered to every believer*⁵⁰⁶

Often when Paul is referring to the law, he is referring to the Torah, God's Covenant Charter for His people, for in Philippians 3:6 he declares that in terms of righteousness based on the Law he was "faultless". He was not saying he never sinned but claiming that he had perfectly observed all the physical requirements to be marked out as a Jew, such as circumcision, dietary restrictions and the like, that some Galatian converts were saying were essential for Christians to observe to be justified before God. No, said the apostle, we are justified by faith in Christ, not the works of the Law (Torah). If righteousness came through the Torah then Christ had died in vain⁵⁰⁷. The Jews also, he said, had approached the Law in the wrong way. It is not that they should not have personally striven to keep the Torah, rather that they had sought to be regarded as righteous *"as it were by works rather than faith"*⁵⁰⁸, by which he meant they relied on the deeds of the Law – the fact they were circumcised and observed dietary and sacral regulations⁵⁰⁹ to be marked out as the genuine children of Abraham and heirs to the Promise as opposed to being *circumcised of heart*, being those

⁵⁰² 1Jn1:9

⁵⁰³ Gal3:3

⁵⁰⁴ Gal3:2

⁵⁰⁵ Gal5:4

⁵⁰⁶ Acts13:38b-39

⁵⁰⁷ Gal2:21

⁵⁰⁸ Rom9:32

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. Gal4:9-10

who deny the disordered desires of the body so as to serve God⁵¹⁰. For the letter of the Law kills whereas the spirit (of the Law) brings life⁵¹¹:

*But now we are freed from the Law (Torah) that being dead wherein we were held that we should serve in **newness of spirit** and not the oldness of the letter⁵¹²*

The Law (Torah) had been provided to God's chosen people to act as a school master until Christ came⁵¹³. But through His death, He "*abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the Law of commandments **contained in ordinances***; in the process breaking down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile to make one new assembly, justified by faith in Christ rather than observance of Torah⁵¹⁴.

And Paul is adamant that the *spirit* of God's Law is fulfilled by love for our fellow man:

*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for **he who loves another has fulfilled the law**⁵¹⁵*

***Love** does no harm to a neighbour therefore **love** is the fulfilment of the **law**⁵¹⁶*

*For the **entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command** "Love your neighbour as yourself"⁵¹⁷*

And Paul is referring as much to the Old Testament Law as he was to the law of Christ, for the inculcation of kindness and treating others as one would wish them to treat us was Jesus' own summary of the Law and the prophets⁵¹⁸. So whilst the Christian is not subject to the dictates of Torah, he must fulfil its ultimate intention *in spirit*. Even the Torah of the Old Covenant was something about which the psalmists frequently eulogised for truly human living expressed in fear of God and concern for fellow man was always at its heart. Paul's critique was never aimed at those Jews like King David who delighted in the Torah and had earnestly sought to keep it, but those individuals, especially leaders who were obsessed with the minutiae of rules, regulation and liturgy and indeed had added to it, laying impossible burdens upon their fellows, whilst entirely neglecting the weightier matters of social justice, mercy and love. Nevertheless, to keep the Law perfectly in letter and spirit

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Col2:11

⁵¹¹ 2Cor3:6

⁵¹² Rom7:6

⁵¹³ Gal3:24

⁵¹⁴ Eph2:13-15

⁵¹⁵ Rom13:8

⁵¹⁶ Rom13:10

⁵¹⁷ Gal5:14

⁵¹⁸ Cf. Mt7:12

was impossible for anyone and *had never been the basis of justification*. If acceptance before God were on such a basis, then the Law would indeed be something to fear and hate for it would condemn us all. The point that Paul wished to make in the context of the gospel was that the Torah had now become redundant for “*in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor non-circumcision avails anything but **faith operating by love***”⁵¹⁹.

Reconciling Paul with James

The apostle James makes it clear that works are relevant to (or referenced within) the process of justification, but unlike Paul, he is not referring to the outward requirements of the Law, but the practical outworking and evidence of a formed faith:

*How does it help, my brothers, when someone who has never done a single good act claims to have faith?*⁵²⁰

And again:

*You believe in one God; that is creditable enough, but even the demons have the same belief, and they tremble with fear. Fool! – do you not realize that faith without works is useless?*⁵²¹

James goes on to give examples of how Abraham and Rahab the harlot were justified by their actions. He concludes:

*You see now that it is by works and not only by believing that someone is justified*⁵²²

By that he means there needs to be a reference to works, i.e. to see that fruit is produced confirming the faith to be formed. It is not really the work itself that justifies but the faith from which it springs, for an evil person may perform the very same act for self-centred reasons but it will never be from faith and they will not be justified. James is not contradicting Paul, who was addressing the problem in the churches initiated by the Judaic exclusivists that Peter had also had to contend with in Jerusalem that were insisting that Christians be circumcised and keep Torah⁵²³. We know Paul is referring to the Torah when he speaks of the Law in this context when he says elsewhere⁵²⁴ that the Law was given 430 years after God’s Covenant with Abraham. James would agree with Paul that only perfection would suffice if justification were on the basis of perfect obedience to the Law, and then it would no longer be by grace, it would be a wage. Likewise, Paul would agree with James when he insisted that nobody can be justified without the good deeds that flow out from

⁵¹⁹ Gal5:6

⁵²⁰ Jam2:14

⁵²¹ Jam2:19-20

⁵²² Jam2:24

⁵²³ Acts15:7-11

⁵²⁴ Gal3:17

faith, showing that it is formed. For deeds in the form of kindness and compassion are not merely the evidence of faith, *they are its efflux*. Expressed another way there cannot be love (*agape*) without formed faith being present, for love flows out from faith; they are effectively a part of the same. James affirms with Paul, the Jewish Law has been replaced for the Christian by the royal law of love for neighbour⁵²⁵, a law which the Christian himself must fulfil⁵²⁶, by which he shall be judged. It is a law of the spirit rather than the letter and is written in the heart. Paul regarded himself as being outside the Law, yet at the same time under a law; that of Christ⁵²⁷. Anyone who shows kindness to his “neighbour” out of compassion or a sense of duty is justified by faith within the Universal Covenant being a “doer of God’s law” as both James and Paul have re-envisaged it⁵²⁸; and that applied to many Gentiles who did not have the Law (Torah) but are a law for themselves⁵²⁹ which they endeavour to obey, whereas as shall be shown in chapter six, some people do not.

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est

Wherever love and charity are to be found within human society, God is there. Love according to the blessed apostle is the fulfilment of the Law, and of the three cardinal virtues being faith, hope and love, love is the best⁵³⁰. In terms of the individual: where love is demonstrated, an underlying “faith” is behind it, but it does not necessarily result in hope for the future which requires an informed faith, being a definite creed. John manages to summarize the essence of Christian theology and anthropology in a single verse:

*Love is from God and **everyone who loves** is a child of God and knows God. Whoever fails to love is not of God because God is love*⁵³¹

Love is the beating heart of Johannine *and* Pauline theology, i.e. “*agape*”, compassionate love: the essence of true humanity and the essence of God.

Jesus had come to make complete or fill out the Law not to abolish it⁵³²; for whilst the Law says, “Do not kill”, He says “Do not hate without a cause”. The Law says, “Do not commit adultery” but He says, “Do not even lust after a woman in your mind”. The Law made allowances for hardness of heart and permitted divorce; Christ’s law says the sons of the Kingdom can do better for the Spirit will write these new principles upon their heart and He

⁵²⁵ Jam2:8

⁵²⁶ Gal6:2

⁵²⁷ 1Cor9:21

⁵²⁸ Rom13:9-10

⁵²⁹ Rom2:14

⁵³⁰ 1Cor13:13

⁵³¹ 1Jn4:7-8

⁵³² Mt5:17

will aid them. The Law had pertained to the letter; Christ's law pertains to the spirit and mind. The Decalogue was filled out by the teaching of Christ; it was not "fulfilled" by proxy so as no longer to be a requirement for the Christian, for it is the doers of the law who are justified, not the hearers⁵³³. For those who truly belong to Christ instinctively love God and their neighbour or they are none of His; they therefore *do fulfil the law* in spirit and in truth – "*the righteous requirement of the law being fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit*"⁵³⁴. Servants obey commands out of duty but those who have become the friends of Christ⁵³⁵ are acquainted with their Master's business and obey Him out of love.

Justification – a free gift

In terms of everyman's standing before God, the fact that *agape* love is needed in evidence does not detract from the fact that justification is a gift from God⁵³⁶, for all that is required to receive it has already been provided. In the universal case, it is the ability to love⁵³⁷. Like the breath in his body, a young child possesses *agape* from birth and like that breath it flows out from his God-given spirit in the very process of being human as he bonds with his mother. At the exclusive covenant level regarding who is in Christ and who has yet to be reconciled to Him, the marker is faith and allegiance to Jesus indicated by incorporation within His Body through baptism. The instrumental cause of Christian justification being faith confirmed by baptism could never be a cause for boasting. The meritorious cause certainly is⁵³⁸: that was the slow and agonising execution of the Son of Man as a sufficient atonement for the sins of the world.

Abraham – Father of the first *elective* covenant

Just as Cain and Abel being the first siblings to be born of woman were representative players in the Universal Covenant, Ishmael and Isaac are such for the new embedded elective covenant established through Abraham. The difference here is that unlike Cain, Ishmael was not disqualified by his actions, he just wasn't selected in the first place, whereas within an inclusive covenant all are admitted but some default. Ishmael had been circumcised by his father Abraham and blessed by God⁵³⁹ but Sarah's son Isaac was elected to inherit the promises given to his Father Abraham. However, God continued to relate

⁵³³ Rom2:13

⁵³⁴ Rom8:4

⁵³⁵ Jn15:15

⁵³⁶ Rom3:24

⁵³⁷ 1Jn4:7

⁵³⁸ Gal6:14

⁵³⁹ Gen17:20

favourably to Ishmael⁵⁴⁰. He was still accepted within the Universal Covenant of life as potentially were his descendants. Others outside or preceding the Abrahamic Covenant specifically referred to as righteous in the Old Testament include Abel, Enoch, Noah, Lot and Job. As for the Christian:

*You brethren, **like Isaac**, are children of promise*⁵⁴¹

And you sisters and brethren, if baptized, are in the elective covenant that replaced Abraham's and you are there by grace alone. Others like Ishmael are loved by God but not elected to that exclusive family predestined before the foundation of the world to form the community in which the education and spiritual resources are provided for individuals to become holy and faultless in love before God through Jesus Christ⁵⁴². That is the Church, priesthood for the world, brought forth by God's will to be the first fruit of a restored universe.

The postdiluvian blessing upon fallen humanity

All who came out of the ark to populate the world after the universal flood were blessed by JHWE⁵⁴³. Of the sixteen seeds and nations stemming from Noah's grandsons, only the seed of the youngest son of Noah's youngest son was cursed for his father Ham's sake, and his name was Canaan. His seed would go on to practice great wickedness as they did in Sodom and Gomorrah and would become contaminated with Anakim giants⁵⁴⁴, the offspring of unions between satanic beings and humans who occupied the Canaanite territories, a notable being Og, the Amorite King of Bashan⁵⁴⁵. From these giants came the unclean spirits that roamed the world and were prevalent in Jesus' day. The book of Enoch fills out much of the detail here for it pertains to the Gen6:1 incident concerning the fallen watchers. This polluted seed pool needed to be eliminated, explaining the wholesale extermination of men, women and children in seven of the Canaanite nations God's elect race went on to inherit, although some of these demonic hybrids continued up to the time of David⁵⁴⁶. At the other end of the spectrum, the children of Israel stemmed from Arpachshad being the firstborn of Noah's firstborn Shem. So for illustrative purposes, *one* of the sixteen postdiluvian ancestral lines was cursed, stemming from the lastborn son (Canaan) of Ham who had exposed his father's nakedness, *one* was the elect patriarchal line stemming from the firstborn son of Noah's firstborn son leading down through a line of firstborns to

⁵⁴⁰ Gen21:20

⁵⁴¹ Gal4:28

⁵⁴² Eph1:4-5

⁵⁴³ Gen9:1

⁵⁴⁴ E.g. Deut2:21; Num13:32-33

⁵⁴⁵ Deut3:11

⁵⁴⁶ 1Chron20:4-8 - Refer to Hebrew interlinear

Abraham; whilst the remaining *fourteen* of the sixteen postdiluvian national patriarchs retained the blessing imparted to Noah and his family on leaving the ark but were *not the elective line* of firstborns. There is also a motif evident here pertaining to the firstborn being the line of special blessing. This can be traced back to Adam's son Seth; firstborn by default, his two elder brothers Cain and Abel having been respectively disqualified and murdered. Seth's firstborn was Enosh, the first to evoke the Lord⁵⁴⁷. After Enosh came Kenan, then Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch who "walked with God", Methuselah who outlived his son Lamech, father of Noah, dying within a year of the Flood. The same motif continues with the Church and her Head. The "Firstborn of all creation" is Jesus Christ⁵⁴⁸; the firstborn of God's children are the elect, who collectively are described as "the assembly of the firstborn" (plural)⁵⁴⁹. Under the Old Covenant with Israel, the firstborn son was always consecrated to the Lord. The firstborn sons are typically designated to sanctity and kingship, and through them are the whole family blessed.

In terms of the New Covenant, Luke provides an account of how non-Jews were for the first time to be beneficiaries of the Covenant of Promise. This was revealed to Peter through a vision and led to his meeting with the Gentile Roman centurion Cornelius⁵⁵⁰. He and his household were described as devout, God-fearing, generous and prayerful. This Gentile non-Christian's good works and prayers had been acknowledged by God⁵⁵¹. Cornelius was already participating in the cause of God's chosen people "giving generously to Jewish causes". The case of Cornelius is the clearest example in the New Testament of a non-Christian who feared God, acted virtuously and was accepted in God's sight⁵⁵². Acts2:5 refers to the devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, who assembled on Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples. In Paul's sermon to a mainly Jewish assembly at Antioch, he addresses them as follows:

*Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and **those among you who fear God; to you** the word of this salvation has been sent*⁵⁵³.

Jesus and the apostles acknowledged that many who had yet to respond to the gospel were devout, decent and God-fearing, and if we interpret Paul's teaching as indicating otherwise we are mistaken. The fact that God does not set humanly unattainable standards

⁵⁴⁷ Gen4:26

⁵⁴⁸ Col1:15

⁵⁴⁹ Heb12:23

⁵⁵⁰ Acts10

⁵⁵¹ Acts10:4

⁵⁵² Acts10:35

⁵⁵³ Acts13:26

of perfection but delights in human integrity and efforts to please Him was the starting point for the Book of Job as He addresses Satan, the arch-calumniator of human nature:

*Did you pay any attention to my servant Job? There is none like him on the earth: a sound and honest man who fears God and shuns evil*⁵⁵⁴

Yet not all who come to Christ are God fearers, there are also many scoundrels: *“And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were consecrated, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”*⁵⁵⁵. Some who practice wickedness God punishes by hardening their hearts all the more, whereas with others who appear to be hell-bent on self-destruction or like Saul of Tarsus before his conversion are misguided fanatics, the Lord may show mercy⁵⁵⁶; yet we may be assured that He would never harden the hearts of those who fear Him, for He loves them.

Conscience as an object of faith

Conscience is the eluded medium of effectual common grace and pertains to the human’s spirit, also largely eluded since the time of Augustine. It serves the natural law, and in the absence of a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ is *“the impression of a divine Light within us, a participation of the eternal law in the rational creature”*⁵⁵⁷. As such, conscience as the universal revelation of God, anterior to the Gospel and supreme over all other human faculties provides everyone with *“a clear and sufficient object of faith”*⁵⁵⁸. For faith is simply man’s positive response to what has been revealed to him from God, be it innately through the conscience or religiously through a creed. Through it one discerns the nature of right and wrong and senses a benefit in practicing the former to be at peace with oneself. The cardinal and distinguishing truth that conscience teaches is that God rewards the good and punishes the wayward; again, a facet of faith as the Bible defines it⁵⁵⁹. Its very existence is the consequence of the fact that the human spirit has been created in God’s image and enlightened by Christ whereas the vessel that houses it is drawn to worldly lust like a magnet, for unlike the spirit it was conceived in sin and shaped in iniquity⁵⁶⁰. But by habitually taking heed to the dictates of conscience, the soul/spirit is effectively relating positively to something, in fact Someone superior to itself; hence the person is regarded as exercising faith in God and so is justified through the merits of Christ’s atonement.

⁵⁵⁴ Job1:8

⁵⁵⁵ 1Cor6:11

⁵⁵⁶ Rom9:18

⁵⁵⁷ John Henry Newman: “Grammar of Ascent” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar_of_Assent

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar_of_Assent

⁵⁵⁹ Heb11:6

⁵⁶⁰ Ps51:5

Paul states that the conscience bears witness to God's moral law, which is engraved in the heart⁵⁶¹. "*To obey conscience is the very dignity of man, and according to it he shall be judged*". So teaches the catholic faith⁵⁶². The New Jerusalem Bible recommended for Catholic readers is one of the fewer translations that accurately conveys the meaning of this section of Paul's letter regarding the role of this faculty:

*When Gentiles, not having the Law, still through **their own innate sense** behave as the Law commands, even though they have no Law, they are a law **for themselves**. They can demonstrate the effect of the **law engraved on their hearts**, to which their own conscience bears witness; since they are aware of various considerations, some of which accuse them, while others provide them with a defence.*⁵⁶³

"*Heautois eisin nomos*" (v14) is literally "a law to themselves" but Paul did not mean this in the negative English colloquial sense of being lawless or doing things in one's own way. As is clear from the context he means that many Gentiles, not possessing and therefore not observing the Torah did by nature the things contained within it, such as care, concern and consideration for their fellow man. And so they become a law for themselves as the New Jerusalem Bible correctly relays and the Apostolic Fathers understood. That is the result of the divinely implanted faculty, which at any particular time we describe as being either clear, such that the individual can find no reason for self-reproach, or guilty in which the person feels a sense of self-condemnation and shame. However, in the category of people to be considered in chapter six, conscience has withered away⁵⁶⁴ or become fatally corrupted⁵⁶⁵ such that the person loses that most vital and noble part of their humanity, and with it any remaining interior semblance to the divine image. Such become absolute unbelievers and godless, for the internal witness (seed) of Christ has departed from them. They effectively opt out of the human race, for love (*agape*) is definitive to being human as well as reflecting the image of God who is pure goodness, for He is *Agape*⁵⁶⁶.

The sense of satisfaction someone may receive from doing the right thing, regarded by certain Christians as a sin in itself, is how conscience functions, which is why Paul writes that he as a natural man was *gratified* by the law in the inward man⁵⁶⁷. The measure of peace a person may receive when acting in a humane way towards someone in need, far from being

⁵⁶¹ Rom2:15

⁵⁶² *Gaudiam et Spes* para 16

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

⁵⁶³ Rom2:14-16a New Jerusalem Bible

⁵⁶⁴ 1Tim4:2

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Tit1:15

⁵⁶⁶ 1Jn4:8

⁵⁶⁷ Rom7:22

sin is a reciprocation of the divine faculty of conscience; for God delights in human acts of kindness and efforts to comply with the moral code He has engrained within man's heart; He regards it as faith. However, any who brag about their "kind deeds" have already had their reward for clearly the deeds were not primarily performed out of compassion or from a good conscience but to impress others, which is not of faith but of the flesh. Most who act humanely would acknowledge in their heart and to anyone who enquired: "I simply did what I sensed I should do as a fellow human being". Such is the outworking of justifying faith in the context of the Universal Covenant.

Pauline anthropology and its moral outworking

The moral predicament especially for those outside the Church concerns their inherited disordered nature and the struggle the unaided human's spirit has in controlling it. The non-Christian's plight is best summed up by Paul in this passage in Romans, which has been amplified in brackets for it is at the heart of misunderstandings concerning the human condition:

For we know that the law (of God – implanted in the spirit and referenced by the conscience) *is spiritual but I am fleshly sold into bondage of sin. For what I am doing I scarcely comprehend: for I am not practicing what I would like to do but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the law, acknowledging that the law is good. So it is no longer I who am really doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, **that is, in my flesh** – for the willing* (to do good) *is present in me, but the doing of the good is not: for the good that I want to do I fail to do; rather I practice the very evil which I do not want to do. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I* (i.e. my soul/spirit) *am not the one really doing it, but the sin that dwells in me* (i.e. in my flesh). *I find then the principle that evil is present in me* (being) *the one who **wants to do good*** (showing at heart I am a good person), *for I joyfully concur with the law of God in my inner man* (affirmed by my conscience and the peace I receive when I do what is right), *but I see a different law* (the triple concupiscence) *in the members of my body* (as their senses are processed through the brain) *waging war against the law in my mind* (referenced by the conscience) *and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is **in my members**. Wretched man that I am; who will set me from the body of **this** death? Thanks be to God* (it is) *through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind* (i.e. my eternal psyche) *am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin*⁵⁶⁸

Commenting on this crucial passage in his autobiographical "Confessions", Augustine is either being woefully inept or deviously subtle, the reader must decide which:

*"For though a **man be delighted with the law of God according to the inward man**, what shall he do about that other law in his members, **"fighting against the law in his mind"** and*

⁵⁶⁸ Rom7:14-25

*captivating him in the law of sin that is in his members? Thou art just O Lord but we have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and thy hand has grown heavily upon us and we are justly delivered over to that first sinner, the ruler of death, because he (Satan) **turned our will to the likeness of his will**, whereby he stood not in thy truth [Augustine's "Confessions" Book VII Chapter 21 - my highlighting to demonstrate the contradiction]⁵⁶⁹*

On the credit side, Augustine, unlike many later commentators does not try to make a case that the Romans chapter 7 passage was referring to Paul as a Christian (contradicted absolutely by chapter 8 – below), the apostle is speaking of man by nature. But then observe Augustine's outrageous conclusions – that it follows from Paul's statement that mankind's will has been conformed to that of Satan - as if the devil would ever delight in God's law in *his* inner being. If man's will had been turned to that of Satan's, then it could never be "free" but could only ever choose what is evil. Unlike Paul's depiction there is no inner conflict in Satan's mind, he is hateful *at heart* and unrestrained in his evil pursuits; man, even in his fallen state is not. Satan and natural man are therefore quite different in nature, for the one has a living spirit referenced by a conscience, the other does not.

Paul goes on in chapter 8 to confirm that the inability to practice what is right through enslavement to the opposing law of the "body of this death" is *not* the state of affairs for the Christian, who is divinely enabled such that he is "*not living in accordance with the flesh but in accordance with the spirit*"⁵⁷⁰. Paul says at the start of the passage being considered that the person he was depicting as himself was "*in bondage to sin*": he therefore cannot be referring to the Christian – it is man by nature. For -

*You (Christians) however live **not** by the flesh but by the spirit since the Spirit of God has made a home in you*⁵⁷¹

Clearly, the person the apostle depicts as himself in the passage *is* living by the flesh: he desires good but consistently fails to practice it because he gives in to the lusts of the body and practices what is evil. That assuredly is *not* the Apostle Paul or else he would be contradicting his own teaching that any who do live in such a way shall die (verse below). With the help of the Holy Spirit, any Christian (let alone Paul) can and should gain the victory:

⁵⁶⁹ <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110107.htm>

⁵⁷⁰ Rom8:4

⁵⁷¹ Rom8:9a

*We have no obligation to the flesh to be dominated by it. If you **do** live in that way you shall die, but if by the spirit you put to death the habits **originating in the body**, you will have life*⁵⁷²

The mortifying of the worldly habits originating in the body is further aided by the renewing of the Christian's mind, being enlightened by Christian teaching providing it is sound, and the Christian's spirit is in mystical communion with Christ's spirit⁵⁷³ so has the potential to over-ride the desire of the flesh and carry out what is pleasing to God:

*Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God*⁵⁷⁴

This mystical union of spirits also affirms the tripartite nature of man, for whilst Christ can have intimate fellowship with our spirit, He cannot become one with our soul or else we become as sinless as Christ, indeed we would become Christ. For the soul is the spiritual totality of what we are; it is what is being "saved to the uttermost" within the tent or vessel that is our temporary sin-prone body. The non-Christian on the other hand does not have the "*grace of our Lord Jesus Christ aiding the spirit*"⁵⁷⁵ to help control the impulses of the flesh; nor the teaching of the Church and Scriptures to instruct the mind.

Paul as apostle – assuredly not the chief of sinners

Every account of the Apostle's post-conversion life and ministry shows him to be a thoroughly spiritual man who declares himself to have "*lived in all good conscience before God up to this day*"⁵⁷⁶, someone whose behaviour set a pattern for his converts to imitate. Speaking of himself and his fellow workers "***our exalting is in the testimony of our conscience*** that in godly sincerity and purity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God we have conducted ourselves in the world"⁵⁷⁷. That is hardly the testimony of one who was still the "chief of sinners"⁵⁷⁸ that some latch on to in order to support their theological perspective. That description had been in the context of what he had referred to two verses earlier concerning his *pre-conversion* attempt to tear apart the infant Church of Jesus Christ; it was in the past. He also described the Christians in the Roman churches to whom he was writing as "*full of goodness and filled with all knowledge*"⁵⁷⁹ whereas he described many of

⁵⁷² Rom8:12-13

⁵⁷³ 1Cor6:17

⁵⁷⁴ Rom12:2

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. Gal6:18

⁵⁷⁶ Acts23:1

⁵⁷⁷ 2Cor1:12

⁵⁷⁸ 1Tim1:15

⁵⁷⁹ Rom15:14

the Christians in the Corinthian churches as fleshly or carnal⁵⁸⁰. It is the same Holy Spirit in Corinth as in Rome: the same Spirit, but different spirits and different mind-sets. It is therefore inadequate to regard the Church as merely an “assembly of justified sinners”: the people consecrated to Christ should aspire to be like the Roman Church of Paul’s day which the apostle delighted in - an assembly of those who like the seed that fell on the good ground are noble of heart, zealous for good works and bearing much fruit⁵⁸¹. They are those who seek to imitate the Apostle Paul, who “*disciplined his body like an athlete, training it to do what it should*”⁵⁸², whilst “*pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*”⁵⁸³. Being already partakers of the divine nature, they endeavour “to attain to God”. Such was the language and aspirations of the immediate successors to the apostles. It has been described by some as a theology of glory⁵⁸⁴, yet it is underpinned and enabled by a theology of the cross. Reconciling the two provides the basis for explaining the greatest mystery of the universe, being the prevalence of evil and suffering within the economy of the sovereign God Scripture describes as love personified⁵⁸⁵. Such will be examined further in chapters six and seven.

No bragging in heaven

Some protest that the concept of co-operating with grace to obtain a glorious inheritance would have Christians strutting around heaven like peacocks. But that is not how holiness works, and only the holy will be rewarded in such a way. Being Christ-like means to be like Christ who was the antithesis of a strutting peacock; meek and lowly of heart. And “*when He is revealed, we shall be like Him*”⁵⁸⁶. The divine quality of holiness is the moral cognate to love as Paul defines it⁵⁸⁷: “*Love does not parade itself and is not puffed up*”. Those who have God’s love in their heart and see a lowly person or an animal in need are not inclined to strut around with thoughts of superiority but are filled with compassion to help them. Such meekness of spirit and genuine condescension is the nature of love *and* holiness; they are the refined instincts of those who already partake of the divine nature. The holy also delight in honouring and submitting to those who are honoured above them, as was evident regarding Jesus towards His Father during His earthly ministry⁵⁸⁸, and Prophet John with regard to the One he was heralding, declaring “He must increase, I must decrease”.

⁵⁸⁰ 1Cor3:3

⁵⁸¹ Cf. Tit2:14

⁵⁸² 1Cor9:27

⁵⁸³ Phil3:14

⁵⁸⁴ E.g. within the Reformers’ 28 Theological Theses of Heidelberg

⁵⁸⁵ 1Jn4:8

⁵⁸⁶ 1Jn3:2

⁵⁸⁷ 1Cor13:4

⁵⁸⁸ Jn14:28

Additionally, worldly pride arises in part from the disordered nature of the vessel the spirit currently inhabits. This is discarded at death and will be thoroughly renewed at resurrection. The proud of heart do not possess the imparted love of the Father; they are morally and spiritually deficient and will one day be recognized by all to be so.

The beauty of holiness

On the other hand, those who come to share Christ's nature and holiness are destined to shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father⁵⁸⁹. Once frail children of dust, through obedience to the gospel they will have drawn life from the Saviour⁵⁹⁰ and placed their necks under His yoke so that through self-disciplined obedience He might be formed in them. For God's healing plan for the world was to purify a special people who would be devoted to His Son and the pursuit of good works. In Paul's words:

*The grace of God has appeared **for the salvation of the human race** teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts to live sensibly, righteously and devoutly in the current age, anticipating the blessed hope and Shekinah of our Great God and the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sake so that we should be **delivered from lawlessness** and be purified as a **specially chosen people for Himself** burning with zeal to do good works⁵⁹¹*

The purpose of the people chosen for Christ being devout and devoted to doing good apart from their own salvation and eternal reward was to bring light and healing *to the world* that God loves and intends ultimately to reconcile to Himself. The scale of His restorative plans that shall now be briefly examined is reflected in Luke's description of Christ's second coming: "*Chronon apokatastaseos panton*" - the time of the restoration of all things⁵⁹².

⁵⁸⁹ Mt13:43

⁵⁹⁰ Jn6:57

⁵⁹¹ Tit2:11-15

⁵⁹² Acts3:21

CHAPTER FOUR

The Universal Restoration

This brief chapter anticipates the time when the Kingdom of God, present in mystery through the Church is at last realized in the presence of the One “*whom heaven must keep until the universal restoration comes which God proclaimed speaking through His holy prophets*”⁵⁹³. As a result of the secret hidden in the Father concerning the reconstitution of God’s people and the dispensation set apart to establish it, Paul confirms that it is the *next age* that is in a meaningful sense “the Kingdom of Christ”⁵⁹⁴. In this age the implementation of Christ’s reign on earth is confined to His Church for only she acknowledges Him as Sovereign and observes His Royal Charter. Luke confirms that it is at Christ’s second coming that the restoration promised to Israel by the Old Testament prophets truly comes about in the world. Paul speaks again of this consummation in Ephesians:

*God made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of times; the summing up of all things into Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth*⁵⁹⁵

Reference to the Greek Interlinear Bible clarifies that Paul is envisaging an administration that Christ will be heading-up or gathering together into one. Paul refers again to this concept of final restoration in his letter to the Church at Rome, placing it in the context of their current predicament; not just for the Christian but the whole of creation:

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the **glory that will be revealed in us**. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God*⁵⁹⁶. *For the creation was subjected to futility; not willingly **but because of Him who subjected it** in the certain hope that the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*⁵⁹⁷. *For we know that the whole creation groans and labours in birth-pangs. Not only (they) but **we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit**, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, being **the redemption of our body***⁵⁹⁸

This passage from Romans chapter 8 is prone to mistranslation for it fits neither traditional Catholic nor Reformed apocalyptic expectations whereas the major theologian of the

⁵⁹³ Acts3:21

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. 2Tim4:1

⁵⁹⁵ Eph1:9-10

⁵⁹⁶ Greek: *huion tou theou*

⁵⁹⁷ Greek: *teknon tou theou*

⁵⁹⁸ Rom8:19-23

second century (Irenaeus) who will have been acquainted with the immediate successors of the Apostles better understood the matter: *“It is fitting therefore that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition should without restraint be **under the dominion of the righteous**, and the apostle has made this plain in the epistle to the Romans when he thus speaks: ‘For the expectation of the creature awaits the manifestation of the sons of God’⁵⁹⁹ .* With the notable exceptions of the King James Version and New King James Version, there is also a reluctance to translate *“huion tou theou”* as “sons of God” in verse 19. As can be seen above, the apostle refers to sons (*huioi*) and children (*tekna*) within the one cohesive passage inferring two distinct groups. The sons of God will be revealed to creation who in turn will receive liberation as children of God. “Sons of God” has both regal and divine overtones, for as Paul has just indicated, the Christian is to be *adopted* as a child into the divine family. That will be fulfilled when *the body* is redeemed (v23), the current version being the cause of the Christian’s and indeed humanity’s moral predicament. Christians are certainly numbered amongst God’s children – the Spirit confirms it with their spirits (v16); the *sons* of God are those being led by the Spirit of God (v14) who share in Christ’s sufferings and will share His glory (v17).

This is the greater of the two restorations spoken of in Scripture, the lesser being the restoration of Christendom to prepare for it so that a coherent gospel concerning the Kingdom may be proclaimed⁶⁰⁰. Then shall the whole earth be seen to be full of God’s glory⁶⁰¹ and the outcomes depicted in Old Testament prophecies will at last have been fulfilled. Below is an example of such a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah that, like all other Old Testament prophecy, bi-passes the inauguration of the Kingdom through the Church and envisages the joyful events of its fulfilment, which align with Paul’s depiction in Romans when *“the whole of creation is brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God”⁶⁰²*:

And there shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse

And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,

The spirit of wisdom and understanding

The spirit of counsel and might

⁵⁹⁹ [Irenaeus against heresies Book V chaps. 32 para1](#) and [chap. 36 para 3](#) and with regard to the [restoration of the animal Kingdom chap. 33 para 3](#)

⁶⁰⁰ Mt24:14

⁶⁰¹ Is6:3

⁶⁰² Rom8:21

The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight is in the fear of the Lord
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,
Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;
But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
*And with the breath of His lips **He shall slay the wicked***
Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.
The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat
The calf and the young lion and fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together,
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.
They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea⁶⁰³

Aspects of this prophetic revelation that are especially relevant to this chapter have been highlighted:

i) The Man appointed to judge humanity is meek and lowly of heart. He will apply the thoroughly comprehensible standards He indicated during His earthly ministry⁶⁰⁴;

⁶⁰³ Is11:1-9

⁶⁰⁴ Mt7:2

ii) The Gospel of the Kingdom is Good News both for the poor in spirit⁶⁰⁵ and those who are materially poor⁶⁰⁶;

iii) The wicked as defined in chapter six of this document will have no positive role in the new order and will be physically removed from earth. *“These shall incur punishment of age-enduring wholesale ruin from the face of the Lord and the glory of His strength”*⁶⁰⁷;

iv) The faithfulness of Christ (*pisteos Iesou Christou*), in particular His atoning death for sin will have been the primary means by which humanity is able to benefit from the restoration;

v) The restoration will be as much physical as it is spiritual incorporating both a renewed heaven and a renewed earth; humanity reconciled to itself and to God; the animal Kingdom at peace with itself and benign towards man as its caring overseer.

Jewish expectation of the restoration

God’s first choice people will have understood from prophecies like this that a divinely appointed king would come effectively to restore the Davidic dynasty, ushering in a time of peace, justice and security focused around the race of Israel. What they will not have expected, even though His death could be understood retrospectively as being foretold in the Fourth Song of the Servant⁶⁰⁸ is that their longed-for messiah would be executed, resurrected and returned to heaven leaving the Jewish nation still under the control of her political oppressors. Our Jewish fathers in the faith would quite reasonably have expected the political aspects of prophecy to have been fulfilled for, after all, *it is what their Scripture and ours affirmed*. Even the preacher of righteousness who was sent by God to “prepare the way of the Lord”, having himself been placed in prison became disillusioned and confused enough to ask:

*Are you the coming one or should we look for another?*⁶⁰⁹

Jesus’ reply to John’s disciples who had visited his prison throws further light on the present and future context of what Matthew calls *“basileia ton ouranon”* – the reign or kingdom of the heavens; whilst Luke and Mark, referring to precisely the same concept use *“basileia tou theou”* – the reign or kingdom of God:

⁶⁰⁵ Mt5:3 reflecting Is66:2

⁶⁰⁶ Lk4:18 reflecting Is61:1

⁶⁰⁷ 2Thes1:8-9

⁶⁰⁸ Is53

⁶⁰⁹ Lk7:20

*So He replied to the messengers, go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor*⁶¹⁰

From this, the imprisoned prophet was to understand that the Kingdom of God/heaven was in the process of initiation. Symbolically at least it represented the overthrow of Satan, the one responsible for leading the world astray⁶¹¹ and blinding men's minds to the truth of the gospel⁶¹², as well as being responsible for physical sickness⁶¹³ and more mysteriously, the one who has been granted the power of death⁶¹⁴ and harnesses the souls of the wicked⁶¹⁵. Until Satan is placed out of harm's way, God's Kingdom cannot be fully realized.

Jesus' ministry was evidence that the Kingdom of God was underway: this is what it would be like when Israel's God came to reign on earth⁶¹⁶: the healing of souls, but also the healing of bodies, society and ultimately the whole world. But that is not how it has panned out. The miraculous healing activity has not been in evidence since the end of the apostolic age. The fate of "the prince of this world" was sealed on the cross⁶¹⁷ but the fulfilment of his demise was deferred, for he still deceives its people such that they are more inclined to worship Mammon than JHWE. Further clues to the nature of the Kingdom are provided by another statement of our Lord:

*And from the days of John the Baptist till now, the kingdom of the heavens suffers violence, and violent men take it by force*⁶¹⁸

Jesus was referring to what John Baptist had earlier had to contend with when he was less than over-welcoming towards some who had come to him for baptism:

*Brood of vipers! Who taught you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance!*⁶¹⁹

These were some of the Sadducees and Pharisees who had come to be baptized in the name of the coming Messiah, believing it would as the prophet said, give them final immunity from the punishment they deserved. The Jews had expected the Old Testament prophecies

⁶¹⁰ Lk7:22

⁶¹¹ Rev12:9

⁶¹² 2Cor4:4

⁶¹³ Lk13:16; 2Cor12:7

⁶¹⁴⁶¹⁴ Heb2:14

⁶¹⁵ Cf. Mt13:39; 15:13

⁶¹⁶ Cf. Is52:7

⁶¹⁷ Jn12:31

⁶¹⁸ Mt11:12

⁶¹⁹ Mt3:7b-8

to be fulfilled through an administration to be established by God's anointed one (not necessarily a deity), and that he would physically stay at the helm whilst the predictions were realized. The reason this did not come about was partly Israel's failed historical mission as light to the Gentiles but also what Jesus came to refer to as "this faithless and perverse generation", who even after His ascension to glory rejected the apostolic witness to His Kingship⁶²⁰. As outlined in the opening chapter, Old Testament prophecy has been subverted by the fact that a universal church has been formed to replace Israel as priesthood for the world⁶²¹. Jesus superseded the Temple and the Mosaic Covenant to provide a new and living way by which those who were now to make up "His peculiar people" could be spiritually united with Him and sanctified to serve as kings and priests within that Kingdom. He had become the surety of a better covenant with the Torah being replaced by the royal law of love for neighbour written on tablets of flesh in the believer's heart⁶²²; whilst the blood of bulls and goats had been replaced sacramentally by something more precious to be appointed for sprinkling, which not only remits sin and pardons but has power *to cleanse the conscience from dead works so as to serve the living God*⁶²³. That was the Good News, but there was also a downside.

An inaugurated eschatology

The cleansing, restoring and reconciling of creation depicted in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah's prophecy featured above is to be inaugurated but not fully realized in the dispensation that succeeds it. The Kingdom of God is arriving in two stages; the rolling together of eschatological events having been both re-ordered and re-structured. According to Isaiah, when the promised redeemer arrived, the wicked were to be dealt with (i.e. removed), the remaining people are chastened but brought to peace with their God and each other, the animal Kingdom is tamed and at peace with itself and humanity, and God's Holy Mountain, referring to Jerusalem, is safe and secure under its divine Head. Moreover, the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God for the Lord would have become King of the world:

*When that day arrives, living waters will issue from Jerusalem, half towards the eastern sea half towards the western sea; they will flow summer and winter. Then **JHWE will become king of the whole world***⁶²⁴

⁶²⁰ Acts13:46

⁶²¹ 1Pet2:9

⁶²² 2Cor3:3

⁶²³ Heb9:14

⁶²⁴ Zech14:8-9

Note: “God **will become** King of the World”. The Creator and Sustainer of the universe does not exercise His kingship on planet earth⁶²⁵, yet one day He will do, through Christ with His people. Then how beautiful on the mountains shall be the feet of him who comes in the name of the Lord and announces to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ For as Paul well knew such a proclamation was not valid at the inception of the gospel age, which is why the apostle subverted that prophecy from Isaiah in his letter to the Romans⁶²⁶. The messenger has been pluralized for Paul now relates it to the preaching of the gospel by the Church, whilst the apotheosis of Isaiah’s message concerning the reign of God on earth has been omitted. When God’s Kingdom *is* realized it will correspond in scope and shape to Paul’s eschatological expectations set out in Romans 8:21-25. That will be when Jesus Christ commands His angels to bind the prince who continues to have authority over sickness and death and destroys his power base in the world. That eradication of wickedness cannot be subsumed within the current mission of the Church, who along with the rest of the world must wait patiently, for what has been subverted for the greater good has not been forgotten⁶²⁷. Such is the “inaugurated but yet to be realized” nature of the Kingdom of God as we currently perceive it. It *is* inaugurated being present in mystery through the Church, intended to function as a counter-kingdom. For acknowledging Christ as her Sovereign Head and observing His Charter, she is to exercise authority quite differently from the kingdoms of this world both in terms of her self-governance and outreach. For just as Jesus’ Kingdom was not of this world, likewise the Church’s authority is not derived from this world order - otherwise her servants would crusade through the world and seek to convert her by force⁶²⁸.

Everyone incorporated within the Church through baptism can be said in a sense to be in the Kingdom of God. Yet Paul had warned Christian disciples at Derbe, “*we must all experience many hardships **before** we enter the Kingdom of God*”⁶²⁹; and as Jesus indicated, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter it. He also told His would-be disciples carefully to evaluate the cost of discipleship, like someone intending to build a tower or a king about to go to war⁶³⁰. That cannot be referring to obtaining Church membership, receiving a sacrament or making a profession of faith; rather it is the assessment to be made by those who are to enter pilgrimage as learners of the Christ. Such who are called, chosen and remain faithful will be fitted for Kingdom service in eternal partnership with the One before Whom every knee must bow, whether on earth or in the heavens or under the earth when He is shortly revealed as Lord of all. That is the

⁶²⁵ Cf. Lk4:6

⁶²⁶ Is52:7 cf. Rom10:15

⁶²⁷ Cf. Rom11:15

⁶²⁸ Cf. Jn18:36

⁶²⁹ Acts14:22

⁶³⁰ Lk14:28-33

context of the resurrection and imperishable crown for which Paul strove and disciplined his body like an athlete so as not to be disqualified from the prize⁶³¹. It would be achieved through personal self-discipline aided by grace: - “**Strive** to enter (the Kingdom of God) by the narrow gate, for many I say to you will seek to enter and will not be able” says Jesus. The irony is that those who take up the challenge of the gospel and in Paul’s words, “aim for glory, honour, incorruptibility and eternal life by persevering in good works”⁶³² will find that as they take the Master’s yoke upon them and learn from Him, He is gentle and lowly of heart, and they will find rest for their souls.

This chapter has been distinctly short for Scripture does not provide any detail concerning *how* Christ will restore all things or the exact nature of His people’s involvement in it; only that it will be set in motion at His coming. Knowing more detail at this stage could compromise the role of faith. What has become essential is a better understanding of the Good News message (the gospel) within the churches so that a suitably *unified witness* can be provided to the world. Given the Church’s current configuration that cannot be a painless process, still less the purging and regeneration of creation that shall follow it – “the great and dreadful day of the Lord”⁶³³.

⁶³¹ 1Cor9:24-27

⁶³² Rom2:7

⁶³³ Mal4:5 or 3:23-24 some Catholic editions

CHAPTER FIVE

Progressive Revelation

Holy Scripture does not set out the totality of God's plan for His creation but concerns His stratagem for the reconciliation of the world to Himself and the key structures and players within that plan. The fuller picture is alluded to in Scripture but only matters directly relating to the key human agencies involved within the reconciliation (Israel and the Church) have been illuminated. Yet for many that sub-plot has been mistaken for the whole salvation story. That has distorted an understanding of the fuller picture (divine providence) whilst not preventing the salvific recruitment and enlightenment operation within it proceeding according to plan. *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that through Him **the world** might be saved*⁶³⁴. The whole matter has been in accordance with God's stratagem for the Church and the world, being progressive revelation.

Natural law – the dark matter of Scripture

Given the divine intention that all true humanity was ultimately to be restored and come to understand the truth⁶³⁵, it was necessary, especially following the breakdown in relationship between man and his Maker depicted in the Eden incident that mankind be given some awareness of the Creator, how people should relate to their fellows and manage the creative order set under them. This was to be by means of natural law, a concept referred to indirectly by Paul and accepted to a degree by today's Catholic Church, having earlier been influenced by thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas and his formulations on its primary and secondary precepts, and more recently by John Henry Newman's reflections on universal revelation and the role of conscience, the latter having a substantial impact on the Second Vatican Council's articulation of broader benign providence in the 1960s. Many Evangelicals on the other hand will be uncomfortable with the concept of *natural* law playing any positive role in human salvation. Yet that description is something of a misnomer for it pertains to eternal laws and divinely provided precepts within man that enable him, even in his fallen state, to discern good from evil and endeavour to choose the former for his own well-being and everyone else's. Moreover, it pertains to what is spiritual, even the essence of Christ Himself, *and is directly associated with His atoning death*. For the fruits of the Passion avail at the forensic level for all who respond positively or "faithfully" to such precepts, for as we shall see in the next chapter, not all do. It provides an object of faith, independent of special revelation, for God foreknew that the Christian message would become confused and distorted, indeed entirely obscured for many as a result of historical

⁶³⁴ Jn3:17

⁶³⁵ 1Tim2:4

cultural and religious developments. Natural law is associated with Christ himself since it pertains to an underlying faith in *Logos* by which little children can do no other than “believe” in the Saviour⁶³⁶. This should not be so surprising given that “natural law” is really Christ’s law, for *all things*, nature herself and the precious human soul were created by the pre-incarnate Christ as *Logos*, through Him and for Him⁶³⁷. Amongst the earliest Church Fathers such as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, this principle was articulated in terms of the divine *Logos* (Word) whom they recognized had provided every age, race and each individual with seeds of divine truth – the “*Logos spermatikos*”, leading everyone to some knowledge of God and His law, however fragmentary. Origen specifically regarded the seed of reason provided to all men equipping them with a measure of wisdom and justice as the essence of Christ Himself, as did Justin Martyr⁶³⁸. From such a perspective Christianity does not supersede natural law but rather builds on it. Even pagan literature, philosophy and mythology contain wisdom that could be regarded as a preparation for the gospel, and that is how the apostle Paul utilized it. He drew upon a Greek poet Epimenides and a Greek philosopher Aratus in his sermon in Athens (below), but firstly in addressing a pagan audience in Lycaonia, the apostle states:

*We have come with Good News to make you turn from these empty idols to the living God who made sky and the earth and the sea and all that they hold. In the past He allowed all the nations to go their own way; but even then He did not leave you without evidence of Himself in the good things He does for you: He sends rain from heaven and seasons of fruitfulness; He fills you with food and your hearts with merriment*⁶³⁹

So unlike His chosen people of the Old Testament whose inexcusable idolatry was not tolerated and was punished severely, God permitted primitive people to go their own way in terms of their search for God, hoping as Paul said that they would recognize the *goodness of His nature* through the natural provisions made for them. According to this apostle’s natural theology, God expected primitive man to grope after Him and find Him to an extent:

*And He has made from one blood, every nation of men to dwell upon the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwelling so that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we move and have our being; as also some of your poets have said, “For we are also His offspring”*⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁶ Mt18:6 – note the preceding verses – the statement cannot be referring to His adult disciples

⁶³⁷ Col1:16

⁶³⁸ [The first apology of Justin Martyr chap. 46](#)

⁶³⁹ Acts14:15-17

⁶⁴⁰ Acts17:26-28

This was in response to the Athenian pagans setting up an altar inscribed “To the unknown God”. Paul concluded his message:

*Truly, these times of this ignorance God overlooked but now commands all men everywhere to repent*⁶⁴¹

Paul affirms that God had been willing to tolerate past sins; He was not as it were bound to Himself to punish them, and that was in part due to His Son’s atonement for the totality of human sin in the middle of history⁶⁴². This is in marked contrast to how the Lord dealt with His own people Israel:

*You alone have I intimately known of the families of the earth. **That** is why I shall punish you for all your wrongdoing*⁶⁴³

When it comes to judgement, God has no favourites; on the contrary He has always made generous allowance for the unenlightened but expects a higher standard from those who have been privileged to be acquainted with His decrees, still more have a personal knowledge of His Son; for such have been given inestimable privileges, resources and opportunities for a glorious inheritance. *How shall we possibly escape if we neglect so great a salvation?*⁶⁴⁴ *How much worse a punishment will those deserve who have trodden underfoot the Son of God and have counted the blood of the covenant **by which one is sanctified** as a common thing and so outraged the Spirit of grace?*⁶⁴⁵ For the Lord shall judge His people. As for the rest, He has not left them entirely in the dark so the irreligious are neither entirely without excuse nor hope.

The Bible is distinctly cryptic concerning God’s wider providence as a result of which the Catholic Church, having been set back centuries in this regard by the theology of Augustine in particular, has only very recently come to apprehend and articulate the true scope of divine magnanimity, whilst many other Bible believing Christians do not perceive the matter at all, strident in their assertion that those not elected to Christian salvation are to be damned. The really good news has been saved for last⁶⁴⁶. Such is the procession of progressive revelation regarding providence, but it has also applied to an understanding of the nature of the inheritance of the elect which has been obscured and overly spiritualized through the influence of Neoplatonism:

⁶⁴¹ Acts17:30

⁶⁴² Rom3:25-26

⁶⁴³ Amos3:2

⁶⁴⁴ Heb2:3

⁶⁴⁵ Heb10:29

⁶⁴⁶ Cf. Rev10:10

*(May God) give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened that you may know **the nature** of the hope of His calling and **the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints***⁶⁴⁷

God and the arts

As well as the light of reason and conscience, the loving Creator also works through His Holy Spirit in the gifts and talents He provides to mankind, for “*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights*”⁶⁴⁸. These gifts are by no means all religious in nature. The Father of lights⁶⁴⁹ can reveal something of Himself and His all-embracing providence in music, art, poetry and many aspects of human endeavour. An artistic creation or composition that inspires or elevates is likely to have been the result of its human creator being themselves inspired. Anyone who genuinely admires and appreciates such work is honouring and welcoming something of God into their heart; for everything that is truly worthy, every good and perfect gift has derived from Him. Within the literary arts, any play, book, drama or comedy that challenges people’s prejudices and encourages a more considered, open-minded or compassionate way of life is a preparation for the gospel. And it was God, not the devil who provided wine to gladden the hearts of men⁶⁵⁰ for as Paul himself affirmed, our loving Creator wishes His human creation to be happy as well as holy⁶⁵¹. An artistic outpouring that creates a sense of longing and wonder that people would not otherwise experience creates the void which ultimately can only be filled by God Himself. Science and learning are also gifts from the God who would not only have all men to be healed and restored but come to know the truth⁶⁵².

At the natural level of revelation, something of God’s providence and power are seen in the magnificence of creation and in the more wholesome aspects of human talent and industry described above, to which much could be added. The Christian is assuredly not to “despise everything pertaining to the senses” as Augustine had asserted⁶⁵³ for not all that is sensed in the mind merely excites the flesh but can also uplift the spirit. These are gifts to be appreciated and cultivated; albeit not to be embraced as if they themselves were the culmination of beauty or joy, for the Christian should discern that their apotheosis is to be perceived *through* them not *in* them.

⁶⁴⁷ Eph1:17-18

⁶⁴⁸ Jam1:17

⁶⁴⁹ Greek: *patros ton phot~~on~~* (plural)

⁶⁵⁰ Ps104:15

⁶⁵¹ Acts14:16-17

⁶⁵² 1Tim2:4

⁶⁵³ Augustine “[Of the morals of the Catholic Church” chap. 20](#)

Special revelation

The Catholic Church rightly affirms that natural law and human reason play a positive and preparatory role in man's search for God. Human reason is not antithetical to divine revelation, indeed is a part of it; yet these faculties are insufficient of themselves to bring individuals to the kind of intimate relationship God ultimately wishes to have with the creatures made in His own image:

*By natural reason man can know God with certainty on the basis of His works. But there is another order of knowledge, which man cannot possibly arrive at by his own powers: the order of divine revelation. Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed Himself and given Himself to man. This He does by revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men*⁶⁵⁴

And God having chosen to work from within, used *a* people (Israel succeeded by the Church) to enlighten and reconcile *the* people (the world) to Himself. That process was initiated when God revealed Himself to Abram and made him Abraham – the father of many nations, by whom all peoples of the earth should ultimately be blessed. From his seed would spring the nation of Israel, intended to become the priestly people of God. For them, divine revelation would no longer be restricted to what could be determined innately or by observing creation. God would reveal Himself and His requirements more precisely by means of the Law and Prophets. He would even reveal His name: JHWE – “I AM who I am”, and something of His awesome power and purity through His presence in the Holy of Holies. Later and more overtly, God's personality and loving purposes for humanity were witnessed, albeit briefly and to a privileged few, through the incarnate Word Himself:

*The **Word was made flesh** and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth...And of His fullness we have all received and grace for grace*⁶⁵⁵.

Now, through the New Covenant initiated by Christ's blood, God's saving truth is known more fully through the Church and her Scriptures. For this holy, universal and apostolic Church is the mystical Body of Christ on earth; His flesh and bones⁶⁵⁶, the instrument of His saving and redemptive mission. The Spirit guides her and progressively leads her into all truth⁶⁵⁷. A further progression of understanding continues in the Church through the centuries, but there can be no entirely new revelation which surpasses or in any way seeks

⁶⁵⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church chap 2 #50

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p1s1c2a1.htm

⁶⁵⁵ Jn1:14,16

⁶⁵⁶ Eph5:30

⁶⁵⁷ Jn16:13

to correct the initial revelation itself, merely its interpretation. For the foundation has once and for all been laid by Christ and His apostles and forms the scriptural and oral deposit of faith which the Church must guard and teach; the faith having once-for-all been entrusted to God's holy people⁶⁵⁸:

*Yet even if revelation is already complete, it has **not been made completely explicit**; it remains for the Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries*⁶⁵⁹

The revelation that *has* been completed will have incorporated clear instruction essential for the functioning and mission of the Church, much of it provided in verbal form, but also a less vital package of mysteries for the Church to unpack during the course of its long journey of discovery. No contributor to the canon of Scripture utilizes the word "*mysterion*" more than the apostle Paul. A mystery from the human perspective is necessarily a secret or veiling from God's perspective, the Greek word encompassing both aspects. There is the mystery of godliness⁶⁶⁰, the mystery of the Kingdom⁶⁶¹, the mystery of the Church⁶⁶², the mystery of the gospel⁶⁶³, the mystery of the faith⁶⁶⁴ together with the four especially relevant to this disclosure: the mystery of lawlessness⁶⁶⁵, the fellowship of the mystery, being the unforetold nature of Gentile inheritance and its implications to wider providence⁶⁶⁶, the mystery of Babylon⁶⁶⁷ and the final Mystery of God, being His providential intentions towards the *whole creation*⁶⁶⁸, an apprehension of which would bring sweetness to the mouth but bitterness to the gut regarding what had earlier been assimilated⁶⁶⁹. For the Spirit's progressive enlightenment both within the Catholic and Protestant churches has invariably resulted in a keener awareness of God's gracious magnanimity towards humanity, challenging the harsh and narrow perspectives of the fearsome Augustine as well as that of the Reformers who regarded that colossus as "Paul's

⁶⁵⁸ Jude3

⁶⁵⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church #66

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p1s1c2a1.htm

⁶⁶⁰ 1Tim3:16

⁶⁶¹ Mk4:11

⁶⁶² Eph5:32

⁶⁶³ Eph6:19

⁶⁶⁴ 1Tim3:9

⁶⁶⁵ Greek: "*anomias*" 2Thes2:7

⁶⁶⁶ Rom11:25; Eph3:9; Col1:27

⁶⁶⁷ Rev17:5

⁶⁶⁸ Cf. Enoch93 verse 10: <https://www.worldstudybible.com/Enoch/Enoch-Chapter-93.htm>

⁶⁶⁹ Rev10:1-10 - note v4: uniquely, John was not permitted to write down what he heard, a mystery so profound that it was not intended to be disclosed to the churches at that stage, even symbolically

most trustworthy interpreter”⁶⁷⁰. In the context of ecclesiological re-integration, any new perspectives must be underpinned from Scripture, and that has involved deconstructing the biblical theology that was foundational to the earlier understanding.

The boundaries of new revelation

The progressive revelation principle is evinced by an indisputable and authentic development of doctrinal understanding and devotional practices through the centuries. The Holy Scriptures like the Kingdom can be likened to a storehouse of treasure from which may be brought out new things as well as old⁶⁷¹. But Martin Luther went quite beyond authentic development and still further beyond the bounds of reason when he made the following remarks about the Fathers of the Church:

“OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH”

*Behold what great darkness **is in the books of the Fathers concerning faith**; yet if the article of justification be darkened it is impossible to smother the grossest error of mankind... Augustine wrote nothing to the purpose concerning faith for he was first roused up and made a man by the Pelagians, in striving against them. I can find no exposition upon the Epistles to the Romans or Galatians **where anything is taught pure and aright**. Oh, what a happy time have we now in regard to the purity of the doctrine, but alas we little esteem it.*⁶⁷²

In all good conscience, how could God deny the world, the Church or any known assembly separated from her any effectual instruction on the means of salvation for over a millennium? For none of the known Christian sects that had separated from the Catholic Church understood saving faith in the counter-intuitive way Luther conceived it, yet if he were right, they could not have escaped perdition unless they had. For, said he: *“It is certain that a man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ”*. This and the other 27 paradoxical theses articulated at the Heidelberg Disputation are effectively the foundation upon which Protestant Evangelicalism has been built, so they need to be reviewed in a little more detail.

28 THEOLOGICAL THESES⁶⁷³ - presented by Martin Luther and Leonhard Beyer to a meeting of the Augustinian order at Heidelberg on 26th April 1518:

Introductory Statement: *“Distrusting completely our own wisdom, according to that counsel of the Holy Spirit, “Do not rely on your own insight” (Prov. 3:5), we humbly present to the*

⁶⁷⁰ Heidelberg Disputation introductory statement (next page)

⁶⁷¹ Cf. Mt13:52

⁶⁷² Martin Luther “Table Talk” #DXXX Marshall Montgomery Collection

⁶⁷³ <http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php>

*judgment of all those who wish to be here these **theological paradoxes**, so that it may become clear whether they have been deduced well or poorly from St. Paul, the especially chosen vessel and instrument of Christ, and also **from St. Augustine, his most trustworthy interpreter**".*

*1 The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, **but rather hinders him**.*

*2 Much less can human works, which are done over and over again with the **aid of natural precepts**, so to speak, lead to that end.*

3 Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.

*4 Although **the works of God are always unattractive and appear evil**, they are nevertheless really eternal merits.*

5 The works of men are thus not mortal sins (we speak of works which are apparently good), as though they were crimes.

6 The works of God (we speak of those which he does through man) are thus not merits, as though they were sinless.

***7 The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous** themselves out of pious fear of God.*

8 By so much more are the works of man mortal sins when they are done without fear and in unadulterated, evil self-security.

9 To say that works without Christ are dead, but not mortal, appears to constitute a perilous surrender of the fear of God.

10 Indeed, it is very difficult to see how a work can be dead and at the same time not a harmful and mortal sin.

11 Arrogance cannot be avoided or true hope be present unless the judgment of condemnation is feared in every work.

*12 In the sight of God **sins are then truly venial when they are feared by men to be mortal**.*

*13 **Free will, after the fall, exists in name only**, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin.*

14 Free will, after the fall, has power to do good only in a passive capacity, but it can always do evil in an active capacity.

15 Nor could free will remain in a state of innocence, much less do good, in an active capacity, but only in its passive capacity.

16 The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.

17 Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of Christ.

18 It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

19 That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened (Rom. 1:20; cf. 1 Cor 1:21-25),

20 He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

21 A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

22 That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

23 The law brings the wrath of God (Rom. 4:15), kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ.

24 Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.

25 He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.

26 The law says, do this, and it is never done. Grace says, believe in this, and everything is already done.

27 Actually one should call the work of Christ an acting work (operans) and our work an accomplished work (operatum), and thus an accomplished work pleasing to God by the grace of the acting work.

28 The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.

Truly, the above would have been an anathema to those who received the Good News from the apostles or their immediate appointees. Such cannot possibly have been *“the faith once*

*for all delivered to the saints*⁶⁷⁴ or indeed anything like it, for none of the writings of the late first and second century Church witnesses most notably Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Ignatius and Polycarp, the latter two known to be fellow-disciples under the apostle John understood the gospel in the way the Reformers or for that matter 4th-5th century Augustine came to interpret it. Luther himself affirms the matter - none of these Apostolic Fathers had understood the gospel in terms of “faith alone”, “resting in the mercy of Christ” from the starting point of a condemned humanity incapable by nature of willing and doing anything pleasing to God. That is why this Augustinian monk came to regard them as being in “great darkness”. From any rational and experiential perspective it is absurd to assert that everything that God does *appears evil* from a human perspective (#4); that acts of kindness and compassion towards those in need are effectively mortal sins (#2); that the response of a good conscience is “evil self-security” rather than the reciprocation of an innately provided faculty (#8); that doing what one believes to be right and just could ever be a mortal sin (#7); more generally that the vast majority who have failed to interpret the “Good News” in such a way are condemned to hell. For as just illustrated, few if any *Christians* in the first millennium interpreted the Gospel in such a way, let alone the rest of humanity to whom God has also wished to impart His saving truth. Given that these issues pertained to the essentials of human salvation and the historical mission of the Church they could never have been truths that were progressively to be revealed but are heretical teachings, resulting in the severing of the Body of Christ, hatred between sincere Christian believers and centuries of warfare.

It is therefore important to ascertain how the teaching of the apostles actually was disseminated through their successors to the churches being established throughout the world. Third century Origen aptly commented that the apostles when handing on the faith to the early Church expressed themselves “*with utmost clarity concerning the essentials*” whilst on other subjects “*they merely stated the fact that things were so, keeping silence as to the manner or origin of their existence, clearly in order that their successors who should be lovers of wisdom might have a subject of exercise on which to display the fruit of their talents*”⁶⁷⁵. Examining the Ante-Nicene writings it will be discerned that all were in agreement concerning certain essentials that have subsequently been the cause of schism, whilst other issues including those being dealt with in this document such as God’s dealings with those outside the Church and the nature of the age to come were not agreed amongst the Fathers for they contained mysteries the solution for which did not form a part of the “faith once and for all delivered to the Church” but were data to be subjected to progressive revelation.

⁶⁷⁴ Jud1:3

⁶⁷⁵ Origen de Principiis - [Preface paras 2 and 3](#)

Apostacy foretold

A partial darkening and some internal corruption was foretold for the Church (initially for the Temple) in prophecy and occurred at its appointed time, resulting in apostasy and the fragmentation of the Western Church along with the development of some fatally flawed theology. But then *“there must be sects among you, that those who are approved might be recognized among you”*⁶⁷⁶. But in these last days there needs to be unity amongst the churches so that the Good News of the Kingdom can be preached *coherently* as a witness to the un-churched before the end of the current arrangements on earth. The Catholic and Orthodox churches must be open to the Spirit of Truth, and therefore to new enlightenment regarding issues not directly challenging the Creed or Deposit, relating rather to scriptural interpretation. That is something in which Protestant scholars often excel; and unlike the controversies of the middle-ages these do not necessarily challenge ecclesiological integrity, although they may well challenge some established doctrines. For as the Catholic Church acknowledges:

*There is a **hierarchy of truths** since not all truths of the Catholic doctrine are equally connected with the foundation of the Christian faith*⁶⁷⁷

If the Spirit were to encounter intransigence in one quarter, He might very well turn to another to spearhead the process and put the former to shame. At the end of the day, home must be where the heart is, yet others may become instrumental in leading the way. The Head of this fractured Body may of course call upon whomsoever He pleases to enlighten the Church, for His ways are inscrutable and He clearly has a sense of humour⁶⁷⁸.

Enlightenment through biblical scholarship

Recent scholarly interest in studying the Bible in the context of other ancient texts aided by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls has thrown new light on the various forms of Judaism that prevailed in the first century, resulting in new perspectives on Paul’s teaching arising within Protestant academia. These have considerably reshaped the understanding of justification by faith in the apostle’s thought in the minds of many biblical scholars, although the development has had less impact at ground level within independent Evangelical churches.

The chronology of progressive revelation

⁶⁷⁶ 1Cor11:19

⁶⁷⁷ Unitatis Redintegratio 1964 – para 11

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

⁶⁷⁸ Mt11:25

Starting at the point of man's creation and the Fall:

- a) Natural law and human reason – observing God's greatness and goodness in what has been created and in His kindly intentions towards humanity⁶⁷⁹; the witness and controlling influence of the conscience regarding God's requirements for human behaviour;
- b) The Law, the Prophets and JHWE's personal presence amongst His people of the Old Covenant; intended also to be an enlightenment to the rest of the world;
- c) The short-lived presence, ministry and teaching of the incarnated Son of God to His disciples and others privileged to experience it; largely restricted to Jews and those who lived amongst them;
- d) Detailed teaching of gospel salvation through the Church established by the apostles on a foundation which cannot be supplanted;
- e) Century by century deepening of the Church's understanding concerning matters not essential to what is required for gospel salvation but beneficial for her devotional life and ministry;
- f) Fulfilment of Jesus' promise that the Spirit of Truth would finally "*lead the Church into all truth and tell her of the things to come*"⁶⁸⁰; her sagacity perfected through a more complete understanding of Holy Scripture such that the churches "*come to the unity of the faith to a perfect man to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*"⁶⁸¹.

Yet what must be kept in mind is that progression to the fullness of truth will not have been a steady upward path, for the faith was not handed down to the Church in the form of a book that was progressively to be unravelled, but from a depository preserved and transmitted in written and verbal form:

*Therefore, brethren stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, **whether by word or our epistle***⁶⁸²

Whilst the Bible was a vital part of that depository, it was Scripture that had *already been explained to the churches receiving it*, or at least those aspects vital to their salvation: such essentials were not to be unpacked through the centuries. So although relatively little is known about the Church's development in the critical late first century period, one needs to reflect upon the missionary journeys of Paul in the middle of that century: their geographical extent and the numerous individuals that would have been appointed by him

⁶⁷⁹ Acts14:15-17

⁶⁸⁰ Jn16:13

⁶⁸¹ Eph4:13

⁶⁸² 2Thes2:15

and his fellow missionaries. Then consider such biblical personages as Timothy (c. AD17-97), Titus (c. AD13-107) and Philemon (timeline uncertain) to whom Paul wrote epistles and envisage the numerous and worthy men they in turn will have appointed to continue the ministry in accordance with Paul's instructions. Finally, reflect on the second century Church and its writers and perceive that it is quite impossible that *all known witnesses* from that era could have been in error concerning vital aspects of gospel truth. For Irenaeus' testimony (below) affirms the churches at that time had a reasonably uniform understanding of the essentials of the faith:

"The Church having received this preaching and this faith although scattered throughout the whole world yet as if occupying one house carefully preserves it. She also believes these points of doctrine just as if she had one soul and one and the same heart and proclaims and teaches them and hands them down with perfect harmony as if she only possessed one mouth. For the churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain or Gaul. . . But as the sun, that creature of God is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shines everywhere and enlightens all men that are willing to come to a knowledge of the truth [Origen 2nd Century]⁶⁸³

Even if such a report of ecclesiological unity were exaggerated, the point is surely made: the essentials of gospel salvation were known and taught by the second and third century churches. We may therefore safely regard ante-Nicene teaching and praxis as normative, at least *for matters essential to gospel salvation*, allowance being made for a progressive deepening and maturing of the faith over time through the action of the Holy Spirit and the collective sense of the faithful. For any subsequent progressive revelation cannot pertain to the essence of gospel salvation: its means of initiation and any essential provisions for ongoing sanctification. Given that it was not until the fourth or fifth century that theology was moulded into any precision and doctrines were systematised utilizing a relatively recently agreed plenary canon of Scripture, the particular interpretations that Late Antiquity exegetes came to when interpreting the abstruse pastoral letters of Paul in particular needed to have been tested against the universal witness of the immediate post-apostolic Fathers. For the latter had not been entirely reliant upon the precarious process of biblical exegesis using texts written in a language with which the Latin Fathers in particular were unfamiliar. The faith "once for all delivered to the saints" had been received by them either from the apostles themselves or their direct appointees. What they had received must have incorporated *all of Paul's teaching that was essential to the practice of the faith*. It follows that there can be nothing essential to gospel salvation that could be discovered, recovered

⁶⁸³ [Irenaeus against heresies Book I chap. 10 para 2](#)

or re-interpreted by Augustine or any of his successors four centuries later, let alone fifteen. It is quite impossible that the second and third century churches could have been uniformly in error concerning such matters as the nature of repentance (that it pertained to moral reform, not acknowledging oneself to be morally bankrupt and hateful to the core) or the economy of grace (that God had provided certain spiritual faculties to fallen man: natural precepts by which he had *effectual* free will to desire and do some good such as exercise compassion and practice justice, albeit not to be raised to eternal life apart from gospel grace). It will have been necessary to understand these matters, not only to discern the true essence of human nature and the disposition required for saving faith, but also to give the Creator due praise for His gracious magnanimity towards the human race as a whole. In many of these considerations, especially those pertaining to natural precepts, grace and free will, Augustine came to an understanding markedly different from the teaching of those who had been personally trained by the apostles and their immediate successors. In so doing he deformed the living tradition of the Church, as some in the East have asserted, albeit he never received any formal conciliar condemnation from the Greek Church. Some of the distortions derived from flawed exegesis became embedded in the doctrines formulated by the Western Church; these were later built upon and reinforced by those (Protestants) who separated from her in the middle ages. It should therefore be of no surprise that once the Bible is unravelled, the outcome is to be much closer to the understanding of the very early Fathers than it is to Augustine, still less to the “Reformers”, especially in those areas that were heavily dependent upon an understanding of the Pauline epistles.

Yet a final resolution should not be expected precisely to match the teaching of the earliest post-Apostolic Christian witnesses, partly in view of authentic development and partly because Scripture itself affirms there are concepts that were never intended to be grasped until the very end, the most fundamental being that the benefits of the Saviour of the World’s atonement avail at a forensic level for the world as whole, not just for those who have been called out from her to be the human agents of her healing and reconciliation:

*“He gave Himself as a ransom **for all**; (a fact) to be testified in due time”⁶⁸⁴*

In contrast to some Christian traditions the Catholic Church recognizes the many things that are true, virtuous and holy in other religions as well as in all “people of good will”. She nevertheless teaches to all who will receive it that only in Jesus Christ is to be found the fullness of Life and Truth, and the only way by which we can experience divine fellowship in the present age or indeed can ever have intimate communion with the One True God. Yet many more will readily accept the Good News of Jesus Christ’s Lordship and His saving work on their behalf when these things are made manifest to all. For God has willed that all demonstrating the essence of true humanity are ultimately to be reconciled to Himself and

⁶⁸⁴ 1Tim2:6

thereby come at last to share Life that is eternal in quality and duration. But such divine benevolence does not extend to the human grouping featured in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Children of the Devil

If you (Cain) do well, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do well, the Sinful One is crouching at the portal and desires to have you: you need to master him (Gen4:7 from Masoretic text)

As has just been observed, the Bible does not set out God's plans for His whole creation but concerns His redemptive strategy for humanity and the key players within that plan: Himself, His Son and Spirit, Israel and the Church. Yet the devil has a role too or else he would have been destroyed or shut away long since, for God is sovereign. Satan has no autonomous right to continue existing, let alone exercise any authority in the world, and yet He does so at God's behest. The Bible teaches us very little about either the angelic or satanic realm; even God's plans for men and women outside Israel and the Church have been obscured, hence such a disclosure at this time. In terms of the realm of evil and the numerous legends pertaining to it, this chapter will only consider those aspects which are alluded to in Scripture, principally with the purpose of completing the jigsaw regarding the eluded Universal Covenant of life and those who default from it.

The above verse from Genesis was considered in chapter two in the context of such a covenant. Because it has been eluded by the churches, so too have been its defaulters; they have been lumped together with all who fall outside the New and Old Testaments' Covenants of Promise. In terms of the Church and her mission that has not essentially mattered for she is to preach the Good News of Jesus as Lord and Saviour, practice justice and offer compassion to all in the world, regardless of how deserving or otherwise the recipients may be. The churches have generally understood there to be one covenant for each testament period and an exclusive one at that. Such a concept should be repudiated, firstly by the reality of Abel and others declared righteous before the Abrahamic Covenant was established; still more so by the story of Ishmael. He had been circumcised, *blessed by God* and by his father Abraham, sent on his way in peace yet he was excluded from the covenant initiated through his father, for the seed of his union with Sarah were to be the children of promise, and such is the Church in the current dispensation⁶⁸⁵. Yet through Abraham, all nations were to be blessed, and that included the twelve that would spring from the seed of his son Ishmael, yet not necessarily through incorporation into an exclusive covenant. So now it is necessary to consider how the other eluded grouping, being *defaulters* from the Universal Covenant may be identified. Along with the powerful spirit

⁶⁸⁵ Gal4:28

that becomes their adoptive master they have played a mysterious role in God's strategic plan to raise up the children of Adam, ultimately to divinity.

The fault-line between those outside the Church who have been planted by God and those who are satanic is often more marked than that between those of God's seed who are being saved through the gospel and those who are not currently in Christ. This is reflected in their behaviour when one knows what to look for, and it impacts upon their future destiny as far ahead as Scripture permits us to discern it. As with other aspects of natural law, these mysteries concerning broader providence have lain almost imperceptibly beneath the pages of Scripture, yet references are made there to this grouping, but as already indicated they have been understood by most to be referring to non-Christians, whereas:

This is what distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil; whoever does not live uprightly and does not love his brother is **not from God**... Do not be **like Cain** who was **from the evil one** and murdered his brother⁶⁸⁶

*Let us love one another since love is from God and everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. **Whoever fails to love does not know God** because God is love*⁶⁸⁷

Those who can love but do not possess “agape”

It is necessary in this context to distinguish between *agape* and other forms of love, for those of the devil's party can exhibit the one but not the other. Those devoid of *agape* may love in a romantic way and to form friendships but it will always revolve around themselves. They may show fondness towards an individual, but it will always be on the basis that if that person were removed from their life, their happiness would be diminished. That is an entirely valid emotion that a saint might share, but it isn't *agape*. For *agape* is *ek tou theou* (derived from God)⁶⁸⁸ so a child of the devil will not possess it. Augustine had been perfectly logical in his insistence that only a Christian can empathize and genuinely care for another human being⁶⁸⁹; if there were only two categories and every non-Christian were a child of the devil as he believed, such would be the case; but it is neither the observable reality, nor is it scriptural. Most Old Testament Gentiles and present-day non-Christians are assuredly not “derived from the Evil One” (Greek: *ek tou ponerou*) but they do *inhabit* the sphere of darkness still controlled by that prince and are yet to be delivered from it⁶⁹⁰. Most evidently

⁶⁸⁶ 1Jn3:10-12

⁶⁸⁷ 1Jn4:7-8

⁶⁸⁸ 1Jn4:7

⁶⁸⁹ Augustine interpreted 1Jn4:7 to mean that only a baptized Christian has the capacity to love since love is from God and no one outside the Catholic Church can be “born of God”. Augustine's teaching that man is innately incapable of love is also evident in Anti-Pelagian writings; [“On grace and free will” chap.37](#).

⁶⁹⁰ Col1:13

possess *agape* which pertains to compassion and empathy; an internal urge to show kindness to a fellow human being which extends to any living creature in need, regardless of whether there is any benefit to the benefactor.

Retaining God's seed

John also tells us that:

*Whoever is born of God does not (habitually practice) sin for **his seed remains** in him; and he cannot (habitually practice) sin because he has been born of God*⁶⁹¹

Note his seed has *remained*; it is not referring to something that is either accredited or infused through spiritual regeneration but to that which has been present since birth:

*"That the working of the Father and the Son operates both in saints and sinners is manifest from this, that all who are rational beings are partakers of the Word, i.e. of reason, and by this means bear certain seeds implanted within them of wisdom and justice, **which is Christ**" [Origen]*⁶⁹²

This third century theologian affirmed Paul to be saying as much in the passage where he writes "Say not in your heart, who shall ascend into heaven (to bring Christ down from above) or who shall descend into the deep (to bring Christ up from the dead). But what says Scripture? The Word is near you even in your mouth and in your heart"⁶⁹³, by which "Paul means that Christ is in the heart of all in respect of his **being the Word or reason**"⁶⁹⁴.

Referring back to John's verse, the apostle well knew that even the children of God commit sin, but he is saying that those in whom God's seed remains do not consistently practice it. That is because they are restrained by God's implanted law in their heart⁶⁹⁵. Those who are of God maintain sound reason and exercise restraint; they do not consistently practice what is wicked. The children of the devil do; it is or has become all they know, and they also fail to love. When one who is of God sins grievously, he hurts others but also grieves himself. Unless he is a masochist, he will not consistently practice such wickedness, or if he does, he will be thoroughly miserable. When a child of the devil causes hurt by his actions, he is simply being himself and feels serene or even exhilarated; he may boast of his exploits in the courtroom when hopefully he is apprehended. Such a positive delight in evil practice is what motivates serial killers to offend repeatedly; it is within the nature of godlessness. Frequent reference is made in the Bible's Wisdom literature to those who go in the way of

⁶⁹¹ 1Jn3:9

⁶⁹² [Origen De Principiis Book 1 chap. 3 para 6](#)

⁶⁹³ Rom10:6-8

⁶⁹⁴ [Origen De Principiis Book 1 chap. 3 para 6](#)

⁶⁹⁵ Rom2:15

Cain by “**leaving the paths of uprightness to walk in the way of darkness**”⁶⁹⁶ as opposed to those who continue to “*walk in the way of good men and who keep the paths of the righteous*”⁶⁹⁷; for the day shall come when “*the upright shall dwell on the earth and those who are perfected will have pre-eminence in it, whereas the wicked shall be cut off from the earth and the **treacherous ones rooted out of it***”⁶⁹⁸. Of course, if all had been born in a state of depravity none would be in a position to leave the paths of righteousness for they could never have been on them in the first place. Those heading for perdition are not those who have failed to apprehend the grace and healing of Christ as it is offered through the gospel, for contrary to the teaching of Arminius and the understanding of many modern-day Christians, man has no innate ability to respond to the grace of Christ. No one may come to the Saviour unless the Father draws Him⁶⁹⁹ as Paul well knew: “*for those He foreknew, He had predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son... and these He predestined, He also called; and these He called, He also justified; and these He justified, He also glorified*”⁷⁰⁰. Yet God is just, for those who are to be punished in the age to come have irrevocably rejected the Word’s interior witness. They are without excuse for all have such an enlightening deposit in their nature, at least to start with, so those who turn their back on it, evidenced by the misery, despair and often destruction they cause to their fellows will have to face the consequences.

God fulfils His wondrous purposes for the ultimate deification⁷⁰¹ of frail children of dust by permitting certain souls to succumb to the control of the devil. The Cain and Abel story identifies the instrumentality of human free will within that process, in which the elder brother chose a course of evil so as to be later classified in Scripture as “*ek tou ponerou*”: derived from the Evil One⁷⁰²

The children of the devil are variously described in Scripture as:

- Twice dead, plucked up by the roots⁷⁰³
- Having their names missing from the Book of life⁷⁰⁴

⁶⁹⁶ E.g. Prov2:13 Masoretic text

⁶⁹⁷ Prov2:20

⁶⁹⁸ Prov2:21-22

⁶⁹⁹ Jn6:44

⁷⁰⁰ Rom8:29-30

⁷⁰¹ Deification as a term and concept was quite widely understood amongst the early Fathers in the context of Christian salvation and is prevalent today more particularly within Eastern Orthodoxy. In the West, Thomas Aquinas (13th Century) denoted deification to be the end purpose of human existence.

⁷⁰² 1Jn3:12

⁷⁰³ Jud12

⁷⁰⁴ Rev20:15

- Devoured by Satan⁷⁰⁵
- Having forfeited their soul⁷⁰⁶
- Having gone in the way of Cain⁷⁰⁷ and departed from the path of righteousness⁷⁰⁸
- “Goats” – humans devoid of compassion⁷⁰⁹
- Not having retained God’s seed or image⁷¹⁰
- Those who destroy the earth – the ones to be destroyed at final judgement⁷¹¹
- Those who cause or encourage others to sin: the ensnarers⁷¹²
- Having had their conscience seared or withered away⁷¹³
- Devoid of truth⁷¹⁴
- Belonging to Satan⁷¹⁵
- Planted by Satan⁷¹⁶
- Messengers or agents of Satan⁷¹⁷
- The desolate ones⁷¹⁸

Cain as a type

Adam and Eve were the progenitors of fallen humanity⁷¹⁹. Their disobedience put a temporary end to the prospect of eternal life for all humanity:

*As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to **all men**, even so through one act of righteousness, there resulted justification of life to **all men**⁷²⁰*

Adam is the type and federal head of fallen humanity that lives under the reign of death. Cain who was in a literal sense the firstborn of fallen creation is the type of individual reprobates, being those who become rejected by rejecting the interior witness of Christ in

⁷⁰⁵ 1Pet5:8; cf. Gen4:7

⁷⁰⁶ Mt16:26

⁷⁰⁷ Jud11

⁷⁰⁸ Wisdom literature considered above

⁷⁰⁹ Mt25

⁷¹⁰ 1Jn3:9

⁷¹¹ Rev11:18

⁷¹² Mt18:6NKJV

⁷¹³ 1Tim4:2

⁷¹⁴ Cf. Jn8:44

⁷¹⁵ Jn8:44

⁷¹⁶ Mt13:39; 15:13

⁷¹⁷ Mt25:41

⁷¹⁸ Dan9:27

⁷¹⁹ 1Cor15:22

⁷²⁰ Rom5:18. This and similar seemingly absolute-universalist statements by Paul are resolved once one acknowledges the existence of an inclusive covenant into which all enter but some default

their hearts. In his short epistle, Jude warns against false teachers who would come into the Church, whom he describes as deluded, defiled, disregards of authority and blasphemers of the glories, both barren and uprooted so twice dead. He adds:

*Woe to them for they have gone in the way of Cain*⁷²¹

Cain was a murderer, not a false teacher, yet he is referred to in type: the human first-plant and the first person to be cursed by God and given over to the devil who according to the Genesis account he was potentially capable of mastering. Scripture affirms Cain to be wicked, satanic and the type of those devoid of moral restraint or compassionate love – inhumane, heartless psychopaths:

*For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain who was **of the wicked one** and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him because his works were evil and his brother's righteous*⁷²²

Cain's parents had been banished from the Paradise garden and the source of eternal life. However, they and their offspring had not been banished from JHWE's benign presence⁷²³. They continued to worship and bring offerings to God, as did Cain and Abel. But after the elder son's defiance in rejecting God's personal plea to him to resist the Sinful One crouching at the portal of his soul, after slaughtering his righteous brother a further degree of banishment from God's presence was established in his case:

*My punishment is more than I can bear; surely you have driven me out **this day** from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from your face*⁷²⁴

Cain - the first defaulter from the Universal Covenant of life

Cain defaulted from covenant for wilfully defying the God who had pleaded with him and failing to do what he was perfectly capable of doing: maintain his integrity and thereby not permit the Evil One to get the better of him by slaughtering his brother and showing His contempt for His Maker. Having defaulted, he becomes alienated from the rest of humanity ("whoever finds me will kill me") and from God's providential care ("*from today* I will be hidden from Your face"). Cain is the type of those who become entirely alienated from God (the godless), having rejected and subsequently lost the witness of the divine will for humane living provided to the spirit and referenced by the conscience. Externally such will still be aware of standards of acceptable behaviour and will maintain it to a degree to be accepted in society; so even they do not usually exhibit "absolute depravity". As for such

⁷²¹ Jud11a

⁷²² 1Jn3:11-12

⁷²³ Gen4:1,3,4 cf. 4:14,16

⁷²⁴ Gen4:13-14

who operate within the Church to pervert doctrine or bring about schisms, a still higher degree of subtlety and sophistication is required if an agent of Satan is to be transformed into an agent of light⁷²⁵. To appear the spiritual master, apart from being erudite and voluminous, such must incorporate *much that is seemingly sound and spiritual* within the poison they are peddling if a sufficient number of the faithful are to be deceived. Their true nature and intentions may be discerned by their character and legacy but by then it can be too late; the damage will have been done.

For here is another mystery: God through His only begotten Son created all things including the human soul, but they were not all planted by Him⁷²⁶. Who was planted by whom will be determined by the outcome - whether they are finally rooted up⁷²⁷, but from a human perspective it will have been a matter of free will. Similarly, the elect are those who from a human perspective respond to the gospel and persevere in the faith, even if from God's perspective they are foreknown and were divinely enabled to apprehend Christ. Defaulting covenant is referred to in the New Testament as becoming reprobate (*adokimoi* – disqualified) or being removed from the Book of life⁷²⁸. No names are ever added to this book, only removed, which is the outworking of an inclusive covenant.

The counter-church

Those who go in the way of Cain are in effect an inverted image of that other vocational group called out from the world to go in the way of Christ. Like Christians, the devil's children are also no longer their own; they are in the ownership and service of another⁷²⁹; they too are spiritually directed and empowered by the effectual working of their lord⁷³⁰; they too are no longer one of the lost: the "sheep without a shepherd" upon whom Christ will have compassion⁷³¹. These are not lost for they have found their herdsman or rather he has found them. He had been prowling around seeking whom he may devour⁷³²; he had crouched at the portal of their souls desiring to possess them. It looked promising, and so he had sifted them as wheat to see if there be any underlying faith within them⁷³³. Such an analysis will appear obscure and arcane to many: but it is scripturally based and pertains to

⁷²⁵ 2Cor11:13-14

⁷²⁶ Rom9:21,22; Mt15:13

⁷²⁷ Mt15:13

⁷²⁸ Rev20:15

⁷²⁹ 1Jn3:12

⁷³⁰ Eph2:2

⁷³¹ Mt9:36

⁷³² 1Pet5:8

⁷³³ Lk22:31-32

the mystery of evil; by far the most intriguing aspect of divine providence required to unlock the Mystery of God.

The elect: assigned to Christ

The elect are planted by God and earmarked for Christ, as affirmed in His high-priestly prayer:

*I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of this world. **They were Yours – You gave them to Me** and they have obeyed Your word⁷³⁴*

Note how our Lord prays: “they were Yours”. Surely everything is God’s, but He means they were *of* God and not of Satan, like Cain who was of the wicked one. The genitive (of Satan) pertains neither to creation nor procreation but to planting, ownership and party.

The wheat and darnel: inseparable within the gospel age

The two planters of souls are figured in the parable of the wheat and darnel⁷³⁵, which has particular relevance to the subject of this chapter as well as providing an indicator for the age to come. Whilst it is only a parable, it is explained by Jesus Himself on this occasion. It will not do to try to restrict it to the Church as Augustine and many others have attempted. Of course, it is analogous to the visible Church and the invisible wheat within her, for those *in Christ* who bare no fruit will be rejected⁷³⁶, but Jesus explicitly tells us it pertains to the world and everyone in it⁷³⁷. The parable suited to the Church is Paul’s concerning the “great house” and the vessels of honour and dishonour within it⁷³⁸. In Jesus’ parable, the wheat represents all men and women who are planted by God in the sense described above. The darnel represents human seed planted by Satan⁷³⁹ whom Jesus specifically describes in the parable as “children of the Wicked One”⁷⁴⁰. Jesus characterises them as distinguishable by their own wickedness and the fact they ensnare others into sin⁷⁴¹, just as in nature darnel can damage and poison wheat. As the darnel is gathered together and burnt, a similar fate awaits the satanic seed, but not until the end of this age. Keeping in mind God’s undoubted sovereignty and the fact that Christ has already triumphed over these evil entities, their continued presence must be by divine prerogative; likewise, the planting or assigning arrangement. A further reference to this mystery is provided by Paul, for the seed planted

⁷³⁴ Jn17:6

⁷³⁵ Mt13:24-30

⁷³⁶ Jn15:2

⁷³⁷ Mt13:38

⁷³⁸ 2Tim2:19-21

⁷³⁹ Mt15:13

⁷⁴⁰ Mt13:38

⁷⁴¹ Mt13:41

by Satan equates to the instruments of God's retribution created for destruction to whom the apostle refers⁷⁴². In the same chapter, he mentions "instruments of His mercy" which he makes clear exclusively refer to elect Jews and Christians. It is therefore assumed by many there are two groups whereas in fact there are three. The third are the bulk of humanity who are neither destined to be co-inheritors with Christ, nor those "*created only to be captured and destroyed*"⁷⁴³; the souls who Paul says have been adjusted or adapted⁷⁴⁴, being foreknown and destined for satanic use to fulfil God's wondrous purposes, such as having His own Son betrayed and executed for the salvation of mankind and the ultimate defeat of His arch-enemy. This is typified in the example Paul himself provides in Romans chapter nine to explain the purpose of such vessels of destruction: the exaltation, hardening of heart and final humiliation of the Egyptian Pharaoh to display JHWE's power to save and deliver His people from their oppressors.

Three eschatological outcomes are evident in Scripture old and new. In God's Revelation to Jesus Christ relayed through John, the largest eschatological group are pictured as the "*nations of those who are saved*", whose kings bring their treasures to the city in which Christ is enthroned with His elect who are privileged to see Him face to face⁷⁴⁵. In Isaiah, they were (under Plan A) those who from Sabbath to Sabbath would come to the holy city where the elect dwell with their Lord and bow in the Lord's presence, "*and on their way out they will see the corpses of those who rebelled against God who will be an abhorrence to all humanity*"⁷⁴⁶. In the Gospels they are the sheep of Matthew 25; the elect having already been gathered to Christ so as to be spared the climax of tribulation⁷⁴⁷. In the epistle to the Romans the majority are those longing to be liberated as children of God who do not have the first fruit of the Spirit waiting for the revelation of the sons of God who do⁷⁴⁸. As for the Lord's related parables, darnel is never converted into wheat nor goats into sheep – they are different in nature from their conception; rather, some of the lost sheep are found and "saved to the uttermost" – hence the three categories. God's special blessings and curses are applied to a small proportion of the human family as was the case in populating the postdiluvian world. The Book of Enoch distinguishes between the "holy and elect" on the one hand who will be honoured at His coming, and others who will *not* be honoured but having repented will be "saved in His Name" for "His compassion is great"⁷⁴⁹. As always,

⁷⁴² Rom9:22

⁷⁴³ Rom9:22 and 2Pet2:12

⁷⁴⁴ Greek: *katertismina*

⁷⁴⁵ Rev21:22-27; 22:4

⁷⁴⁶ Is66:23-24

⁷⁴⁷ Mt24:31,40,41

⁷⁴⁸ Rom8:21-23

⁷⁴⁹ Enoch50:3 [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_\(Charles\)/Chapter_50](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_(Charles)/Chapter_50)

there is a third group who will be unwilling or unable to repent or bow the knee and they will not be spared.

Some will understandably be mystified by Romans chapter 9 and the concept of souls adapted for destruction in terms of God's justice. As Paul wrote, it is not for His own pleasure that God endures these people's abhorrent ways, but for the ultimate benefit of those He would bring to glory (v22,23). As for God's justice, these are often persons of great renown⁷⁵⁰ who enjoy wealth, power and prestige in the world such as the example of Pharaoh given in Romans 9. As well as enjoying a sumptuous lifestyle they may be influential in politics, industry or religion and be greatly esteemed and respected, even by the good, as were certain hypocritical Pharisees in Jesus' time and as recently as the last century, a democratically elected Chancellor of Germany. For often being respectable these people will not be easy to identify. Only God and on occasions those filled with His Spirit may gaze into the window of their souls and discern the emptiness there⁷⁵¹. Evil being a deficiency, these people are not to be defined so much by what they possess and practice as by what they lack and so fail to practice. Such people leading the Jewish community in Jesus' day could not fool the Saviour who declared quite plainly: "*You are of your father the devil*"⁷⁵². That was not the way Jesus generally addressed or approached "sinners"; the multitudes whom He loved and regarded as sheep without a Shepherd⁷⁵³. Others within the devil's party more readily display their affiliation, such as those criminals who abuse, dehumanize or destroy others without mercy or remorse and take pleasure in doing so. The behaviour of such can be so inhumane as to be beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. Their absence of conscience, remorse and an empathy for their victims has been the common observation of judges, juries and victims' families when such people are brought to justice. For if the divine light provided to the mind's eye of natural man still leaves him in the dark and in need of spiritual healing, how deep will a man's darkness be if the eye itself is darkened. As Jesus expressed the matter, though it is invariably mistranslated, "*if the light that is in you is darkness, how much darker is the darkness*"⁷⁵⁴. Thankfully, the majority of people demonstrate by their moral restraint and empathy that they have a working conscience. Their mind's eye is enlightened, yet they will continue in a measure of darkness until they

⁷⁵⁰ Cf. Gen6:4

⁷⁵¹ Acts13:9-10

⁷⁵² E.g. Jn8:44

⁷⁵³ Mt9:36

⁷⁵⁴ Mt6:23 – "How great is *the* darkness" not "*that* darkness" (many translations), obscuring the fact that divine light is provided innately, albeit still leaving man in a measure of darkness unless aided by grace. The third category whose "eye" is evil have extinguished that light provided to all men (Jn1:9) to be left entirely in the dark

are finally liberated from the bondage of corruption into which they were born⁷⁵⁵ or encounter the grace of the gospel in the meantime.

Indifference to truth

The other feature common to the human category being focused on regardless of whether they are outwardly respectable or plainly criminal is indifference to truth. Their adoptive father was described by Jesus as the “father of lying”⁷⁵⁶ so those he masters are pathological in that trait. Having no working conscience they will only speak the truth if it is convenient for the purpose in hand: there will be no other incentive. Anyone who is of God may lie but will never feel entirely comfortable about it unless, perhaps, it is a white lie so as to avoid hurting another, which on at least one occasion is commended in Scripture⁷⁵⁷. Those who are indwelt by the Spirit and already united to Christ will be highly sensitized in this area, wishing to avoid even so much as a hint of exaggeration. For truthfulness is integral to holiness; which is why the promises of God are so dependable even if He fulfils them in the most surprising ways.

Children of the devil in Jesus’ ministry

Jesus portrayed starkly contrasting attitudes to the people he encountered during His earthly ministry, all of whom were to one degree or another sinful. It will be surprising to some that in calling his disciples there is little if any reference to their sinfulness. These were ordinary working men: Simon Peter was conscious of his own unworthiness when he became aware of his Lord’s divinity⁷⁵⁸, but Jesus’ only recorded comment concerning the moral state of His new recruits was a positive one regarding Nathanael: “*Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile*”⁷⁵⁹. Nathaniel was something of a cynic⁷⁶⁰, so not perfect but those who *are* perfect such as the incarnate Word look for the good in people and love them for it⁷⁶¹. He did not ask His disciples to “acknowledge their lost estate”, simply to follow Him⁷⁶². Unscrupulous tax collectors on the other hand were required to turn their lives around (repent) and make restitution. Note Zacchaeus’ childlike exuberance:

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord: “Look Lord! Here and now I give half my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four

⁷⁵⁵ Cf. Rom8:21

⁷⁵⁶ Jn8:44

⁷⁵⁷ Jam2:25 cf. Josh2:1-5

⁷⁵⁸ Lk5:8

⁷⁵⁹ Jn1:47

⁷⁶⁰ Jn1:46

⁷⁶¹ Mk10:19-23

⁷⁶² Mt4:19

*times the amount". Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham**"*⁷⁶³

The Man who has been appointed to judge the world was remarkably tolerant towards the human weakness of His disciples and ate and drank congenially with tax collectors and sinners, much to the contempt of the religious leaders. Consider His gracious dealings with the woman accused of adultery. Having challenged her accusers with "*Let he who is without sin among you cast the first stone*", He asks the woman: "*Did no one condemn you? Neither do I condemn you. Go and offend no more*"⁷⁶⁴. Yet when faced with wickedness and hypocrisy amongst religious leaders, the tone sharpened noticeably:

*Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*⁷⁶⁵

Jesus was addressing certain scribes and Pharisees who are confirmed as occupying the seat of Moses; in view of which, He said, they should continue to be obeyed by His followers. Their position of authority was one reason Jesus was so scathing: they of all people were without excuse. As He told them:

If you were blind, you would not be guilty, but since you say, "we can see", your guilt remains⁷⁶⁶

These wicked tenants of God's vineyard had refused John's baptism unlike the majority who had acknowledged him to be the "prophet of the Most High" and an "esteemed preacher of righteousness". In so doing, these leaders had thwarted God's purposes for them⁷⁶⁷. For if they had been good tenants, teaching and pasturing God's people in the ways of righteousness, these erudite and revered religious leaders would logically have been the ones to take the work of the Kingdom forward. Yet in rejecting these leaders of His people, Jesus did not there and then "turn to the Gentiles". That was to be Paul⁷⁶⁸; that was to be later; that was God's secret plan⁷⁶⁹. The inauguration of God's Kingdom remained a strictly Jewish affair: Jesus appointed a motley crew of small businessmen, fishermen, a physician and a tax official for His immediate circle and prepared them to build the Kingdom of God in His temporary absence. Those more established leaders who had expected to be the princes of God's Kingdom rejected Jesus and all He stood for. It was largely through their

⁷⁶³ Lk19:8-9

⁷⁶⁴ Jn8:11

⁷⁶⁵ Mt23:33

⁷⁶⁶ Jn9:41

⁷⁶⁷ Lk7:30

⁷⁶⁸ Acts13:46

⁷⁶⁹ Eph3:9-12

influence⁷⁷⁰ that many of the palm-waving crowds that had been heralding King Jesus as He triumphantly entered Jerusalem would become a baying mob calling for the Messiah's crucifixion a short time later. For it is in the nature of lost sheep easily to be led astray. Jesus was handed over to Pilate "*because of envy*"⁷⁷¹. Ordinary Jewish folk were hardly envious of Jesus, but their religious leaders were, because their flock were looking to Him rather than to them, and under Jesus they knew they were to be axed. In their teaching these blind guides were "straining out gnats and swallowing camels"; neglecting to teach or practice the weightier matters of the Law – justice, mercy and faithfulness⁷⁷². There was a stark contrast between the attitude of these Jewish leaders and many of the people they led. It is typified in this verse concerning Jesus' daily preaching in the Temple:

*Every day He was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the Law and the leaders among the people were **trying to kill Him**. Yet they could not find any way to do it because all **the people hung on His words***⁷⁷³

Most people Jesus encountered were excited by His ministry, and not only the miracles, but as Luke affirmed, they hung on His every word of teaching. This reality needs to be grasped: had they not been so cajoled by their leaders, the Jewish people would have welcomed Jesus as their messianic king, whereas many of those leaders whom gospel writer John unhelpfully labels "the Jews" wanted Him dead, and since that was in accordance with the divine plan, they soon got their wish. Little did these leaders realize they were being used; for through divine ingenuity the satanic seed were playing into God's hands as they always do. For a section of the religious leaders who conspired against the Messiah were the devil's children, and as is their wont they went on to ensnare a sufficient number of the people who looked up to them to bring about, humanly speaking, the most perverse injustice in human history, enacted at the place of the skull. Their Victim was aware of these leaders' origins:

*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is **no truth in him***⁷⁷⁴

Note again how the devil, like his children, is defined by what he does *not* possess: "there is no truth *in him*". Likewise, his children are devoid of truthfulness, moral restraint, remorse

⁷⁷⁰ Mk15:11

⁷⁷¹ Mt27:18

⁷⁷² Mt23:23

⁷⁷³ Lk19:47-48

⁷⁷⁴ Jn8:44

or pity. In contrast to many of their leaders, Jesus received respect, love and honour from a good number of Jewish people He encountered during His ministry as Luke also observed:

*Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God **and man***⁷⁷⁵

The majority were of God; desiring a Good Shepherd to lead them but easily deceived and led astray; as were many such people including a good number within the Christian community nineteen hundred years later, adoring and cheering their political messiah in Germany who went on to leave much of Europe in ruins. *“God has at last given the German people a pious and faithful ruler in the person of Adolf Hitler”* affirmed the Protestant group calling themselves “the German Christians” in the 1930s; and a good number of Catholics were equally deceived. Likewise, during the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, if it were not for the devil working in the minds and hearts of those that he controls inciting the Jewish people against their true Messiah and a devilish disciple betraying Him, Jesus would never have been crucified. But then God’s plan for humanity would not have been fulfilled, for the crucifixion was according to “the definite plan and foreknowledge of God”⁷⁷⁶ and Satan’s seed were an essential part of it. For it was necessary not only that the Son of God should die for mankind’s sin, but that He died when He did and how He did within the narrative of the Israel project and its transmutation into the Church project. The children of the devil had unwittingly played their part in bringing about the ultimate victory of God assured through the cross, and they continue to play a role in the world including the churches, mosques, synagogues and temples, especially keen to pervert religion and the meaning of holy writ for their own destructive ends – *“for offences must come, but woe to the ones by whom they come”*⁷⁷⁷. The reason such offences must continue for a little longer is outlined in the final chapter.

⁷⁷⁵ Lk2:52

⁷⁷⁶ Acts2:23

⁷⁷⁷ Mt18:7

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Theodicy

It is the understanding of many Christians that the cruelty, injustice, broken relations, sickness and death that have become an inescapable aspect of life on earth are the result of an act of disobedience by the first human couple. Non-Christians presented with such a concept are inclined to regard it as facile, and with some justification, for it is only a *third* of the story when understood from a more enlightened Christian perspective such as that possessed by the apostle Paul. But before coming to the providential dimension to which the apostle alludes, he also affirms that there is a realm of evil *extraneous* to humanity that took the lead in that apparent catastrophe; a sophisticated principality of wickedness that endures as a force in the world to the present day:

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*⁷⁷⁸

The verse is addressed to Christian believers, but the One who remembers the needs of sparrows is aware that the activity and influence of this evil realm impinges upon the whole human family and all created life. It will appear to many that we *are* in fact wrestling against flesh and blood for the diabolical activity that Paul was referring to is largely exercised through the human agencies under its control. These are the human seed considered in the previous chapter – they are the darnel poisoning the wheat that must remain until harvest. Of course, the rest of humanity sins and causes plenty of trouble as well, the more so for being led astray and corrupted by Satan who deceives the world through the people he controls. But God holds Satan rather than mankind personally accountable for the world being in the state it is; he will pay by far the greater price, as will his agents. A more profound mystery is why these wicked beings continue to thrive, influence and offend. As one traces events back to the Fall, one should discern that it is not entirely a matter of free will that resulted in wickedness being retained on the earth but divine decree. Yet evil does originate from a malign exercise of the free will that the Creator is bound to give to any being to whom He wishes intimately to relate, starting with the angelic realm. However, it must be acknowledged that the extent to which a created being having chosen a course of evil is then permitted to continue practicing it and hurting others is a matter of divine prerogative, or else impotence or indifference which is certainly not the case here.

Adam and Eve had been warned that if they disobeyed God, they would die that very day. That warning did not refer to physical death for they continued for centuries, nor what would happen to their souls after they died, but to the disruption in their relationship with

⁷⁷⁸ Eph6:12

God whilst they were in the body⁷⁷⁹. Yet this pair could have been eliminated there and then, feasibly with a better outcome for humanity, for they had been created pure in soul and body and unlike fallen man were potentially capable of full obedience. God was not obliged to establish His human creation through such corrupted progenitors; He was well aware of the dire outcomes when He chose to reject what might appear to human minds to have been the logical rebooting option. Yet this incident in the Paradise Garden and the inscrutable way that God chose to handle it is in fact the most staggering aspect of His love for humanity, especially in view of the personal cost to His only begotten Son. As for His earthly creation, many were now to be subjected to a life that was frustrating, vain and unfulfilled⁷⁸⁰. For the bulk of humanity that has been the case: their lives have certainly not been without purpose or a measure of fulfilment and joy, but the primary intention for which they had been created was not accomplished during their earthly lifetime. That had been to experience a living relationship with God and His Christ, described in the Bible as having eternal life⁷⁸¹. Very shortly after the incident in Eden the divine prerogative was exercised again with the first man to be born of woman. Cain had become entirely alienated from God⁷⁸², yet He still ensured that this psychopath and his seed survived. Again, he could have been eliminated for his fratricide and insolence towards God but instead was provided with a mark for his protection such that he and his accursed seed would continue up until the time of the Flood. The book of Enoch relates how the spirit of Abel petitioned God for Cain's seed to be annihilated, which duly occurred through the worldwide flood. This clarifies Gen4:10 and Heb12:24 concerning the reference to Christ's blood speaking better things than Abel. This inspired book also expands on Gen6:1,2 alluded to in Jude1:6 concerning satanic unions with women and the irretrievable corruption it caused. But what cannot be perceived without reference to Enoch yet is needed to understand the rationale behind the universal flood is that these satanic collaborators had imparted knowledge to humanity that the Lord had intended mankind gradually to discover over many centuries. As with Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, humanity in its infancy was not ready for such knowledge which would lead to their destruction, yet could never be unlearned, hence the need for a radical universal cleansing by water. Enoch19:1 explains that these rebellious sons of God who left their appointed habitation⁷⁸³ and were responsible for the global contamination and the thwarting of God's plans for mankind's development were able to assume different forms to carry out their illicit unions⁷⁸⁴. Through the mercy of God, the bulk of humanity who ignored Noah's warning and perished

⁷⁷⁹ Cf. 1Pet4:6

⁷⁸⁰ Rom8:20

⁷⁸¹ Jn17:3

⁷⁸² Gen4:14

⁷⁸³ Cf. Jud1:6

⁷⁸⁴ Re: objections raised by Mt22:30

in the Flood has subsequently had the Good News preached to them by Jesus Himself⁷⁸⁵, as, the apostle Peter indicates do all the dead have opportunity to hear the Good News so that although having been punished in the flesh “*they might live according to God in the spirit*”⁷⁸⁶. This is yet another “problem verse” that becomes more intelligible once one understands the context of gospel salvation within God’s broader reconciliatory plans. These imprisoned spirits were given the opportunity to repent and acknowledge Christ’s lordship; they were not to be betrothed as His eternal Bride, nor did they escape punishment for they had been imprisoned for centuries.

Although all who came off the ark were blessed by God, one of the sixteen seeds stemming from Noah’s sons was cursed, leading to the wickedness of Sodom, Gomorrah and the Canaanite territories resulting in their partial annihilation. Of course, wickedness continued through till the time of Christ and until the present day, and that is not surprising in view of the role Satan himself has been permitted:

*Then the devil taking (Jesus) up on a high mountain showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to him, all this authority I will give you and their glory for this has been **handed over to me** and I give it to whomever I wish; therefore, if You will worship before me all will be yours*⁷⁸⁷

Satan is a liar, but he had no hope of deceiving the Son of God on such a matter, nor did Jesus deny Satan’s claim to have been given authority over the world’s kingdoms, rather He would later affirm it. Jesus described Satan as the “leader of the world order”⁷⁸⁸, whilst Paul refers to him as the “prince of the power of the air”⁷⁸⁹ and John as holding the whole world under his control⁷⁹⁰. Unlike in the coming age of the Kingdom of Christ, Satan is not currently prevented from deceiving the world⁷⁹¹ but in spite of the salt and light provided by the worldwide churches and many people of good will outside them, he continues to preside over a principality of wickedness that impacts upon nations and their governance, greatly adding to people’s suffering. This prince had not been cast out after the resurrection of Christ⁷⁹² – it looked initially as though that was being indicated by the short-lived witness of expelled demons and miraculous healings, but the Adversary’s final ignominy has been

⁷⁸⁵ 1Pet3:19-20

⁷⁸⁶ 1Pet4:6

⁷⁸⁷ Lk4:5-7

⁷⁸⁸ Greek: *archon tou kosmou*

⁷⁸⁹ Eph2:2

⁷⁹⁰ 1Jn5:19: Greek “*en to ponero keitai*” is not inferring that “the whole world is in a state of wickedness” (e.g. King James Bible) but that the world is under the authority of the Evil One

⁷⁹¹ Rev12:9

⁷⁹² Cf. Jn12:31

deferred. The Great War and Jewish Holocaust of the last century reinforce the fact that Satan's influence has scarcely been eroded nineteen centuries into the Christian era.

Yet God is Love personified and He knows best. Suffering is no accident: *"I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create calamity. I the Lord do all these things"*⁷⁹³.

Spiritual masters have proposed solutions in the past: Thomas Aquinas asserting that *"God permits evil so as to bring out of it a greater good"*. More specifically he proposed that *"diverse grades of goodness occur in things, many of which would be lacking if no evil existed; indeed, the good of patience could not exist without the evil of persecution"*⁷⁹⁴.

Without evil and the dysfunctional practices associated with it, there would be no place for virtue, or it would not so clearly be seen to be virtuous and something to delight in; not only in human affairs but in the worshipful admiration of God Himself. If Satan had not been permitted his triumphs there would have been no victory for God and His Christ for there had been nothing to conquer. How could God have demonstrated the extent of His love and grace if He could have spared His only Son? If Adam had not sinned or the humanity project rebooted, there would have been no need for a Saviour. And what a Saviour: *O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem*⁷⁹⁵.

The ultimate purpose of human suffering

But this is not the whole story: evil is a temporary yet essential component within the plan of human destiny. Suffering is neither a result of divine impotence nor a miscalculation; as well as being the backdrop to highlight the beauty and loveliness of the good and therefore of God Himself, its principle purpose is to prepare humanity for the next phase of her development. That is not mere philosophical speculation, it is a biblical reality that again has been historically eluded through a failure to grasp both the context of gospel salvation within broader providence and the nature of the age to come. Human beings created to be a little lower than the angels and currently possessing bodies originating from dust⁷⁹⁶ are destined for glory and service at least as splendid as that of the angels⁷⁹⁷. Suffering and consequently the existence of evil is a necessary part of deification which requires human beings to be, as it were, stretched or go beyond themselves in order to be fitted for such a destiny. The Son of Man set the pattern: He tasted death for every man for our salvation, but there is something else we are told about His death:

⁷⁹³ Cf. Is45:7

⁷⁹⁴ Thomas Aquinas: *De Potentia* <https://quotes.yourdictionary.com/author/thomas-aquinas/143262>

⁷⁹⁵ Catholic Easter hymn: "Oh happy fault, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!"

⁷⁹⁶ Cf. Gen2:7

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. Heb1:14

*Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before Him**, endured the cross and despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God⁷⁹⁸*

The highlighted phrase is not the one on which one would normally focus. The Godhead's love for humanity and the Son of God's obedience and suffering to deal with our sin are rightly the usual focal points. But Jesus' awareness of the joy and glory awaiting Him is nevertheless referred to and it hints at what is being adduced in this chapter: the divine principal that suffering is beneficial, indeed necessary for those who are to be glorified. Jesus might appear to be the exception, for He is worthy of glory through divine birth right. Nevertheless:

*It was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in **bringing many sons to glory**, to make the captain of their salvation **perfect through suffering**, for both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are **all of one**, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren⁷⁹⁹*

And later in Hebrews:

*Though He were a Son, He **learned obedience by the things which He suffered**, and **having been perfected** He became the author of eternal salvation for all who obey Him⁸⁰⁰*

In Jesus' case His suffering could have nothing to do with personal purification, for He was without sin. It pertained to His personal capacity and office, especially that of High Priest:

*Therefore, in all things (Jesus) had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make a propitiation for the sins of the people, for **in that He Himself has suffered**, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted⁸⁰¹*

His awareness and personal experience of human suffering also prepares Him for His role as Supreme Judge of humanity. It set a pattern and example for those who as co-heirs must support Him as priests, kings and judges; they are to share in Christ's glory but must firstly share His suffering:

*Now if we are children, then we are heirs: heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ; **if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory**⁸⁰²*

⁷⁹⁸ Heb12:2

⁷⁹⁹ Heb2:10-11

⁸⁰⁰ Heb5:8-9

⁸⁰¹ Heb2:17-18

⁸⁰² Rom8:17

Here is an advantage that human beings have over the angels of heaven: a personal day-to-day experience of sin and suffering. Such might not be advantageous if human destiny were to be confined to the spiritual realm: a blissful stasis beholding the vision of God's glory, wonderful though that is for those who have fallen asleep as Scripture describes the temporary separation of body and spirit in heaven. But the emphasis from the Old Testament prophecies, the gospels, the epistles and Revelation as far as the next age is concerned is for the elect of God to be "*the children of the resurrection*"⁸⁰³. For the believer's destiny once resurrected does not merely consist in beholding but participating with God in eternal union with His Son. But as with any marriage, *howsoever* the Bridegroom may relate to His Father through eternity so must His Bride for they are now in union; and *whatsoever* His Son's activity and domain, so shall His co-heirs share in it⁸⁰⁴. Clearly the spouse concept is mystical in the sense of the "wife" being a corporate identity, but so is Christ's bride-in-waiting the Church, which functions as His Militant Body on earth; each person playing his or her role as a member of that spiritually directed administration. Paul also affirms that eternity will comprise numerous ages⁸⁰⁵ and, no doubt, many surprises. If the Church thinks she can be clear about the precise nature and procession of eternity, she must surely think again. For this few millennia of human history on this pinprick we know of as earth is in terms of time and space a grain of sand within the desert of eternity. Who knows what plans God has for the limitless theatre that is His universe? For God's Word *became flesh*; Jesus being from two natures, human and divine, yet essentially one subsistent nature as the incarnate Word of God. Humanity has therefore been permanently incorporated into the Godhead, indicating future physicality and terrestrial activity as well as the prospect of beholding the divine Glory that historically has tended to be the focus and expression of the Christian's future hope. Yet the faithful shall not be disappointed, for being in eternal union with the One "*in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily; the Head of all principalities and powers, **we shall be complete in Him***"⁸⁰⁶

Yet it is the whole human family that suffers in the present through the devil's malevolence, and for a similar purpose; for all the scattered seed of God will in due time enjoy future communion with the divine glory; it is a question of staging, the faithful of the Church being the first fruits. For when Jesus comes again:

*He shall be glorified in His saints and be marvelled at by those that believe on that day just as our testimony among you was believed*⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰³ Lk20:36

⁸⁰⁴ Cf. Dan7:18

⁸⁰⁵ Eph2:7

⁸⁰⁶ Col2:9-10

⁸⁰⁷ 2Thes1:10

This is re-affirmed in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive; but everyone in **his own class**⁸⁰⁸: Christ the first fruits; afterwards those who are Christ's at His coming⁸⁰⁹*

"Christ the first fruits" refers to the Church⁸¹⁰ which on one occasion Paul simply refers to as Christ⁸¹¹ for it is, after all, His mystical Body on earth. Christians are the first fruits of creation⁸¹². Jesus is also described as the first fruit but He was never "dead in Adam" in the Pauline sense being Himself the Second Adam; and He cannot be a "class of those in Christ" for He is the Christ. Moreover, Paul is referring to those who would be made alive *in the future* which cannot include Christ Himself but to Christ's elect and those who believe at His coming.

The above aligns with Old Testament prophecy that all who shall call on the name of the Lord will be delivered from perdition. Logically the same principle applies to those who have died having never had the opportunity to know the Saviour, and that is substantiated on two occasions in the first epistle of Peter⁸¹³. On the other hand, those alive at His coming who are not of God and refuse to obey the gospel of Christ will in Paul's language be set ablaze⁸¹⁴, removed from God's presence and everyone else's. By "not obeying the gospel" is meant refusing to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ even after His identity has been manifested. For one can only obey or refuse to obey what has been clearly presented and understood. So when Christ re-appears on earth and indeed wherever He has presented Himself in person there can be no excuse for those who reject Him. Likewise, if a universally agreed announcement of the coming Kingdom of Christ were provided to the world from a re-unified Church it would be a clarion call that would seriously need to be heeded⁸¹⁵. And such would be the roll call: *Who is on the Lord's side; who will serve the King?*

The Church as the Kingdom of Christ on earth is involved in a spiritual battle with satanic forces but cannot eradicate them. World peace and Christian dominion cannot occur in this age. The darnel will grow till the end of the age, then the reapers (God's angels not the Church) will remove it and destroy it⁸¹⁶. The Pilgrim Church was never intended to be in the

⁸⁰⁸ Greek: *hekastos de en to idio tagmati*

⁸⁰⁹ 1Cor15:22-23

⁸¹⁰ Jam1:18

⁸¹¹ 1Cor12:12

⁸¹² Jam1:18

⁸¹³ 3:18-20 and 4:6

⁸¹⁴ 2Thes1:8

⁸¹⁵ Cf. Mt24:14

⁸¹⁶ Mt13:30

business of “ruling the nations with a rod of iron”⁸¹⁷. That refers to what is to be done in the next age such that when all earthly authorities have been subjected to the Arbitrator⁸¹⁸, His Kingdom will be handed over to His Father for whatever subsequent ages may hold in store within a restored heaven and earth⁸¹⁹.

Christian submission to earthly authority

The Christian gospel was not intended to be subversive in terms of its adherents’ approach to earthly authority. Jesus is Lord of the Church and King of the believer’s heart, but the Christian is to render to “Caesar” that which is his or her due, otherwise he is denying the faith⁸²⁰. Yet if a particular tyrant should require the Christian to worship him or her as a god or directly oppose the teaching of Christ then to render to God what is God’s may require the ultimate price of martyrdom. For most that is not the reality, though of course it hasn’t always been the case. Yet even Paul lived happily in Roman lodgings for two years teaching and evangelising “*without hindrance from anyone*”⁸²¹. His principal opponents and the instigators of his frequent imprisonments were more often unbelieving Jewish leaders than the civic authorities. Likewise, he instructed the churches to respect and pray for those in authority over them, as these were established by God for their good⁸²².

However, the current structure and composition of the earthly authorities is not as a reigning King Jesus would wish them to be, for the personal qualities required for those participating in any administration of His would be quite different; more in accordance with His predecessor David: people after His own heart. For what is subverted by the Christian gospel is how authority is to be exercised – both now in the Church where he who leads becomes the servant of servants, and in the future where it will not be the militarily powerful who inherit the earth but the gentle and the peacemakers⁸²³. Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Under the present arrangements the gentle, the merciful, the pure of heart and the peacemakers are the people *least* likely to be running the *kosmos* (world system); nor have they ever been throughout the gospel age; nor can they be because of the continuing presence and influence of Satan and his seed. For when Jesus is King in an executive sense, Ephesians2:2 will not apply - Satan and his hold over people, death and sickness will have decisively been dealt with, not merely assured for the future. Spiritual renewal of individuals through the

⁸¹⁷ Rev2:27; 12:5

⁸¹⁸ Cf. Is2:4

⁸¹⁹ Cf. 1Cor15:27-29

⁸²⁰ Mk12:17

⁸²¹ Acts28:30-31

⁸²² Rom13:4-6

⁸²³ Mt5:5

centuries has been the Church's other vital function in order that elect people from every nation and age, the chosen and faithful will have been prepared to participate within God's realized Kingdom at their resurrection together with those alive at His coming.

In the current age, as the apostle Paul refers to the matter, God has placed all things under Christ's feet, but as ultimate victor and overseer rather than reigning Monarch, albeit that He already is Head over all *to the Church*⁸²⁴. The kings of the earth are inferior to Christ and answerable to Him in final judgement, but they do not currently take their orders from Him more's the pity. That is why the Christian's citizenship is said to be in heaven, for that is where His ultimate allegiance lies, where his Lord is located and his spiritual treasures are being deposited. The Old Testament prophets on the other hand expected the promised messiah to be based in Jerusalem, enthroned as king of Israel and thereby king of the world, acting as Great High Priest for the Jewish nation who in turn were to function as a Kingdom of priests and monarchs for the world⁸²⁵. But for now, "*He has to remain in heaven until the time comes for restoring everything*"⁸²⁶.

The Messianic Kingdom

The Catholic Church has long rejected pre-millenarianism as an approved doctrine, although it was the predominant view of the ante-Nicene Church Fathers including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus of Rome, Tertullian, Cyprian, Barnabas and Lactantius and by deduction others who they had instructed or by whom they had been instructed. Such were supported initially by Augustine of Hippo together with a good number of his contemporaries inside as well as some breakaway groups outside the Church. It was initially Marcion who challenged the consensus in the second century; he was later clearly shown to be a heretic. The other key influences were Augustine who changed his mind and Origen of Alexandria who was inclined to a Platonic spiritualism; these colossi of the Western and Eastern Church ensured that Millenarian views came to be rejected by the fourth century, no doubt reinforced by the conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine which transformed the Church's perspective with regard to its relationships with the political structures of the world. The Eastern Orthodox Church has regarded the final book of the New Testament (the Revelation of Jesus Christ provided to Him by God)⁸²⁷, as very much a mystery and is predominantly a-millennial. For an outline of why pre-millennial views had largely been

⁸²⁴ Eph1:22

⁸²⁵ Ex19:6

⁸²⁶ Acts3:21

⁸²⁷ Rev1:1

abandoned by the middle ages, Wikipedia proves useful background⁸²⁸; the consensus being that (once again) Augustine's influence was a key factor.

Yet such is God's wisdom, for the vague and predominantly spiritualized eschatological understanding that the Apostolic churches in East and West have held for centuries has been perfectly suited to the recruitment process for Kingdom. Unlike early chiliasm, particularly in its perverted hedonistic form, the predominant Church teaching since the beginning of the middle ages will have held little attraction to vain, faithless, materialistic glory-seekers and such are not the people the Lord has wished to recruit into His service. That was evident at His first visit, where the superior and erudite of the religious establishment were bi-passed and the angels' *"Good News of great joy that shall be to all people"*⁸²⁹ was announced to shepherds on a hillside. Its propagation was spearheaded by an apprentice carpenter from Nazareth of all places⁸³⁰ who turned out to be the promised Messiah. He in turn had recruited uneducated fishermen and the like to support Him and they would go on to turn the world upside down. It is only now as the end of the age approaches that those who think of this as the millennial age depicted in Revelation are liable to become discouraged and be unprepared for the lead-up to what is to follow.

In terms of fleshing out more eschatological bones the Bible does not lend itself to dogmatism, nor has *"eye seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those that love Him"*⁸³¹. So whilst Peter foretold the destruction of the heavens and earth at the time of Christ's coming, he was in no doubt that a new heaven and earth would be created⁸³². Others understand Peter's reference to the vanishing sky and burnt-up earth to be a typical use of cosmic language to denote a cataclysmic event within the time-space universe, a hypothesis supported by extra-biblical writing of that period. Paul, John and Enoch all of whom were physically or spiritually transported to heaven to glimpse the future indicate that the Son of Man is coming to restore and liberate creation, although that will be a devastating and destructive event for those who continue to resist the Good News of His Kingship once that has been elucidated⁸³³. Most accept that planet earth and certainly the *kosmos* (world order) will be radically altered after Christ's coming, though quite how different the former will be has not

⁸²⁸ Background to the development of [Church's approach to Pre-millennialism](#):

⁸²⁹ Lk2:10

⁸³⁰ Jn1:46

⁸³¹ 1Cor2:9

⁸³² 2Pet3:13

⁸³³ 2Thes1:8

been elucidated. There have always been certain data the Lord would not supply to anyone, even those who were about to establish His Church⁸³⁴.

The Enoch perspective

Although ex-canonical, the Book of Enoch is regarded by many as inspired, valid for reference and introduces itself as something written for the express benefit of those living at the very end of the current age⁸³⁵. It foretells a messianic rule on earth together with the “elect and holy”, whilst at the same time envisaging an entirely new heaven and earth that will be prepared for the time of the General Resurrection and Universal Judgement of mankind and the angelic realm. It provides a little more detail on the physical means by which human life and wellbeing are to be sustained prior to that. Politically, the whole “structure of unrighteousness would be removed”⁸³⁶; those not of God, having made their irrevocable choice for destruction are necessarily culled and a righteous rule established. It distinguishes more clearly between the righteous or what John in Revelation describes as the “nations of those who are spared”⁸³⁷ and the “elect who cling to the Elect One”⁸³⁸. Describing the respective fates of the three main categories of people at the end of this age, Enoch foretells:

*The righteous shall be victorious in the name of the Lord of Spirits and He will cause **the others** to witness this that they may repent and forgo the works of their hands. They shall **have no honour through the name of the Lord of Spirits yet through His name they shall be saved**, and the Lord of Spirits shall have compassion on them, for His compassion is great. And He is righteous also in His judgement, and in the presence of His glory unrighteousness shall also not maintain itself: at His judgement the **unrepentant shall perish** before Him⁸³⁹.*

The sequence of events according to Enoch is set out in chapter 91⁸⁴⁰. As the end of the age approaches, wickedness, violence, uncleanness and apostasy will have increased. The first universal judgement had been by flood, the last on the current earth would be in the presence of the Lord, when the roots of unrighteousness and idolatry will be removed from under heaven (v9) and the righteous (only) would be raised from the dead (v10). This initiates the Messianic Kingdom which would be a period of righteousness in which “sinners would be delivered into the hands of the righteous” (v12), after which the righteous “would acquire houses through their righteousness whilst a house will be built for the great King in

⁸³⁴ Acts1:7

⁸³⁵ En1:1-2 [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_\(Charles\)/Chapter_01](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_(Charles)/Chapter_01)

⁸³⁶ En91:5 [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_\(Charles\)/Chapter_91](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_(Charles)/Chapter_91)

⁸³⁷ Rev21:24

⁸³⁸ En40:5 [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_\(Charles\)/Chapter_40](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_(Charles)/Chapter_40)

⁸³⁹ Enoch50:1-4 [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_\(Charles\)/Chapter_50](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_(Charles)/Chapter_50)

⁸⁴⁰ [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_\(Charles\)/Chapter_91](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_(Charles)/Chapter_91)

glory” (v13). At its conclusion comes the great white throne judgement when all the dead are raised, the world having been written down for destruction after which all mankind shall look to the path of uprightness (v14) within a new heaven and earth. Then, “all shall be in goodness and righteousness, and sin shall no more be mentioned for ever” (v17). This goes beyond but doesn’t contradict the Revelation account and re-affirms a terrestrial age to follow this one in which the wicked are removed and the elect support Jesus Christ as He “subjects all things to Himself”.

The Fall of Babylon

“MYSTERY: Babylon the Great, Mother of all prostitutes and all filthy practices on earth”⁸⁴¹, the “great city that has authority over all the rulers on earth”⁸⁴², by whom all the ship owners and merchants have been made wealthy and who has been responsible for all the blood ever shed on earth⁸⁴³. Given the universality of its impact, this “city” must refer to a mystical entity, for no one country, city or institution could be responsible for all corrupt practices on earth or all its slaughter. It is the “structure of unrighteousness” referred to in Enoch, and in terms of personnel “the wicked” in Old Testament writing; “children of the devil” in the New. The two key points for those inclined to dismiss a period of messianic rule on earth to note is that “Babylon” is to be destroyed in order that the spiritual and political framework of evil *can no longer function in the world*. Currently, wrote John, “*we are of God but the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*”⁸⁴⁴. The fall of Babylon cannot pertain to the end of the time-space universe for the people of the world subsequently mourn over her demise. The rich and powerful are distraught at her downfall whilst God’s chosen people celebrate. Clearly even “Babylon” cannot be directly responsible for *all* bloodshed and depravity on earth but as far as God is concerned she rather than the world is ultimately liable and will bear the punishment of destruction; the second key point then being that “Babylon” is destroyed but *not the earth along with her*. It is not always easy to distinguish between past and future events in Revelation but here the sequence at least is clear: not until “Babylon” has been destroyed can “the reign of the Lord God (on earth) begin” and the marriage of the Lamb take place, the wife having at last made herself ready⁸⁴⁵. That reflects Old Testament prophecy in which the reign of Christ with His people invariably follows the destruction of their enemies.

Cyrus: a type of Christ

⁸⁴¹ Rev17:5

⁸⁴² Rev17:18

⁸⁴³ Rev18:24

⁸⁴⁴ 1Jn5:19

⁸⁴⁵ Rev19:6-7

The Neo-Babylonian empire, who under king Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the first Jewish Temple and brought God's people into exile as slaves in Babylon was defeated by Cyrus the Great. God used this enlightened Gentile to liberate His people from Babylon and through his sovereign edict, their temple was rebuilt. He was described by Prophet Isaiah as "God's anointed one" or messiah⁸⁴⁶. The self-styled king of the world destroyed the Babylonian hold over God's people and cleared the path for them to worship JHWE in the city of the great king. This prefigures the end-time destruction of "Babylon", representative of the mystical, invisible body of satanic evil, currently functioning in the world in opposition to the mystical, visible Body of Christ: the one seeking to bring light, truth, peace and healing, the other moral degradation, greed, deception and destruction. That is the nature of the struggle; it is not the Church versus everyone outside her as depicted in Augustine's "City of God"; it is a two-way battle for allegiance from amongst the World's inhabitants. The Church and "Babylon" are both seeking to woo people to themselves but for opposite ends, resulting in three outcomes: the saints, the satanic agents and the rest of creation who will one day after much tribulation be *"delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"*⁸⁴⁷.

Since flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom⁸⁴⁸ we look to heaven from whence the Saviour will come *"to change our lowly bodies to be fashioned like His glorious body according to the operation by which He will subject all things to Himself"*⁸⁴⁹. For those resurrected at that time will have an incorruptible body, which as well as being indestructible will no longer be subject to the corrupting influence of the "body of this death", so they will no longer be inclined to fleshly passion and pride but to righteousness and peace. Those worthy to attain that age and the first resurrection⁸⁵⁰ will be like the angels in heaven yet still able to relate on earth to those subjects in corruptible bodies just as the risen Jesus related for a time with His disciples, as did angels with the likes of Abraham and Lot. Paul had described this particular resurrection as being a *"prize he was striving to attain"*⁸⁵¹ whereas *all* who have died are to be resurrected at some point so Paul cannot have been referring to the general resurrection for he was seeking *to attain a prize* provided to the few⁸⁵². Two resurrections are also indicated in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians⁸⁵³ in which he states that at Christ's coming, the dead in Christ will be raised before the living elect join them "in the clouds" having been raptured so as to be spared the

⁸⁴⁶ Is45:1

⁸⁴⁷ Rom8:21

⁸⁴⁸ 1Cor15:50

⁸⁴⁹ Phi3:21

⁸⁵⁰ Lk20:35; Phi3:11

⁸⁵¹ Phi3:11-14

⁸⁵² 1Cor9:24; Jn6:54

⁸⁵³ 4:15-17

hour of testing that the rest of the world must endure when the wicked are ingloriously removed from the earth by His holy angels⁸⁵⁴. Those remaining on earth will have cause to mourn over their rejection or ignorance of Christ⁸⁵⁵; many of whom will call upon His name, accept His Lordship and accordingly find mercy. The two resurrections are explicitly set out in the Revelation of God to Jesus Christ⁸⁵⁶ and Scripture should surely be taken at its word unless obvious symbolism is intended. There is no textual justification to treat this particular datum metaphorically especially as no one has come up with a workable suggestion as to what two resurrections could symbolize.

The hierarchical nature of Kingdom

Revelation depicts the New Jerusalem *coming down from heaven* as “the Bride that the Lamb has married”⁸⁵⁷. This is currently the “heavenly Jerusalem” described in Hebrews⁸⁵⁸, for that is where Christ is installed as King with His angels and saints who are in mystical union with His Pilgrim Church on earth. The New Jerusalem is to be the inhabitation of all the elect, whilst the nations outside will come to its light and the kings of the earth will bring it their treasures⁸⁵⁹. So there are to be principalities and powers in the next age as well as this⁸⁶⁰ which Christ will still be heading, the difference being that everyone will know about it. Given such indubitable physicality, not everyone once resurrected can be in intimate communion with the Lord of glory; some must admire from afar. An eternal egalitarianism, apart from being unbiblical could only function in an environment in which disembodied souls became, as it were, absorbed into God or are in a permanent dream-like state. The latter may be the case for disembodied spirits currently said to be “sleeping in Christ” or “resting on Abraham’s bosom” but it cannot be so after the resurrection, for each will be as physically substantial as the resurrected Jesus before His ascension⁸⁶¹. For He is the “first fruit of them that sleep” just as His people are currently a kind of first fruit for the human creation, most of whom are yet fully to be made alive⁸⁶². Mankind is to share in God’s divinity yet will remain distinct from the Father in His essence. Man obtains intimate communion with the Godhead through the mediation of the Son. The Christian is already described as being in the Son whilst the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son⁸⁶³.

⁸⁵⁴ Mt13:41; 2Thes1:7-9; Rev3:10

⁸⁵⁵ Rev1:7

⁸⁵⁶ 20:5-6

⁸⁵⁷ 21:2

⁸⁵⁸ 12:22

⁸⁵⁹ Rev21:24

⁸⁶⁰ Eph1:21

⁸⁶¹ Cf. Lk24:42

⁸⁶² Jam1:18; 1Cor15:23

⁸⁶³ Jn14:10

But after resurrection there will have to be an order as there is in the angelic realm⁸⁶⁴ yet in due course every soul may be fulfilled in accordance with its established capacity; hence the importance of life in this body; hence the value of anything by which that capacity might be enlarged; hence the value of temporary human suffering: the grist for glory.

Angelic intrigue

Given the reality of Lucifer, that supreme angel of light who became Satan (the Adversary), not all the heavenly host were content with God's plans for humankind and some revolted. Surely, thought they, it would be the Godhead with the *princes of the angelic realm* who were destined to rule the heavens. Those who were content within their own sphere and remained faithful are nevertheless intrigued and desire to look into these matters⁸⁶⁵. Little wonder, for the extraordinary transition that is required of fallen human beings to fulfil such a destiny is staggering, and it is referred to by the writer to the Hebrews:

*For He has not put the world to come of which we speak in subjection to angels, but one testified in a certain place saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honour and set him over the works of your hands; You have put all things in subjection under (man's) feet. For in that He put all in subjection under man, He **left nothing that is not to be put under (man)**. But currently we do not see all things put under him. But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels and **because He suffered death** has been **crowned with glory and honour**, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone*⁸⁶⁶

The author of Hebrews indicates that whilst we currently do not see all things subjected to human beings, that is the eventual plan. What Christians *can* see by faith is the Man Christ Jesus already *crowned with glory because of His suffering*⁸⁶⁷, so as to bring many human sons to glory. As all the letters to the Asian churches through John in Revelation make clear, such privileges are not for all who have been incorporated into the Church through baptism but those relatively few⁸⁶⁸ who are deemed worthy⁸⁶⁹. God calls many into the Church (*ekklesia* - the called-out ones); of those only some are deemed worthy to inherit the promises of Christ⁸⁷⁰. For they had been called out of the world to be sanctified, requiring their personal co-operation, application and perseverance which not all provide or have

⁸⁶⁴ Cf. Lk1:19

⁸⁶⁵ 1Pet1:12

⁸⁶⁶ Heb2:5-9

⁸⁶⁷ Heb2:9

⁸⁶⁸ Cf. Rev3:4

⁸⁶⁹ Cf. 2Tim4:7; Lk20:35

⁸⁷⁰ Cf. Mt20:16

even understood to be the case. It is therefore expedient that all who are sincerely seeking to be faithful to Christ within the various churches at the current time know what is expected of them in anticipation of His coming.

Scripture is explicit: the suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf also perfected Him for His future Office as well as being an example to those who are to follow Him to glory⁸⁷¹. It is all the more necessary for those whose current bodies originate from dust and are tainted by sin to experience suffering to perfect them for the future privilege of sharing their Bridegroom's life and domain. For within God's economy those called to lead are to do so through serving and must be prepared to suffer on behalf of those they are to lead:

*I (Paul) now rejoice in **my sufferings for you**, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His Body which is the Church*⁸⁷²

He also told the Corinthian Church that their own salvation was being perfected by their sharing in the apostles' suffering⁸⁷³. The same apostle had received certain revelations concerning future glory⁸⁷⁴, in which he was "*caught up into the third heaven*". To prevent him from bursting with joy or becoming conceited he was given a physical affliction – a thorn in the flesh. God permitted Satan to inflict this physical discomfort on His beloved apostle for his own good, and so that God's strength may be made perfect in Paul's weakness.

The more one begins to comprehend God's exhilarating plan for humanity, or as much of it as has been disclosed, the more one should begin to perceive a positive role for human suffering in the present preparatory age. Through Paul's revelation in the heavenly realm, he had an exceptional grasp of this matter such that he positively rejoiced in his own sufferings for the Church⁸⁷⁵ and knew that as the Body of Christ, the Church must suffer for the world:

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the **glory that is to be revealed in us**. For the earnest expectation of creation eagerly waits for the revelation of the sons of God*⁸⁷⁶

For the elect's tribulations that anticipate their glory are also a reflection of God's universal justice and equity:

⁸⁷¹ Cf. 1Pet2:21

⁸⁷² Col1:24

⁸⁷³ 2Cor1:6

⁸⁷⁴ 2Cor12:1-6

⁸⁷⁵ Col1:24

⁸⁷⁶ Rom8:18-19

*Your tribulations are a manifest witness of the **righteous judgement of God**, that you may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God for which **you also suffer** seeing that is a **righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation** to them that trouble you⁸⁷⁷.*

And as James also wrote:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters whenever you **face trials** of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance continue its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything⁸⁷⁸*

Trials incur suffering but help a Christian persevere and spiritually grow towards moral perfection. It is also linked to the need for discipline, which is more readily understood from our experience as children or parents:

God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later however it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it⁸⁷⁹

Suffering endured by wider creation

The many people who have not heard or heeded the various presentations of the gospel cannot be expected to understand the need for human suffering, for the Church herself has scarcely comprehended the mystery of evil. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church acknowledges:

*It is a great mystery that **providence should permit diabolical activity**, but we know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him⁸⁸⁰*

This chapter is setting out *how* the devil's mischief works for our good but the Church will not perceive or be able to explain the need for human suffering if she does not pay heed to what Scripture testifies are the future roles and responsibilities that she as Bride may share with her Royal Husband. And as more and more within the churches are grasping, the rest of human creation is not to be assigned to oblivion (or worse); it too is suffering for a purpose. In terms of the elect and those they may come to rule, it is a question of ordering and staging within the process of the enlightenment and deification of humanity so that all might come to share in the felicity of the children of God.

⁸⁷⁷ 2Thes1:5-6

⁸⁷⁸ Jam1:2-4

⁸⁷⁹ Heb12:10-11

⁸⁸⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church #395 <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/para/395.htm>

It is surely right and just that human beings endure the trials that they do in view of the privileges that await them. All will suffer at some point for everyone must be salted⁸⁸¹. But it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil⁸⁸²; better to be a miserable beggar like Lazarus and be comforted in the spirit after death than to live a careless life of ease like Dives who must suffer for much longer: *“Remember that in your lifetime you received good things and likewise Lazarus evil things, so now he is comforted whilst you are tormented”*⁸⁸³. And the Master again: *“Woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation now”*⁸⁸⁴. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom: those who respect God through religious creed or conscience make the better choices for their eternal welfare. Yet he who would valiant be let him come hither, for it is finest of all to suffer for Christ: *“For our light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”*⁸⁸⁵. So shall every sacrifice be seasoned with salt⁸⁸⁶.

Being unaware of these matters it is hardly surprising that the world along with many less enlightened Christians hanker for something very different: a life as free of suffering as possible. Christians should recognize that life in the present, though not without its blessings, is merely the birth pangs⁸⁸⁷ leading up to the glories that await those who love God or are capable of doing so once they apprehend His glory. In that same passage, Paul refers to the *involuntary aspect* of the human predicament:

*For creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice but by the will of the One who subjected it, in certain hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage and decay and be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God*⁸⁸⁸

It was in accordance with divine providence that His creation be submitted to frustration and vanity. God well knew the outcome would be even better for all and would demonstrate His glory and grace more fully than if events had taken a different course, and humanity will have been better prepared for the challenges they are to face in the future⁸⁸⁹. Human suffering will not have been wasted; not only will it be compensated for at the individual level but will have been the efficacious means by which the souls of frail children of dust could be disciplined, shaped and extended for a future experience that will include

⁸⁸¹ Mk9:49

⁸⁸² 1Pet3:17

⁸⁸³ Lk16:25

⁸⁸⁴ Lk6:24

⁸⁸⁵ 2Cor4:17

⁸⁸⁶ Mk9:49b (some textual variants) <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/mark/9-49.htm>

⁸⁸⁷ Rom8:22

⁸⁸⁸ Rom8:20-21

⁸⁸⁹ Cf. Rev2:26-28

for some, not only worship and adoration from afar but an immediate and intimate association with the Lord of Glory⁸⁹⁰.

Such is the wisdom of God, and such was the role for evil and the realm of darkness. Its prince's mischief has been utilized by God as grist to prepare children of dust for a glorious inheritance. There are related truths that are both observable and borne out by Scripture: the greater the pain, the greater the joy. If every day were the first day of spring how diminished it would be if winter had not first been endured. It appears sweeter to regain something that was lost than if it had been there all the time. This is evident in the parable of the prodigal: the wayward son returning home to his father was more cause for celebration than the one who had remained faithful. The angels rejoice more over one sinner that repents than ninety-nine not needing repentance. This is linked to another motif traceable in Scripture: divide to reconcile. Through God's inscrutable providence it applied to man's broken relationship with His Maker, reconciled and restored through Christ. God's first choice for the Kingdom the Jewish people failed to appreciate the day of their visitation allowing Gentile members into that privileged role; the partition having been broken down between Jew and Gentile through the cross to create one divine assembly. And it is to be hoped before too long, the Western Church - divided through internal corruption and a break-away movement; Mother and her separated children reconciled⁸⁹¹, bringing with them the untold wealth contained in Christ's gospel, the full extent of which may yet have remained undiscovered had the Church never divided and gone its separate ways. Through God's wisdom it was deemed fitting that ecclesiological unity be re-established from division and plurality rather than a historically maintained integrity. Likewise, may Western Christianity be re-affiliated with Eastern so that once again the Church may breathe with both lungs. All in time for the greatest reconciliation of all: the whole created order purged, restored and re-united with its Creator. Division always involves suffering for the parties involved, but the joy seems all the sweeter when they are united at last.

The suffering of God

Suffering for all parties, for our God is no deistic, impassionate chess master overseeing this wondrous plan. He had been perfectly entitled to enjoy unbroken felicity but for mankind's sake He was prepared to endure the agony of observing His only begotten Son's humiliation and death. If Satan had been barred from planet earth or Adam and Eve had been erased for their disobedience and replaced, Christ need not have died. But He permitted His enemy what appeared to be an extraordinary victory for the sake of what He knew would be the ideal preparation for the beings created in His image to be raised from dust to glory. This is the third reason apart from Satan's treachery and our first parents' disobedience that things

⁸⁹⁰ Mt20:23

⁸⁹¹ Cf. Mal4:5-6

have been as they have been in the world and in the Church. Suffering partnered with essential spiritual healing and progressive enlightenment are the means by which God is drawing man toward his ultimate destiny as exemplified by His Son's own experience.

The precise nature of human experience through eternity, although hinted at through the various offices and titles applied to those chosen for Christ, "*cannot and may not be spoken of by any human being*"⁸⁹². What we have been told in Scripture about our future life with God and His Son (and most have yet to grasp that) pertains to the immediate future in the context of eternity, which is as much as most human minds could currently sustain. To know too much would anyway undermine the principle of faith. God's nature and covenant faithfulness towards those that love Him can and never will change, yet the creative energy of the Universal Deity is incomprehensible, and whatever He has prepared for the future, His divine Son as Agent and Overseer of all that has been created or has yet to be established within the universe will be at the centre. As joint heirs His redeemed human family will spearhead that activity along with the hosts of angels and the rest of God's salvable earthly creation. If even an nth degree of this can be grasped, human suffering will have been worth it as it will undoubtedly have enlarged the human capacity to enjoy a fuller communion, companionship and participation with the Divine Glory. Such will have been the meaning of life. So, who now will discern as much, re-evaluate the understanding of their faith in light of this disclosure and where necessary reorder their lives in preparation for what may shortly come to pass?

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*I (the Lord) have kept silent for a long time; I have kept silent and restrained Myself*

*Now like a woman in labour I will groan, I will both gasp and pant*

*I will lead the blind by ways they have not known along unfamiliar paths I will guide them*

*I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth.*

*These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them*<sup>893</sup>.

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<sup>892</sup> 2Cor12:4

<sup>893</sup> Is42:14,16