"The Vandal"

This unique smorgasbord of writing forms gives startling, disturbing and encouraging insights into the human condition, and reveals the author’s deep and intimate walk with his Heavenly Father.

The Vandal is audacious, revealing, intriguing, and ultimately deeply reassuring as jewels of truth are brought delightfully to our understanding. It is in line with similar books of stories, essays and poems, such as Angel Wings, God and the Ghostown and I Saw, in the Night, Visions. Geoffrey Bingham is a master of these.

Pro Hart has kindly contributed an original painting for the cover, which depicts the person in ‘The Vandal’, the title story of the book. Hart catches the idiom of the writer, but long ago he had developed his own understanding of his fellow Australians, his humour being no less whimsical than that of Bingham. The two have much in common, and their coming together again makes this a desirable volume to possess.
Other Books by the Same Author

FICTION

To Command the Cats
The Translation of Mr Piffy
The Days and Dreams of Arcady
The Raymond Connection
The Boy, the Girl, and the Man

SEMI-FICTION

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Bright Bird and Shining Sails
Angel Wings
The Concentration Camp
God and the Ghostown
Three Special Stories
I Saw, in the Night, Visions
Man of Dust! Man of Glory!
The Heavenly Vision
This Building Fair

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FOREWORD

Geoffrey Bingham, from his boyhood story-telling and his earliest days in journalism, has always had ‘the pen of a ready writer’ (Ps. 45:1). All his gifts in adult years of mature experience have been dedicated to the task of communicating by voice and by pen the message of the Gospel. This has led him to think out its implications and to seek fresh ways by which to get it across to the society in which he lives. This book is an example of the freshness of his thinking and his enthusiasm to give it articulate expression in a way which will reach contemporary readers.

The book itself is a Christian Miscellany. It consists of devotional studies or essays, short stories and poems. He explains its purpose in the Introduction, and adds a comment with naive honesty: ‘Critics have said I write too much, that I ought to spend more time in perfecting techniques, and that I ought to do better in self-editing.’ He accepts these criticisms, but does not think he can write too much. The reason is that his mind is so fertile, overflowing with new ideas and fresh lines of approach, that he can not write fast.
enough, nor allow himself time to revise what is written. This aspect of his work is perfectly summed up in a sentence of his own, in the essay on Abraham and the Covenant: ‘We need to close off this simple essay,’ he wrote, ‘before its materials mount up afresh, tumble out, and confuse us with their own innate prodigality.’ So this book reflects both the faults and virtues of one who is always conscious that in his Master’s name he must echo his Master’s words: ‘I have somewhat to say unto thee’ (Luke 7:40).

I am not drawn to his poetical fragments, chiefly because I have never accustomed myself to the rules and structures of modern poetry. Only two of the poems in this book follow the old-fashioned rules of rhyme and scansion, viz. ‘Covenant Hymn’ and ‘The Lamb of God’. But the short stories are very attractive, full of homely detail and accurate character representation. They reveal qualities of imagination and observation which touch human experience on the level of ordinary people. There are elements of autobiography in ‘The Beloved’ and in ‘The Kingtide of Love’. It would do a world of good for a host of would-be preachers if they were to read, mark and inwardly digest the latter. And the true story of ‘Lionel’ has a special appeal.

The essays, devotional or didactic, vary in quality. The essay on Reconciliation is excellent, and includes a true statement: ‘Christian theology is not primarily a theology of glory, of power, of social achievement, of human compassion, or of moral excellence. The Gospel is summed up in a statement of Paul: ‘The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ Men may not want to hear the Gospel, but they need its message with a need no words are adequate to express.

I have described this book as a Christian Miscellany; and so it is. But one theme is basic to all its parts. That theme is the presentation of the good news of God’s saving grace and redeeming love. The language is fresh; the approach is original; and its message is for all. I hope this little– book will be widely read and its message warmly received.

M. L. Loane
Sydney, September 1989
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THE UNIQUE COMMUNITY

It has gradually come to me, over the years, that the church is a unique community. I suppose I have always understood that in a theological sense, but time and experience have shown me that the church and those who are not of the church constitute two different communities. The tendency is for both to be at odds—each with the other. Our world is composed of one human race—a male–female entity. There seems to be no reason why we should not speak of the entire human race as ‘the world’, and often we do this, but in fact we have come to speak of ‘the church and the world’. Perhaps we cannot escape this, by nature of the case. We only hope that on the one hand the church will not develop an elitist attitude, and on the other that the world will not reject it as a privatized and exclusivist community.

We know that these views and errors often obtain in history, so that there is conflict between the church and the world. The church which is committed to bringing God and salvation to the
world must not judge the world moralistically, nor be patronizing in proclaiming its message. Ideally the world should give the church a genuine opportunity to state its case and offer its wares, but in practice this is rarely the case. The Scriptures teach those of us who are of the church that we should give honour and dignity to all human beings, whether of the world or of the church. Whilst the idea that all persons need salvation is an offence to world-thinkers, yet the offer is simply one of grace and love—not of criticism and indictment. Jesus told his disciples the world would hate them, since it hated him. Ironically enough, those who hated him at that point of history were those who were leading the Jewish church or congregation. Jesus called them ‘the world’. Jesus and his disciples counselled a gracious attitude towards the world. There is no point in picking a fight.

The thrust of this small essay is that the world and the church have their own ‘in-house’ structure, ethos, and mores. Of course, the world is not a highly-organized, conspiratorial group whose main aim is to topple the church. It is simply that it regards the church as unnecessary, irrelevant, and even offensive. The world has a strong moral sense, and may approve of the church maintaining a reasonable morality in the community, but since the world is based on the principle of human freedom or autonomy—as against domination by God—its tolerance of the church is minimal. At the same time, the church is ever in danger of withdrawing itself into monastic retreat, gathering up its skirts for fear of worldly contamination, and segregating itself from the general stream of humanity.

I have always considered that the church should not have an ‘in-house’ mentality, i.e. simply provide for itself, and develop a culture and a way of life for itself—as distinct from participation in the whole of the human race. I still believe that. The trouble, however, is that while we are always looking to bring truth to the world, we will so shape our communications and our life that the church never has opportunity to live within itself. Whilst this is certainly a good thing, it seems to me that the church needs to develop its own ideas in regard to life, to culture, and to art. I do not mean that we should develop a religious ethos, a religious set of mores, and shape up a religious art and culture. In any case, this is what has happened over history, and we may well debate whether it has been a good or bad thing; whether it has constituted itself as ‘light’ and ‘salt’, penetrating all society and bringing sanity, good health, and good moral sense to human history.

I am thinking more particularly of publications like this present book. As a writer, I have realized that there are elements of secularity and humanism in the world that strongly reject any attempt I—and perhaps my colleagues—may make to penetrate the world of writing and other art. I have learned to accept this without rancour. I understand the offence that things of faith bring to humans who do not want it. It is simply that I believe they need it, which makes me persist. I am certain that without faith life can never have its true savour. Sometimes the world is penetrated by the gospel, and even seems to accept the penetration, but this is rare, and if it happens there is often a hue and a cry about the matter. One persists, but one knows there is little—if any—hope of success.
Some years ago the thought came to me that whereas we ought not to develop a religious poetry, or religious fiction, biography and autobiography, yet those of the church should be permitted the luxury of enjoying those forms of art—amongst others. Because I was part of a publishing company which printed my theology and fiction, I was able to devise a new form of book. It was composed of stories, essays, poems and other fragments. Probably another religious book-house would not have published my material, because of its particular bent and form of expression. No matter: our own company published these books. Only time will tell whether they have any intrinsic and lasting value. Whilst I hope the writing may be well evaluated, I am not primarily interested in acceptance of it.

What I appreciate and enjoy about this kind of writing is the opportunity to express my ideas and understandings to an audience which knows what I am about. Of course, many in the church do not accept or appreciate the way I go about things, and some do not even accept the substance of what I write. I can understand and come to terms with their views. Yet I find an incredible freedom in writing on the issues of life without having to use constant apologia, without having to have an eye to convincing my readers, and so being able to express what I think and feel. Critics of essays may feel I lack fine writing; fiction critics may question the quality of my stories, and poets who are true poets may see my scribblings in verse as deficient. Even so, I hope that what I do may encourage others to follow suit. Those more competent in essay-writing, story-telling and the creation of poetry may well outclass my bit of writing, but at least this present kind of book has been pioneered.

This particular format just grew up, of itself. The first of this kind of book was Angel Wings, which was composed of true stories and character studies of biblical persons. Then followed books such as The Concentration Camp, I Saw in the Night Visions, God and the Ghostown and This Building Fair. Somewhere in the midst of these we printed a second edition of Angel Wings. We added poems and essays to the stories and character studies, bringing it up to the shape of these later books. Thus we consciously created a new format. The difference between it and literary productions which contain stories, poems and essays is that in these books the three forms of writing are by the one person.

I suppose I am aware of some of the weaknesses of my writing. Critics have said I write too much, that I ought to spend more time in perfecting technique and that I ought to do better in self-editing, since I am somewhat averse to the editing of my writing by others. I accept these criticisms. I do not think one can write too much. No one paints or sculpts or composes music ‘too much’. It is the much writing, painting, sculpting, and composing which develops the skill of the artists. Most of what we do is ‘on the run’. We live our lives, and snatch time here and there to communicate what has become rich for us. We simply wish to share it with others. This, of course, must not be an excuse for careless art-work.

One experiences intense pleasure when readers tell what has happened to them through reading what has been written. Far more than one would have expected, a response has come to the reading of a poem, a story or an essay. That is
reward enough, and encouragement galore. Most artists would wish to communicate on the highest level possible. That is to say, they would wish to be as close to perfect as possible in what they do. On whatever level they are able to do their work, it will surely meet someone who can understand it on that level. I have found that many writers and other artists have been deeply disappointed in themselves. They are often visited with a sense of failure. Very few would ever have thought their work was perfect. The human conscience is a demanding faculty, and that is a good thing. However, one must also live in justification or his–or her–heart will be cast into despair. Doubtless we must work as well as we can–at top pitch if possible–but there must be no self-reckoning if we are disappointed in our work. The disappointment may arise from a source other than our work. It may even arise from our desire to look well in the eyes of others. We must be content with God’s praise, and let slide the demand for the praise or affirmation of our fellow human creatures.

Of course, we must take note of critics, but we must first understand the position from which the critic makes his judgements. The critics of the prophets doubtless had their reasons, but history has taught us that the prophets–however they may have lacked finesse–were substantially right. Without trying to vindicate ourselves, we must be assessors of what we communicate, however lacking may be the communication itself. If the substance of the communication is valuable, then we must come to terms with our lack of ability to communicate perfectly. Of course, there is also the story of the willingness or unwillingness to hear what we present. The human mind is adept at cutting out what it does not wish to hear, of subverting and even of perverting what has been said or portrayed. We must have enough courage–with humility–to assess our critics, profiting where we can, but refusing to be crushed where the criticism is not valid.

* * *

When, then, it comes to the unique community–the church–we must resist the spirit of exclusivist monasticism or dreary sectarianism, in simply writing ‘in-house’ communications. At the same time we have a responsibility to the community to edify it, to give it encouragement and strength as well as exhortation. There is also that entertainment in art which is intended for sheer joy and delight, for humour and laughter, and for the witness to all that the world–God’s creation–is a wonderful place, and life in it is the supreme gift that God gives. The world will look with a certain wonder when we are truly human, and truly joyful, and when we are not dismayed by opposition or persecution. It will recognize the reality of faith when it sees it, for it too has to battle for a kind of faith. If we are writing to ourselves in this kind of book, then we are also writing to them.

I hope this kind of a book will continue to create itself, whoever may write it, and that we may enjoy, hugely, the work of our hands.

Geoffrey Bingham
Mr Andrew McCutcheon was by no means a young man. It may sound like a cliché to say that a man—a person—is as young as he—or she—feels, but it is true. As to years, Mr Andrew McCutcheon was certainly no chicken, but was a very active man. He had only lately retired from work, and his firm had been glad to have him stay on well past retirement age. In fact he was sixty-five years of age, and ready for a useful autumn of his life.

His wife was no fool. She knew that this and that had to happen in order that her Andy should live the last period of his life without bewilderment, disappointment or loss of identity. How did she come to that kind of thinking? To tell the truth, she was an avid reader of Arthur Best, the famous pop-psychologist who tells you how to live life fully, and certainly does well out of the deal himself. You will know his books—their titles are innumerable—and the fact that they sell in millions. Indeed it is difficult to know how our generation—young and old—could have made it through these dark years without the light of Arthur at his Best. The book that Andy’s Amy had
Andrew McCutcheon knew it was a funny old garden. It was all the idea of his wife. She planted everything everywhere and anywhere. Bulbs grew up here, annuals there, shrubs here, there, and everywhere. Sometimes tall plants were at the borders of the garden, and the low-growing ones at the back. Often it was a mixture of both.

Amy, his wife, was a bit like that—a bit unmarshalled. She seemed to adore her kind of wilderness. Long ago it used to irritate Andy because, having been in the Army and having to have a tidy palliasse, and equipment, and field-dress, he kept on wanting to be tidy when he came home. He remembered that in action they had always lined up the corpses in tidy fashion which was a compliment to them in death as in life, for in life they had lined up methodically by the right, and marched together, wheeled together and about-turned—all by the right.

At work his desk had been very tidy. His fine entries were also neat. His letters were tidy. His memos were readily readable. That was Mr Andrew McCutcheon to a T, and to be honest his wife's idea didn't altogether phase him. He had a glint in his eyes when he went to town on the garden. Foolish flower plants were dug out, his barrow with the plump pneumatic tyre was piled high with rubbish. His new compost heap rose higher and higher, and the garden became tidier and tidier.

Arthur Best and Amy McCutcheon combined to help Andy over the first and most difficult phase of his retirement. Whilst his mind could not entirely withdraw from the office, its desk, its various fellow employees (erstwhile), and the daily routine (1945–88), yet he sensed elements of freedom in being able to do what he wanted, which was always what he had wanted, deep down. He was also a fairly healthy fellow, and liked coming in to the evening meal, weary with accomplishment, yet hungry and ready for their bit of telly-watching, and their subsiding into the bed so beautifully warmed on No. 3 of the electric blanket. That was the life Mr Andrew McCutcheon was beginning to enjoy.

Amy was delighted. It is true she sniffed a little when she saw her roses dug out in this autumn and planted in regular sections; when she saw her agapanthus deprived of their one million snails and set out in rows like an infantry company; and when the new annuals were lined up like the valiant three hundred of the Light Brigade along the borders of all her gardens. Nevertheless she and Mr Arthur Best had a good thing going, and she encouraged it. The change was no real trouble to her. Her garden may have been scatty, but her mind never was.

Blessings, then, upon Best and wife McCutcheon. No one knows the anguish newly-retired persons feel—be they male or female. The pop-psychologist is right—there is an identity crisis. Trained circus animals want to go on doing what they have always done. It is no joy to them to be given a new freedom. Such freedom is bondage, but Andrew McCutcheon was reasonably free in his freedom. Helped on by numerous cups of sweet white tea—
he always took two spoons and was none the worse for them—and newly-baked cup-cakes and crisp, fresh biscuits, Andrew McCutcheon flourished.

That is, he flourished in all things but the confrontation of the poison ivy which grew on a tree that was on the edge of a special garden, which, itself, had become filled with the ivy. Somewhere, in the tangled mass of ivy arms, were special roses— the old-fashioned scented roses which his wife treasured. Almost all rose fanciers know that modern roses have had to sacrifice old scent for their new brilliant beauty. Only the old-fashioned roses can give out their scent to fragrance-starved contemporary humanity.

The poison ivy always reminded him of a book he had once read, called The Day of the Triffids. It had been powerfully illustrated, and he remembered that plants had actually attacked human beings—choking them. He could also remember vivid sessions of Doctor Who, where much the same phenomenon was manifested. He wondered whether one day their garden might be invaded secretly and silently by some radioactive splurge that would launch their plants into an apocalyptic 'day of the McCutcheon gardens'. Whilst he knew that plants are never likely to do that, the poison ivy clambering over one of their best flowering eucalyptus trees certainly gave every indication that it would eventually and inexorably take over other gardens.

In his heart of hearts he knew he ought to attack the ivy, and destroy it. He knew it could not fight back—his weapons of weedicide, axe, pruning shears, and hand-clippers could soon lay it out upon the lawn, ready for transport to the rubbish pile.

What really worried Amy’s husband was the height to which the ivy had grown up the tree. He would have to plant a high ladder against the tree, and bit by bit decimate the ivy, and the fact was that he had a dread of heights. It was plain acrophobia, and he suffered badly from it. He could not bear to see workmen on top of high-rise buildings, even when there was substantial scaffolding on which they could work. He could not bear to go near to the edge of balconies, and as for someone sitting on the rail of a balcony—it almost put him into palpitations. The same fear had kept him from climbing trees, climbing steep steps up the sides of the Blue Mountains, and from standing near the edge of the look-out from which you look towards the Three Sisters. He could drive the car around high hills, but he made sure he looked into the side of the hills and not down below. He had formulated special rules for evading this inbuilt phobia which was his.

The phobia had started during the war. As a child he could scale high trees. Indeed, he liked doing that. He had three older brothers who collected birds’ eggs, but they were not fearless like him. They dared, urged and coaxed him up trees of such a height that, when the adult Andrew thought back on them, he shuddered at the very memory. One part of him was proud at what he had done, but the very thought of those heights climbed could set him trembling.

It had all happened when the bombing began. He was in a theatre of war up in the high hills of Greece when the German planes came roaring across over them, dropping bombs, with stuttering machine-gun bursts where they lay, barely protected by camouflage and the hardy hillside.
scrub. It was not until he was hit that the fear had begun, but a leg had been badly smashed and they carried him to the makeshift Casualty Clearing Station where the medical staff strapped his leg to a platform splint—the only equipment available—and he had to lie there whilst the bombers roared overhead and the enemy’s shells broke into the hillside. Time and again his leg shook and rolled with the trembling of the hills. Miraculously they got him out, and even more miraculously on to a hospital ship, and he was invalided home—suffering from fear of heights, though at that time he knew it not.

In the depth of himself, Andy McCutcheon knew he did not only have fear of heights. He had fear of almost everything. Of course, his fear of heights originated from his association with planes high up in the air, and from association with the hillside off which he might any moment have rolled when he was wounded. That much he knew, but it did not explain the fears of life which he had. Someone had once told him that the fear of life is really the fear of death. That was as close as he had ever come to solving his puzzling problem. He knew he had been afraid to die. There were many others like him. He was not ashamed of that fear. It seemed natural to him, and the lot of all humans. It was the other fears which worried him. He had once read that if a person is afraid to come to solving his puzzling problem. He knew he had been afraid to die. There were many others like him. He was not ashamed of that fear. It seemed natural to him, and the lot of all humans. It was the other fears which worried him. He had once read that if a person is afraid to travel in the upper deck of a double-decker bus, then he is basically insecure. Andrew had admitted to himself that he was basically insecure.

Amy, his wife, knew he had fears. She remembered the early days of their courting, after the war. Andy had been afraid to go into shops and buy goods. He was timid in making arrangements for their honeymoon. He was shy with her—unusually shy. He had small nameless fears for so many things. He feared for their children, for their futures, for their sporting events, their examinations, and even their graduations.

Yet, in spite of his fears, he was a man of honour. He could joke when the mood took him, and do a bit of skylarking, especially when they had gone on holidays, but then fear of water was with him. He would not swim. Fear of heights prevented rock climbing and hill walking, though he walked cheerfully enough through level bush, and along roads.

Bit by bit he had overcome certain fears, or rather, he had been able to counteract them by certain planned acts. It was a marvel that he had worked all his clerical days on the fifth floor. It was a miracle that he had overcome fears of failure and had turned them to some considerable success. His children knew he was not a whimp because they had never heard him whimper. They admired and loved him, but they knew he battled with many fears—some major, some minor.

He had even told them of the dread fascination that heights had for him, and how—if he looked down into depths—that he felt a terrible urge to throw himself down into this abyss or that, so he kept away from such places.

Sometimes he wished he was wholly fearless. His two boys, Jimmy and Ronny, had no fear of heights. They had grown up as he had, fearless in climbing trees and sides of mountains. They loved hang-gliding. Indeed they were experts of that game, but they never invited him to the displays they shared down on the South Coast of New
The Vandal

South Wales, high up near the Bulli Pass. They also loved sky-diving.

★ ★ ★

One day when Amy was out at one of her many Women's Committees, where terribly important things were discussed and weighty and life-changing decisions were made, Andy Mac. decided he would tackle the poison ivy. The man at the local Garden Centre recommended the ideal poison for the climber. Right! He would poison it. He did this with mask-covered face, and the fine mist of the pump-spray. He said nothing to Amy about what he had done, but she noticed a certain air about him which she felt was quite new. Because she was working hard on the Best principles, she felt her efforts were being rewarded and left it at that.

Two weeks later the ivy began to droop. It turned faintly yellow. Then the leaves browned and began to fall in fluttering clouds in the wind. He barrowed loads to the rubbish pile. The gaunt arms of the blasted vines hung drearily from the branches or clung desperately to the trunk of the eucalypt, which had been unaffected by the spray-treatment.

Mrs McCutcheon was no less than astonished. 'What has happened to that ivy vine, Andy?'

'It's dead,' he said. 'Can't you see that, Amy?'

She could see it all right. 'Then how did that happen? Ivy never dies.'

'Of course not,' he said, with a note of triumph. 'I poisoned it.'

She looked at him, and then at the vine, and then at the hanging arms of it. 'It looks dreadful,' she said, 'hanging there like that.'

Antiphobia

'I'll get it down,' he said confidently, but she knew he would not. She knew he could not. She resolved, there and then, to ring the boys and get them to do it.

By some instinct, by long years of association with her, Andy knew what his Amy was thinking.

'Oh no you don't!' he shouted. 'Don't you dare get those boys in. This is my tree and my vine, and I'll look after it, thank you very much.'

She was too astonished to say anything, which was rather unusual. She looked at him for a time, hands on hips. Then she breathed heavily and huffed off.

He waited for the day she went to visit her daughter, Angela. She went fortnightly, and drove herself in her Mini Minor. She had hoped that now Andy was retired he would come with her. Well, he might one day, but not this day. He had something else in mind. He sent off a few of his special vegetables with Angela's mother, and waited until she was out of sight before he went to the garden shed.

He trembled as he took down the long two-section ladder. He staggered with it to the tree, and hauled up the top leaf of it by the rope. It seemed to ascend to the very sky itself, but he kept a strong hold over his own trembling, and set the foot of the ladder at a good angle. He decided to make two sockets in the ground to hold the feet of the ladder from slipping. He let the bottom of the ladder into the sockets. He went back and brought his pruning saw and a pair of secateurs. He was still trembling.

He wasn’t just trembling as he went up the ladder: he was shaking. The ladder shook with him. Memory started spilling over in his mind.
like molten metal in a foundry. He knew he could have started cutting about six feet up the tree, but he kept ascending. Sweat was breaking out on his face, and he felt the drops sliding down his cheeks. Some of them were salty in his mouth. The day, however, was quite cool.

Hill clouds seemed to lower themselves as he ascended. Some branches poked out at him, as though to prevent him ascending further. He sawed away at them, swaying as he did, and having to do it with one hand whilst he clung to the ladder with the other. Once or twice the ladder seemed to shift back from the tree, but he applied the right pressure at the appropriate time, and kept sawing. Small branches fell away, and the way was cleared to ascend higher. More small branches, more sawing, more branches falling.

Once he was tempted to make his way back down the ladder. He felt weak, and his trembling made him wonder whether it was too much for his age. He knew it wasn’t.

Further up, great vines hung like solid ropes from the flowering gum. There were a few close to the trunk, but the others were further out on the branch. This was the branch on which he had rested the top leaf of the ladder. First he cut the vines closest, and heard them fall with a crash. He decided not to look down. Then he leaned a little towards the ivy ropes further out. His heart gave a sickening surge, but he made his hand press on the vines as he sawed. He was careful not to lurch sideways when the vines dropped away. He leaned a little more. More vine fell.

He came back to centre, and sawed at the vines which had encircled the great trunk, crushing the bark as they had entwined themselves. He wondered how the tree was not suffocated. He sawed and sawed.

The sweat was dripping away. It ran from his forehead over his glasses, and he was half-blinded. He balanced precariously and took off his glasses, slipping them into his shirt pocket. They were reading glasses and he was long-sighted. He could see well without them.

Once, inadvertently, he looked down. His head swam. He felt the dizziness take him and he swayed. Again the surge of fear; but it helped to clear his brain. Deliberately he kept looking down. He began the sawing again.

Once he descended. He did this in order to shift the angle and place of the ladder. He set it out further on the same branch so that he could cut the hanging vines which had been out of reach for him. He had to make fresh sockets in the ground. While he was doing this a faint new excitement was growing within. He knew the task was not over, but believed, now, that he could do it.

When he began the new ascent, memory began pouring back into him. He knew the sound of Stukkas and the spurting stammer of their cannons. They seemed right above him, but he fought the idea and threat of them. He gripped the sides of the ladder, almost with anger. He seemed to be fighting something he had not fought before, something he ought to have fought, back in those days. It wasn’t that he ignored the planes which now burst out of his memory upon him. It was as though he was glad they had come. This was the time he could resist them, even fight them.

Amy would not have believed it, had she seen him almost run up the ladder. Some silence
within had broken, and he was growling with anger. Their parrot in an aviary often screeched away to them, and when—now—he heard his master shouting, he began screeching. It was like a symphony of protest, of angry imprecation, of assured triumph.

At the branch, Andy attacked the vines on the right, and then on the left. They fell, looking like foolish dragons drained of life. He then put an arm around one side of the trunk and began sawing into vine and bark. He snipped with his secateurs at the resisting smaller branches that jutted from the pulpy, stringy vines. Without thinking, he left the ladder and began to climb, ascending branch by branch, cutting away twigs and small impediments that would prevent his ascent.

He remembered his brothers. The stutter of the planes had died away and they were there—his brothers—taunting, teasing, daring. He felt exultant. He would show them. Then he thought he would show Jimmy and Ronny—they with their hang-gliding and their zestful sky-diving. He finally thought he would show Amy.

He made descents and ascents. Time and again the trembling would threaten to start, but he outbested Best with his positive thinking. He kept attacking, and finally the vine lay foolishly below the tree like a mad, dead wreath swathed around the rooted eucalypt, and Andrew McCutcheon—Corporal Andrew McCutcheon—stood surveying it, his pruning saw almost in the present-arms position. Anyway, that was how his spirit was.

When Amy returned in her Mini-car he was barrowing the last of the vines and leaves to their dump. She saw him wheeling the barrow back to the tree, and she could not believe her eyes. How she had hated that poison ivy, and now it was all gone! Cunningly he had returned the ladder to the shed. The saw on the ground, and the rake leaning against the barrow tyre. were the only clues to what Andy had done.

She rushed to him, almost girlishly. She liked the smell of sweat on him, and the hard, crushing hug he was giving her.

It was inevitable she would say, 'Oh Andy!' and so she did.

He for his part was perfectly happy about that. He had overcome his fear of heights. Then the stunning thought came to him: ‘I have overcome all those fears, the fears that the other fear bred in me.’

Now he was as silly and happy as was she, and so he hugged her as he hadn’t in years. He had even lost his fear of being foolish.

In her heart Mrs Andy was thanking Arthur Best and his books. She did not know that her Andy couldn’t care less for Best and his books. It had nothing to do with Best, or with anyone for that matter, but with something that a man can do—if he will. Well, he had.

He kept hugging her, not even thinking how substantial she had grown in these later years. He was thinking of something equally, if not more, substantial, and was enjoying his new freedom, this true freedom which had come to him.
**MAN-MIMER**

I saw him standing—his eyes averted—
Head down, and lips in mumbling.
Upwards he looked, then down,
Then sideways, as seeing something,
Yet seeing nothing. His seeing was inward,
But a non-seeing.
Likewise his thinking was not to the outward,
But only the inward.
When I spoke he answered nothing,
His 'nothing' was in incoherent mumbling,
But in the mumbling was deliberate nothing.

I assumed my presence was unwanted
And made the gesture of going,
But he bade me stay.
His mumbling became more incoherent,
But deliberately, emphatically insolent.
I gestured outward arms in incomprehension,
But he smiled and mumbled more.

Comprehension of his incoherence
Came to me. His deliberate mumbling
Was his fitful communication.
Nothing was anything to him.

Anything was nothing.
Everything was nothing, nothing everything;
My astonishment grew,
And dismay expanded.
He nodded, stooped
As though in low salute—
Mild appreciation of my audience gift.
He moved out afresh
Into his planned incoherence,
And deliberate mumbling.

I thought, as I surveyed him—
He never looked me in the eye—
That he was careful to see nothing
As he looked within. His gaze inverted
Was an empty one. His gaze averted
Stared at all nothing.
It seemed he pondered
Whether he would admit reality.
Reality seemed so confronting,
But reality would break the illusion,
Send him back to life,
And so some seeing.

Having pondered he made his no-decision,
And adverted to
The indeterminate nothing.
I doubt he saw my sorrow,
My reluctant departure.
I thought his grin was sly,
His averted eyes triumphant
With a slow glinting at his own
Killing of communication.
The congregation looked up at the preacher, but without much expectancy. They had heard him Sunday by Sunday, and from time to time had appreciated his sermons. They listened quietly, knowing that he had always prepared his sermon well, and spoken with a certain ability to convey his message. Beyond that he never seemed to go. He was a good pastor in the sense that he cared for his people, enquired as to their state of being, and assiduously visited those who were in hospital. He was a sociable person, though with a certain wistfulness, an air almost of being absent to those to whom–and with whom–he spoke. They had assessed him as a creditable preacher, a regular pastor, but certainly no whirlwind proclaimer, one who was a stranger to histrionics. Those who disliked oratory and those who feared confrontation were happy enough to have him as their minister. The others accepted him, and yet wished there would be more life to his words and in his actions.

That is why the whole congregation was surprised to hear him preach on this particular Sunday morning. They had noticed during the service that his leading of the hymns, his praying, and his reading of the Scripture was unusually animated. They rather liked the animation, for the worship seemed to be alive, and yet they had not anticipated any change in his mode or manner of preaching.

There was, however, quite a radical change in his presentation. From the moment he began his preaching they could recognize that this was not the man who had addressed them on previous occasions. They saw a light in his eyes. His face was suffused with colour. His hands moved in unaccustomed gestures, but it was the voice that was different. It seemed to be the voice of another man.

The fact that he had begun without a text, seemed not to have regulated points and headings under which to speak, and that he was not reading out Scriptures which he had himself printed out prior to the preaching, showed how far he had departed from his own norm. Much of what he said was a witness to what had happened to him, although he avoided drawing attention to himself alone.

He said, 'Jeremiah was a man of fire. God had said to him, 'I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them.'

'Jeremiah preached to the wood, and the wood did not want him. Later God came and the word of his prophecy was fulfilled. The wood was burned up. You only have to read the sad, strong Book of Lamentations to see that. Those lamentations were over Jerusalem, the city He loved and the people He had warned. When God said,
'I am making my words in your mouth a fire,' it was true. His words became a fire.' The pastor looked at his congregation. 'When have God's words ever been a fire in my mouth, and whenever have you been wood that has been devoured by them?'

No one spoke and the preacher went on. 'Never! Never have I had fire in my belly.'

Fire in the belly! This was an inelegant phrase, and they were a bit startled. Some stole looks at others. Some simply raised their eyebrows. All—nevertheless—were listening. Never had that man had such attention. They wondered what he would say next.

He said, 'If I had had fire in my belly, you would have had it also, in your hearts and your brains. Fire lights fire.' He paused and gave a strange smile.

'I know a bit about fires,' he told them. 'I once worked with the Country Fire Service, and I know how fire works. When you have a hot day, and the heat is throbbing, and the scrub is dry, it only takes a spark from a chance electrical storm, or a match from a firebug to start a great blaze.'

His eyes gleamed. 'If we had had a great wind and fire of revival, this congregation would be different. It would spring into life.'

His voice rose higher. 'I have heard the statement time and again when there has been a terrible bushfire, and when people's homes have been razed to the ground. They would say, 'There was nothing you could do!' That's right, when a blaze comes like that, there is nothing you can do. When God comes with fire, there is nothing you can do.'

He gave a light but serious laugh. 'You have

never been in danger of a holocaust in this congregation. I can't blame you and criticize you as being wood-like Jeremiah's listeners. You deserved more than I have given you, but you were never in danger of catching alight from me.'

Now he had their rivetted attention. They could not believe this was their quiet and staid preacher. His statements hit them as they were uttered. Some even wriggled, but they all kept listening.

'When I was in the C.F.S. we made firebreaks so that we could contain the fire. Why, it is a thing incredible, but I have always made firebreaks around my sermons and addresses. Somewhere in me I have had the conviction that if I did not condition all I said, it would somehow get away from me, and a fire might begin.'

He was highly animated, and many who were listening were likewise stimulated. 'I suppose I have had the fear of faith, fear that I might—if I were not careful—preach with power and conviction and things might happen in the congregation which would disturb the people and so cause trouble. It would be big trouble if I disturbed our congregation.' Again there was the faint smile. 'Jesus said that he came to cast fire on the earth, to disturb it with a holocaust. He had not come to bring peace, but a sword. The sword and the fire are one in the Scriptures. They cause havoc and division, but they burn up the dead wood, and set the rest free to live truly.'

He seemed to gather momentum as he talked. 'There has always been warfare between the pulpit and the pew, at least between some pulpits and some pews. People do not ask for fire from pulpits—they ask for peace in the pews, and that requires peace in the pulpit. Well, I guess that is
what I have been about, but an end has come to that kind of thinking.

'I have asked God to make His words fire in my mouth. I hope that is how they are right now. I trust that is how they will always be. I desire that you receive what I say with consideration. If my preaching is—or becomes—offensive, then you must do what you will, but at the moment I feel like the apostles who said, 'We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard.'"

He paused and looked around at the congregation. All eyes were fixed upon him, and no one seemed to want to sleep.

'For some time,' he told them, 'I have known how dry my sermons have been and how uneventful my pastoral ministry has proved. I reckoned I knew the truth, and in a way I did, but it was never any more alive to me than it has been to you. So I became troubled. I prayed. I read my Bible. I even bought books on preaching and pastoral care. I went to seminars by gifted and experienced lecturers, but nothing altered. I prayed for something to happen and when I did, an almost imperceptible change began to take place.

'I began to read the Bible with sight and insight that were changing. Sometimes the Scriptures were almost heart-stopping. I would feel a heaving going on inside me, and outside me things seemed to be transformed. Yet, on Sundays, when I would come into this pulpit, I would be frozen with fear. I would quickly become aloof again, and spell out my thoughts in the old pontifical way, or I would hesitate and become apologetic. Then when I went home I would be overtaken with a burning shame, with hot embarrassment.

Sometimes I would even weep for the indignity of it.'

Some in the audience seemed now to be alarmed. Interested as they were in this unusual flow of words and the animation of their pastor, they felt apprehensive of him, and for themselves. Was this man going to disturb the status quo? Was he going to make Sunday mornings intensely personal, perpetually confronting, and would he not divide this hitherto contented congregation, confusing them and setting them at odds with one another? They moved uneasily.

Others were thinking, 'Whatever is happening? This man sounds as though he has got hold of the truth, and that somehow he has never had it before, and—for that matter—we haven't had it either.' They were puzzled.

Yet others were flushed with delight. At last their preacher had come alive! He was a new man. No longer simply the thoughtful yet boring sermons. No longer the insipid tolerance. No more the good sermons which, though correct, lacked dynamic and power to inspire motivation to responsive action.

All, of course, were staggered by the change—whether they thought it good or bad—and could not decide what it was. No one said anything. All would bide their time. This might prove to be a spasmodic burst, a chance aberration. The pastor would come back to his former state of mind, and preaching.

It soon became clear that this would not be the case. He was telling them, 'For many months I have been seeing that God's word is His own word, and not just what the preacher thinks he ought to preach. God and His word are one. You cannot have an uttered word without an utterer.'
God is the real Utterer or what the preacher says is not His word. It becomes merely a man’s words, and has all the weakness and foibles of his own thinking and his so-called understanding.

‘The word I have been delivering to you was virtually man’s word, although I quoted so much Scripture and gave you what I thought was biblical truth. It was still man’s word. I apologize, of course, but an apology won’t alter much. I intend from now on to deliver God’s word, but of course as God Himself enables me.’

Some thought that statement was close to blasphemy. Most didn’t understand what he was saying. Others just suspended their thinking, but all of them could recognize the earnestness of their minister. Some sighed. Some sneaked a view of the time from their watches. Others moved restlessly, but most of them were watching the man. Their gaze took in his every movement.

He continued. ‘When I began to see the Scriptures in a new way, and when I began to understand God as I had not done so before, then I remembered that in my early days I had been more powerful in my preaching, more alive in my utterances. That may surprise those of you who have only known me in my middle age, but it was true. I suppose you could say I was alive in what I said. People were interested to hear me, but over a number of years that vitality seemed to wane and disappear.

‘When I think back on it all, it was not truly alive. It was the energy of a young man, the keenness we all have in youth, the mental stimulation that comes in theological training—that is, the hobby of ideas, and the desire to be heard, to be praised and to be accepted. These things kept me going, but they were not the fire of God’s word. In fact, I have come to see how little I really believed that stuff, so that it was no wonder I could not convince those who heard me speak.

‘Now—over these past months—I have come close to breaking out, to doing what I am doing this morning. I understand what Jeremiah felt and meant when he said, ‘If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.’ You see God’s word is a fire. God told Jeremiah, ‘Is not my word like a fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?’ Whilst I cannot say I had preached this word of fire and then stopped doing so, I can say that I knew I ought to preach it and had held back from doing so. But when God commands, we must obey, and if the fire is in your bones then it will scorch you unless you give it forth.’

He looked at the congregation, knowing that their attention had not waned. ‘You will say, ‘Well, preacher, you still have not uttered the word of God,’ and you will want to know what I will utter. What I am doing now is confessing to you that I have not been a true preacher of the word, but claiming that I will be. Even what I have said now is a revelation of the truth of that word. You know I am speaking the truth, and that is what matters.

‘What I am asking you now is whether you believe this word, or have in times past believed it but drifted from it or lost it. Look! I will show you something, and please listen to me. It is really a matter of life and death, and it goes something like this:
'Every man or woman comes to a time in life when he or she is conscious that God is God, and that He demands belief and trust from His created beings. Because He has sent His Son into the world to save it from itself, from its sin, its degradation and sin's ultimate punishment, then He has a double hold over humanity. He created us all, He redeemed us all, and we ought to respond with love, affection, and obedience. We ought to become united to Him as His new children–His loving family.

‘Because of our human pride and stubbornness and our refusal to admit our guilt and confess our need of His Son, we refuse to come to Him. Then begins a further process of experience by which we become angry, dissatisfied with material goods, human relationships and ourselves. We then sense our need more deeply and desperately, and know God alone can help. We are now ready to have a revelation of God in His love. We see the enormous cost to the Father and the Son in the terrible action of the Cross. We see the Father sending the Son because He loves us, and we see the Son bearing the shame and ignominy, the pain and terror of our guilt, as also its dreadful defilement, and suddenly we realize that God is love–holy love–and we cannot hold out. We surrender to Him. We gratefully accept His love and forgiveness. We know ourselves to be acquitted from guilt. We are free, and we love Him.

‘Now I put it to you–does not that word burn into your heart? Does it not confront you? Are you not bound to respond, and will you not do so now?’

Some in the congregation could not believe their ears. Others were deeply moved. Others thought they ought to have more time to think these things over, and others were simply angry–furious that their preacher had stolen this march on them, for it seemed to be so to them.

At the door, some congratulated the preacher, but their tones were guarded. Others lowered their gaze and slipped by with a hurried handshake. Yet others wrung his hand warmly, whilst some refused the customary handshake and moved angrily away. The usual animated conversations among the emerging worshippers were for once suspended. The noisy throng became a silent group. Some left quickly, and the preacher was suddenly alone. He was not sure of the reception of his words, and after a time he left. In the kitchen his wife said little but gave him an encouraging smile. The children–all in later teenage–gave him a respectful look, but they all ate the meal in a good silence.

The next Sunday, the congregation had increased. Certain persons who usually came had absented themselves, and there were some newcomers.

The preacher took up where he had left off the previous week. ‘Last week I talked about fire in your belly or your bones or your mouth. I want to continue this theme, but first of all I want to say that all believers must surely want to have fire in themselves. We may be afraid of it, we may be in awe of it, and we may even be scared to speak the fiery word to others, but we had better do so. If we withhold the fire we will suffer for it, and eventually–like Jeremiah–we will have to utter it, no matter what the consequences.

‘I am sure that some people do not have fire,
but they know they should, so they create a kind of fire which seems to be the genuine article, for it approximates to what is real. I do not call it real fire, but—in biblical terms—false fire or ‘strange’ fire or ‘ unholy’ fire. You may remember the incident in Leviticus 10 when Nadab and Abihu, who were sons of Aaron—and so priests—offered ‘unholy fire’ to the Lord. They perished because of this. We can only offer what is holy to the Lord.

What I want us to see today is that real fire comes not from us but from God. God’s true fire does one of two things. It judges all things, and in doing so consumes what is dross and false, and leaves what is true and good. No one has to fear this kind of judgement since it releases us from what is human and fleshly, and leaves us only with what is genuine.

John the Baptist spoke about this kind of judgement. He said, ‘He—Messiah—will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn up with fire unquenchable.’ The same fire which purifies one will destroy another. Many Scriptures speak of purifying fire. Yet the same fire energizes those who are purified. At Pentecost, the Spirit came and was shown as tongues of fire on the heads of the believers, and they became filled with power. They had fire to preach the true word. It came from their mouths and many were convicted.

This was the fire Jesus came to cast on the earth—it was fire which would judge, which would purify, and which would be a holy holocaust, convicting many of sin and righteousness and

judgement, and bringing to those fire in the heart so that they could then tell the world the word of God, which is the power of God. But at what point and by what means did this fire come?

Of course it came at Pentecost, for there were tongues of fire on the apostolic band of people, but it was through Calvary that he came. When Jesus said, ‘I have come to cast fire on the earth,’ he also said, ‘I have a baptism with which to be baptized and how am I constrained until this baptism be accomplished.’ Jesus’ baptism was one of suffering. He was immersed in suffering at the Cross. No baptism, then no fire—but he was baptized in suffering, and so fire was cast upon the earth. It was at once the fire which purified his followers, and immediately energized them—put fire in their bellies—to preach. What they had to preach was ‘the word of the Cross’ and this was the very fire they brought to others.

The fire that Jesus brought at Pentecost was also to be that which would ‘burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable’. It was the fire which will be ‘a lake’ and ‘the second death’ to all evil. This is the eternal and unquenchable flame.

Now the point we must not miss—indeed dare not miss—is that this fire is really the fire of God’s love. There is no contradiction in the two statements ‘God is love’ and ‘Our God is a consuming fire’. The fire of love will not harm, it will only purify and energize, but where there is sin and defilement, it will consume, and if the person now refuses the liberating judgement of God, then he will eventually know the destroying fire of God. By nature of the case it cannot be otherwise. God must destroy what is evil, so that those who are now stubbornly rebellious and finally
impenitent must inevitably know the suffering of 'where
the maggot does not die, and the fire is not quenched'.

'Because this last-mentioned fact is repugnant to us,
and because–probably–we refuse to believe that we will
be the ones who will experience this judgement–we scorn
the thought. We say that God is love and not cruelty, but
in saying so we neglect to say that God is holy, that His
love is holy, and that His holiness brings wrath against
evil, and that He will–whatever–destroy evil and all that
clings to it.

'Jesus came to cast fire on the earth. Has, then, his fire
destroyed your evil and set you free? If so, then the fire
of his love must be burning in your heart, and the word
of his truth must be in your mouth, your bones and your
belly. If not, then what has happened? Have you
'thought that you were purified from your old sins',
and have you ceased to be grateful for grace, and to love
others because of His love to you? Has your spiritual
sensitivity become dulled, or have you drifted from the
saving Cross, from the justifying Resurrection, and have
you discovered some artificial righteousness of your own
which no longer needs the grace and love of God?

'To such people, who have drifted from grace into
their own self-righteousness, God speaks in the kindness
of His love and grace. He says, 'Fan the flame that is
within you,' 'Strength the things that remain.' He says,
'You have abandoned your first love. Repent and turn
and do the first works or I will come and take your
candlestick out of its place.' He says, 'Awake thou that
sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give
you light.'

'One day all our works will be tried 'as by fire', and
everything that is dross, everything that has come out of
our own fleshly endeavours, and everything that has self-
fame as its motivation will be consumed. Much of our
life may become mere ashes. What, however, has been of
the true fire–i.e. of the true love–will remain. It will have
passed the test and will be for ever.'

By this time the congregation had been polarized. The
faithful–the people of the true fire–were in agreement
with the preacher, but others were either puzzled or
angry. Yet they listened without murmur. Later they
would murmur and do even more than murmur.

Their pastor was saying, 'In any congregation–and
probably in ours also–there are three kinds of people.
The first are those who have fire in their hearts, their
bellies and their bones. These are those who will have
fire in their mouths and will be constrained to tell what
they have seen and heard. The second group is those
who have never known the fire of salvation in their
hearts, and this they need to know–even this morning.
The third class of people is those who once knew the fire
of God but have drifted. The fire has died, but they may
not even know it. I trust this morning they may come to
know it.'

He looked around with concern. 'In my years I have
seen this false or strange or holy fire worked up by men
and women. It was so in the days of the prophets, for
there were false prophets, but not every one could detect
their spurious nature. In the Book of the Revelation it is
the second beast–or false prophet–who calls down fire
from
heaven, and is thought remarkable. That so-called ‘fire from heaven’ was the simulation of the true fire. How people will be perversely attracted to simulated fire, for they are superstitious and love something strangely supernaturalistic. You will remember the two witnesses in the eleventh chapter of that same Book. They were genuine prophets, and when they were opposed they spoke to their enemies, who were consumed by the fire that came out of their mouths. Theirs was the true fire.

‘Also you will remember that in the nineteenth chapter, Messiah is the one out of whose mouth issues the sharp two-edged sword. By this sword he smites the nations. He, himself, is the Word of God, and his word is the word of God, and it is this word–this true fire–which both defeats and wins the nations. In the twentieth chapter the forces of the devil move up against ‘the camp of God’ in order to destroy it, but ‘fire came down from heaven and consumed them’. Thus the sword and the fire are one–they are the word, but the word uttered from the mouth of God through His Messiah and His servants. This is the fire lit in the holocaust of Calvary.’

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The preacher had finished his sermon, and the people heard it, and afterwards they went home. Some had been purified by this living word–quite slain by the sword, but then also healed by it. Fire came into their minds and their hearts and their mouths, and they would have to speak it. Others heard the word as the outrageous aberrations of an unbalanced preacher and they rejected it–at least for that time. The ones most slain of all were those who had once known the fire and who recognized it as genuine, and who knew they must be renewed in that wonderful fire of love, mercy and grace.
JOY COMES IN THE MORNING

For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favour is for a lifetime.
Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.
Psalm 30:5

The tide is so listless,
It waits without expectation,
Lazily aloof against the mainland.
Its still silence and its non-movement
Are as suspended nothingness.
The night has been long and slow,
Without event, and purposeless.
Scarcely the water swirls,
And the surf has long died.
The sea itself is as death's lethargy
Or the spirit somnolent.

Such was my own spirit.
The dawn and the sun came without incident,
The day stretched out to its hot dying.

If the tide rose it did so noiselessly,
And the mainland scarcely knew it.
Came the evening and somnolence prolonged
Slipped into its long stretch
Of aimless lethargy. The nothingness reigned
Over breathless, nerveless night
Until another such dawn appeared.
Thus the spirit dies.

Yet the spirit resists also.
It cannot die without protests.
It dreads its own awakening-awakening to guilt,
Awakening to the despite done,
The wrong that has robbed it—it would seem—
Of its essential being—its old joy,
Its true and turgid passion, its sense of purpose,
Thrust of vocation,
Its reaching out to the high tide
And its own eventful dawn.

Came the awakening and the skies darkened,
Old clouds forever banished returned
As louring and lurid skies.
The storm festered,
Broke with its lightning
And cracked with its reflexive thunders.
The dead sea grew livingly wild,
Thrashing the mainland with dark angers,
Splitting the soul with varied lashings,
Punishing the deep guilts, and the senseless sins.
The storm was the angry hand of the Divine,
Was God chastising the soul,
Saving it out of its dull deadness
And its senseless dying.
It was the grand judgement
Which brings liberation.
'Weeping endures for the night
But joy cometh in the morning,'
This the ancient had said, bowing
Over his holy harp. He had wept
Till the tears clung to the silver strings
And dripped to the base of his own
Heart and hands. He had felt the throb
Of the new regime of God, the new sobbing
Of pulsing repentance, withdrawing
From the somnolent gloom of the no-dawn,
The listless lapping of the no-tide,
The barren desert of the spirit
Where nothing breathes.

Came the new dawn when the waters leapt,
When the surf broke crashingly
On the long beach and the stolid mainland.
Came the sun too, also leaping
In the purified azure, the clean sky,
The benevolent heavens. Came the surge
Of the pure joy—God-given—bursting
Into the spirit once lethargic.
The dark night of the soul now banished
Gave birth to the true dawn of joy.
The spirit leapt up to gold and azure, to free skies
And grasped the interminable delight,
With grateful hands waving its gratitude
To the imparting heavens—the giving by God
Of the unutterable, the unspeakable,
And most unquenchable joy;
God’s joy, His innate own eternal joy
Imparted to the warm and palpable creature He had made—
Man, His beloved, His own inimitable image.
annals of human history? Who is this great one of humanity who dares to close with God and wrestle Him after this manner? It is not an event which we can bypass. If it was the experience of one man, then we must be involved in it. If one man can do such a thing, why not another, and why not all? If this man was essential to the coming of the Abrahamic Covenant, then we are bound to know and understand him, and his special experience of God.

The battle took place near the ford of Jabbok. The man—son of Isaac and grandson of the great Abraham—had sent his caravan ahead of him, streams of cattle and baggage, wives and children. In the vanguard—the advance guard—were gifts of goats, sheep, camels, cattle and asses to appease or propitiate Esau, who twenty years before had vowed to kill his brother Jacob. Why did he wish to kill Jacob? Because, as he said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.'

Was Jacob justified in fearing his brother Esau? Esau had said to himself, those long years ago, when his anger was hot, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.' Fratricide is a dreadful crime. Was Esau justified in killing—or in intending to kill—his brother? Is any man, under any circumstance, justified in killing his brother? In Esau’s case, Jacob was his mate of their mother’s womb. Of course, everyone has a case for his point, and Esau was saying Jacob had firstly cheated him out of his birthright, and then the blessing the father would give to his first-born son—a very coveted source of happiness and security for the future.

In the matter of the birthright, Esau had been indifferent. He was known as a great hunter, but on one occasion his hunting had been fruitless, and when he returned home Jacob was preparing a savoury meal. Esau was not simply hungry, or even just famished. He was faint from lack of food, and asked Jacob for some of the meal. Jacob demanded the birthright of the first-born, and Esau gave it to him. Hebrews 12:16 enjoins, ‘that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal’. This shows that Esau’s careless giving away of the birthright for a meal was a most reprehensible sin. Genesis 25:29–34 gives an account of the event and terminates it by saying, ‘Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.’

What, then, were the birthright and the blessing? The birthright was that due to the first-born son, namely twice the portion of the inheritance given to other children. The first-born took over the leadership and responsibility of the family on his father’s death, and he was bound to look after his mother and the other children. In Esau’s case—and this is the main point—his birthright was to inherit the covenantal promises given to his grandfather Abraham, and to his father, Isaac. History would then name God as ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Esau’. The blessing would be the invocation by his father for a life of prosperity, success and leadership for the future, so that birthright and blessing were closely linked.

On the surface it would appear that Esau had a
right to both birthright and blessing. The story of
When Rebekah became pregnant,

The children struggled together within her; and she said,
‘If it is thus, why do I live?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the
Lord said to her,
‘Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the elder shall serve the younger.’

What we have to see is that Jacob was to be the
stronger and to rule his brother, and that Jacob was then
necessarily ‘the child according to promise’. Just as
Ishmael, the oldest, was not ‘the child according to
promise’, so Esau was not. Esau had no strong calling to,
or appreciation of, the birthright which by birth had
fallen naturally to him. In fact he had despised it. In this
sense Jacob did not cheat him of it. Likewise, since the
birthright and blessing were inseparable, Esau had
virtually forfeited his right to it. It is true that Jacob
deceived his father, and that cannot be excused, but
what is also a fact is that the blessing should have gone
to Jacob because of the revelation God had given to
Rebekah when conflict between Jacob and Esau was
going on in her womb.

It is interesting to note that when Isaac discovered
Jacob had obtained the blessing, he then ‘trembled
violently’. Was this because he realized God had had His
own way because Jacob was ‘the child according to
promise’ and so he was terrified, and fiercely rebuked by
the action of the sovereignty of God? Rebekah had felt
that the deception was justified, so she probably did not
name it a deception. Whatever the case, Jacob was now
the possessor of the blessing and birthright.

After Isaac had trembled violently, he said, ‘I have
blessed him......– yes, and he shall be blessed.’ Did Isaac
realize that this is how it was to have been, anyway, by
Divine decree, and that he had even tried to cheat Jacob
of being the true successor in the course of the
covenant?

Much of this must have been in Jacob’s mind when he
crossed back over Jabbok after he had sent his stock and
family ahead. When, then, at Peniel he wrestled with the
angel, was this utterly necessary so that he could resolve
the matter of his life and his destiny? It seems so.
Without wrongly denigrating Jacob, we can say he had
lived in accordance with his name ‘supplanter’ or ‘cheat’.
He had gone about right things in the wrong way. In
a sense he had tricked Esau into giving away his
birthright, though Esau ought not to have done that. He
had deceived his father in order to get the blessing. In
his dealings with Laban, his father-in-law, he was also
very cunning–however justified in doing it he may have
been. He was also very worldly in his attempt to
propitiate Esau by the sending to him of gifts which
would be difficult to reject.

If Jacob were never to have had the experience which
was his at Peniel, then he would have been a man
without the regeneration of his character. Why did he
send all things ahead and then return to fight with the
angel? We do not know. We know
his actions were planned deliberately, but there was an
angel who was to wrestle with him. That, again, is all we
know.

We have no need to spiritualize the event at Peniel, but
we have a responsibility to understand
it, for probably no man or woman of God is ever without a Peniel experience. Jacob was a man with unresolved matters in his heart and on his conscience. Anyone who would be his judge had better have great wisdom. The issues are not so clear that anyone can make unimpeachable judgements. Let us try to understand something of Jacob’s mind. We can be helped in part by some of the biblical insights given to us. The first of these is Hosea 12:2–6:

The Lord has an indictment against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, and requite him according to his deeds. In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed, he wept and sought his favour. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with him—
the Lord the God of hosts,
the Lord is his name:
‘So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.’

In this passage God is chiding Israel for what it is doing. Verses 3 and 4 are speaking of Jacob’s endeavour from birth to fulfil his destiny, as though he was always aware of it. The two verses compass both the event at Peniel (Gen. 32:22–32)—where Israel wrestled the blessing from God—and the event at Bethel (Gen. 35:1–15)—where God renewed the covenant of Abraham to him, confirming both the birthright and the blessing as belonging to him. This contrasts with Israel’s state in Hosea’s time, when Israel was not obedient to God. On the record of Jacob-become-Israel, Hosea’s Israel was enjoined to come back to God, and walk in the righteous ways of the true Israel—the one who has prevailed with God.

The second passage is found in Isaiah 48:8—the conclusion of a statement regarding Israel’s obstinacy, faithlessness, disobedience and idolatry:

For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and that from birth you were called a rebel.

The question is whether Jacob was a rebel from his mother’s womb (cf. Ps. 58:3), or whether Israel was a rebel from its inception as a nation, that is, in the wilderness and, later, in Canaan. The latter seems to be the case rather than the former. Whilst he was called Jacob or ‘Supplanter’ at birth, his destiny was already that he would take his place as God’s founder and head of His people. In Isaiah various observations are made of Israel, such as, ‘The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name’; ‘.......O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you’.

The statements made about Israel’s rebellion, such as we find in Deuteronomy 9:7, 24, Hosea 7:9, Isaiah 43:27 and Ezekiel chapters 16 and 24, all appear to fit the words of Isaiah 48:8. Thus they would seem to refer to Israel in the wilderness and the promised land, rather than to the nature of Jacob at his birth. So then, when we return to Jacob at Peniel we see a man who does not feel he has cheated his brother out of a destiny which was never, anyway, going to be Esau’s. Yet, at the same time, we do see a man who has manipulated much of his life. He did not wait upon God to fulfil His will, any more than did his grandparents.
Abraham and Sarah, when they ‘jumped the gun’ by having the child Ishmael through Hagar the servant girl. In a way, Jacob’s father, Isaac, was a man of the flesh for he seemed almost inordinately fond of his food—a trait we also see in Esau—and because of his preoccupation with food was thus easily beguiled by Jacob in regard to the blessing.

Today, in devotional terms, we might say that Jacob’s endeavours were ‘of the flesh’, rather than ‘of the Spirit’.

How many believers have not had similar patterns of life? Jacob had connived for the birthright and the blessing, had schemed to build up special flocks when working for Laban, and had cunningly escaped from his father-in-law, who would have held him in bondage all his days. At Jabbok Jacob was at his wits’ end. Perhaps his stratagem with Esau would fail. He could not meet his brother with a clear conscience.

To put it even more bluntly, he was not a princely sort of man to govern and lead a great people such as God had promised to his father and grandfather. There is seemingly little nobility about him, little greatness of character. Yet—at the same time—he held a high view of the covenant, the birthright and the blessing. This was what he had been about, even in his mother’s womb. He coveted the great promise of God. By hook or by crook he was going to obtain all. Yet, what he had been precluded him from the worthiness which would make him a great prince. By this we see he had a battle to fight, a struggle to come out of his ‘Jacob-being’, and attain to an ‘Israel-being’—not that he would have consciously understood all that! We can say that on the one hand Jacob was a man with a sense of destiny, but on the other he did not have greatness to achieve that destiny. He

may well have dreamed of his posterity inheriting the earth, but his endeavours to bring that to pass held within them the conniving and the cunning which was native to him, but which did not—of itself—make for greatness.

What intrigues and even amazes us about Jacob is his single-mindedness, his determination to achieve his destiny, his belief that God alone was the One who held—and always holds—the reins of history, and his tenacity in pursuing the nature and goal of covenant. It is almost as though ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’—opposite elements—are found in him, and he is seeking to work them both through to his advantage in obtaining and filling out the covenant of God.

What, then, was the battle? It was a facing God, a clearing up of the past, a cleansing of the conscience, a total surrender to the God whom he had once met at Bethel (Gen. 28:10–22). Even at Bethel he had made a bargain with God. If God would look after him until he could return safely to his father’s house, then he would give a tenth of all things to Him.

The battle, then, was really the resolving of a crisis, an inner tension, Jacob’s facing up to himself in the light of God, and coming clean from his fleshly past, and being so free that he could commence this new and important phase of his life as a different person. To put it in the later New Testament terms, he needed to move from ‘the flesh’ into ‘the Spirit’. That might seem like reading one’s own ideas back into the event at Peniel, yet why, otherwise, would Jacob wrestle all night? Why indeed should God take the
initiative and wrestle Jacob? What drove both God and man to wrestle, each with the other, in the darkness of the night? We are driven to see that that battle was one of the most significant in all history.

Anyone who has been in a similar situation will know. He will know that he needed to face, not an Esau, but his own God. To face God is to be able to deal with Esau. Yet it is more than simply being able to deal with one’s Esau: it is coming to be a new man altogether. It is Divine regeneration and sanctification invading the stock of a supplanter so that this man is stung into life, has passion for the truth, has passion for God, and battles until he has prevailed with God, insisting on holding Him back from departing from him, insisting that He reveal Himself as He is, and that He bless with blessing imperishable. In other words, it is a clever man who has a sense of destiny, and knows his destiny lies in God, and not in himself. He must know God intimately and be delivered from his own fleshly humanity, and be bonded to the Almighty God, and be made one with His purposes—purposes which are historic, covenantal, and which pertain to the movements of all history and which eventually capture the eschaton!

One school of thinking—pious in nature—would say this was presumption, this was an affront to God, that it lacked humility, that it was crass action and would fail. Another school of thinking—triumphalist in nature—would see no problem. Hammer away at God by all means! Shout! Insist! Demand! God likes a boisterous spirit. Wrestle with Him by all means! Capture history in God. Cry aloud until God bends His will to be one with

the battling insistent.

I doubt whether it was either of these. Those of the first school lack the dynamic faith that unites passionately with God for the outworking of His will and plan. The second would go ahead, almost without God, grasping the initiative and taking God with them. As for Jacob: he was fighting for his life. By no means a young man, he was going through a crisis which would determine his future integrity, and, in fact, the stream of posterity which would issue from him. It is a fact that crises in youth or in young manhood are strongly determinate of what a person will be, but further on, when one has wives and children, when one is turned towards one’s parental home, and one wishes to settle down, a crisis is fairly unusual. What is it that stirs a person to such a change in his being?

Let us take some who are typical of today. With the idealism and exuberance of youth, seeing things in black and white, being indignant for the failure of past generations, and insistent on immediate change, they tackle the human situation out of some inner power. Their demonstrations, their protests, and their incursions into the corridors of power excite their spirits and enliven their actions. Then comes love and passion, courtship and marriage, babies and diapers, the need to earn bread, to bring up children, to live in the community. The reforming spirit is checked, the radicalization of society is only temporarily—so it is believed—suspended. Preservation of the family, the cultivation of friendships and relationships—the battle of familial living—all demand time, attention, application and thoughtfulness. The former missionary passion—the messianic and utopian zeal—has all
but played itself out. Younger ones have come in to pick up the tab, to sally forth to the jousting, and the older ones have settled into the nooks and crannies of domestication. Was Jacob almost to that point, and yet did something cry out in him, protesting against domesticating high destiny?

With Jacob there were a number of factors. One may have been a conscience somewhat troubled and unclear, despite his strong sense of destiny. The second would have been that strong sense of destiny, itself: he would achieve the leadership of the covenant people. His apprehension of Esau's coming and the calamity which might ensue was a large factor in thrusting him into the grasp of the angel. All these factors would have been strongly contributory. The greatest factor, of course, was God Himself. Although this goes without saying, we need nevertheless to understand what we mean by saying it.

* * *

'The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham.' Stephen the martyr was to say this many years later. When God appears to a man he comes to know God—as a man may know Him. That revelation of God to Abraham had utterly changed the man, and his greatness flowed from the experience. Isaac, also, had had a great revelation of God, especially as he lay bound on the altar on Mount Moriah. Who can fully enter into the terror and wonder of that moment as father Abraham, knife in hand, is about to strike his unresisting son? The God of glory appeared, then, to Isaac, and later to his son Jacob—at Bethel. If one goes to Bethel with Jacob, then one cannot be merely a spectator and commentator, but one must be a participant. Jacob may have driven a bargain with God, but it was God who took the initiative and revealed Himself to the fugitive from Esau. Never could Jacob forget the strange unbidden compassion of God in His revelation of Himself.

We are saying that Jacob was no less fleshly than other human beings, nor any more. Yet, fleshly as he was, he was fleshly about greatness of being, about full stature of his humanity. He was no profane man like Esau, despising the birthright of God. At the same time his life had become messy and confused, and now he was facing the outcome of it; and so the life of him, his family and his possessions depended upon the outcome. At such a time man wrestles with God.

When each man comes to his Peniel, he understands Jacob and his conflict. Each man wrestles with the unknown angel—the palpable God. He is terrified of not knowing his antagonist—the angel who battles in grace with human flesh—and is desperate to evoke from the celestial one the blessing, without which he is lost, without which he is left with his own incorrigible flesh, and his own weakness which will drag him down to the pit. Yet Jacob was not as a rat driven into a corner-savage to save itself. God is not a killer. He is not the Destroyer of men, but the Redeemer of them. Jacob's faith rose in insistence. He would give the angel no quarter; he knew what he needed to know of God, and he had a high sense of destiny. If his thigh or hip was put out of joint, then he gave that happening no special place, no high rating and no significant status. The act even spurred him on to more endeavour.

He struggled on, passionate to know the name of God, demanding his destiny be sealed and he
be thus assured. At the close of the struggle he said, ‘I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.’ That was the blessing. That was what purified the Supplanter and made him to be Israel, that is, the man who had contended with God and prevailed, who had broken out of fleshly inferiority and had been made noble in interaction with ‘the Lord the God of hosts’; that, then, was the man who sealed the history of covenant by refusing to sink into the morass of self-motivated and self-preserving humanity.

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The rest of the story is not quickly told. It requires patient reading, and deep contemplation. Later, Jacob had to return to Bethel—the place where he had first seen God. After the sad tragedy of his ravished daughter, Dinah, and the bloody slaughter of Shechem and his people, the patriarch was told to return to Bethel, and it was there the covenantal promise once given to Abraham and to Isaac was now confirmed to Jacob. God said to him,

‘Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.’

It may sound trite to observe that ‘Jacob’ had graduated to ‘Israel’, the second son of Isaac to the covenant head of a great people. It may sound almost banal to say that the former Jacob had become born anew, regenerated of God and fitted for a high destiny, but however it may sound, it was true. As with us all, the old Jacob remains to contend for some place under the sun, but the new Israel scorns the foolish conniving flesh. Even so, the whole person knows the simul iustus et peccatore, (‘justified yet sinful’), and looks in hope to the release from conflict with his flesh into ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’—the ultimate and irreversible glorification of the body, mind and spirit.

Even so, actions and effects of the Peniels and Bethels fit the men and women of destiny to live with their Isaacs and their Rebekahs, their Esaus and their Labans, their Dinahs and their Hamors, and thus know that their high vocation will be fulfilled, not only in spite of all things, but through all things. God holds their destinies in His hands, and in the same hands does He hold all history. He who sees God and wrestles with His angel knows what it is to be truly human, and to have his home and refuge in God.

There remains but one thing to be observed. Given that God took the initiative through His angel, and granted that Jacob knew his hour had come, what was it that made him battle with God? Why did he not surrender quietly, and go on in passive obedience? We have seen that Jacob was desperate, and knew his accounts must be totally settled, and he must emerge with assurance and blessing. What then—we repeat—made Jacob so militant, and so unrelenting?

The answer must be ‘Covenant!’ If the word ‘covenant’ surprises us, then it must be because we do not understand its importance to men such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Covenant meant first of all that God had revealed Himself in His promises, and more than that no one can have. Secondly,
it meant that God was promising to be all to them that He revealed—of Himself—so that they were to live their lives on the basis of His known character. They were to trust Him, pray to Him, obey Him and live in Him on the same basis. Just as Exodus 34:6-7 was the revelation by God of Himself to Moses, so the nature of God in covenant had been made known to Jacob through his father and grandfather. This, with the intimate revelation at Bethel, had made Jacob so covenant oriented that his whole life was lived in that system. Consequently he was armed with great knowledge and great incentive to wrestle with God near Jabbok. Covenant was the secret and reason of his strength. With reverence we say that God had to be true to Himself and so allow Jacob to fight Him on the basis of covenant. If there had been no covenant, then there would have been no basis on which Jacob could have so wrestled with God.

If this last paragraph—the one above—seems somewhat strange, and somewhat complicated, it is because what is stated is mainly foreign to our modern ideas. In Psalm 2 God tells His Son-Messiah-King, 'Ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for your possession.' The Son is to command his Father, who will then respond. Likewise, God expected Israel to believe that He was 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty......' Israel was expected to press God on the basis of His revealed nature and covenant promises. Thus Moses could insist on some occasions that God should not destroy idolatrous and rebellious Israel, and that God was bound to obey! Likewise, Jacob insisted that the
blessing in Genesis 49 is superb. The enriched and wise old man who has been blessed now blesses, rebukes, prophesies, predicts and exhorts.

So, we say again, is it with us. We are loth to expose ourselves to the eyes of others, but since each can say, ‘Sinners, of whom I am the chief,’ we need not be reluctant to witness to God’s visitation of us. I suppose it is difficult to pin-point an event and say, ‘This was my Peniel,’ but I always have it at the back of my mind—the day when I found my creatureliness. The memory is warm and always evokes gratitude.

We are often told that we rebel against our finitude. Because the word ‘finitude’ speaks of measurements, I suppose I have not accepted it. I think we rebel not against finitude as such, but against our creatureliness. God is not so much Infinite as He is Creator of all things, the God Most High. He does not so much transcend me (another of those quasi-philosophical words) as He is Other than I am, yet having made me in His image. It is when I revel in His Creatorhood that I revel in my creaturehood.

The battle of the flesh is always for oneself to be as God, to act apart from God, to have the sweetness of independence and the joy of autonomy. I am I. I rule my world. I think; I plan; I accomplish. Yet there is at the same time fear, loneliness, and always an impending failure, the shades of which are ever over me. That memorable night I had preached with great energy for I had always known—like Jacob—that I was called of God. My sermon had been on ‘Brokenness’. I could see that David’s broken heart was valid, Christ’s broken bread was fruitful for the hungry, and his broken body the only way of power in redemption.

Having preached these high words, I waited for some intimations of appreciation, acceptance and praise. When none came I was uneasy, so I asked for a response and found none. A friend with spiritual discernment and perception suggested I had preached beyond my own experience.

I need not recount the anger, the enlarging uneasiness, and the self-justifying arguments. Now—looking back—I can smile, but the issue, even though I did not realize it at the time, was a life-or-death one. I can remember the continual restlessness as I could not sleep, and late in the night I went into a small artificial cave, and lay on a seat, wrestling with God. Yes, it was wrestling with God. I was wrestling for my life, seeking to have God approve. Instead He let my mind rove back over many years to see that much—if not most—of what I had done was out of my fleshly humanity. I can see now—in hindsight—that I had always had a sense of destiny, or a high calling, of the vocation of the preacher. Yet I was seeking to fulfil that vocation by my own endeavours.

It just happens to be that I limp with my right leg because it was injured through wounding during World War II. I make nothing of this, of course, but on the night of my Peniel—so to speak—I understood the power of the Cross to crucify the flesh so that it no longer dominates one’s mind and modes of operation. One is put out of action, unable to walk without a limp, unable to depend upon one’s natural abilities. There is no question about what happened there. On that night a new ministry was born for me, whatever may have been the value of service prior to it. I can remember the sheer peace that came to me, and the steady joy with it, when I pressed God for the blessing I needed.
There may have been visitings of Bethel prior and posterior to that night, but the business took place when I wrestled with God.

**WRESTLING WITH CHRIST AT PENIEL**

Charles Wesley's famous hymn, 'Come, O Thou Traveller Unknown', with Samuel Wesley's tune 'Wrestling Jacob', is a magnificent interpretation of Jacob's Peniel experience. The first six verses are given over to Jacob's experience, and the last eight to the experience one has in wrestling with Christ. Once I was asked, 'How could one possibly wrestle with Christ?' The following is an explanation, much more beautifully set forth by Charles Wesley, but at least an attempt to show how the flesh fears a close encounter with God, for the Cross spells doom to it.

* * *

When Jesus told his disciples that they must take up the Cross daily, he meant that the path he trod would end in the ignominy and shame of the Cross, and they must realize that, identify with it, and live their discipleship in it. Such statements about Cross-bearing are not made in the Acts or the Epistles, but the principle is really the same. Paul speaks of the offence or scandal of the Cross. To the Jew it is a scandal, and to the Greek foolishness. Nevertheless it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. One must daily face the scandal of the Cross. This is the kind of Cross-bearing the Gospel demands.

When it comes to the proud human flesh which we saw in Jacob's life, there is always a refusal to come to the Cross. Paul told the Galatians bluntly, ‘They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh.’ He meant that the flesh will not obey God's law and neither can it. The believer in the New Testament is a member of the New Covenant, a covenant which the writer of Hebrews says outmodes and transcends the covenant with Moses. If the fleshliness of Jacob had to be dealt with at Peniel, then the Cross becomes our Peniel. There Christ has wrestled with us, taken the flesh from us and nailed it to his Cross. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh in his Cross. They saw the action of Christ in judging the flesh and executing its death. In the battle with Christ they surrendered the flesh in exchange for holy blessing.

It should be evident to us that in the church, in the community of Christ, there is much that is of the flesh. I would like to share what I think is its very clever and most subtle form of operation. The flesh of us studies the Bible closely. It distils biblical principles. It abstracts them from the word, and it abstracts them from Christ, his Father and his Spirit, and takes such principles unto itself. That is, it shapes a methodology and system from these abstracted elements and operates in this mode. Thus the humanity of a believer is still autonomous, and is religiously so. The religious flesh is the most dangerous in all the universe. Another way of saying this is that there is no genuine spiritual life and power which is not Christ himself in us, and we in him. Only in union with Christ does the flesh know defeat.

The Cross cancels this fleshly ego. It creates the new man in Christ. It crucifies sin, worldliness, self-success, self-ambition and self-accomplishment. Let no one say he gives in easily to the angel of God, but when the battle is joined he knows he
will lose to Christ, come to hate the flesh, and love to do the will of Christ and his Father. He will not only be glad to be rid of the flesh, but will rejoice in submission to his Lord.

The matter is not a light one. Many have been attracted by fleshly evangelism to a fleshly religion. Many have been driven by a tyrannous conscience to find peace in the wounds of Christ, but often after a temporary lull in which the conscience does not accuse, the flesh rises to rule in the things of Christ. Hence the need for some Peniel, and the later sealing of some Bethel, when our old Jacob becomes the new Israel. We must contend with God against ourselves in order to find our true selves— the selves regenerated at the flesh-crucifying Cross.

* * *

Finally, it is a matter of covenant. God said that in the New Covenant He would reveal Himself to us, internalize His law in our new heart, and banish our sin and guilt from us. All that Israel knew in Exodus 34:6–7 becomes ours, and—if possible—even more. Now we press God with His promises which have become our claims. If the old saints could become bold because of the covenant, then even more may we be bold. We will press the Angel of God. Let us then join with Charles Wesley in understanding the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, finding Him, as we do, to be ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’, the Covenant-God, the ‘God of all grace’.

COME, O THOU TRAVELLER UNKNOWN

Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,  
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!  
My company before is gone,  
And I am left alone with Thee;  
With Thee all night I mean to stay,  
And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell Thee who I am,  
My misery and sin declare;  
Thyself hast called me by my name;  
Look on Thy hands, and read it there:  
But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou?  
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

In vain Thou strugglest to get free;  
I never will unloose my hold!  
Art Thou the Man that died for me?  
The secret of Thy love unfold:  
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go,  
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.
Wilt Thou not yet to me reveal
Thy new, unutterable name?
Tell me, I still beseech Thee, tell;
To know it now resolved I am:
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go,
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

'Tis all in vain to hold Thy tongue,
Or touch the hollow of my thigh;
Though every sinew be unstrung,
Out of my arms Thou shalt not fly;
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

What though my shrinking flesh complain,
And murmur to contend so long?
I rise superior to my pain,
When I am weak, then I am strong;
And when my all of strength shall fail,
I shall with the God-Man prevail.

My strength is gone, my nature dies,
I sink beneath Thy weighty hand,
Faint to revive, and fall to rise;
I fall, and yet by faith I stand,
I stand, and will not let Thee go,
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

Yield to me now; for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair;
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
Be conquered by my instant prayer;
Speak, or Thou never hence shalt move,
And tell me if Thy name is Love.

'Tis Love! 'tis Love! Thou diedst for me!
I hear Thy whisper in my heart;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
Pure, universal Love Thou art;
To me, to all, Thy mercies move:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

My prayer hath power with God; the grace
Unspeakable I now receive;
Through faith I see Thee face to face,
I see Thee face to face, and live!
In vain I have not wept and strove:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

I know Thee, Saviour, who Thou art,
Jesus, the feeble sinner's Friend;
Nor wilt Thou with the night depart,
But stay and love me to the end;
Thy mercies never shall remove:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

The Sun of Righteousness on me
Hath risen with healing in His wings;
Withered my nature's strength, from Thee
My soul its life and succour brings;
My help is all laid up above:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

Contented now upon my thigh
I halt, till life's short journey end;
All helplessness, all weakness, I
On Thee alone for strength depend;
Nor have I power from Thee to move:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

Lame as I am, I take the prey,
Hell, earth, and sin with ease o'ercome;
I leap for joy, pursue my way,  
And as a bounding hart fly home,  
Through all eternity to prove  
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

Charles Wesley, 1707–88

**The History of the Hymn**

Some details of the hymn are given in the book *The New Methodist Hymn-book Illustrated.* Charles Wesley recorded in his Journal for Sunday, May 24th, 1741, 'I preached on Jacob wrestling for the blessing. Many then, I believe, took hold on His strength, and will not let Him go, till He bless them, and tell them His name.' This was in Bristol. In July of that year he again preached on this subject. In 1742 his Hymns and Sacred Poems was published and this hymn was amongst them. On October 6th, 1743, he again preached on the subject at the famous Foundry. He said, '[I] promised the Society an extraordinary blessing, if they would seek the Lord early next morning.' On June 12th, 1744, there was another great occasion of preaching—a 'glorious time'. He recorded, 'Many wept with the angel, and made supplication, and were encouraged to wait upon the Lord continually.' Other times of such preaching were in Dublin on February 7th and March 7th, 1748, in Bristol again on May 20th, 1748—seven years after his former preaching of the matter—and again in Bristol on January 29th, 1749.

* John Telford, Epworth Press, 1934

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We can see, then, how powerful was the theme by one who had penetrated to its deepest meaning. In the New Methodist Hymn-Book verses 5 and 7—as above—were omitted, the poem having 14 verses in all, perhaps too long to be sung, even in those days of hearty hymn-singing. Today we seem almost suspicious of any theme that needs to be sustained beyond half a dozen verses! How rich are those verses—5 and 7—and no less than their companions.

Charles Wesley died in 1788, and his brother John said in the obituary he presented to the Methodist Conference, 'His least praise was his talent for poetry, although Dr. Watts did not scruple to say that that single poem, 'Wrestling Jacob,' was worth all the verses he himself had written.' A fortnight after his brother's death John Wesley burst into a flood of tears when preaching at Bolton. From the pulpit he was giving out the lines,

> My company before is gone,  
> And I am left alone with Thee,

when he was overcome, and sitting down, wept a flood of tears. The singing ceased, and the congregation wept with the preacher. After a time both preacher and congregation recovered themselves, but it was a never-to-be-forgotten service.

Almost one hundred years later the Wesley tablet was unveiled in Westminster Abbey, and the celebrant, Dean Stanley, whose wife Lady Augusta Stanley had just died, quoted the same verse, and it was said, 'The pathos of that touching reference to Lady Augusta Stanley, in all the bitterness of the Dean's great bereavement, was indescribable.' James Montgomery—a famous hymn-writer
himself—regarded ‘Wrestling Jacob’ as ‘the author’s highest achievement’.

**THE TUNE ‘WRESTLING JACOB’**

Whatever the tune used in the time of the Wesleys—‘David’s Harp’ by R. King (1684–1711) being the alternative in the New Methodist Hymn-Book—it is fitting that Charles Wesley’s grandson, Samuel Sebastian, should write the tune which most fits it. The Wesleys were a family of poets and hymn-writers as well as musicians. Charles’ father, Samuel, wrote histories of the Old and New Testaments in verse, and one of his outstanding hymns was ‘Behold the Saviour of Mankind’. His son Charles wrote many thousands of hymns, and John also wrote fine poems and hymns. The eldest son of Samuel was his namesake who wrote hymns to the Trinity, for Sunday, Good Friday and Easter.

Charles Wesley had a son, Samuel, who was a fine musician, a talented violinist and composer. At one point he converted to the Roman church, but later returned to the Anglican fold. Though married, he had a mistress, Mary Suter, who became the mother of Samuel Sebastian and other children. Whilst the father Samuel did not produce enduring music, yet he set three of his own father’s hymns to hymn tunes by Handel which he had discovered in the library of the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1826.

His son, Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810–76), had a distinguished career as a chorister, pianist and organist. He was organist at Hereford, Winchester and Gloucester Cathedrals successively,

as well as being at famous parish churches. In 1872 he published some of his psalm tunes under the title of The European Psalmist. His best-remembered work is Twelve Anthems. As we have said, it was most fitting that Charles’ grandson should write the tune which is now most associated with the famous hymn.

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**COME, O THOU TRAVELLER UNKNOWN**

Great hymns such as Thomas Olivers’ ‘The God of Abraham Praise’ and Charles Wesley’s ‘Wrestling Jacob’ do not call for a commentary on them. They stand nobly on their own merit. Thomas Olivers was illiterate and profligate in his youth, and this makes his hymn all the more remarkable, seeing it has been called ‘one of the noblest odes in the language’. Converted under the preaching of George Whitefield, Olivers became an active preacher and supervisor of the Methodist press. He wrote other hymns and an elegy on the death of John Wesley. Charles Wesley, graduate of Oxford University, might be thought to have been of another ilk altogether, but there was something common to men such as these. The days were alive with substantial and moving poetry and preaching. Of the same period was Samuel Davies, whose magnificent song ‘Great God of Wonders’ is unsurpassed in the hymnology of pardon.

Charles Wesley’s ‘Come, O Thou Traveller Unknown’ reveals the passionate love man can have for God, the unswerving insistence that we know Him, and the daringly ruthless determination never to quit until the blessing of God be ours. The worm Jacob tells us that this passion to know God and live in Him can be for us, who are
no less worms than he, yet no more, either. That is why the great song is to be read time and again, pondered often, meditated over, and lived in continuously. Only then will grace not be taken for granted.

I want to tell you quickly about the visit I had that time to Singapore. I say 'quickly' because my mind is getting confused these days, what with old age, and approaching death, and something of turmoil about the past. I have the thought that if I write quickly I will strike the right chord. Suddenly all memory will come together—of itself! There will be a flash of light, and suddenly it will piece itself together and make sense. That is how I feel at this moment. Later I may want to go limping back to bed, what with the pain in the leg and the arthritis, and all that.

It has come to me to do it quickly because my old friends from Singapore—Changi and such—are dying fairly rapidly and widely these days. Our Ex-POW magazine keeps giving the lengthening obituary lists. Strange, isn't it, that humans think it is terribly important to get every little detail down on paper, so that nothing is lost! Down on paper and as soon as possible? Nothing must be lost? Ah, yes, all must be transmitted. The generation that is going out finds it suddenly important, and the generation being left behind doesn't want the oldies to miss anything. 'Transmit!' is what they both say.
So I will give it to you in bits—dribs and drabs, so to say. I may be able to piece it all together, or at the last it may come together itself, or some knowing friend may yet edit it, and make it tidy.

The first thing I remember about that trip twenty years ago was staying with rich Chinese friends—the parents of a former student. How kind they were, and how gracious! How marvellously hospitable! They attended to everything I wanted to do. It was restful, staying with them in their large mansion. Nothing was a trouble to them, nothing was spared in order to make my stay joyful.

They looked upon me as a teacher, indeed a great teacher. They had seen the fruits of this teach-ing in the life of their son. At that very moment he was in Japan, with his new young wife. She also had been my student: hence their warm approval of me and their quiet respect.

So they took me to Change Alley. You who have been to Singapore recently will say that Change Alley has disappeared. Then so much the worse for us all. Almost all the world has met at some time or another in Change Alley. It goes there not only to buy goods cheaply, but to be in the fun and noise, the music and movement of it all. Not in a hundred years did I think I would meet old Cotter-Harvey in Change Alley. He had been years older than me in the prison camp, and I had thought he must be dead those twenty years ago.

Fancy meeting Cotter in that alley! What do you know! It was true. He looked quite shaky about the eyes, but very firm as a human being. He had always been that. He had encouraged me those many years ago, both in Changi and Kranji. (Kranji is where they now have the War Memorial Cemetery—with all the tall white crosses). In Kranji he had read my writings with great respect. When I think about it, I believe he gave me faith in my art of words. And here I was seeing him, aged and shaky, but firm as a human being, using a walking stick and making his way through Change Alley. He had some other men with him, every bit as frail as himself, and he was telling them about ‘the days in ‘41 when we of the A.I.F. used to go to the Alley.’

My, what a bunch of suave schemers and con-men they were in that Alley, but they had glorious goods—imports from all over the world. They tried to give them away. They offered me a camera for ten dollars. I had just bought socks—fine khaki socks to go with my Bombay bloomers—but the khaki colour ran in the first monsoon storm. I only paid cents for them. But a camera for ten dollars! They must have been kidding. I was so young and raw that I blushed to bargain with the smiling Indian, and so a man offered me the camera for a dollar! Of course I never bought it. Who would buy a camera for a dollar! Even so, I used to think later that it might have worked out.

Once you had been in Change Alley you seemed to change for life. I don't know, even now, why that should have been so, but the change remained for life. For ever after you looked for a bargain. Like a camera for a dollar!

In the long nights in the prison camp I used to dream about Change Alley, and the things you could buy and some of the things you could eat. That is, if it did have eats there. I have long ago forgotten. Why, then, did I think about Change Alley eats in the prison camp?
I nearly cried when Cotter and I finished talking. I used to think him the wisest man in the world, and now it seemed I was wiser and stronger than he. Of course I am now speaking of over twenty years ago and about that particular visit to Change Alley. Cotter seemed immortal to me, and I was stunned by his obvious mortality in the Alley. He halted a bit on his walking-stick. Oh dear Cotter-leading heart specialist—where has all your power gone? I had always thought I would die before Cotter did. Seeing him, I lost confidence in his immortality and mine.

After I left Change Alley I was absent-minded and slipped into a gutter. My right leg swelled enormously at the knee and I wondered about the old osteomyelitis that Bertram Nairn used to care for. He said the thing could revisit me in later years. He and Cotter were close friends. Bert used to make me feel like a boy—almost his son. Cotter used to make me feel that fame was just around the corner. I had a fresh sense and charge of it when we met in the Alley. In post-war years he had read some of my fiction-writing and liked it.

My Chinese hosts had let me wander the streets on my own. I wanted to go back to the old Fullarton Building where I had lain on my back with a fractured leg because everyone was so busy and had not noticed me in the welter of other fracture cases. In the evening a strange English surgeon noticed me, and had started shouting at everybody for the neglect. That was the war-ward where the surgeon and the nurses gave nine of us lethal doses of morphia so that we would die with ease, before reaching the prison camp. Another

Aussie and I had insisted on living; we knew nothing about the lethal doses, and only about the glorious cessation of pain. I often wonder where Andy is. I know he came from Queensland. Together we survived the intended euthanasia.

Perhaps it was best that I didn't find the old building and the General Post Office next to it from which we were fed out of accumulated Christmas parcels sent to the troops. I can still remember the old Nestle's cream, the rich Christmas cakes, and the tinned peaches. There were packets of sultanas and raisins also—all from Australia.

I think my hosts wanted me to get to the Kranji War Cemetery. They knew the way there. Indeed, all cars seemed to be going that way. I had a thick throat because the cemetery was—is—just above where some of us lived for the last eighteen months of incarceration. The camp was under rubber trees, in a plantation. We lived in rows of nipa-palm huts. There were little gardens outside our huts, but under the trees fed only filtered sunlight. At night the moonlight through the foliage left silver sequins on the silent soil.

We used to fill the rose-bowls with urine during the night, and then rush to get it for our little gardens in the morning. There was little else to give the soil nourishment other than our urine. Some stumped out bloated with beriberi and others groaned their way to the latrines with dysentery pains. There is nothing to equal excruciating dysentery pains.

As my Chinese friends rushed me along in their shiny Mercedes Benz, I remembered the agony of renal colic in the old Kranji Camp. Stones in the
kidneys, terrible pain in the gut, and horrible heaving because the agony was so bad. Whichever way you turned, there was no escaping it. They said it was as the pain a woman knows in childbirth, and unmarried as I was, I vowed I would never let a woman go through that. It was Cotter who came to the rescue—Cotter with a phial of MSA. The heart specialist told me it was what they gave to mothers in childbirth. 'Twilight sleep' they called it. That last phial of precious drug sent me into the leaves of the trees, and I was living in the venation of those leaves. I knew everything about everything. More than the philosophers had known. Heightened awareness it was, within a thin, strengthless body. And so it was then I discovered more hallucinated truth than any other camp member had had in three years. 'The last phial we have,' Cotter had told me, with a friendly hand on my skinny arm. I could scarcely believe the release. It was like lethal morphia in the relief, and even better in the mystery of hallucination.

Talking about morphia: I dreaded the thought of another attack of kidney stones, knowing that there was no more MSA in the camp. Then, unbelievably I had another attack on the night before our departure on the beautiful Dutch hospital ship the Oranje. They took me on board, loaded with morphia, and I fell in love with the most beautiful sister-in-charge who had ever been in a hospital. She also fell in love with me, but we could do nothing about it—not only then, or ever after.

* * *

When we arrived at the War Cemetery I was awed. It was a vast silent place. No one seemed to talk.

The rounded hill was set out symmetrically with white crosses. They were cold and silent and very reverent. I always feel awed where death has come to such quietness. You can almost hear the silence of the unbreathing dead below the even-green of the turf. You want to speak to them, silently, and so you do—in your heart you do.

I moved up and down the rows where my mates were buried, and was not ashamed of the tears. The men I knew rose vividly in my memory, and I still could not believe they were dead. It is not imagination that makes you say they speak to you in the silence, but then they are so much younger than you, and you wonder for the strength and beauty of them. How you wonder!

Some graves I could not find, but the names of the lost I found on the memorial walls. 'Missing, presumed dead' was the inscription.

I have been back on further visits and the same power is there in the quietness and the stone crosses and the green turf, and the sweep of the memorial gates and the memorial walls.

On that first occasion I had stared down at where the camp had been—our prison camp. Now it was gone. From it I had helped to inter the first bodies, and had always thought of them as lonely up on the hills. Now in this vast quiet War Cemetery many friends were together, and the old once-living, suffering camp was gone for ever.

* * *

They took me out that night to one of those fantastic Singapore restaurants. Fabulous place, exotic, and with the right music, and all the special people, and my mind was a jumble of
memories. They talked to me gently, and with humour, and they drew a soft warm blanket over the past. They told me about the Island, and how it had flourished under their strong Prime Minister and his firm government.

Then they told me about Reformatory Road. No one knew where it was, or even where it had been. Yes, they knew it was near Bukit Timah and had stemmed from that place. They said they thought they knew where it had been. They would take me there the following afternoon, and so they did. During the first part of the day we had visited friends of their own and then friends of friends of mine, and so the day passed quickly.

Behind all the action and the visiting I was thinking about Reformatory Road. I was thinking about the lake on which the ducks had quacked, and which told us that maybe the enemy were coming. I had thought the fever I had was malaria or maybe dengue, and my teeth had chattered and my body was in an ague, but the notion never entered my mind that it might be unconscious fear. In those days I had no conscious fear. I was waiting for the action. I had ditched the Army Norton on which I had ferried the Brigadier for a day or two, and we were there beside the lake or the dam or whatever it was.

So, I thought, as we visited friends and chattered about inconsequential things, we will easily find a lake or a dam, and then we will be on the road, Reformatory Road. That was where a company of armed Sikhs had tried to bayonet me because I told them—in the presence of their Brigadier—that they were cowards. An English Officer had knocked up the bayonet that would have gutted me when a enormous Sikh Private

objected to my dishonouring remarks, and it was after that that the Sikhs had followed me in numbers. Followed me! I could hear their cries and my cries as we rushed towards the yammering machine-gun pit just below the left edge of Reformatory Road, and suddenly they had all veered to the right, through rubber country—over a high hill—and I and a few others had rushed ahead to silence the menacing, yammering machine-gun.

How we hated it's yammering, though as yet we feared nothing. Our bayonets were like live steel and even silver fire, and the nest below suddenly stopped its noise, and I crashed to the ground, my right leg shattered, whilst searing pain stabbed my surprised body and mind.

It had been there, on Reformatory Road, that I had lain in the early morning. When the dawn came through the war-smoke and war-sounds—mortars all the time whistling over me and breaking below—I wondered why I was not killed so many times.

Then the dawn became very quiet, silent as death. Even the distant sounds died away, and death came stealing through the tall harsh lalang grass to claim its own. Dappled sunshine broke through the tall rubber trees and spent golden coins on the black bitumen.

I watched the river of red flow across the road and into the valley below, and I wondered how much of its Nipponese brotherhood was in the silenced machine-gun nest.

* * *

We never found the place. There was no lake, and there was no bend in the road—which, if you looked you would know—you would know
this was where it had been. There were only houses and mansions which had outstripped the plantations and overridden the kampongs. Two decades had covered the business of war, and made a new world in which not even the memory of it found a place.

They were sad for me that I could not have my sentimental journey. So they spoke so gently, so lovingly, and I felt the disappointment ebb away as I enjoyed a new and critical moment.

That night as I slept I saw the few men of my section who had come to get me. I saw them coming along the road which had now lost its name, but then was known to us all. There was not much laughter in their faces, and they looked around and above to see if there was a sniper or two, but the snipers had gone. We had the dawn to ourselves, and I wondered why Tod—that tough tiger—should weep whilst the others cursed, and a few were grateful.

They could do nothing about the blood, for you cannot recall blood that has flowed and drained into the soil, but you can know a world that those who have never fought in war can never know. Call it what you will, it is higher than what we know at other times, and no matter how hideous death and war may pose themselves in the eyes of many, it is the precious and the valid thing that comes to participators in their Reformatory Roads. Names may die away, but memory is the strongest reality men know.

So they carried me to the truck, gently, as only men know how to be gentle, and they laid me on top of the other wounded, and sent off the truck with gentle words and silent tears, and a good measure of Aussie humour, and they waved goodbye.

I told you at the beginning that these snatches of memory coming to me now in the autumn of my life are precious to me. I really cannot put together all the snatches of them except as they come to me, and I suppose it does not matter. What I have to convey, however, is that everything is precious—every action and movement of us all upon the earth. We cannot wait until someone rationalizes it all, and puts it together as a tale, and gives pleasure of a story. That is not the point at all. It is the whole thing of that beautiful Island, and those prison camps in which we lived and suffered, laughed and died that matters. It is the Change Alleys, and the Fullarton Buildings, and slipping into a gutter so that an old wound comes to life, and it is searching out the place of battle after having seen the sleep of the battlers—that is what matters.

Without it there is none of this joy, none of this knowing all things to be significant. Indeed there is nothing! If roads and buildings and places and names have been swallowed up in history—what does that matter?

What we do know is that there is no ‘nothing’ There is only ‘something’. The something lives not only in memory, but also in the age to come. There can be no age to come without the ages that were—the ages where we have lived.
We had not thought about it.  
We were born. We lived to die. 
All the while we lived we did not think. 
When the casket came 
We followed to the graveyard, 
Solemn and thoughtful, still not knowing, 
Not knowing why we were created, Indeed why anything had come to be. 

Some of us remembered the country school yard, 
Also the classroom, the teacher, 
And the daily business of life. 
In the afternoons we went home, 
Played time and life along with the family, 
Returning to the school next day. 
These were the only things we knew,  
And these without reflection.

So it has always been. Time comes and goes; 
Sometimes a vagrant thought tickles the mind 
And puzzles the otherwise restful innerness-- 
The hiddenness of our being-- 
Where thought perhaps both comes and goes. 
And things are as always were--and will be.
What's it for--all of this--and all for what?
Why anything and everything?
'Morons,' you say we are. Morons we are.
We know so little who know so much,
And all's away, and little grasped.
No one can say the word, 'Create!'
And really understand its truth,
Its fact and being, all its form and life.

If this we learn--this much for now.
Perhaps we're on the way to it,
To knowing and to seeing it,
To feeling and to being it. You say,
'Oh, here we are, so quit it quick--
This foolish quest of knowing,
Finding out, round and about
The fact of this creation'.
We cannot quit who know it not.

We know we're here, but how and why,
And why it is that we must die,
Are speculations rife and oft
From time's beginning--so we hear.
The fact is this, the truth is this,
That we must know, and when we do
Creation's truth will dazzle all,
And we'll begin to hear
What God is saying to His world,
His dull and hazy, lazy world.

Stephen told the Jewish Sanhedrin, 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.' Stephen was facing a parliament of elders whose mind and thoughts were concentrated upon Jerusalem and Palestine, and this would seem natural enough. However, Stephen was about to tell them that God had a universal plan, that He was not limited to a man-constructed temple, and that the Jews had missed the widest purpose of God. So he tells them the God of glory appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia--far from Palestine. The glory which Israel believed was limited to Israel, its temple, and its people, had in fact been seen first in Mesopotamia. The Shekinah--the Presence--was the glory Abraham saw. In his time Joshua had told Israel that their father Abraham, with his father and grandfather, had been an idolater.

For our purposes, the statement of Stephen is of great importance. Abraham saw the glory of God! It is a clear principle of Scripture, and of
our own experience, that when a man sees the glory of God, he is transformed. A man may study theology all his life and never see the glory of God. A person may develop a theology of glory, and yet not have a revelation of that glory. Some scholars speak of the development of ideas of God as though joy were some kind of theological evolution, but just one immediate sighting of God's glory will radically affect the viewer. It is true to say that each prophet was first given a revelation of God by God Himself, before the prophet was sent out to speak His word. This would have to be the case.

Abraham, then, received a revelation of the nature of God. With the revelation came a revolution. Abraham turned from worshipping idols to worshipping the God of glory. Anyone who understands the passionate attachment of human beings to their idols will know what a shattering revelation of God is needed in order for them to turn from dumb idols to serve the living God. Romans 1:19–25 shows us how highly idols figure in the affairs of human beings. Each of us must have an idol, for idols are surrogates of God Himself. All the dreams and aspirations of men and women are put into their idols. We need not, here, dwell on the tyranny of the idols, the failed promises of well-being that they give, and horrible distortions they bring to the human spirit.

What did Abraham see when he saw the glory of God? What did he come to understand? In one way we cannot know, since the revelation was personal to the patriarch. In another way we can know. God is God, and when He reveals Himself to a person He shows Who and What He is. God did not only appear to Abraham in Mesopotamia, but also in other places, and on a number of occasions, and in somewhat different modes. We speak of such revelations as theophanies—manifestations of God—since God is Spirit and in that sense is unseen. The theophanies were substantial enough, and not at all mystical. They did not arise out of contemplation, meditation, and inner thought. Abraham concluded nothing about God from mere rumination. He saw God; he saw the glory of God.

In Exodus chapters 33 and 34 we read of Moses asking God to reveal His glory to him, and God's answer that if a man were to see God he could not do so and still live. Even so, God said He would reveal a part of His glory to Moses, and Exodus 34:6–7 gives us the substance of the revelation. It is in intelligible words, and is a description of God:

‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation.’

This God Who tells of His character to Moses is the same God Who appears to Abraham and reveals Himself. Whilst there may be something to be said for ‘progressive revelation’, a revelation of God will mean seeing Him as He is. Nothing more is needed. Hence, Paul’s astonished statement in Romans 1:21, ‘for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him.’ How could men know God and not respond in reverence and gratitude? If they had not known Him, then their wrong action would not have been
so reprehensible. To go to idolatry from knowing God is nigh incomprehensible.

In Abraham’s case he went from idolatry to God. He exchanged the lie (of idolatry) for the truth (of God) and served and worshipped the Creator rather than the creature. This statement is, of course, the reversal of Romans 1:26. What we are saying is that Abraham came to know God when he saw His glory. To know God is to know so much. In fact it is to know all. An ‘ancient’ who has seen God will know far more of the living God than a ‘modern’ who has not! The ‘modern’ who sees by revelation will not know more than the ‘ancient’ who likewise had received a revelation. By the term ‘living God’ we mean the God Who acts, the God Who is ever about His business in history, the God Who is constantly revealing Himself via many media.

When, then, Jesus said of Abraham, ‘He rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad,’ what did he mean? We truly sympathize with careful commentators who rightly ask, ‘What was Jesus’ ‘day’, to which Abraham referred, and the thought of which made him rejoice? Was it the day of his birth, or the day of his life and ministry, the day of his death and passion, or was it ‘the day of the Son of man’—the day of his ultimate appearing? Was it all these days rolled into one? When and how did Abraham see it so that he became glad?

We know that Abraham was given many prophetic sights, and doubtless these may all have added up to conclusions about Messiah, Abraham’s ‘seed’ in which all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. But why, in seeing the God of glory, should not revelation come of itself, i.e. of Himself?

Does man not receive such inner revelation when he meets God, even though—later—he cannot fully articulate, verbalize or theologize it? How gripped we are by the tyranny of naturalism, the assertion that what does not appear to man in rational terms is not acceptable. Man must gradually come to realizations of God by a long evolutionary process of thinking. Having come to any ‘realization’, can he be sure this is authentic, and that it will not be displaced—or replaced—by some future natural realization?

We can surely say that Moses received a revelation of God in many ways, and they all added up to something substantial, but just the revelation of Exodus 34:6–7 was enough to last Israel for all time, let alone for all who will ever be in God’s covenant. God did not progress as Deity from the time of Abraham’s revelation until that given to Moses, nor from that given Moses to us, in Christ. All of it was, and is, within covenant. God is God and is the Covenant God. Whilst we may experience an ever-widening understanding of God, God Himself is immutable. A man does not have to be ‘modern’ to receive the richest revelation of Him. It might even be better for him not to be ‘modern’ so that he might be more amenable to revelation! Is there in fact a truly ‘modern’ man—one who is different from an ‘ancient’?

What happens to a man when he has a revelation of God, whether it be Abel who knew God by faith, Enoch who walked with God and was translated, Noah who was a preacher of righteousness because God had favoured him, or Abraham the historic giant of faith, and all the others who saw God because of His objective visitation to them? Man who has receded
from humanity through the Fall is a bereft spirit. He lives in the unreality of alienation from God. Forgetting the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of God’s visitation—whether there seem to be ‘intimations of immortality’ or just the abysmal loneliness that comes to man from the absent presence of God, as G. K. Chesterton styled it—it is man’s renewal as a creature in his universe that comes to him via God’s visitation. Our cold—or even tepid—theological formulations or commentaries miss the inner dynamics a man knows under the revelation of God. No one can compute these; they are the substance of his life given as a gift. The miracle has taken place. A different man is now upon the earth. No wonder he looks towards his new home—the City of God. No wonder he looks to the King of that City, Who is his ‘Father and Redeemer from all eternity’. Let us then have no talk about the evolution of concepts, progressive and processive comprehensions. These originate in our minds, and there is no guarantee of their basic reality. One can never build on such cerebral rationalizations. One can only build on God Himself as He has shown Himself by whatever medium or media He has chosen.

Abraham’s Experience of Things That Were, That Are, and That Are to Come

The writer of Hebrews gives us the overriding drive of Abraham’s life, which was that ‘he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God’. It is obvious from the context that Abraham did not anticipate the fulfilment of the promise in what was Canaan—the land that was promised by God for an inheritance. All that we consider of Abraham’s life can only be understood via his forward-looking to the city of God.

God’s covenant with Abraham was first a promise:

The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves.’

We need to know the nature of covenant. O. Palmer Robertson describes it as ‘a bond in blood sovereignly administered’. It is an alliance or agreement made between two, but in biblical covenant it is unilateral, God being the Initiator, and grace being the basis. The mode of covenant takes the form of (i) a statement of ideas made known (agreed upon), (ii) the agreement sealed with and by an oath, (iii) the invocation of a curse to guard the solemn stature, and (iv) the agreement ratified by some external act, i.e. a ritual. A statement such as this is technically correct, but it fails to convey the wonder of God as revealed in and by His covenant.

If we think about it, then we see that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are really given to us to form the background of covenant. The great theme in Scripture is ‘covenant’. If we go back from Abraham in time, we are led, step-by-step, through the major events to creation. From creation to Abraham-in-idolatry is the saga of history. Then God reveals His glory to Abraham, and what we might call ‘modern history’ began. Abraham must have been beside himself when the Lord (Yahweh) addressed him and told him to leave his country.
and kinsfolk and go to a far land, and that He would make him a great nation and a universal blessing.

As we proceed from point to point, observing Abraham’s life, his obedience to God, his lack of covetousness regarding the land, his quiet way of life, his defeat of the five kings, his release of Lot and his family, and his refusal to touch the spoils, then we can understand his great joy when God in a vision told him, 'Fear not Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' It is true that he wondered what God could possibly give him above the blessings he already enjoyed, but God told him he would have descendants equal in number to the stars, and his heir would be from Sarah his aged wife.

The ritual for what was called 'cutting the covenant' is described in Genesis chapter 15, and was a most awesome one. The carcasses of the covenantal sacrifice were cut and when at sundown 'a deep sleep fell on Abram' and 'a dread and great darkness fell upon him', then God sealed the covenant with the patriarch. A smoking pot and a flaming torch passed in the darkness between the pieces of the offering, and God promised the land—later to be called Canaan—to Abraham’s posterity. Can we begin to sense and understand this further manifestation of God to one who came to be called 'the friend of God'?

To the point in time when the patriarch was ninety-nine years old, his name was 'Abram', i.e. 'exalted father), and God then altered it to 'Abraham', i.e. 'father of a multitude' or 'father of multi-tudes', which would accord with God's statements regarding his posterity. In this theophany he was told,

'I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.'

The Affects and Effects of Covenant

These are many, and not easy to describe. The primary thing about covenant was that God committed Himself to surround Israel with security for ever. The covenant is often called 'eternal' or 'everlasting'. That meant that the covenant people had their identity settled and guaranteed for ever. They were never to be a lonely people. Even in exile they would know they were within the covenant purposes of God. Is it this that has made the Jews believe God has not deserted them, even in the gas-chambers of Dachau, Auschwitz and Belsen? Abraham knew his posterity would ultimately be primary upon the earth—they would inherit it.

One way to understand the security of covenant is to read of the Gentiles that they were ‘alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world’. These are terrible words for any people, let alone any person! They tell of peoples who are without goal or aim, without purposeful future, and alone—drearly alone—in the midst of unintelligible history.

Abraham and his descendants were promised a land in which to dwell, the nature of God in which to live, and the blessings of covenant which are innumerable.
The Belief Which Brought Righteousness

Genesis 15:6 says, ‘And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness’. Abraham simply believed God: believed what God had said. The things God had said seemed impossible: Sarah—’and she as good as dead’—was to have a child. Who could believe that? Was Abraham reckoned righteous because he had believed what was impossible? Was this a special work? Abraham believed God, and God and His word are not two different things.

Abraham believed in God as ‘the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth’. He believed Him to be ‘the God of heaven and of earth’, ‘the Judge of all the earth’, the One Who punished Sodom and Gomorrah, and Who was Healer, i.e. of Abimelech, his wife and female slaves, and Who—all-in-all—was ‘the Lord, the Everlasting God’. This was high belief, yet such belief was Abraham’s very way of life. His belief was dynamic—as James was quick to point out:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works.

Abraham’s belief was a relationship, hence he was called ‘the friend of God’. Faith, then, was his way of life. This we can see so clearly in our next section.

Abraham at Mount Moriah

In Genesis 15:6 we read that Abraham believed God and was thus justified before God. To be free of guilt, right before God, are the things which make a man free to be obedient and enjoy obedience which is itself a form or part of righteousness. One then lives in God’s righteousness because of this imputed righteousness.

The way this worked out is seen in Genesis 22. Much had happened between chapters 15 and 22, all of which certainly finely tempered the character of the patriarch. Strengthened by the nature of God and the covenant given, he was fortified by faith to undertake the experience of Mount Moriah. The story, of course, is famous in history. Abraham’s son was a sturdy youth, able to carry sufficient timber to the top of the mountain to immolate him were he to be a sacrifice. Abraham told the young men to remain with the ass whilst he and his son went up the mountain. He was a man of faith, for he told them, ‘I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.’

The writer of Hebrews 11:17–19 describes the faith of the patriarch.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.’ He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

If we remember that God has said to him,

‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you,’

then we see that Abraham knew what he was doing. He believed God would unswervingly fulfil
His covenantal promises. Paul later said that Abraham believed in God, the One ‘who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that are not.’

One of the great points of the Mount Moriah happening was that Isaac was ‘your only son Isaac, whom you love’. So, too, Christ was God’s only Son Whom He loved. In this God and Abraham had affinity. Was this, then, the ‘day of Jesus’ who– Abraham saw? Had God revealed to him the burning heart of love which was His own? Was Calvary–so to speak–so in the heart of Abraham that he could go to Mount Moriah, and then come again believing ‘a Lamb that was slain’, and ‘a Son brought back from the dead by resurrection’? I believe so. I believe that when a man meets God–when God meets a man–that the person knows more than ever he–or she–could ever express. The pure in heart see God; the simple in spirit enter the Kingdom of heaven where they see all.

Abraham and Worship

Only the man who knows God can truly worship Him. To worship is to ‘give worth’ appropriate to the object of worship. Doubtless the highest worship–if we have a right to speak of ‘highest worship’–Abraham gave to God was on Mount Moriah. Abraham’s first altar was at Shechem, by the oak of Moreh (Gen. 12:6). This was where God first appeared to him in Palestine and told him He would give the land to Abraham’s descendants: ‘So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him’.

One of the things we have seen about covenant was that it ensured land for the people–specific land. This, itself, was a security. ‘At that time the Canaanites were in the land’, and it would appear would retain hold of it, but God had appeared to the patriarch so that he built an altar to worship the Lord, doubtless in thanksgiving. Then, in Genesis 12:8, we are told Abraham ‘removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord, and called on the name of the Lord’. To call on the name of the Lord is to worship fully (cf. Gen. 4:26; 21:33; 26:25). In 13:4 this altar is again mentioned, and it appears Abraham worshipped again.

In 13:18 we see that Abraham built yet another altar to the Lord–by the oaks of Mamre–and doubtless this was linked with the further promise of the land, by contrast with Lot’s having chosen the fertile Jordan Valley with its sophisticated cities. In 18:1ff. Abraham is visited with another theophany, and he is near to the altar of the Lord. Again, in Genesis 14:18–20 we see Abraham share in worship with Melchizedek king of Salem, a matter which the writer of Hebrews defines in 7:1–10. The covenantal sacrifice of chapter 15 was doubtless worship in an awesome mode, for it was the certification of covenant. The great and significant worship of Genesis 22–the event at Mount Moriah–is the last account we have of Abraham building an altar.

It would appear Abraham had become a man as mature in God as men may become. His worship and his altars were–every one of them–connected with God’s promises of covenant. Doubtless they were in adoration and thanksgiving to the God of covenant and His grace. In worship
men know God more than in any other action of their lives. Abraham’s worship, however, was not only for himself. He prayed, doubtless, when he ‘called upon the name of the Lord’. He prayed for Lot and the cities in which that nephew lived. He prayed for Ishmael, and for Abimelech and his wives. He was a man visited so many times by God that much prayer must have been in His manifested presence.

St Paul, later, summed up the character of Abraham:

He did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

The RSV has a fascinating translation of the same verses (Rom. 4:20–21):

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Abraham and the Things that are to Come

Almost all the things that Abraham was promised were yet to come when he came to the end of his life. It was true Isaac had been born and married to a woman of the family. The miracle of a large household was effected. Abraham was a rich and honoured man. Even so, the things promised to his descendants were, of course, yet to be fulfilled. History has shown rich fulfilment of the covenantal promises in the children of Jacob, Abraham’s grandson. The great people of God was established. Most wonderful of all, the blessed Seed was born, and has brought—as he is bringing—rich blessing to the nations. The end of that blessing is not yet, but it is leading to the greatest of all faith’s anticipations to which we now look, for like Abraham who ‘looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God’ (Heb. 11:10), so we do.

This was the vision which gave substance to Abraham’s being. He was to inherit the earth—i.e. his posterity were to possess not only the land of Canaan, but also the whole earth. How marvellous! Yet that gift was one with the promise of the ‘city to come’, i.e. the Holy City.

When we turn to the Holy City itself, especially as we see it in Revelation 21:1-5, 10-27 and 22:14-15, we are struck with the wonder of this glorious city. It is the City which is the Bride of Christ, which has all the glory of God, is structured of the materials of history—such as the twelve tribes of Israel, the apostles—which is light itself from God and the Lamb, Who constitute its temple, and also constitute the ruling power—the eternal throne.—The City’s gates are for ever open, and the people of the nations pour into it, and the kings of the nations bring their glory into it, and nothing that defiles is allowed to enter into it. The holy ones of God—the redeemed—shall see Him face to face. They will be constituted a kingdom of priests, and they will reign for ever.

No wonder Abraham looked to such a city. We see, moreover, that the vision of this city to John the Seer was not a new novel one. Long ago the prophets and the thoughtful in Israel had looked to a ‘Zion beyond Zion’, a New Jerusalem, the
Holy City to which the nations of the world would flow, as they listened to the prophet and then counselled one another:

It shall come to pass in the latter days
    that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
    and shall be raised above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
    and many peoples shall come, and say:
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
    to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
    and that we may walk in his paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
    and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
    and shall decide for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
    and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
    neither shall they learn war any more.

The writer of Hebrews was familiar with this city, or he would not have known Abraham's mind—his orientation towards the Holy City. This writer told his Hebrew readers:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

The author of Hebrews is writing to Jewish readers, those who would know his thought patterns. They knew that Abraham's view of the Eternal City was no new thing superimposed upon an Abraham who was unconscious of so high a view of God and the eternal dwelling of His people which He richly provides for Himself. This was no redaction, an idea lately come upon but read back into history, for it was out of this understanding of the ultimate City that history was formed. Abraham, then, always thought and moved in the eschatological dimension. He never thought of covenant as only temporal, but as the eternal within the temporal, just as God has put eternity into man's heart, which thus alters his views of the temporal, and so his manners and habits of life.

The Father of the Faithful, Today

We need to close off this simple essay before its materials mount up afresh, tumble out, and confuse us with their own innate prodigality. Paul has already dealt thoroughly with the fact that the sons of Abraham are the children of faith, and that the children of faith are the children of God. From Galatians 3:6 to 4:7 he has shown us (as indeed have—John the Baptist and Jesus) that being children of Abraham is not only a matter of blood descent, but a matter of faith. Blood descent may make us harder than the rocks (Matt. 3:9), and the very devil our father (John 8:44f.). We need the faith of Abraham. This is not faith in Abraham, but faith in God. The patriarch had faith in God, heard His word, obeyed His precepts, walked in His will and anticipated His intentions for history. So must we—not through Abraham, but directly through God—be members of His covenant.
It is on this matter of covenant in the world that we need to speak, although it is so wide a subject that it must warrant special treatment on its own. We need to see, as Paul said, that the Gentiles (the nations other than Israel) are ‘separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world’. This tragic and almost unbelievable state means the generations outside Abraham are lacking the resources for life, for true relationships, for fully enjoying the gifts of God. They are sadly hopeless.

On the other hand, the resources of those within covenant are endless. We have only to see all the promises of God, to read, believe, and see the nature of God, and live within Him. Jesus said, ‘Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me.’ We say, ‘He who loves abides in God and God in him,’ and add that we abide in both the Son and the Father. This means we are a people who have rejected idolatry—as did Abraham—and have espoused the living God, knowing Him as Father, as against those other surrogate fathers, the idols.

This means we have an altogether different social structure, a family being, a wholesome theocracy. The Kingship of God effects—our social mores. As covenant-people we are kingdom people, members of the Kingdom of God. We are people of faith who have been justified, whose sins and iniquities are not only covered but for ever not remembered by God. We know Him. His law is internalized at the core of our beings. We walk in the will of the King—our Father—and under the Lordship of His Son, ‘the mediator of a better covenant’, the Leader of the New Covenant, the one who leads us to the climax of history.

The children of Abraham are the blessed of God. God is the God of the living, i.e. of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and we are His true children. Even if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not to acknowledge us (Isa. 63:16)—which they would, anyway—yet, ‘Thou art our Father......our Redeemer from eternity is thy name’.

Nothing greater can be said of any human being than was said of Abraham:

‘I have chosen him that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.’

It is in Abraham, in the Abrahamic Covenant which is presently the New Covenant, that the Covenant-Father brings such to pass.
Covenant Hymn

The blood of bonding has flowed,
The awful Cross is aflame:
The horror of sin is consumed-
Defilement destroyed in its shame.

The risen Saviour appears,
Hell’s pillars all tremble and break:
The Son rides high in the heavens,
The chariots clash in His wake.

The Christ of the Covenant breaks
Sin’s bonds with His powerful Breath;
The Son of the Covenant rolls
Through darkest prisons of death.

His judgements complete their intent,
The dross is destroyed in His ire:
The earth is consumed by His love—
His passion of holy fire.

The songs of the heavens break forth,
As myriads thunder their lays:
The anthems of the centuries burst
In Love’s most glorious praise.
Today I am to go into hospital and I wonder which Bible I should take with me. I am not going to have serious surgery, but only what they call an arthroscopy, and it should require no more than two days. So I am not in a serious state of mind, nor even the slightest bit apprehensive. I always take a Bible with me—wherever I go. I don't wish to have a large Bible. They can be a bit obvious to folk who don't read Bibles, and I just want to read quietly to myself. I have quite a number of Bibles—different translations—and I use these for close study. They are quite large.

I have just gone through my shelf of rarely used smaller Bibles, and have found three from which to make a choice. The first one is a King James Version, and it belonged to my father. It has inscribed in it, 'To Dear Dad, with lots of love and 'happy returns'—Geoff, Laurel, Dick, Carol and Anne'. It has no date in it, but it would have to be at least thirty-five years since we gave that Bible to my father. The other two Bibles belonged to our daughter, Ruth Pauline, who was killed in an accident in December 1974. The first one was given to her in 1966 when we returned from Pakistan to settle back into Australia, and the second is inscribed, 'Presented to Ruth by Dad and Mum, on July 18th, 1972.' In it is written, 'Born 18th July, 1956, Baptized 7th October, 1956, Confirmed 4th November, 1968, Married-----------, Died 14th December, 1974.'

I know my father used his Bible when he was in the Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney when he had to have important surgery. He disliked—even feared—hospitals. Even though he was a dentist, he had certain ideas concerning hospitals which were not well informed, or well founded. But then that was my father—parent of us nine children. As I look up at the shelf over my desk I see two photographs of him—one when he was twenty-five years of age, looking extremely handsome in his black wedding suit, with a black stock and a high stiff collar which makes you think at first that he must have been a clergyman, as indeed this writing son eventually became. The other photograph was taken when he was in his forties and had applied to take a practice in a New South Wales country town. In this photograph he looks very much the confident man of the world, master of his profession.

Both photographs are of an extremely strong-minded man. When I look into his Bible I am reminded that for many years our father never went to church. Indeed he seemed to dislike churches. From a low Church of England family, he was surprisingly insistent that we observe the Sabbath day. He would not let us eat other than fish on Good Friday, and that was the day when he gloomed most. He also thought Christmas was a holy day,
and was a bit impatient of empty festivity. His father was a good-living man, upright in morals and ethics and had taught his son well, but I think his mother was perhaps the most remarkable. The eyes in her photograph are particularly penetrating.

Then again, of course, there was my mother. Whereas my father was the second generation of Australian-born English, my mother was of Irish parents, one of whom had come from Northern Ireland and was Protestant, and the other—her father from the south—was a Roman Catholic. My mother developed in a cross-culture of both parents, and I think she was always religious, with a kind of Irish mysticism. My father was primarily objective in his understanding of life, whereas my mother was very subjective. She was a fine musician, had done some acting, and had a vivid imagination.

Why I mention my father is because I never thought he would one day read the Bible, but he did. He thought my forays into theology and evangelism somewhat peculiar and kept away from them, but as a young theological student, I was one day amazed to see him present in the congregation with my mother, where I was conducting a service. How thrilled I was! How I preached my heart out, and then wondered with a sort of dread of my dad as to what he would think. His praise was quite high! I could scarcely believe it. From time to time my parents would travel across country to see and hear me, and my mother—who was otherwise forbidden to go to church—was enraptured.

I know of few more godly persons than my mother. She prayed for her nine children regularly, and at great length. I know some of the family were a bit uneasy as to the effects of those prayers, for most of us were suspicious of what we called ‘religion’. Our mother was a practical and loving person, and all of us were devoted to her. Far more than we were to our father, whom we dreaded somewhat. He could be very fierce, very dominating, and most forceful in the ground rules he laid down for our family life.

One by one the children left home, and my father could scarcely bear to see it. He wanted us all to live at home—for ever, I imagined. One of his problems was that he retired from his profession early in life. There was some talk about a nervous breakdown, mainly because he was always a fairly tense man, and had a perfectionist drive which he generously passed on to his children. I doubt whether he would have known what has been called ‘the Puritan work-ethic’, but he demonstrated it admirably. Our garden must have had the largest rose-beds in the suburb. Standard and climbing roses went into the hundreds. Lawns were wide and sweeping. Our shrubberies were prolific, and each of us had a plot of garden in the orchard where we could grow flowers or vegetables at our will.

My father could rarely be still. He worked away at building a brick garage, at landscaping our vast territory, setting out many chains of cement paths, building a beautiful fountain, creating a croquet lawn—and goodness knows what else. He loved work, and insisted that we be his helpers in it. All lawns were mowed with a hand-mower, all edges snipped and clipped with hand-shears. Gardens were not allowed to accumulate weeds, and so we were constantly involved, especially on Saturday mornings when some of us ached to be away on
sport, and dreaded the time after breakfast when our mother gave us the weekly dose of castor oil—a full tablespoon, to be exact.

So life went on for us, and our morally upright father ignored religion as such, but insisted on the highest ethical standards. Looking back I marvel, of course, that he had the resources—along with my helpful mother—to rear nine children, all of whom have done remarkably well in life. Yet I always sensed a weakness in my father. I thought him to be a lonely man. There were times when he was warmly conversational, but I had the feeling that he longed to be surrounded with affection, but could not evoke it by affection. He was certainly raised in a stoical school, and expected us to be the same.

Take, for example, how he taught us five boys to box. He would never let one of us have mercy on another. I was better at wrestling than boxing, but he insisted I should not win over my older brothers by simply wrestling them. So I, too, learned to box. Sometimes we boxed to weariness. I suppose it was all good, but I planned—as do most children—to be a different father. I would show warm affection to all my children, win them over to my side, be their chum, and become their confidant.

As we grew older and went our ways we nevertheless would regularly visit our parents. My father was always very lucid, but he was also in his anecdotage. He would tell us stories we had heard many times before, and we tried not to let our eyes glaze, and our attention wander, for he loved close attention. In fact he had many interesting yarns to share, and he had had high prowess in his profession, hence the endless yarns about molars, fangs and bicuspids, as also snugly-fitting dentures, but none of us ever wanted to be dentists.

You can see that I also am in my anecdotage—running on like this! I suppose our father was a remarkable man, though in her own way our mother was not one whit behind him. During the years of the Great Depression she supported him when fears came to him that his reasonable bank balance would be exhausted and we would be in penury. He had accumulated gold sovereigns for his dental work, and kept this gold—along with accumulated silver coins—in a special treasury which he would bury always under an orange tree. Unfortunately he would sometimes be unsure as to which tree covered his treasure of coinage. He had been known to walk in his sleep, dig up the money and bury it under another tree—always an orange tree, of which we had many.

When I enlisted in the AIF he was quite proud. Two other brothers were in the same AIF, although in different theatres of war. My eldest brother was a 'cloak and dagger' person, an Intelligence man under cover, for which he was later decorated. Yet another brother worked in a civilian airways, and was often in a theatre of war. One sister was in the WAAF, and other sisters were nursing or getting married.

After the war my father showed me his affection in a new way. I had once thought myself heavily martyred when he opposed my going into theological college, and at that time there was a barrier between us, but after a few months I wrote and apologized for my part in the argument, and received a most beautiful letter from him. That was before the war, and so then in the
years after the war we were warm towards each other. This friendship grew as I was married, and he loved our children, and they liked him.

When he went into hospital we had gone overseas on missionary service, and were not there to visit him at the time of his operation. Some of the hospital sisters who nursed him and who were special friends of ours described him as a patient.

‘What a dear old man he was,’ one said. ‘Always gentle, always polite. And he loved to read his Bible.’

I don’t know that I had thought of my father as gentle, mild and patient. I had seen him otherwise so many times. I have thought over their description of him. Perhaps they assessed better than we—his children—had done. We were always his responsibility. I doubt whether he was the kind of man who could show us the kindness and affection that we sometimes saw him give to other children. I have come to the conclusion that the exercise of authority did not come easily to him, and in some ways he was a bit of a bluff. He posed as stern, and was scared lest he might lose that image and so his authority. Perhaps that was why he rarely expressed affection.

When the first contingent of retiring Japanese prisoners of war arrived in Sydney I was amongst them. We had travelled on a luxury hospital ship, the ‘Oranje’, and from Circular Quay we threaded all the way through the City up to the Repatriation Hospital at Concord West. It was a most extraordinary time. I remember my father wept with joy. When we arrived at the country home, he went to a cupboard and brought out a box of ‘Precious Promises’, each cylinder of paper having a Bible verse on it. He explained that every day he had taken a cylinder with the tweezers provided, and had read the text and applied it to my situation behind Japanese barbed wire.

I suppose, then, that I ought not to have been surprised when a few years ago I was given his old Bible. This was after the death of my mother, at whose graveside we stood and sang ‘Amazing Grace’ because that seemed so appropriate. When I opened my father’s Bible which was otherwise totally unmarked, I saw he had inscribed the title page with these words, ‘The God who is with me.’ I stared at that, astonished and gratified. I have often murmured it over to myself, ‘The God who is with me.’

So, just as I am about to leave for the hospital I think of him with his faith that God was always with him. This was a pretty explicit and unusual utterance for my father. It tells me more about him than almost any other thing I have read. As I say, I have no apprehension regarding the modest bit of surgery I will be undergoing. I have had so many operations that my wife asked me a few minutes ago how many I had had, and I said I didn’t know.

* * *

The other two Bibles from which I may choose belonged to Ruth Pauline. The first one—given to her in 1966—is virtually unmarked, but the second one is significantly underlined in a number of places, particularly in the Psalms. Psalm 1 has written above it, ‘Thank You for Les’. Psalm 5 has over it, ‘Thank You for Gail’. Yet another Psalm (34) has, ‘Thank you for Barry’. These three persons were close to our family, and very close to Ruth.
The strange thing about Ruth was that she was very much like my father. She was really a passionate girl, and sometimes not in the very best way, but in the family she found it hard to express her affection. Also, she did not open up to me a great deal until the last years. She was much closer to my wife, Laurel, who seemed better to understand her. I was glad, then, to receive Ruth’s Bible and to go through the passages underlined. They tell us a wonderful story.

The passages that seemed so dear to her were mainly in the Psalms. Some of them are underlined very heavily, such as:

The Lord has heard my supplication;  
the Lord accepts my prayer;

In my distress I called upon the Lord;  
to my God I cried for help.

Consider my affliction and my trouble,  
and forgive all my sins;

Blessed be the Lord,  
for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me.

If I were to put all the verses she has selected together so that they were a continuous line of thought, then I think you could read her as well as I could. I know that some months before her death she burst out one day, ‘Daddy, I want to see Him, as I see you!’ It was like saying, ‘I want to walk by sight and not just by faith.’ There was deep impatience in her voice. Once, when she was a small girl skipping down a road in Pakistan, we warned her against cars that might suddenly swing around a corner, and perhaps kill her. She was indifferent to that. Her little arms went up into the air and she said, ‘Well, that wouldn’t matter. I would go straight to heaven and see Jesus.’

As I look through the underlined verses in the Psalms, I see this theme:

I lie down and sleep;  
I wake again, for the Lord sustains me;

Thou hast put more joy in my heart  
than they have when their grain and wine abound.

In peace I will both lie down and sleep;  
for thou alone, O Lord, makest me to dwell in safety;

Thou dost show me the path of life;  
in thy presence there is fullness of joy,

As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness;  
when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form.

About a year before her fatal accident, Ruth composed a short song—a chorus in fact—and whilst she wrote many poems and songs, it is the only one for which we have the music. The little song was taken from Zephaniah 3:20:

‘At that time I will bring you home,  
at the time when I gather you together;  
yea, I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes,  
before your eyes,’ says the Lord.

Her song has the haunting refrain which has no full stop:

I will bring you home.

Well, she has gone home. She seemed to have anticipated that. Some of her teenage years were quite stormy, and like all of us she needed forgiveness. But she did understand that forgiveness.
That is why I like to link another passage with the ones above, for they seem to make a whole:

Into thy hand I commit my spirit;
   thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

Perhaps for the joy of it all I shall take both Bibles, and they shall remind me of my father who has gone to be with the Heavenly Father, with my daughter who is already there.

In a few moments my beloved wife will drive me to the hospital, and she is a remarkable woman, much admired by my father, and much loved by her daughter, Ruth Pauline, to whom she gave so much. I always associate Laurel and myself with the word of Robert Browning, in his beautiful poem Rabbi Ben Ezra:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
   Our times are in his hand
Who saith, 'A whole I planned,
   Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!'

There is, then, no end to the marvel of family. I have only dealt with fragments of the wonderful and varied whole. Precious, nevertheless, are those when something sharpens our memories, evokes recollection of beautiful days, and the dignity and honour of the ones we have loved, and love.

His eyes ran down fountains of tears,
The eyes of the rugged prophet,
The prophet who warned the beloved
Who loved not—as they ought to have—
The Beloved Bridegroom
And the Covenant Father.
His eyes ran down fountains of tears
For the sad apostasy
Of the daughter of his people.

My eyes run down fountains of tears
For the joy of my eternal Beloved,
Husband of the true Israel,
Vine of the living branches.
My eyes run down fountains of tears
For the joy of his full incarnation—
The conceiving by the Holy Spirit
In the life of the woman's womb,
Old Abraham's latest seed.

Those tears in their flowing shall never cease,
But the flood of them—the inner Niagara—
Starts at the Calvary action, the grim Golgotha,
The Vandal

The horror of the human rejection.
Oh heart within, weep for thyself,
Weep for thine own hardness.
Ah! The stark loneliness as men pass by, indifferent-
The indifference of deliberate rejection-
And decry the incarnate Redeemer
In the lone separation—the inevitable fracture
Of man with God, though not
The God with God—inseparable Son with his Father.

My eyes are now cascades of weeping
And my joy is to the utter uttermost,
The high singing of eucharistic wonder-ment,
The love-filled response of the grateful heart
Joining the whole creation, the festal angels
And the celestial choir where none is absent.
I weep for the wonder and the pure joy
Of him who is my Saviour, my prophet, priest and king.
My tears flow for the Pioneer of faith
Who drew me unto God,
Whose nail-pierced hands and feet
Settled my death forever; brought me life
In the new resurrection, the bath of blessing,
The fountain of new living
In the Atonement and the Resurrection.

Ah, blessed Jesus you are my Lord.
You are the beloved one of my heart,
Let me then tell of your great coming,
Your perpetual intercession in this time-intermission,
And your love forever possessed.
Possessed by you let me you possess.

The Reconciliation of All Things

Diversity is no sin or crime in itself. It has often been observed that in nature there is a unity which springs from diversity. This, of course, is apparent in art of all forms—diverse colours, shapes and movements can constitute a wonderful whole. It is singularly apparent in the human race, in which features, body dimensions, fingerprints and even blood groupings differ in every person. In theology, likewise, we should not object to diversity, especially if it is the gathering of varied insights that by nature are an integrated whole.

When diversity is deliberate, when it is engineered because certain of us object to unchanging reality, then it is harmful. We ought not to diverge from what is essentially real because we reject what has been long accepted, or because we seek something new, for the sake of novelty. In the Scriptures the unity of God’s nature and of His people is of paramount importance. ‘The Lord your God is one Lord’ is one of the most important announcements made in the history of Israel. One cannot love the Lord with heart, soul, mind and
strength if He is not One. The people of God cannot have unity on the basis of a Godhead which is divided. That is why idolatry is evil–because it divides one's loyalty until there is no basic, integrated loyalty. One cannot properly serve two masters. One cannot serve no master. The integrity of the worshipper depends on the integrity of the Worshipped.

When we come to the church, its doctrines, its creeds, its notions, its operations and its worship, there is a rich diversity in understanding and action. Whilst this may not necessarily be a bad thing, and may even be a good thing where it is simply unity-in-diversity, yet it can also be most divisive. We know the history of the church is that of multi-thinking. If this were merely a dialectic–i.e. a balancing of the truth by a weighing of the differing values, and adducing a synthesis which we could see had brought us back to centre, to the truly ontological–then diversity of thinking would be valuable.

Too often, what we see is a diversity which teeters on heresy, that is, 'heresy' as we understand it in the New Testament sense. It is the over-emphasis upon one doctrine or fact or truth, which–in a sense–becomes absolutized in itself. It becomes the key to interpreting all truth. This is a diversion, and is harmful. Today, I believe, there is a problem we face in the extreme individualism which has arisen in the community of Christ. It is the matter of shaping up truth by the system we have devised, and then utilizing it for personal advancement. Doubtless that has always been done, but prevalent today is the ambition of a person, especially a person who has been trained in a particular academic system who sees–consciously or unconsciously–that this will give scope to his ambition and goals. At the lowest end is the title given, such as 'The John Bloggs Ministry', or 'The John Bloggs Ministries'. Doubtless there has always been the master and his disciples, but when the school referred to claims that this is the true way, and the only way–as against every other way–then it is not only sectarian but heretical, even if the bulk of its teaching parallels the credal truth of the church. Not all particularistic ministries give themselves exclusivist titles.

Today we are seeing diversity in sad and damaging forms. Nothing much is gained by nominating the variations of teaching and practice. Of course, the matter is not new. It is difficult to see whether this harmful diversification is more prevalent now than it has been in other ages; but anyway, even that is not the point. The point is, 'Is there some element–or elements–we can discover, some integrating factor or factors, which can help to unify us?' By this we mean, 'What is so basic to the Christian faith and truth that–by nature of the case–it determines the unity of truth, fellowship and practice?'

I think almost any Christian could give a quick answer of value, such as, 'Hold fast to Christ the Head and all will be well.' That is true, if only because God's plan and intention is to unify all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9–10). Without question, Christ will ultimately head up, fill up, reconcile and harmonize all things in himself (Eph. 1:10; 4:10; Col. 1:20–22; 3:15). He created all things unto himself, so all things, then, will find their ultimate being in him, and in unified form (Col. 1:16–22). Certainly this is the way to both present
and ultimate unity.

We might also give another answer: 'Love one another from the heart, and the unity will be there.' This, too, is a good answer, because 'we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren'. An answer parallel to this is, 'Live in the unity of the Spirit,' and without doubt it is a valid way of unity. Unity is certainly through the Spirit.

The trouble is that it is getting to hold fast to Christ the Head, it is getting to love one another, and getting to live in the Spirit which is the basic factor in achieving unity. We are confronted by the fact that, for the large part, we are not getting to these things. We then ask the question, 'What is the way of reconciliation, i.e. reconciliation with God--or from God--and reconciliation with others, especially men and women of the faith?' We know that the reconcilers--i.e. 'the peacemakers'--are blessed, 'for they shall be called sons of God'. Yet is reconciliation a task we undertake simply because it is desirable, good and fruitful? Do we have the capacity to reconcile persons on the deepest level of human living? Is there a dynamic constraint to reconciliation?

I believe that reconciliation in the New Testament is primarily linked with the Atonement of Christ, and not with some charismatic ability or theological principle to bring people together and to unify them. I believe a study of the few passages of the New Testament which set reconciliation forth will show the matter has to do with the Cross of Christ, i.e. his death and resurrection. These passages are Romans 5:10–11, II Corinthians 5:18–21, Ephesians 2:14 and Colossians 1:19–23. As we see, there are remarkably few passages, but these are set in the context of other passages which relate to the matter of reconciliation. For example, when we are reconciled to God by the death of Christ, then all elements of the Atonement are relevant to reconciliation. Thus the themes of wrath, alienation and justification--to name only a few--come within the scope of reconciliation. In other words, reconciliation is not a minor doctrine of the New Testament.

Two Aspects of Reconciliation

Theologians have long classified reconciliation as being of two orders, the first dealing with God's personal reconciliation of the sinner, and the second dealing with cosmic reconciliation, i.e. the reconciliation of all things, the 'all things' constituting the elements of the whole creation. Of the passages nominated in the above paragraph, one set refers to personal reconciliation, i.e. Romans 5:10–11 and II Corinthians 5:18–21, and the other set to cosmic reconciliation, i.e. Ephesians 2:14 and Colossians 1:19–23. It may well be that both sets overlap, and in the opinion of some they are of the one piece. We will later examine them more particularly.

What we simply observe at this point is that if all men and women must go through the crucible of the Cross without exemption, difference, partiality or favour, then, rightly speaking, we ought all to be reconciled wholly to God and wholly to one another. Even if we have difficulties working out 'reconciliation with all men' (Rom. 12:18), yet the basic effecting of our reconciliation with God has been executed, and logically we can--as we then ought--to be reconciled with all men. It
is this basic effecting of reconciliation to which we shall turn our attention.

**RECONCILIATION EFFECTED BY CHRIST’S CROSS**

The Enmity Against God, and Within Creation

Reconciliation presupposes a falling out, or a separation by one from another. The Scriptures show generally—and sometimes particularly—that the initial unity of creation was broken by two sets of rebellion, the first being that of angelic powers in heaven against God, and the second that of man at the Fall. If we realize that all things were created by God, through the mediation of His Son—the Word—and via the agency of the Holy Spirit, then we must conclude that the entire creation was a unity, i.e. 'very good'. We must also think of things celestial and things terrestrial as being of the one piece. That is, there are not two creations—a heavenly and an earthly—but one creation, so that celestial powers have their functional oversight of what is terrestrial. This is seen in the terms 'principalities', 'dominions' and 'authorities'. We have biblical reason to believe all things constituted a complete whole in absolute unity.

When, then, certain heavenly powers rebelled against God, and man allowed himself to be subverted, the unity of all things was fractured. Whilst the essential unity of all things—i.e. things de jure—could not be broken under the sovereignty of God, yet elements within that ontological unity did become disunited, i.e. de facto. Satan and his heavenly cohorts set themselves against God, and man—in Adam—sought to live apart from God. Whilst we do not understand the nature of guilt in regard to heavenly creatures, we certainly understand it in regard to man. Man's conscience is such that when he is guilty before God, he dislikes the One against Whom he has sinned. In the Old Testament, man is shown to be at enmity with God by espousing idols and worshipping them: '[He] exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.' There are many evidences in the Old Testament of man's enmity with God.

In the New Testament, this enmity is explicitly named. In Romans 1:30 men are 'haters of God', and in 5:10 'we were enemies [of God]'. In Colossians 1:21 Paul said, 'And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds...'. Some translations seem to infer that the guilt men had from evil deeds was what set them against God (cf. Job 1:5). Others imply that evil deeds arose out of hostility to God. Whatever may be the case, separation from God fosters compounding hostility. Notice that the enmity is deep within the mind, and cannot be static. It must do evil deeds against God.

Along with man's hatred of God is man's hatred of his fellow man. Paul speaks (Titus 3:3) of some as 'hated by men and hating one another', and John speaks of two groups of people, 'the children of the devil', and 'the children of God'. Abel typified the children of God, and Cain the children of the devil. Another situation of separation and hatred is that of Jew and Gentile, which, in Ephesians 2:16, Paul calls 'the hostility'.

The hostility of Satan and his hosts against God,
and the hatred of man for God, are not inconsequential things. They are highly significant. The history of creation is a history of violence amongst fallen angels and fallen humanity. The dimensions of hatred and bitterness are enormous.

‘Bringing the Hostility to an End’

How could such hostility be brought to an end? John said that the purpose of the Son of God being manifested was to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8). How can the works of the devil be destroyed? The answer lies in the work of the Cross.

In Isaiah 59:2 the prophet said,

your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hid his face from you
so that he does not hear.

In 1:4 Isaiah had said,

Ah, sinful nation,
a people laden with iniquity,offspring of evildoers,
sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the Lord,they have despised the Holy One of Israel,they are utterly estranged.

In both references it is the evil of man which has separated him from God. We need not here go into the emotional and psychological elements of sin and guilt which make and widen the gulf between man and God. It is clear that the most powerful of them all is the sin of idolatry, which is the greatest blasphemy man can utter against God. Because of his blindness, man cannot know how utterly his sin alienates him from God.

The gulf is so wide and deep that no human power or action could ever begin, even, to bridge it.

One of ‘the works of the devil’ was to separate celestial creatures from their Creator, and man from his Maker. If Christ was to destroy the works of the devil then he would have had to bridge the gap between God and man and make the way open for man to rejoin God. This would have had to be a mammoth task. Man being fallen and depraved, and God being holy and righteous, access was blocked off from man to God, even if a man might wish to come to God. Paul quoted two Psalms when he wrote, ‘No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong.’

We will now look at some of the basic New Testament passages relating to the theme of ‘Reconciliation’.

Romans 5:1–11

Verses 10–11 of this passage speak primarily of reconciliation, but the passage needs to be read as a whole, for when the opening verse says, ‘Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’, then ‘have peace’ means we are reconciled to God. At verse 6 Paul commences a description of the things which have caused us to know God’s love. In verse 9 Paul says that having been justified by the blood of Christ, ‘much more shall we be saved by him [Christ] from the wrath of God.’ In verse 10 he points out that we were enemies of God. We were enemies in that we opposed God: in that sense we are His enemies. In other places he says we are enemies emotionally and practically.
through the matter of our wicked works, i.e. our guilt places us in opposition to God. He says that if we were 'reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life'. He says that this leads us on to 'rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation'.

By all of this, Paul is saying that we were enemies with God. Now we have been made to be His friends. Whereas once we dreaded Him, had hostility, and feared God as Judge, we now are in friendship. This is extraordinary: friends with God! That is why 'we rejoice in God'. The relationship is glorious. If we are friends with God through reconciliation then the natural outcome must be that we are friends with one another. All of our life should be couched in friendship.

Ephesians 2:11–22

This passage gives us one picture of reconciliation. Having painted the picture of the Gentile utterly without God, without the covenant that so comforted Israel, and without the great promises given to Abraham and all the people of faith down through the centuries of human history, the Gentile had a deep hatred of Israel as 'teacher’s pet', as God’s favourite people, and as an elitist religious nation. Even so, Israel was not God’s favourite people but His chosen people, and—what is more—a people who had to do God's will, fulfilling the task of being a 'kingdom of priests', among, and for, the nations of the earth (Exod. 19:5–6; cf. I Pet. 2:9–10). Having drawn this picture of the mutual hostility of the Jew and Gentile nations, Paul then describes how the hostility was brought to an end, and how reconciliation was made.

Firstly, because enmity between man and God has brought guilt, and flourishes on guilt, then guilt must be destroyed. Properly speaking, it must be propitiated, and in this Ephesian passage Paul does not talk about propitiation as such. He says that Christ broke down ‘the dividing wall of hostility’, i.e. the partition wall between the court of the Gentiles and the court of (Jewish) sacrifice. How did he do this? ‘By abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two [Jew and Gentile], so making peace [reconciliation].’

This must mean that Christ fulfilled the demands of the law for the Jews, and so outmoded the Jewish law as a factor which would continue to prohibit the Gentile entering into the court of sacrifice. It must also mean that the law of God which obtains with all mankind from creation onwards (cf. Rom. 2:14–16) must also have had its demands met (cf. Rom. 10:1–4) in Christ’s sufferings. Paul said the action of the Cross would bring reconciliation: ‘...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.’ The key statement is ‘through the cross’, i.e. apart from the Cross there could be no reconciliation. If Christ’s fulfilling of God’s law meant he suffered the guilt of men, and so met the demands of the law, then it means that both Jew and Gentile have had their sins borne by Christ, so that the law no longer controls them (cf. Rom. 3:27–31; 7:4; Gal. 2:19).
Since there is no impediment of sin or guilt between the Jew and God, and the Gentile and God, then both Jew and Gentile are reconciled with God. Being reconciled with God they are reconciled with each other. This salvific reconciliation is made living and functional by the Holy Spirit, ‘for through him [Christ] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father’. Note, too, that it is to the Father, i.e. we are restored to the family of God, the place of living out our reconciliation. The rest—the figure of the new temple, members being bonded into one another, and of all being the dwelling place of God—are the practical fruit of the Cross, but without the Cross none of these things would have been possible.

II Corinthians 5:14–21

In this passage Paul was saying that the controlling power of the believer’s life was the love of Christ. Note, it was not ‘love for Christ’, but ‘the love of Christ’. Paul then shows what that love was, i.e. dying for us that we should no longer live for ourselves (v. 15), and being made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him (v. 21), and by this means reconciling us to God.

When we look at the Cross we see that death was what we deserved to die, but he died it, and since sin and death are in the one bundle, then his being made sin for us meant he took all the judgement of God upon sin—i.e. death—and endured the death, tasting death for every man (Heb. 2:9). Whilst this might sound like a theological formula, the working out of it was by no means a mere cerebral matter. It was literally a matter of life and death, the most terrible life-and-death event in all history.

For example, Paul said, 'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.' Not to count a man’s sin against him is the same as justifying him, yet how can this be done? God does not simply issue a fiat of non-imputation, for He cannot. Indeed He dare not. No! Christ must be made to be sin before man can have such non-imputation of his sins. This ‘being made sin’ is beyond our comprehension, and certainly beyond our personal experience. Whatever, then, was the experience of Christ, it has banished sin and guilt for ever! There can be nothing between us and God. The way of reconciliation has been made by the trail-blazer of our salvation (Heb. 2:9–10; cf. John 14:6).

Paul exhorts or appeals to his readers to be reconciled to God. What was impossible for them hitherto is now possible, and even mandatory, since God has given His Son for this matter.

Colossians 1:15–23

This passage contains both the ontological basis for reconciliation as well as the soteriological work that effects it. We mean by this that by creation all things were one, existing as a dynamic unity. That unity is the ontological basis for reconciliation. We can say that initially all things were reconciled, for they had never been divided, at odds or in competition with each other. Nevertheless they could not come back—as it were—to the created unity unless that were first an ontological reality. Just as all things were created through Christ and for him, i.e. unto him, so they
would be in him and upheld by him (subsist in him). This enables us to see the unity of Christ, which is Christ himself.

Verses 19 and 20 are important: ‘For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross’. This last statement is equal to ‘by his death’, in verse 22. As we have observed before, this reconciliation appears to be cosmic. That is, it affects ‘all things’. It is about the term ‘all things’ that much debate has ensued. How can a salvific death effect a cosmic reconciliation? We must define what the term ‘all things’ means, if that is possible.

In I Corinthians 15:22 Paul said, ‘For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.’ We take this verse to be either particularistic or universalistic. ‘In Adam’ surely means ‘all human beings who are in Adam and remain so’, and ‘in Christ’ means ‘all human beings who have come to be in Christ and remain so’. Universalism would say, ‘All were once in Adam but ultimately all will be in Christ.’ The context of the verse has no such universal inference. The constant thought of spiritual death elsewhere in the New Testament becomes meaningless in the light of universalism, especially the statement ‘the second death’. We should assume, therefore, that in this and other places, ‘all things’ means ‘all things in Christ’, and ‘all things that have been redeemed’. ‘All things’ may well include things other than redeemed persons, but not persons who have refused redemption. There is, of course, the further proposition that outside of Christ no ‘thing’ is really a true and authentic ‘thing’.

In Colossians 1:19–20 God is said to have reconciled all things by the blood of the Cross, and in verses 21–22 believers are addressed as having been reconciled by that death of the Cross. That reconciliation is personal, and it has only happened by the death of Christ. This brings us back again to the work of Christ in the Atonement. It is by the Atonement—or rather—by the atoning Christ that we are reconciled.

We can refer here to Colossians 3:14 (and context): ‘And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony’. This is much the same as Romans 12:18, where Paul said, ‘If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all [men].’ However, these two actions do not produce reconciliation but proceed from reconciliation—the reconciliation already achieved at the Cross.

First let us try to deal with what has been called ‘cosmic reconciliation’. Leaving aside the rational creatures of the creation—celestial beings and humans—we can say there is nothing evil in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms—so-called. Only rational beings can be evil. If in the ‘all things’ of Colossians 1:20–22 celestial beings are included, then that would be the one reference to such having salvation, for without salvation nothing is redeemed, and so cannot be reconciled. It is clear from Romans 8:18–25 that the whole creation is eagerly anticipating the glorification of the sons of God when it, itself, will be liberated from the bondage of corruption and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.
Some of the eschatological passages of the Old Testament seem to indicate the same, e.g. Isaiah 11:1–10 and 65:17–25, whilst other passages related to the outpouring of the Spirit on God’s people speak of a regeneration of nature, i.e. creation.

If the liberation of the creation is dependent upon the revealing (unveiling) of the sons of God in glory (Rom. 8:19), then we can say that the ‘all things’ of Colossians 1:18–22 constitute the redeemed, the loyal celestial community and the remaining non-rational creation. If we ask why impenitent humans and angels are not included, we have to answer that they are cast into the lake of fire, the ‘second death’. Since none of these creatures capitulates to Christ, then each is outside Christ and not inside Christ (en Christo). Only that which is in him has life (John 1:4; I John 5:12). Outside of Christ all is death, and nothing is substantial, i.e. ontological. It seems clear from II Corinthians 5:20, where Paul beseeches readers to be reconciled to God, that not all men will do this. A real offer is made to them, but they are not forced to accede. Some do not accede.

Being Reconciled to God at the Cross

The order of salvation in the New Testament is that being aware of the offer of the forgiveness of sins, justification and the Holy Spirit, men and women repent and believe (some say, ‘believe and repent’), are baptized, and receive the forgiveness of sins, the gift of eternal life, the gift of justification, sanctification, sonship and the Spirit. These persons have been reconciled to God. They are no longer at enmity with Him. Properly speaking, they are no longer at enmity with anyone, though other persons may constitute themselves their enemies.

Christ’s teaching is clear: if anyone approaches God and he is unreconciled to his brother, then he ought to go and effect reconciliation–whatever may be the response or reaction of the brother. This teaching can be seen in Matthew 5:9, 21–26, and 18:15–35. It is also the subject of the apostolic Epistles. We mention this because it seems clear that willingness to reconcile and be reconciled to others must be the hallmark of a person already reconciled to God.

Understanding the Gospel and Unreconciled Man

Coming back to the subject of our reconciliation with God through the Cross, through the blood of Christ, it would seem that not all who would call themselves ‘Christians’ or ‘believers’ have necessarily been reconciled to God. I believe this is the crucial point of our whole study. One cannot be reconciled with God if one has not been crucified with Christ, if one does not glory ‘except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’, and if one does not resolve ‘to know nothing......except Jesus Christ and him crucified’. Let us be clear: we are not speaking of a ‘crucifixion cult’, or an absolutist concentration on the death of Christ to the exclusion of all other elements of truth, e.g. the Resurrection, Ascension and Parousia of Christ. No: we are talking about whether a person has come to the Cross and passed through the crucible of it, the crucifying experience.
of having died with Christ.

It is to this matter Paul refers in Romans 6:1–14; Galatians 2:16–21; 5:24; 6:14; Colossians 3:1–3, and other related passages. In I Corinthians 1:17 to 2:5 Paul shows that two things are sought by the human race, especially relating to salvation, the first being 'signs and wonders', i.e. supernatural power, and the second being wisdom, i.e. special wisdom that is extraordinarily powerful. The Jew (the religionist) looks for supernatural power in regard to salvation, and the Greek (the intellectual) looks for the knowledge which of itself will effect salvation. In answer to them Paul says, 'We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block [a scandal] to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.'

Now Paul is saying that some Jews and some Greeks have left their wrong ideas and have seen the power and wisdom of God in Christ crucified. Other Jews and Greeks have not. The matter which confronts us is whether or not we are trying to shape the Gospel as 'power-as-religion' and 'wisdom-as-religion'. Later we will examine whether a person who has not been fully crucified could possibly be reconciled to God, and so to others. Indeed, we will ask whether such people who espouse the Christian faith are not the ones who are primarily divergent from it, giving us the many disparate elements which prevent basic agreement on the Gospel, and so basic reconciliation.

If we could research the different presentations of Christian truth today and eliminate all those which seek for signs and wonders, i.e. supernatural power through supernatural evidences, and if we could eliminate all those who seek to show the Gospel as being extraordinarily wise, then we might be closer to basic reconciliation in the community of Christ. Let it be clear that we are not against signs and wonders or against wisdom, but we are only interested in the signs and wonders that are of Christ–whatever they may prove to be–and are only interested in wisdom as it is Christ's wisdom. Christ does not merely have the power of God and the wisdom of God. He is the power of God and the wisdom of God, but only as 'Christ crucified' and not as any one of the various Christs we have raised up for our theology- or practice-systems.

Let us state the matter more particularly. Many religionists see the offence that the Gospel is to non-believing people. They wish to pare away unnecessary offence in order to eliminate wrong ideas about the truth of Christ. This is commendable, provided it does not pare away the actual offence of the Cross, nor present a false picture by presenting a 'wisdom-Gospel'. For example, the church is faced with multitudinous matters, such as abortion, accelerated divorce, extreme permissiveness in sexual and moral matters, homeless children on the street, vast plagues and famines that call for material mercy, the rise in violence and crime, oppression by governments of their people, wars that stem from commercial greed, and similar matters. When asked what the church is doing about these things, the church feels guilty unless it sets about rectifying the situations as far as possible. It feels the Gospel is an offence or foolish if it does not set about fighting the battles of the weak and oppressed.
Again, we have a climate of humanism today, and we may wish to show that the Gospel has something to say to the human race, a philosophy which is as good as, if not better than, what humanism or some other philosophy offers. Education is one of the primary concerns of all societies, and the church does not wish to appear ignorant, behind the times, at loggerheads with science, or in the rearguard of present advances in learning. There are those, too, who would wish to show the world that believers are good artists and artisans, good at music, good at sport, and that their religion—so-called—is not fuddy-duddy, obsolete, behind-the-times or one whit lacking when it comes to living life, sharing entertainment, and being up to the mark and the moment.

Now, whatever is good in all these things, the question is whether we have not missed the point of the Gospel. As citizens of this world we are bound—as are all other people in the world—to take social responsibility where necessary, to live where other people are, and to share their problems, their joys and their life, but with the main thing in mind, which is that if men and women are not reconciled to God then they do not know what life is about; they do not have an eternal goal, and they need to hear the Gospel as it really is, and not in its adapted forms which are intended to attract on the basis of power and wisdom.

The Basic Offence of the Cross

Having dealt with the Jewish demand for ‘signs and wonders’, and the Greek demand for ‘wisdom’, we might wonder if it is further necessary to speak about the offence of the Cross. Its offence is not simply the lack of signs and wonders and extraordinary wisdom. Its offence is that the Cross is necessary—indeed, wholly indispensable—for me as a sinner. Able religionists and brilliant intellectuals are highly offended by the teaching that they need the Cross. Christian theology is not primarily a theology of glory, of power, of social achievement, of human compassion or of moral excellence. The Gospel is summed up in a statement of Paul: ‘The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ The angel told Joseph, ‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ Jesus said of himself, ‘The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost,’ and, ‘God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.’

What we are saying in these paragraphs is that there is no reconciliation apart from the Cross, and if the Cross be not seen clearly, or received with humility and faith, then there can be no practical reconciliation between God and man, and man and man. Continuing, then—regarding the necessity of the Cross—we say that there can be no doubt about the fact that sanctification of life is linked with justification and forgiveness. The church is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in mercy, and it is to exercise mercy. It is to do good unto all men. It is a community purified to do good works, and these may take it out into many spheres of life, to ‘all sorts and conditions of men’, but its primary task is to preach Christ crucified, for this is the only way of reconciliation.
Let it be said that 'Christ crucified' has meant many different things to many people. Theories of the Cross are not lacking, and many of them may have insights of great value, but Christ crucified is not a theory. It is not even a theology—as such. The teaching of the Cross is clear in the Scriptures: the race of Adam is under doom because it sinned in him, it fell when he fell. Death has come as a result of sin—death which has the sting of death, sin. Man cannot redeem himself. He has no moral power to do so, and any wish for self-salvation will be a spur only to self-atonement. Man is morally weak to the point of impotence. He is energized by Satan to do his will and not God’s. Man is doomed to death, and death is existence apart from God. Eternal death is such existence—forever. God is love, and before creation had planned the slaying of the Lamb, the work of the Atonement. In time He set forth His Son as a propitiation for the sins of all mankind. No human being can do without the Cross. The Cross must confront man with his sinfulness, his enmity with God, his loss of true life, the judgement of God’s holy law, and his own moral pollution.

If all of this seems horrific and objectionable, then let a man know that God is love, that His Son has borne the sins of the world, having been numbered with—all transgressors. He has borne the wrath which is upon sin, he has purified the pollution of man’s evil, and he has taken the guilt which has crushed the human race. He has done all this, and has thereby reconciled us to God. There is no other way to reconciliation, for there cannot be, by nature of the case.

That is at once both the offence and glory of the Cross.

What every one of us who reads this essay must ask himself—or herself—is: ‘Have I really ever faced the reality of the Cross—its terrible offence, the horror of man crucifying the Son of God, and that crucifixion being necessary in the face of man’s evil?’

I am strongly convinced that many of us who claim the name of Christ, have not really come to the Cross, to face it, understand it, and accept our co-crucifixion with Christ, with this one who was lifted up as a snake, who crucified the whole corrupt body of Adamic humanity with himself, who was made to be sin, who bore all sins in his body on the Tree, and who was made to be ‘curse’ for us. Few of us understand that he fought Satan and the powers of darkness, and liberated us from the control of Satan and his world. We are further offended to be told we were—or are—under the power of the prince of this world. All the things we have noted here are the things which divide man from God, and members of the human race from one another, and human creatures from angelic ones.

I believe that when we come to the Cross, see the evil of ourselves, and then the measure and mode of Christ’s suffering, then, and only then, will we weep before God and be reconciled to Him, and having been reconciled to Him become reconciled to all. The exercise of this long essay is to confront each one of us with the Cross. This is the point and place of our reconciliation with God and one another. It is the only true place of unification in all history. If we respond to this confrontation in repentance and faith, and if we receive with humility all the gifts of salvation, then surely we will not be divergent in the ways we have been. Surely we will come back to centre, and in that sense be ‘apostolic’. Only the
heart that is broken at the Cross can become regenerate through the Gospel and the Spirit. Only it can come under the unifying Lordship of Christ, and only it can know its sonship in the Fatherhood of God, and its unity in the fellowship of the Spirit. It is these things which make for unity, for harmony, and for integrity.

I have read widely over many years, have travelled in many countries and had ministry in many places. I think I have been as thoughtful as any, and I am sure that the most humiliating thing in all the world is the Cross of Christ. How the heart refuses to admit its utter sinfulness! How it hardens at the Cross, and will not admit its need of such suffering! Yet having gone through the humiliation of confessing one’s sinfulness, and having seen the unspeakable love of God in His Son and in His own Fatherhood, the spirit of a man sees what he has never seen on land or sea or sky—the Father Who loves us freely.

I have seen, to my sorrow, how quickly men and women who have been to the Cross can skirt it, think of it as an initial experience and seek to go on to things which they say are ‘beyond the Cross’. ‘Beyond the Cross’—if we must use that term—is an impossible direction. There is still and ever only the Cross, and nothing beyond it. Yet scholars and theologians strangely rationalize the Cross until it is merely on the human plane, and the rich mystery of it is shaped into human thinking, human action, and even into a Christian humanism which has no Gospel. Theories of the Cross take the place of the Cross, and the theories ameliorate the strong meaning and message of Christ in his propitiatory suffering. Few theologians delve into the mysteries of sacrifice, scorning the Old Testament teaching on propitiation, preferring to develop soft options of their own, or romantic and useless rationalizations of the universal suffering of Christ. To them and others, the Cross is a landmark but no more, or it is sentimentalized into some non-propitiatory demonstration of love, but, as such, it is lifeless and meaningless.

In our day we need a resurgence of understanding the Cross, a regenerated theology of it, and a powerful proclamation of it by those who have been filled with the Spirit, who himself reveals the ‘deep things of God’, the very Cross and Resurrection of Christ, the great redeeming Atonement, and the Redeemer Himself. The Cross is not just for forgiveness, justification and sanctification, but it is for all the world in every element of its existence, its government, its life and its mercy. Great love reaches down to justify guilty men by grace, and great mercy reclaims them from endless misery.

Dynamic Opposition to Reconciliation

I have suggested that man’s opposition to the Cross—the Atonement—is because of the whole demand for our crucifixion with Christ. The Cross is a scandal (to the religious) and foolishness (to the intellectual). However, opposition does not begin and end with these two types. The powers of darkness, under Satan, are disintegrative forces. They seek to shatter God’s kingdom in order to establish their own. This can be seen from a reading of Psalm 2, where the nations set themselves against God—a theme strongly worked out in chapters 12 to 20 of the Book of the Revelation.
The arch-instigator of this rebellion is Satan. It is a theme which, of course, runs throughout Scripture. The reconciling power of the Cross—the blood of Christ—is therefore a threat to the whole system of Satan, including as it does rebellious man, who is virtually a slave of evil powers. We would therefore expect every energy of the world-system to pit itself against God, seeking to confuse humanity about God’s love-action in the Atonement. In II Corinthians 4:3–4 Paul wrote,

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.

We would expect, then, that in every way possible Satan would seek to minimize the reconciling power of the Cross, and would endeavour to raise up in humanity a deep dislike of that Cross. As we have observed, even some of those who have come to God through the Cross soon skirt it and some even desert it (cf. Gal. 1:6–9).

Conclusion to ‘The Reconciliation of All Things’

There may be some who have read this essay and have said to themselves, ‘That is the work of a man who has seen the basis but not the implications of the Gospel.’ Others will say, ‘That is a hard, dogmatic, and unappetizing Gospel.’ Yet others will say, ‘I once thought of things like that, but time has changed me. I have mellowed. I see the sorrows of the world. This Gospel the essayist espouses bypasses the suffering of the world. It lacks compassion.’ There will even be those who say, ‘Ah! This is the truth I once knew, and which I have lost. I need this truth. I have forgotten I was purged from my old sins. I have fashioned out a self-righteousness which needs to be crucified at the Cross.’ There may be those who remember the liberation once received who will say, with the old hymn-writer, ‘I must needs go home, by the way of the Cross, for the way of the Cross leads home.’ This, of course, may sound strange to modern ears, and sentimental. Sentimental it is, but the sentiment is not trivial. Indeed, it is profound.

I am trusting that there are readers of this essay who will see, and perhaps even for the first time, the wonder of the act of God in Christ, and that they will come to the Father, full of gratitude for the forgiveness of sins and the free pardon God gives out of His generous and warm love.

For those who remain angry for what they think God has done, or not done, let me say, ‘Christ was a man familiar with sorrow. He understood—and understands—our griefs and sorrows. He suffered our sins, and he bore our griefs and sorrows, and through his wounds our wounds are healed. Be comforted. Surrender to Him. Know the relief of reconciliation with Him.’

My conclusion is—without patronage or condescension or foolish dogmatism—that we would not be off on so many bypaths, human techniques, strange endeavours, exotic systems, esoteric and mystical ways if we were all to come to the Cross, and live daily in Christ crucified. Since all of the sufferings—and indeed all the experiences of all men and women throughout history—were
borne on the Cross, he having experienced them, then nothing happens in history in which he has not already been involved. This is the power of his Cross: that Death is triumphant in all of life. He can give us the wonder of reconciliation with God, and with one another.

As to the reconciliation itself, there will one day, of course, be a cosmic reconciliation, when all things will be unified in Christ, summed up and integrated under his Headship. The present reconciliation between God and man is a practical fact for those who have repented and believed. The harmony of God's true people proceeds as a present miracle. We are to live at harmony with all men—as much as lies within us. We are the peacemakers—making reconciliation. Peace has come to us through the Cross, and we bring that peace to others. Fierce dissident and dividing forces are operating in the universe, but they cannot succeed in establishing permanent division. Such forces will themselves be destroyed, and the forces of reconciliation will succeed. The work of reconciliation is not one only done at the end of time, but one which is proceeding now, and progressing. It will come to a climax of success when all things are unified in Christ, as they will also be ‘filled up’, harmonized and reconciled for ever.
Who from immortal love plans all
And makes that all to be. For him it is
As from him true, and unto him its End –
The glory that must be.
Within him then created joy
Its joyousness does know,
As too its peace, its full shalom.
Then why depart from it?

Dreams that are dreams beyond all dreams
Are lethal dreams, dreams unto death
Deceits that dream their death but think
Their hopes are hopes of life.
Such dreams devise a new reality
That empty is, and hollow is.
Fashioned on senseless glory –
Empty hope that baseless is
And reaches out
To endless emptiness.

Not then is peace for those who dream,
Whose energies full burst to make
The truthless true. Heady ambition
Reaches up to God to make
The dream come true. One dreams –
Not two–yet all may dream,
Caught in deceit together then devise
The oneness that destroys the One,
And shatters the integral unity.

The pain the divided know—the ones
Who turned upon themselves
Are caught within their own idolatry –
Is pain intolerable, pain that drives
The restless to more restless be
Unto the restless end. Then there

Is no place to flee, no goal to reach,
No true serenity. Ah! this the hell
That sets its own eternity.

Into the restlessness he came,
Into the shattered unity;
As Prince of all peace he came
From peace celestial and eternal joy:
He came to bring shalom. He came
To bind the shattered heart and give
His own tranquillity. He came to heal
The fretful mind, the fitful hand,
The darting eye, the care-hung heart,
And set all free.

As Prince of all peace he came.

There in that place hung high
He gathered into one
The pains of all the race, the guilts that burn
Upon the inward eye and heart,
The sins that stain the pure created heart
And all indelible remain
Until they lie upon his pure heart,
And in his pains dissolve to nought
And break the prisoner’s chains.

The spirit restless that sees love,
The heart in anger that sees pain,
The mind enraged that knows the rage
Of holy anger on its sins, sees Christ,
Sees bloody one all ragged on those sticks
Called Cross, and in his seeing sees all love
That bids him back to peace again.
So great a Cross! So great a debt!
So great a shatteredness of heart
That brings the heart to peace again!
So great a love we cannot see  
Apart from bloody Calvary.

That Prince of Peace brought all shalom  
To earth that earth may peaceful be,  
Pacific love pacific makes  
What once the deathful dream had dreamed  
To dread disunity. He unifies  
The shattered parts into one whole,  
Fills up what’s empty, makes it all  
Become one harmony. His Cross  
To one tranquillity. All idols fall,  
All dreams dissolve, all glory false  
Flees from its Lord; repentance comes  
In waves of cooling streams  
Till peace is wrought within the restless heart,  
And we are Home again!

The New Testament word 'peace' (eirene) is a beautiful word in any language. Its Hebrew form is known to many—shalom. It is used in greetings and salutations by Jews, and its Arabic equivalent by Muslims—salaam—is used wherever the followers of Mahomet live. The Old and New Testaments make great use of the word which conveys the ideas of security, protection, prosperity, well-being, lack of conflict, serenity and tranquillity. Even in conflict one can know 'the peace of God which passes all understanding'. In the light of the reconciliation of all things, redeemed human beings can have a rich and satisfying peace. It is the subject of such beautiful eschatological passages as Isaiah 11:1-10 and 2:1-4, from which we now quote in part:
The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’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 sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

When we look at our world scene and when we read our world history, we will say that such a state is impossible. When, however, we realize that the Messiah is ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’, then we realize that he came to bring ‘peace on earth among men with whom he is pleased’; and when we read the prophecies concerning God’s Temple in the final age, and the beauty and glory of the Holy City, then we see this fulfilment—the subject and dream of the prophets—is attainable. Indeed, for Christ to unify all things (Eph. 1:10), and fill up all things (Eph. 4:10; 1:23; Col. 2:10) is for him to reconcile all things (Col. 1:19–21) and so harmonize them by his love (Col. 3:14–15). Sadly enough, even those of us who think theologically often put this wonderful climax in history away in the future. In fact, it becomes theological theory instead of daily practice. We do not relate it to present life. We see so much anger, enmity, disharmony, dissonance and conflict—and this in most terrible forms—that we think it impossible to effect now the ultimate peace and unity that the world will know. We call ourselves ‘commonsensical’ when in fact we are far from that. Let us now look at the matter of the present practical outworking of reconciliation.

The Basis of the Unity of All Things

Unity is not merely something we can effect by our endeavours, holy and high-minded as they may be. Our hearts may ache for the world to come to love and unity, to peace and amity, but no such state can eventuate unless it begin with God, and be completed by Him. That is why we are driven to study the theology of God, man and creation. If we are to know the will of God and see it effected, then we must be one with that will, in which case our understanding of that will is essential. Understanding it, we can properly participate in it. We are not saying that until we understand the theology we are about to study that we cannot be in the business of reconciliation. We are saying that until we participate in the will of God—His plan and purpose for history—then we cannot be effective agents in bringing peace to our planet. For those who find theology difficult to understand, I suggest they push their ‘Fast Forward’ button, and recommence reading.
at the heading 'Reconciliation in Practice', on page 159. Having completed a reading of the essay, they may wish to come back to this point and study the theology which is the basis of biblical reconciliation.

Of course, the unity of all things must be found in God. The name in Exodus 3:14 of YWH (YAHWEH) was said to be I AM. That is, ‘I am what I always have been, what I am being, and what I will be,’ though such a statement is an accommodation to our time-thinking. ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last’ is another concession to human thinking, since we live in the sequence of time. We see and know God in time, but His nature is not merely His being in time but Who He is and what He does. The acts of ‘the living God’ communicate to us His nature. It is not only that for Him to be is to do—which is true—but it is what He does that indicates Who He is. Even then we must not assume we can fully understand what He does, i.e. sufficiently comprehend it.

The best statement of the unity of God is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.’ The statement ‘The Lord our God is one Lord’ is literally Yahweh, our God, Yahweh, One, and can be translated variously as ‘Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one’; ‘Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one’; ‘Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone’. Notice that Jesus said (Mark 12:29, RSV) ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ At the simplest level God is One, and this against the many gods, for Exodus 15:11 asks, ‘Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?’.

This is saying that other gods cannot do what God does. He is not in competition with them but is utterly other than what they are, so that essentially they are not gods at all. Yet He is not simply One as against the many, or superior to the many, or even over all the many, but He is uniquely One. He is One within Himself. His unity is essentially His Being. When, then, God demands total worship from His people—’and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might’—He is really showing that the unity of the covenant people is contingent upon them being one with His unity. To love with one’s whole being is to be united with one’s whole being with ‘Yahweh our God’, for ‘Yahweh is one’. To worship Yahweh and other gods is not only not to worship God authentically, but it is to deny His unique unity. It is this unique unity we now seek to comprehend. Before we leave the point, however, let us note that Jesus coupled love of God with love of one’s neighbour (cf. Matt. 22:37–40), i.e. the unity of God determines the unity of the worshipper, and the unity of the worshipper determines the unity of the (covenant) people. That is, God’s unity determines all unity, and so the two commandments are the essence of ‘the law and the prophets’. ‘The law and the prophets’ are all about the unity of God, and thus the unity of His people.

The Unity of God the Basis of All Unity

At this point we will not embark upon a proof of the Trinity. We will take the Christian dogma of the Triune God, especially as it is stated in the
Athanasian Creed:

......That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.......so we are forbidden.......to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.'

It is the relationship or unity of the three Persons we wish to comprehend, that is, as far as a human being can receive the revelation of this mystery.

The orthodox way of speaking of the Triune God is to show the fact of the Person of the Father, the Person of the Son, and the Person of the Spirit, and then to show that each Person has Deity. This is not too difficult if we take a certain exegesis of portions of the Scriptures. Then it is pointed out that there are certain elements which speak of an innate plurality in the Godhead, such as 'Let us make man in our own image', and 'who will go for us?'; whilst adding to the first reference, 'So God created man in his own image', and to the second reference 'Whom shall I send?' In these passages of Genesis 1:26–27 and Isaiah 6:8 we have both a plural and singular pronoun referring to God. The next step in orthodox presentation of the Trinity is to show the truth that God is love, and hence the Godhead is unity in love, and love in unity.

What I propose to do now is to leave this apologia and proceed with the idea of the relational unity of the Godhead. The Athanasian Creed speaks of ‘The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate’, i.e. that the Three have ever been. There never has been when the Father was not Father, when the Son was not Son, and the Spirit not Spirit. What is important to us is to see that God’s Fatherhood is not to be understood by using the analogy of human fatherhood, nor the Son to be understood by using the analogy of human sonship. At best human fatherhood and sonship can be but a faint reflection of essential Fatherhood and essential Sonship. That is why the Creed speaks of ‘The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible: and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible’. In Isaiah the prophet asks, ‘To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?’ (40:18; cf. 40:25; Micah 7:18; Exod. 8:10; 15:11). Whilst man is in God’s likeness, God is not in man’s likeness. Even so, we do have relational factors in human fatherhood and human sonship which help us to come to some understanding of the Divine relationships.

Before we proceed further, we should also see that human masculinity should not be the basis of trying to understand God’s ‘masculinity’. God is always spoken of as ‘He’, but we must never use the analogy of human masculinity, or we will prejudice true understanding of God as ‘He’–as ‘Father’ and as ‘Son’.

The Internal Social Relationships of the Triune God

Admitting the incomprehensibility of God, we nevertheless have Scriptures which bring us revelation of the relationships within the Trinity: nothing is incomprehensible to us which God chooses to reveal by His word. We repeat, revelation shows us all we need to know as human beings. Here Deuteronomy 29:29 is relevant: ‘the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law’.
God gives the knowledge that leads to practical obedience. There is no knowledge that is merely noetic, occultic or esoteric. In order to have knowledge of God, and especially of what we call 'the internal relationships of the Godhead', we doubt that there is a better place to begin to understand than the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel. In this long passage Jesus opens his heart to God his Father, and to those who heard his prayer. That opening of the heart is richly intimate and most revelatory. We recognize that it was the man Jesus who spoke to God, but his relationship with God as Father did not begin and end with his humanity. The whole Gospel testifies to the fact that he was one with the Father long before his incarnation. He was given glory by the Father 'before the world was made', and 'before the foundation of the world'. He could say, 'Before Abraham was I AM,' with all the connotations of that expression.

This Gospel also tells us that the one who became incarnate was always the Word (the logos), and that everything was made by him-statements which are supported in other New Testament passages, namely Colossians 1:15–17, I Corinthians 8:6 and Hebrews 1:2–3. When the Word became flesh he did not cease to be the Word. Likewise, when the writer of Hebrews tells us that God 'created the ages by [a] Son', he was 'Son' before he was incarnate, i.e. his Sonship preceded time. In regard to the Father and the Son, Paul sums up: 'for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.'

John 17 speaks of the full relationship between the Father and the Son, and the intimacy that has always existed, both prior to creation and in the present—the present time of his prayer. Statements such as the following reveal that firm relationship:

......all mine are thine, and thine are mine ;
......that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us;

The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one.

Jesus also made other statements, such as:

I and the Father are one;

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself;

......the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise;

I am in the Father and the Father in me;

He who has seen me has seen the Father.

Matthew's Gospel adds to these a similar statement:

......no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

These statements show that there is an identity of nature of the Father and the Son. Since 'Father' and 'Son' are not terms analogical but terms direct, then the terms 'father' and 'son' are not to be used in order to understand God as He is Father, and God as He is Son. In other words, the ontological relationships of the Father and the Son cannot be conveyed by human ontological relationships—especially as they are...
marred by sin—but the Divine relationships not only transcend in degree those which are human, but also transcend in quality. Yet whilst it is true that they are ‘wholly other’ they are not wholly beyond the comprehension we need to have as humans confronted with the Divine Nature.

This is shown by John 17:3 and 1 John 5:20:

And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

In the first reference eternal life is knowing God, and knowing God is eternal life. This is also the case in the second reference. The amazing fact is that we come to know God, i.e. as human beings can come to know God. Here we need not go into the mystery of such revelation, but we know the means God uses to reveal Himself are His word and His Spirit. John said, ‘And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth.’ Jesus said of the Spirit, ‘he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.....’ Paul said, ‘no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.......And we impart this in words.......taught by the Spirit.’ We can, then, comprehend the mystery of the Triune Godhead so far as we need to know.

What we know, then, is that there are Three Persons, and that the relationship between the Father and the Son is necessarily intimate, and that of love. The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father, and the Spirit of the Son. Whilst all Three have discrete Being, yet they are not three monads, or three deities. Their unity is that of ontological precedence of being. One hesitates to use the phrase ‘of hierarchical order of authority’, because the word ‘authority’ is corrupted in the minds of the human race, since it was rebellion against authority—in the Fall—which brought this word into disrepute and into the discard. It is clear enough that

. . . the Son can do nothing of his own accord;

When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me;

The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

It is also clear that the Holy Spirit does nothing of his own accord, for

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority [from himself], but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

The Son, then, cannot be a monad, for he is Son to the Father. The Father cannot be a monad, for He is Father to the Son. The Spirit cannot be a monad, for he has being as the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. If we cavil at this interpretation of the Johannine statements regarding the Son’s relationship with the Father, insisting that it is his earthly (incarnate) Sonship which makes him contingent upon the Father, then we must note that the Spirit, without being incarnate, was (is) also contingent upon God. The Spirit may not speak from himself, and when he does he may only tell what he has heard from God.
The Mutual Inter-dwelling of the Three

The statements ‘the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father’; ‘I am in the Father and the Father in me’; ‘the Father who dwells in me’; ‘I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love’; ‘even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee’; ‘that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one’, along with Paul’s use of ex-apostello—’God sent forth’, i.e. from or out of Himself—tell us of the intimacy of the Father and the Son. Incidentally, in the same context (Gal. 4:4–6) the same verb (exapostello) is used for the sending forth (out of Himself) of the Spirit.

Now this mutual inter-dwelling of the Three is because, and out of, the reality that ‘God is love’. It is no less, of course, out of the reality of God being righteousness, truth, goodness and holiness. The word ‘attribute’ may be useful, but God does not so much have attributes as He is the moral elements we have just stated. We say this because God is not love apart from these other elements, and in the ultimate they are all One. To have or be love without having or being holiness is impossible. Yet in speaking of love we are speaking of the oneness of God, His true unity, the pure social unity of the Three. When we use the word ‘love’ on the human level then we need the Divine revelation of its meaning and its action. We have sufficient statements in the New Testament that the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father, and that there is ‘the love of the Spirit’ to allow us to conclude not only that God is love, but that all Three love one another within the Godhead of Themselves. Nor is it merely

Our Need to Understand the Unity of the Godhead

In our pursuit of full unity we must comprehend the unity of the Godhead, or unity within manhood will neither be understood nor accomplished. For this reason we must seek to understand the extraordinary matter of ‘God is love’, i.e. the love that each member of the Godhead has for the others, so that we can also understand the love of God for man, and then man’s love for his fellow creature, since ‘we love, because he first loved us’. Failure to understand this will thoroughly impede all proper discussion of reconciliation. This can be seen from the following Johannine statements:

......the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand;
For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing;
For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again......this charge [command] I have received from my Father;
......I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father;
......and that thou hast sent me and hast loved them;
Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world......that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

From the above references we adduce the following points:
(a) The Father loves the Son and gives all things into his hands, i.e. the authority over all creation, and the ministry relating to redemption. The Father loves the Son for doing his redemptive work.

(b) It is in love that the Son is obedient to the Father.

(c) The Son does nothing but what the Father shows him, and it is the Father’s love to show him these things.

(d) The Son’s obedience shows his love for the Father to the world.

(e) The Father’s love for His elect is no less—and no other—than His love for His Son.

We must conclude that love, being one with all the attributes of God, and all those attributes working together appropriately and the Father, the Spirit and the Son having identity of nature, it is love which constitutes and sustains the unity of all things, i.e. within the Godhead, and within the creation made by God. The discrete being of each of the Three does not make Them monads, but rather is the true discreteness of life, and it is this which gives hope for mankind, since all humans are made in the image of God. Human beings cannot naturally be monads, since this is against man’s essential (created) nature. Sin is the denial of creatational sociality, and always tends towards making persons monadic. Reconciliation is the restoration of those relationships natural to created man, and which thus image the nature and action of God.

These elements, then, are absolutely essential to the understanding and practice of reconciliation, for if we do not know the basis of all relationships, we cannot understand the restoration to man of the relationships which were impaired by the Fall and its consequences.

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**The Reconciliation of All Things-II**

**Reconciliation in Practice**

**The Nature of Unity**

We must remind ourselves that the unitive nature of the Triune Godhead is reflected, functional and active via the image of God in man. Each human being made in the image of God is not a monad but a social being, and the whole human race is essentially social. This unity is moral, i.e. derives from ‘The Fountain of Life’—God so that ‘from it [the heart of man] flow the springs [issues] of life’, i.e. the moral issues of love, goodness, righteousness, holiness and truth (faithfulness). Whilst man is one with the God Who is One, then total unity will (must) prevail.

**The Loss of Unity in Creation**

In our previous study we saw that the break of angelic and human creatures with God has brought dissonance into the creation. Separations and divisions of every kind are now extant. The sin of man because of the Fall has brought dissident elements into the universe, and through the curse all creation is affected. Although man—by nature of the case—lives and moves and has his being in God, yet he does not volitionally dwell in God, nor does God relationally dwell in him (cf. Isa. 59:2), i.e. there is no relational unity. The tragedy of this has its personal, familial, racial and cosmic effects. Any reconciliation which comes will have to effect personal, familial and racial unity, and climax in the unity of the whole creation, i.e. of elements both celestial and terrestrial.
The Reconciliation of All Things

This was the subject of our former study, in which we saw that the separation between God and man came through the Fall, original sin (rebellion, the drive for autonomy), and thus separated man from God. Man had an essential need to worship, to have a dependency, and so he devised idols and lordships to fulfil these emotional, relational and functional needs. Because man is not centred in God he has no true source of unity—hence the great gulf between him and God, and the innumerable divisions which we have called personal, familial, racial and cosmic.

The work of the Cross removed the guilt of man and freed him from the domination of the world system, from Satan, the prince of this system, and from every other enemy. Man, through the Cross, has been reconciled to God. Christ, in defeating the dissident elements—the enemies of God—did so by taking away the guilt of His people, and making them one with himself. It was for this that Christ prayed in his High-Priestly prayer of John 17—a prayer at which we must shortly look. In this ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself’.

It has sometimes been said that man has to reconcile God to himself. It has to be seen that man—left to himself—would not see the necessity for such reconciliation, would not move to make such reconciliation out of a pure motive, and would be unable to effect acceptable reconciliation. It has to be admitted that man does seek to make self-atonement, but this is both the expression and compounding of his basic sin—his drive for autonomy, in which is the illusion that he can justify himself. It is better, then, to say that man has to realize he cannot effect reconciliation with God, but yet that he is duty-bound to do so. The fact is that God is the Prime-Mover in reconciliation, a matter which is set out in Leviticus 17:11:

> For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I [God] have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood which makes atonement, by reason of the life.

God, then, is the Initiator of reconciliation, and so Paul speaks of ‘Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation’.

The Indispensable Nature of the Atonement for Reconciliation

The whole point of our last study was that unless each person comes to repentance and faith and is crucified with Christ, i.e. comes to the effective work of the Atonement, then practical reconciliation with God and man cannot effectively take place. What we might call ‘internal experience of reconciliation’ cannot take place without the objective work of the Cross, and whilst this is sufficient, our understanding of reconciliation will be deficient if our beings do not grasp the significance of the Atonement. Indeed, a failure to understand the love of God dynamically will affect our understanding—and practice—of love, goodness, holiness, righteousness and truth. We must have dynamic union with God before we can have it with others. We have warned ourselves against humanistic ideas of reconciliation, and human attempts to effect such. The matter is of such
The Vandal

vast dimensions that human beings cannot even cope with personal, familial, racial and cosmic divisions, let alone effect their reconciliation.

The Reconciling Practice

Coming to Reconciliation

If we look at the requisite elements of coming to reconciliation with God, we see that they are dynamic. These things are repentance, faith, and turning (converting). Repentance and faith are gifts of God and not primarily works of man (Acts 5:31; 11:18). Through these, then, come the further gifts of God to man, namely forgiveness of sins, purification of sins, justification, sanctification, regeneration, adoption (sonship) and love. These gifts entirely alter everything for the believer, who can rightly claim, 'If any one is in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]. Old things have passed away, behold they [the old things] have become new.' It is this newness which comes from and gives reign to reconciliation so that we dwell in the Father, in the Son, and in the Spirit, and the Three dwell in us so that reconciliation now goes outwards to all persons, and to the creation.

Acting in Reconciliation

We first need to see the position into which the gifts of God have placed us. We are reconciled to God. We know the Triune God. We come into new relational living. Eternal life is to know the Father—'the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent'. Just as the Son knew (knows) the Father by relational affinity, so do we. 'Now we are the children of God'; 'We are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus'; 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God'; 'God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' ' Through the Son and the Spirit we are sons of God. The Son is our Elder Brother, and we are being conformed to his image so that he might be the first-born among many brethren. The Spirit is 'the spirit of Sonship', and he is 'the Spirit of our [your] Father'.

All of this is familial: hence Paul said:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family on heaven and earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith: that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of God which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

If we examine this passage, we see our familyhood comes from the Father, and with it all relationships. The Spirit and the Son also dwell in us, and we come to know the love of Christ and to be filled with all the fullness of God—an amazing reality. Thus we are led into the fruits of the Lord's High-Priestly prayer. We will repeat some of these elements already quoted:

......all mine are thine, and thine are mine ;

......that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one : The glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and
thou in me, that they may become perfectly one.

Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be one with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. . . that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

We saw that the oneness of the Father and the Son is because of love, because of their indwelling of each other, and because they were One in vocation, in the plan of God in creation, salvation, and the ultimate unification of all things—the cosmic reconciliation:

I and the Father are one;

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself;

. . . the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise;

I am in the Father and the Father in me;

He that has seen me has seen the Father.

Now we need to see the reality of man's union with God, his indwelling of God, and God's indwelling of him. In this way is the reconciliation true and dynamic in effecting reconciliation in all cases. In John 14 Jesus spoke of the Spirit coming to dwell in his disciples. He added, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.' In John 15 Jesus called for the action of 'abiding'. Just as he was (is) dependent upon the Father for all things, so they will be. Jesus spoke of the love that would be experienced by this:

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide

in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.'

In his First Letter John spoke of 'the abiding', by saying, 'All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.' Again:

No man has ever seen God; if we love one another God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit . . . God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Paul also has passages which refer to this dwelling of us in God and God in us: 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'; 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'; 'For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.' He also speaks of our bodies being 'the temples of the Holy Spirit', and that all God's people are (corporately) the temple of God, i.e. the place of His indwelling. He confirms this by saying that we are all part of the growing holy temple of God, 'in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.'

All of these statements add up to a saying of Peter's that we are 'partakers of the divine nature' (II Pet. 1:4). We are not divine, nor ever will be, but participate in God because of His dwelling in us, and our dwelling in Him. We conclude, then, that since the Godhead is the true unity, and we dwell in that unity and are indwelt by that unity, then there is an irresistible thrust and drive to 'follow after reconciliation with all men' and to 'live peaceably with all'.
Personal Reconciliation

Most of the New Testament precepts should be read in the light of the moral-ethical system of covenant Israel. In that law every possible provision was made for ‘keeping the peace’, i.e. keeping each reconciled to his neighbour (cf. Lev. chs 18–19). The law of love to God and the law of love to one’s fellows summed up ‘all the law and the commandments’, and James and Paul—to saying nothing of John—indicate that this is how it is in the true ‘Israel of God’. Thus the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount spring from the former (Mosaic) covenant, even if they appear to transcend them. To have anger is most reprehensible; indeed, it is about the worst element one can have (cf. Matt. 5:21–22). There are injunctions for coming to reconciliation with one’s neighbour (Matt. 5:21–26; 18:15–20). In the New Testament Letters there are many exhortations to relational reconciliation.

Familial Reconciliation

The church is looked upon as ‘the family of God’ (cf. I Tim. 3:15; 4:1–3; Heb. 3:1–7; Eph. 2:19). Because it is ‘in the Father’ (I Thess. 1:2; II Thess. 1:2)—since all are sons of God—then the family peace must be kept.

Racial Reconciliation

In the family of God there are no differences which can divide, for ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:29; cf. I Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:10). The famous passage of Ephesians 2:11–22 shows that racial reconciliation has come through the Cross. The hostility between man and God, and race and race has been brought to an end. Nor do those of Israel ‘have the edge’ on those Gentiles who have become believers, since they are ‘fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers in Christ Jesus through the gospel’. Nations have to be baptized ‘into the Name of’ the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

 Nations are to be baptized into God! Is this not the defeat of the nations (cf. Ps. 2; Acts 1:8; Rev. 19:15), and the bringing of them to dwell in God (cf. Rev. 7:9–14; 21:22–26)? These are the nations which will bring their glory into the Holy City—the nations whom Satan seeks to deceive but who are ultimately smitten by the sword in the hand of Christ the Conqueror! This is the ultimate racial reconciliation.

Meanwhile the church is the true ‘Israel of God’, the house of prayer for all nations (cf. Isa. 2:1–4; 56:6–8).

Cosmic Reconciliation

As we saw briefly in our earlier study, ‘all things’ are to be reconciled by ‘the blood of the Cross’, i.e. by the Atonement. The fruit of the Atonement, i.e. ‘the travail of his soul’, is the unifying of all things:

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

This is the cosmic reconciliation which comes with the defeat of all evil, when all things are ‘filled up’ by Christ, when the curse has run its
course, and all things are harmonized by love. This is when every enemy shall have been put down—the last enemy being destroyed will be death—and when the Holy City descends out of heaven adorned as a Bride for her Husband.

Conclusion

We are forced to see that it is ‘by the blood of his cross’ that God will ‘reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace......’ This means that all reconciliation, whether personal, familial, racial or cosmic, can come only through the Cross—all other endeavours are futile, bound to fail. The extraordinary dynamics of the Cross are the rich and full expression of the love of the Triune God, working in sociality to effect the irreversible triumph of total reconciliation. In practice this means we are to live in discerning love. We derive all our relationships from God—from the ‘social Trinity’. The dynamics of reconciliation are all present in the Persons in Whom we dwell, and Who dwell in us. There is no overall strategy that we can devise. Any blueprint there may be is in the hands of the Triune God. It is the richest of all revelations to know that God loves me—really loves me—loves me no less than one member of the Three loves the other members of that Unity. This must not only be known by us, personally, but the same love must work through in all our relationships. This means that spouses can love each other, and no marriage need be seen as beyond repair and rehabilitation. No two persons are necessarily incompatible. Parents and children can become a family-in-unity.

Anger and resentment, bitterness and enmity can be dissolved and a new unity replace them. Families can cease feuding and come together as the larger family. Racism, colour-consciousness and anger from injustice can change to genuine unity. Yet all of this must be through the Cross, the transformation of sinful men by forgiveness, purification, membership within the family, all effected by the Spirit of love.

We must be realistic and recognize that no reconciliation can be effected apart from repentance, faith and turning from what was to Christ himself. When it comes to one person being reconciled to another, there must be love as from God, repentance for one’s own divisive sinfulness, and faith that love can heal. This must apply in marriages, in familial relationships, and relationships within the whole community of man. When it comes to nations once pitted against each other,* then there must be national repentance and international repentance, and where this is in Christ, lasting reconciliation can be achieved. We must recognize that reconciliation is not primarily individualistic. It is not privatized for persons, or even for ecclesiastic groups, but it is structured for nations, and contains within itself (Himself) all the dynamics which can effect reconciliation. There is, of course, false repentance which is often little more than regret or dry remorse. Even so, it is a testimony to the fact that nations ought to repent and convert.

For the other—that climactic eschatological

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* Alexander Solzhenitsyn has a magnificent essay ‘Repentance and Self-Limitation’ in From Under the Rubble (Fontana/Collins, 1976, pp. 105–143), in which he discusses the matter of internal repentance within a country, and repentance towards another country (or countries).
reconciliation—then let us remember that it, too, comes from and through the Cross. The measure of repentance, faith, family and sonship—along with the other gifts of creation and redemption—are all working for God, for the ultimate liberation of the creation 'from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God'.

Postscript

Since this essay was written in September 1989, a whole shift in the affairs of nations has taken place, and is continuing to take place. Much of it is happening in Eastern Europe, much of it throughout the USSR. Nations and peoples who for over seventy years have been under the grip of Communism are emerging in their own rights, with their own distinctive nationalities. The essay written by Alexander Solzhenitsyn—'Repentance and Self-limitation'—has virtually come into fulfilment. We are living in extraordinary times. Events are moving so quickly that commentators and analysts cannot keep up with them. Third World countries are feeling the effects in depth, and the resonance has been sensed in many places.

Whatever may be the outcome of this dominoes-movement of events is yet to be seen. What we do know is that the Christian church has been very much alive in the countries which are now knowing a new revolution—a turning to democracy. Doubtless democracy—of itself—will prove no saviour, for it will not fill the spiritual gap which this generation is sensing. Even so, the happenings and events show us how quickly the affairs of nations can change, and change radically. For us this can be no less than God’s action, and no more than that. If we have eyes to see, we can see God at work, perhaps more clearly than for generations.

The near-present outcome may not mean that all nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, but the events may serve as an enacted parable for us, showing us what God is doing—'through the blood of the Cross'. In other words, faith in the ultimate reconciliation and peace of all things can be stimulated and encouraged by the present events. The cosmic power and work of Christ will bring (i.e. is bringing) about the age of peace and serenity.

Given in all this, yet the cosmic fulfilment comes about when the personal fulfilment is working. Personally, I can and must have peace with God through Christ, and through his Gospel of reconciliation. I must beat my sword of human militancy, aggression and ambition into a plowshare that will break new ground, and that will win by its humility. I must turn my murderous spear into a pruning hook in such a way that peace—brought to earth by Christ—will come to all warring factions and break their wills and win them to love, joy and the very peace that is its own self.
Once in the high Baluchi hills
Ten thousand feet into the peerless blue
Of the dry sky above Quetta,
We wandered in careless search
Of the ancient Ziarat,
That shrine of the Muslim saint,
The old peer of Mahomet
Who—long dead—
Imparted wisdom to his living devotees.

We wondered were we lost—
She, and the three children,
And I—we wondered
What might happen in these high hills
Where we met no man,
And the goats
Stared thoughtfully from crag to crag.
We wondered whether
You could be lost forever
Staring at things
Like the wise mountain goats.

Almost without warning
We came across the crater.

We stood at the end of a million years
Nigh on toppling to a thousand feet below—
Ten thousand all in all.
Unwarned we could have walked
Into the peerless sky, the blue
Of the yawning heavens.
Suspended, standing at the sharp edge,
And—diminuted suddenly—
We marvelled at the beauty
Of this unheralded vastness.

The inner fears of a possible lostness
Dissolved in the confronting magnitude.
The ancient movement of the vast volcano
Rehearsed itself so silently
In our minds and spirits,
Enlarging them until we understood
The dimensions of us—of man—
And all creation. If—within ourselves—
We had been dwarfed by life,
Then suddenly we expanded
Under the silent surging
Of the magnifying magnificence.

There we remain in memory suspended.
There we peacefully accept
Our healing diminution.
Having delivered his lecture he felt drained. Not wholly drained, just a little emptied. It was often like that after giving a study. He ate his lunch thoughtfully, wondering what the Saturday afternoon would bring forth. He smiled a trifle, remembering his childhood Saturdays. There were the honey-jumble biscuits he used to buy with his pocket-money. That was after the lawns had been mowed and the edges cut. His father would look over what he had done before letting his mother give him the money.

The arthritis had crept up from his knees to his hips. That had been during the week. It was a reminder to him of his frailty, and also of his mortality. Frailty he did not much mind, and mortality brought no fears—only a tinge of excitement at what lay beyond the life he was living. He was telling the arthritis to make itself unseen this bright afternoon. Spring was running through his mind like the stream of blood that was pumping through his body. He wasn't even a trifle nostalgic on this October afternoon. It wasn't honey-jumbles he wanted (did they still make honey-jumbles?). No, he wanted to be out in the garden.

'Don't bother about the garden,' they had told him. 'We will do it for you,' they had said.

He had been grateful—what with seeming frailty of body, and such reminders of mortality—but he loved sowing seed, visualizing its awakening and its growth. He loved planting the seedlings he had raised in the hot-house. The pain experienced in bending and planting was negligible. His mind was dynamic beyond the limits of his body.

The watchful woman who was his wife would not let him drive the car. She liked doing it for him, and he found he could extend his reveries when she drove. He liked heaping up his ideas, piling them up, and up and up. He thought them all to be good. He wondered whether his computer could contain them all. Megabytes of ideas he had, and they would run riot or run away if he did not capture them on the disk.

They were busy at the garden centre. Cars parked everywhere. It was something like a fair. Flowers rioted along the pavement, under the awning, and into the cool heart of the shop itself. He found the seed stand and picked out the seeds he wanted—beans, sweet-corn, large-hearted lettuce, packets of carrots and parsnips. They would all be ready for the Christmas table.

Christmas! His thoughts stopped, then spilled out like a barrow when it is tipped. He smiled a bit and picked out some beetroot seed. The seedlings were mostly too dear. He would get them cheaper at the supermarkets.
Then he stopped his running reverie and looked about him. He noted the large number of people, moving here and there. Some were after earthenware pots, and some after potting mixture. Others were lifting up potted flowers or shrubs and regarding them. Yet others were peering at hanging ferns.

The old sense of purposelessness invaded him. What were they about doing? Why were they here? To what point was it all?

'Shallow lives,' his old mind told him. 'Trying to snatch a bit of transcendence. Everything is so dull—so horizontal.'

'So suburban,' another part of his mind told him.

He went out into the vast area under shade-cloth, and there was a riot of colour. Most of the plants were in pots—azaleas, late rhododendrons, early annuals, colours tumbling over one another in carefree abandon. From the rafters hung fern-baskets of fresh green, and amidst them baskets of growing flowers. It struck him in a moment how unbelievably beautiful it all was. Women were decked out in floral patterns, and men had their beach shirts with startling colours. Suddenly it seemed to him that...this on the horizontal? Was everybody a flat-earther? Were they all doing it out of custom, from tradition—mindlessly?

The beauty chided him. The riot of colours told him there was transcendence in all this cultivated buying and selling, planting and seeding, sowing and waiting. It was all part of an unassuming miracle. Transcendence was descending like a gentle spaceship from some alien planet.

He knew they could not do without it—without this beauty. They needed growing things like trees, and shrubs, and flower annuals and perennials. Flowers soft and flowers firm, flowers bending gently, and others turned stiffly to the sky or open to the sun. Flowers that barely lifted themselves above the soil, and others ranging in orders of lowliness and height of simplicity and majesty, of beauty and rigid in their social scorn, like the haughty sunflowers or the delicate delphiniums.

It all came to him, in a flash. These people really needed their flowers and ferns, their scrub and their shrubs, their hedges and their trees. They needed it all. They were made for something more than bitumen roads and hard paths, for barren wastes and sterile hills.

Yet it was not until he saw the young woman, thoughtful as she was—pondering what she was to buy, and perhaps envisaging the outcome—that his thought came to a change. He thought, 'She is just a person,' but he knew that to be untrue. No one is 'just a person'. At first he saw her as just another woman, along with all other women such as mothers and sisters and daughters and granddaughters; interesting, real, but not to any great point.

He knew in the next moment as he watched her that it was all to some point—her being a woman and the person she was—although he
knew not to what point. It did not matter that he should know. God was with the woman. God had created her. He had given her life, form, beauty, and at this very moment she was in His hands. Maybe He was talking to her in His silent way, helping her to know what she should do. She was examining first some terracotta garden things, and then her little purse. She would have to make a decision. It was a moment—the whole of the morning study, the midday meal, the drive to the garden centre and the medley of flowers, plants, seeds and human beings—and the moment came together quietly and gently. Indeed it all stood still, just poised in the Spring afternoon. His restless mind ceased from asking questions about it all, or from coming to some brilliant understanding. Without seeking to understand—he knew—he knew all. He knew that beyond him and his human gifts the great sovereignty of God regarded all things and that He was drawing everything with deft hands of kindness towards its ultimate goal.

* * *

In the car the radio was delivering a lecture on the art of growing flowers—where they should be according to their height and colour, according to where they should amass, or where they should stand in slim and separate splendour.

His mind did not question the brilliant lecturer. He allowed her all her thought: thought of patterned gardens, ordered landscapes, and ancient beauty of forms—Greek forms, Roman forms, and forms English. It was all part of the manifestation of the God Who cared, whether He was playing out a drama in an African drought, or bringing retribution via some other judgement, or just revelling in His humanity—the humanity He had created—as though He sought now (in this very domestic garden centre) to reproduce in floral fecundity the garden that had once been theirs—the paradisical beauty, without which they could not fully be themselves.

It was as though for a few moments the cherubim guarding the ancient way, and even the flaming sword had gone—maybe for a sip and bite of afternoon tea—and in the interim he—the meditative man—was looking into the primeval garden.
Flesh calls to flesh; heart cries to heart
In the upwards yearning
For the true desired union,
The union that He made
For the man and his maid.
The warm palpable union
Is the true expression
Of the union within the heart and spirit
As two become one
In the other-centred selflessness.

Only in the union is the expression,
And in the expression is the union
Made true. In the image of the Three
Who are One without divisions,
Do the united two
Become the one flesh, the one spirit.

When the division comes,
When the anger spurts upward
In the disturbed heart; then it is
That the rending comes,

The intolerable pain, the anguish
As other-centred self returns
To self-centred otherness.
This is the deep pain,
The searing of the tender nerve
The cruel cauterization.

Each had cried out to each,
And each had given to the other
The secret heart, the hitherto
Undisclosed. The intimacy
Had whispered upwards from the
Hidden core, the yielded self,
Only to find the union spurned.
All of that purity–entirety of love–
Plunged into nether gloom
And the dim darkness
Into which the spirit returns
Encapsulated in the pain,
The unremitting agony.

Where go, now that the heart
Has given all it has? The abyss
Looms large to the puzzled eyes,
The baffled gaze that... None knows that deep abyss–
Now cracked to infinite depths
Out of the first-love union.
None knows the cries that come
Uncalled by the lips; uncalled yet called
Out of the depths to Him.

And deeper still those cries become
When the beloved no longer loves
But turns the eyes and heart
To other love—the lesser love,
The love not joined by God or man,
The love—so-called—denying love
In the illicit union.

A life is given to life;
When body’s joined the spirit too
Joins in the unutterable fusion.
How can this break?
Who can return what once was given
In the irreversible act?
The dream of the total welding
Becomes the terrible nightmare
In the shattering of the unity.
What pain would God endure
If Father and Son and Spirit, too,
Turned inwards to Highest Self
In lowest egotism? Such pain
Is reflected when the life is spurned
That poured its love upon the other.

These are the days of creature joys
When spirits mean suck honey sweet
Like blood from others, feast upon
The deep delights so simply given,
And having feasted move anon
To another flower, a nectar thing
From which to drain the life.

Out of the fracture—the shattered thing
Of broken marriage—comes the crueller pain
Of the young dismayed, the familial spurned
In ceaseless anger, harsh despair,
The lonely horror of the love denied,
And aching yearning for the peace that is

The natural birthright.
Serenity once filched
Brings bitterness to bear
Upon the spirit baffled by
The insensate treachery.

There is no place for spouse to hide,
Or orphaned child to find security
But in the heart of Father-God.
He Husband is to lonely wife,
Is comfort to the brideless man
And Father to the child bereft
Of natural love. In Him alone
The hurt is healed. In Him alone
Such love returns.

Yet all the while
The crime of selfishness consumes
The one who’s selfish, till the end
When all is judged.
That bitter day shall fully show
The crime of breaking faith with God.
In breaking faith with spouse,
With child, and all the human race,
The sad indignity of what was done
Shall haunt to all eternity.
The scream leapt up in his mind, swirling like a desert whirlwind, like a twirling, tapering cloud that surmounted his consciousness and ripped the pure blue of serenity apart as it resounded, mounting higher and higher in its shrill anger, its demoniacal hatred and billowing wrath. There was a high hell in its frustration of expression. Had he been able, he would have pulled the high deity from his stupid throne and cast him across the flaming abyss below him until he was cast out beyond the pitch-black horizon.

The warden saw him and click-clicked with his tight tongue. ‘Another one of those days,’ he muttered, and strengthened his fists in readiness, his fingers fiercely against his palms; but the man on the bed just kept his eyes as two stabbing jets of black, biding his time. In his mind the scream kept going around and around, vibrant, swirling, twirling, cannoning against the dark perimeters of his brain, banging backwards and forwards while the intolerable aching went on.

One part of him knew there was nothing he could do—nothing until the invisible passion expressed, vaunted and expended itself; until he went down into the deep sombre pit of his own making, and lay as a writhing, twitching creature on the dark bed of his own delirious death. He would die in the growing terror until it had exhausted itself and everything had become cessation, frozen movement, fossilized fury, impassioned but futile nothingness. Only then would his mind cease its reverberations, except, perhaps, for a thin and pitiful whimper, a silent wailing that attested the next visitation of unbidden death.

After the death he would know nothing. Had peace come he would have known that, since this would have been the unknown. Had it been the unwinding of the hard knot in the intestines of his mind, then there would have been the relief that had never yet come. He did not know what it was, but his keen and intelligent mind sought some sanity in the matter, some understanding. It was when comprehension did not come that the swirling mass of his mind—the massive burgeoning of his bitterness—would break out of his momentary control and fling him again into the upper storms of uncontrollable fury.

Perhaps a demon! That had been the only thought of all which ever gave him momentary—though jagged—peace. Then the shrill laughter of accusations would come splitting through his mind as extended pointing talons, taunting him that there could be no demon unless he were it, for a demon has its limits but he had no limits. The madness of it would seize him and his own shrill cry would be a worse indictment than could come from any demon, and the horror and terror would draw up the boiling cauldron of his fury until it spilt across the taut membranes of his mind and scalded the shuddering nerves of his super-sensitized spirit.
Because he was no fool, and because he had unusual brilliance of mind, he would keep shrieking back to himself that this was not himself, that some horrible parasite from some hideous hell had fastened on him in some unconscious, some unprotected moment of his history. Perhaps in conception—how he hated the concept of conception—or perhaps in one of those few fair days when faint dreams had come, the presentiment of a paradise for the mind and the spirit. He never dared to go back to those pale presentiments, lest his anger become unbounded and he destroy the whole universe in his frustration. He was no believer in a blind fate, for he was certain the deity had picked him out for the hottest hell of all, the special burning brimstone set for the vandal of all vandals.

The warden turned about and retraced his steps. Sometimes he could almost read the hatred that lay in the dark pits of the man's eyes, but though he was himself a strong man out of some anger of his own, he never dared read deeply and ultimately lest he provoke the raging beast of the other man itself, so that it came leaping upon him. He had seen men in the delirium tremens, and knew that ten men could scarcely hold the demoniacal at bay until the harsh sharpness of the needle had sedated the twitching nerves and muscles.

He knew he could only be an effective warden because he knew something of the same dark spirit. Long ago he had learned to harness the hardness of his own self. It was a deliberate training he had exercised, and the man on the bed knew it. He knew there was an inexorable law that refused the right of one person to express his fury to the uttermost. In his own private mind, and even in the dark reaches of the night, a man may vandalize to the full expression of his will, but if he go beyond a certain point then the utterance must be judged, and the action be brought to court, and the conscience itself be summoned to take the judgement, the spirit to receive its execution.

The warden knew he had right on his side, though he never cared—or even dared—to rationalize that right. Whilst he knew he was not a righteous person, he knew full righteouness as he guarded the human race from the outbreakings of this wild creature. His mind fought the mind of the other, and the other evaded the conflict, determined to battle only with the deity himself—the inexorable but evil and passionless deity. It was not that he had never battled human beings—he had, but only because they mirrored something of the god he had imaged in his own mind. He knew in his depths—and this was the deepest source of his anger—that in some way he imaged the same deity, and he hated the bondage of this despicable affinity.

* * *

Very early on he had begun the human vendetta. As far back as he could remember, he had despised them—those other humans. He kept his dislike to himself, masking his mind, but they who were in many ways so naive began to suspect his attitude towards them. He felt justified in concealment, and gave them what they thought they needed, but this fed his scorn. To any other who dared to dominate him, or tried to rule his spirit, he gave short shrift. He knew his strength, and
soon they knew it. Some simply withdrew from the battle in puzzlement, but others interacted and wondered at the wounds, and how they had come.

In this way he protected himself, but it was not about protection that he lived. It was about destruction. That was why he attacked beautiful things. The ugly he despised, for he had them hidden in his own spirit. It was the things which claimed some glory, or even dared to confront him with his own ugliness, that he hated. To score a richly ducoed vehicle of noble lines and aristocratic lineaments gave him the deepest satisfaction. A knife or a change coin would do the trick. He was never savage in his defacement, only pausing long enough, and going deep enough, to make the beauty seem pathetic, to deject the magnificent, and to cauterize the aristocratic.

At first he would wait and watch for the affects of his vandalism. He despised the sorrow of the mob for the indignity he had done. He knew they envied the beauty and the magnificence that another had captured and enslaved, and he felt he had brought a kind of honesty to the human race. Not that he ever sought justification. He could never remember being wrong, and he scorned simply being right. He never justified himself, but then he never exposed himself; not even to himself. The deity was wrong, and that made everything else wrong.

Sometimes a person would cross him, hint that he was unusual, criticize his mind, or despise his way, and the fury within him would leap up, but he was careful never to show his anger. It was his passionless neutrality that terrified most who knew him. Others simply scurried out of his way,

but time and again he had been caught, not because of what he had done, but because some could not leave well alone. They had some insistence of spirit, some inner uneasiness that made them gather others about them, and herd him into a corner and momentarily entrap him. Only then would the anger burn out and terrify them. When they would withdraw, his scorn for them would cauterize their spirits. They could never forget.

There were, of course, the coarse, passionless ones, the insensitive creatures with the minds of law who doggedly opposed him, and hunted him down—whether with words or with weapons—and he would seek to evade them. Had he always won he could not be here, now, in this ward and on this bed, but in regard to them he would bide his time, not just for revenge, but for escape, for frustrating their perverted legalism, their deviant sense of justice. He would cheat them of fulfilment.

He had left his family early on in life to go on to the streets, because he wanted more time to vandalize. Those primitive efforts had lacked subtlety but they had been effective. The paint spray-cans had expressed the mind of him in whorls of ugliness, and innuendoes of uncleanness. Now he was beyond much of that kind of thing. He was far more subtle, far more penetrating to the insecure minds of the mob, and destructive of their uneasy peace. He knew they thought there was a beast 'out there'—and in those days he had chuckled, delighting in his own form of terrorism. They deserved nothing less.

Time and again others who seemed to have been of his own mind had tried to join with him.
A myriad of pictures—memory pictures—could be recalled at any moment. He kept that gallery open for his own titillation. They would come to him, confident that they had a fellow-hater and a fellow-rebel in him, but he only had contempt for them. He knew they were seeking strength, support, justification for what they were doing. They saw his cold loathing for them and scuttled away like rats in a sewer.

It was not that he thought of himself as a lone wolf. He never thought aloneness was necessarily loneliness, and if it was, then so much the better. It was not even that he was an anarchist savagely seeking to destroy society. That would have to spring from too high a view of society, an admission that they had succeeded. No, it was the deity against whom he waged primary war, and one day he would topple him for the obscenity of creation and life, the deceit of beauty, and the impurity of pomp.

He never lacked paint for his canvas or canvas for his paint. He knew the way to destroy what they called reality was to oppose it in itself, to suppress what was, by the accomplishment of what was not. His present psychiatrist was an indolent idiot, a careless optimist. He was like an animal lover who wanders into a den of lions—all appreciative, and not anticipating the rending. He had cold detestation for this brilliant fool. He let him be deluded. He knew the man could be destroyed in a trice, but he was not worth the game. Indeed, there was to be no game.

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What the psychiatrist knew—for all his naivety—was that his patient had a mind brilliant beyond any he had known. Guileless as he was, he knew it could be unbelievably destructive. He bided his time, not knowing what to do. He had read reams of the man’s writings, and knew him to be no less brilliant than Feurbach or Nietzsche, and more cunning than these two.

He had worked out the pattern very well. The man would tackle the most beautiful of all things in the world of art, of music, or of writing. He never feared to ravage the most accepted, the most traditional, but did so in a way which transcended the spray-paint can. He called integrity into question, he made sweet bitter and bitter sweet, and then demeaned them both, twice over. Men and women, horrified by his vandalism, might be drawn back to what he had defaced, simply to revive their old understanding and to restore integrity to the object or the piece, but it was never the same again.

Long ago he had made puerile the human body, the human spirit, and the human mind. There was nothing here to pioneer; centuries of that kind of beauty-defacement had been done already. One of the keys was prurience, the itch of a person to satisfy morbid lust, and in doing so to utilize the purest for a mean perversion. He knew the secret of coarse humorists—to put down what the high-minded understood to be the most beautiful, the most sacrosanct and the most indicative of the love of the deity. Such self-deceit brought a sneer to his mind. Crude humorists had long ago debased the body, giving pet-names to the reproductive organs, ridiculing them by making them personal entities in themselves, causing them to promise so much to a lust-hungry prurient race, and then cheating them at the point of
seeming fulfilment. He, however, was far more subtle, far more insinuating, far more deadly.

Had he made the body only ridiculous, that would have been something, or had he made it seem evil then that would have been worse, but he seemed to unmask it for a nothing, a pathetic, stupid nothing—promising all, but giving nothing. It was not just a vain thing, but a hopeless puerile thing. As was the body, so was the mind, and as was the mind, so the spirit. The psychiatrist had traced this all with wonderment, but because he had his own idolatry—the salvation of the twisted mind—he blundered on.

The warden was no blunderer. That was not his mentality. He knew the danger of the man on the bed to true morality and the human race, and to the tradition that kept society sane, and kept it operative. The subtlety of the mad mind before him he did not know, nor care to know. He was better armed against it when he did not have to fight it with its own weapons. He knew he would be no match for the mind now diseased beyond all redemption. He understood the savagery that was down in the human spirit, for that he had encountered many times. He was ... and no man of pity. He was simply supported by his own blunt legalism. He stood as secure in that as any high priest of any profession. He also despised the real high priest of the profession—the psychiatrist—for an eyeless fool.

Mad mind, sane warden, and foolish therapist were no match—though they knew it not—for the simple ward nurse. The three thought her stupid, inane, and mindless, though they acknowledged a certain virginal freshness about her, a gentle simplicity, but they classified it as naivety.

Two of them recognized the danger she was in, and a chaplain who often called also recognized the danger. He was there, in the ward, at that moment.

The warden thought she would be attacked; that the anger of the mad patient would not tolerate all he hated—the implicit simplicity and faith she had in deity, in creation, and in humanity. She must surely be destroyed. The patient thought her simple and easy—too easy for his liking. He desired a more informed and passionate opponent—someone competent in the intricacies of human thinking. The psychiatrist was simply professional in his assessment. Persons of her type oversimplified situations, not understanding the complexity of the human spirit.

In their own way all three were right—the warden, the psychiatrist and the chaplain. Even so, they watched the drama. All three had this one thing in common—a sense of the dramatic. None of them would have been in the business of life were it not for that.

The young woman was unaware of drama. She had a simple faith which many of her friends thought to be too simple. They knew that things could not be as this young woman saw them. Even though many claimed to have a faith like hers, they did not claim to have one as hers, nor did they want it.

He knew that his hour had come again. He felt the rising of the anger and the hatred, but mostly of the frustration. He had spent the years focusing his hatred and contempt upon the deity, and all that he had created, and all that was, and his vandal.
spirit said he should launch the barrage of his weaponry, and make the final assault upon the citadel of the deity. Had it been the old days, he would have taken the thing most representative of the deity—most claimed by that deity to represent himself—and he would have defaced it, deforming it into something which made the holy unholy, and the unholy holy. Nothing had ever failed to yield to his ability, everything was twisted into the most leering of perversions or the most futile of the things pathetic. Reality was annihilated, and nothing remained substantial. The deceit of all things was unmasked, and by this deceit he towered as a deadly deity above all that had been true. The world was silent and empty at his feet.

The nurse—the naive young woman before him—typified all he had hated, but this time he was deceived. He did not think her worthy of his destructive powers. He had no wish to vandalize her. If, however, his mind would suddenly recognize her for what she was—a genuine daughter of the deity, pure and noble and regal in her simplicity—then his rage would have known no bounds, whatever his cunning may have dictated. Somehow—by some means or another—he would have destroyed her.

The high-pitched scream in his mind was caught, paralysed and suspended, as he would make deadly onslaught upon the despised and hated deity. He could not and would not believe the simple beauty of her smile, the gentleness of her attention. She offered him a cup of tea and a biscuit, for it was the time of morning tea in the ward. His mind was momentarily stunned by the affront.

The warden looked at her curiously, but he was alert. The psychiatrist paused, looking up from another patient. The chaplain who knew the patient, and knew the things he thought, felt his heart leap in terror. The young woman proceeded to offer the gift. At the back of her mind was the grace of God, and of this she had a most unusual understanding. She sensed guilelessly that the man was burrowing into her mind, trying to know what she knew. She cared not what he thought, whether he accepted what she was thinking, or hated what she saw. She just knew it to be true. If he knew it was true that would be enough, no matter what his response or his reaction.

In fact she was not naive—not as naive as the crazed patient, or the warden, or the psychiatrist, or even as the chaplain. She was simply one woman of whom it had been said, 'To the pure in heart all things are pure.'

The man on the bed knew that god—the deity—had never fought him—never. This was what always kept him in anger. He had always won, had always vandalized the venerable, and the pure and the holy, and the deity had done nothing. He did not know whether his anger was that the deity was not strong, that what he had brought into being was capable of victory over him, but his rage was that there had been no conflict, no personal battle, no closing in, no wrestle. So then, as yet he did not know the strength, either of the deity or of himself.

The warden knew that this was the moment. He had long prepared for it, and prepared other ward nurses—male ones. His eyes flickered here and there to alert them. The chaplain felt a sickening surge in his breast. He could smell the doom over the long line of beds. The psychiatrist
thought it best not to look, but his mind was not on the mild man to whom he had been talking.

The small, gentle nurse was thinking of her Lord, the one in whom she had faith, and her thoughts were, ‘He became as this one, in order to deliver him. He took into himself all the anger and hatred, the passion and the cruelty, and he bore it, playing it out, expending and exhausting it—to the end.’ Even as she thought it she wondered how one man could do that—take the entire evil of all human creatures in one climactic and total suffering, since the evil of but one person is so terrible. She knew the evil of this man was very, very terrible, but then she knew the suffering had contained it all, anyway.

He was looking at her with eyes wide with fright and horror, as if he comprehended her thought, though how he could comprehend it she did not know, and he did not know, and the rest of them were ignorant, anyway. Even the chaplain was ignorant.

A shudder passed through the man. The dreadful wrath of his bitterness, and the screaming of his hatred, and the taunting he would have brought down upon her were paralysed. Everything was arrested.

It was an eternity from when she offered the cup of tea and the biscuit to when he took it, and when he did, he died as a vandal. A terrible shudder passed through him.

It was strange—how they were all drawn to the moment. The psychiatrist stayed where he was, but the chaplain came forward—drawn irresistibly. The warden was not far away, and he needed not to come to the man on the bed. One part of him felt cheated, but another part of him—

—the major part—was awed.

He watched the man smile at the girl, and he himself gulped with fear. What he saw was not possible. This girl epitomized all that the man hated, all that roused him to imbecilic fury and rage, yet he was quiet. The warden knew he was in his right mind.

They all heard the simple nurse say, ‘Do you have sugar?’

They saw the man nod and say, ‘Two.’

They then saw the nurse sit on the bed and begin to talk to the man, and they wondered when they saw his smile, partly of admiration and appreciation, but mostly of peace and joy. They had never seen the man serene before. That would be because he had never known serenity.

As they looked, they knew he was in peace, and in serenity. The nurse was not at all surprised, but the man on the bed was—joyfully surprised.

After a time life resumed in the ward. The psychiatrist nodded wisely to himself, as though he had always known. The chaplain was grateful in his spirit, but the warden did not quite know what to think.
HALF GHOST TOWN

The young people are alive,
Toting their magazines—
Post, and Woman’s Day—
Unurgent they traipse their way
Through the old town.
Here they are unsophisticate,
And the Stateliner* seems an intrusion,
An atavism from the future
(Reversed in the time web),
But they accept it.

The older ones live also,
TV masts with their strong antennae
Ornamented on the other world.
The old buildings have new paint,
And houses have Stratco fences,
So all is really alive.

It is the dark shops that betray them,
The tooth-gapped windows—
Black plastic draped over the past—
And hollow mystery stares out
But is not seen.

* A bus company operating in South Australia.
Winter 1940! The strong, crisp nights of the Bathurst Army Camp—who can forget them? The duck-boards and the palliasses, and the frosts that crept across the flats before midnight, gripping white-sheeted pastures. There was Captain’s Flat, with its ghost-memories of gold-diggers, and the intrigues that once haunted the acacia scrub, where now old diggings crumbled to dull anonymity.

There was the dry bed of the defunct river, the high banks that now resounded to the trial run of the wild young despatch riders. I can remember the way we tore along the sides of the banks, spurting the dry clay until it powdered and smoked under the wheels of our Beezers and Nortons. We would open the throttle and directly drive up the banks, front wheels high into the sky, and poised for desperate moments when we wondered whether we would make it. High excitement in the Don R. courses, with Aub Lawson—Number One on the world’s cycle tracks—leading us in and out of the closely planted fence posts, weaving and skidding and broadsiding, whilst the bush rang to the roar and tumble of it all.

Lionel was there in those days, and I knew nothing about him. He might have been the fellow on the cycle just behind me, or the one ahead, and whatever was the case I was not consciously to meet him until thirty years later. Lionel was an ‘SX’ fellow—a Crow-eater from South Australia. In the days before he joined the A.I.F., he and his brother had belonged to the 4th M.D. Army at the famous Keswick Barracks in South Australia, where they made a notorious Don R. pair. Posted to the 8th Division Signals, Lionel had been sent to New South Wales to join our new unit.

I had been a raw recruit at the Sydney Showground, marching every day to the music of a record-player mounted in a utility truck. Every time the truck hit a bump in the road we would have to change step. You could see it happening right down the line. They were strange days; sleeping in pig pavilions, rolling saffron fruit puddings between the aisles of duck-boards, handling our platoon drunks at night or doubling up on a route run around Centennial Park—these were some of the things we did in our rookie days.

Now all that seems millennia away. Today, here in Adelaide, I rang Lionel, and found out by accident that it was his seventieth birthday. Up in the Hills, where I am, the day was soaked with winter rain, whilst there was sunshine where Lionel lives with his Amy in the stately suburb of Kensington Park. Good old Adelaide! Nothing changes very much. It keeps its quiet identity, especially in the Hills and at Kensington Park.

So we talked—Lionel and I—reminiscing about Bathurst Army Camp, and what the life was like there, secluded from close Kelso and the further-away Bathurst township, and enduring the winter nights when the frosts crept through the blankets.
We had cold showers there, too, if I remember correctly.

My part of Signals went to Malaya under the famous (infamous we thought him then) Colonel J. H. Thyer, known as ‘Sig-Toc’. What a man he was! He picked me out at the Sydney Showground, when I was supposed to be unseen by him, and whisked me away to Bathurst. I was a Physical Training Instructor, having to put the troops through their paces in the early mornings, and teaching them how to box and wrestle. Our section—‘J’ Section—was composed of bright boys. They knew all about wireless and other forms of communication. They laid cable, and used Fuller-phones and tapped out Morse code on them, as well as using heliograph, semaphore flags and flashing signal lamps.

* * *

Lionel did not go with us to Singapore on that 1941 January trip, aboard the Queen Mary. He was to come much later—about September—and in a Dutch ship that burned oil heavily and is now on the ocean bed for its sins; but meanwhile his group—‘G’ Section—trained with the 2/15th Artillery Regiment. They were well-trained troops when they hit the Malay Peninsula, and well-trained they needed to be! They were the ones who were caught in the famous Muar action towards the Mid-East coast some months later. We were on the West Coast at that time, building fortifications at Mersing and Endau.

The men in the Forces always thought Lionel to be a wild boy. In fact he grew up in a church situation, and knew something of truth; enough, anyway, to be baptized at the age of thirteen.
hard. Bitter, you could say, and pretty cynical. He was a prisoner of war under the Japanese.’

I pricked up my ears, having myself been a prisoner of war. Of course, I knew of others like Lionel. The years of harsh treatment by our Japanese captors, the horrible days of death by starvation, cholera and other diseases still haunted the embittered memory. Some men had sealed over the past, unable to contemplate it, and powerless to come to terms with it. Often they saw themselves as victims of blind fate, and they loathed what they had seen and they felt the anguish of it all without being able to do much about it. Deep down within them the bitterness soured their spirits, and they were suffering intensely. For this reason, I believe, many of these men have died prematurely. Had they been able to come to terms with their past then they may well have lived longer. Lionel was one of these. Trevor had tried hard to get to him in order to help him, but Lionel had kept him firmly at arm’s length.

‘He’s a really fine guy,’ Trevor told me, ‘but he is full of hatred for the Japanese. Won’t have a bar of them.’ I understood that, and sympathized with this former fellow prisoner of war.

Trevor went on. ‘I am preparing his wife for baptism. She and Lionel have great friends who attend our church. In fact, they live in a kind of granny’s flat at the back of Lionel’s home, and they are like a mother and father to the couple. Lionel and Amy love and respect them highly. Amy wants the very best for herself and Lionel, but Lionel worries her. He has been a heavy smoker, a virtual alcoholic, and although he is a fine husband to Amy and a good father to his children, he has been a constant trouble in so many ways.’

He paused, and then went on. ‘Some time ago he had a bad accident. This was after he visited Victor Harbor one night and had a few drinks. Although he had been a taxi-driver for years he could not handle the car that night. He blacked out and ran up a tree close by the District Hospital. The car was upside-down, badly smashed, and so was Lionel. Two young men helped him out of the car, through the opening made by a shattered window. He had a broken arm–the right one–and a smashed kneecap on the right side. He was heavily gashed over his left eye, and bleeding profusely. He was certainly a mess. All he could think about was getting the vehicle back on its wheels, but he was taken to the hospital.’

I remembered hearing about the accident. Trevor continued, ‘Lionel has been in the Daws Road Hospital in Adelaide. His kneecap had to be removed. His arm and leg were in plaster for months. His wife Amy had to carry on with the general store they operated in Encounter Bay, and from time to time I’ve helped her weigh up salt and sugar and that sort of thing. She told her husband what I was doing and he is quite warm towards me, but he still won’t have a bar of anything which he calls ‘religious’.

Trevor has a most infectious smile. He grinned and said, ‘I found out that he was in your Unit during the war. He told me that his psychiatrist had said he would never be a healthy man until he gave up his hatred for the Japanese.’

Trevor paused. ‘You know, he has had many doses of shock treatment–seven, I think. His doctor told him he would have to have more of these as time went on, if no change of attitude
were to take place. Geoff, he's in a bad way. I said to him, 'You know God can help you,' but he just about laughed me out of court. It was close enough to sneering.

'He said, 'Son, how old are you?'' and when I told him I was twenty-nine, he scorned me. He said, 'You're too young. What would you know about what I've been through? How could you help?''

'I said, 'I know a man and he doesn't hate the Japanese. In fact, he loves them. Like you, he was a Japanese prisoner of war for three and a half years.'

'Lionel looked at me, a bit surprised. 'What's his name,' he asked. 'Where does he live?'

'I said, 'His name's Geoffrey Bingham. He lives here in Victor Harbor. He's principal of the Bible College at Mount Breckan.'

'Lionel was staggered. 'That man was in my unit,' he said. 'In fact, there were two of them of the same name. Both of them were Geoffrey Binghams. Now what do you know about that! I think I'd like to meet him!''

Trevor grinned. 'I told him that wouldn't be difficult.'

* * *

We met the next week. My wife, Laurel, and I went to have tea with Lionel and Amy. We were impressed by their well-ordered garden and their neat and comfortable home. We were also impressed by the cooking.

As we ate, Amy looked at Lionel and then at me, and said, 'He hates rice. He'll never eat rice.'

Laurel said, 'Geoff loves rice. He can never get enough.'

Lionel and I exchanged grins. We began to talk about old times. Strangely enough, Lionel did not mention Bathurst. We talked about the war, about mutual friends, about his work as a despatch-rider with the Artillery regiment, and about mine as sergeant in charge of a cable-laying team on Infantry Brigade Headquarters. We chatted about Changi Prison Camp where we must have seen each other from time to time, and then the sending of the troops to work on the Burma-Thailand Railway. Lionel had been on working parties in Singapore but missed out on being sent north to the notorious 'death-railway', so called because every sleeper represented a life lost.

When it came time to wash and dry dishes, Amy told us to go into the lounge room. 'You fellows can talk better together,' she said, and Laurel went off with her into the kitchen. Something had already happened with Lionel and me. We had established an easy relationship. Some time ago Lionel had given up his heavy smoking, the doctor having warned him that he would have about six months to live if he continued the habit.

We didn't dither. Lionel wasn't awkward without a smoke, and I knew we could get down to business. We went straight to the point—anger and hatred for the Japanese and what they had done. It was clear to me that I already had Lionel's respect, possibly because I had been decorated for bravery during action, had held a despatch-rider's licence, and had been known as 'the battling padre'. I wasn't a chaplain in those days but was fairly free in discussing the things of faith, and I had won an important boxing bout—something which established my reputation as a fighter!

Lionel talked about his many times in hospital,
but especially about the time when he was recovering from the car accident. He had felt deeply ashamed of his drinking, and of that night, for he had been out when he should have been home looking after Allan, their three-year-old son. Amy had been at a meeting. In his shame he sought out the hospital chapel and had prayed for help with his drinking. Somehow, after that, he was able to knock back the drinking. Yet, even though he was free of his smoking and drinking, the answer to his mental and nervous condition had not come. He was still on heavy sedation and pain-killing drugs for his back. Because of these things he was on a 100 per cent pension.

Whilst Amy and Laurel talked about their husbands, about liking and hatred for rice and other things, Lionel and I went back to the most powerful and significant event in all history—the life and death of Christ. It was not difficult to talk about those matters. Indeed there was a strange and wonderful ease in it all. I told Lionel the story of the king who had a debtor-servant, a man who owed him fifteen million dollars! The man himself had nothing with which to pay his debt, and his master was about to sell him and his family into slavery in order to get at least a tiny return for his great loss. I told him how the beggared man had pleaded for time. He thought that if he could have time he would be able to pay.

Obviously his master did not believe him. The man definitely could not handle money efficiently. When it was evident that the king would really sell him and his family, the servant fell to the floor, cried out wildly, wept and begged for mercy.

Surprisingly, the king had compassion on the man and remitted his entire debt!

I can still see Lionel staring at me as I told the story. It wasn’t that I was just a good story-teller. It was that Lionel’s life lay on the outcome of his understanding of the story. I talked about man’s monster debt to God, the rebellion of the human heart, the enormous pride of us as a race and as persons, and our offences committed against a holy God. I talked about the bitterness of human wrath, the heavy guilt that twisted us, and made us angry with God and man. I talked about the deep wounds that the human spirit can know, but yet cannot heal.

I knew Lionel was angry about the Japanese, about the deaths of comrades, the starvation that emaciated fellow prisoners, and the tragedy of his first marriage, the guilt which come with heavy drinking, divorce, the tensions with children growing up, the pressures of business and work, and the mental pain of many failures. While I talked, some kind of a miracle was forming itself in Lionel’s heart and mind. As we talked about our sins being laid on Christ in his death, and about him bearing the weight of their guilt—the pain, shame, burden, loneliness, alienation, anger, confusion, along with the dread of ultimate judgement—I saw the tears in Lionel’s eyes.

‘Fifteen millions dollars of debt,’ I said, ‘and the man being forgiven went out and met a man who owed him fifteen dollars—a trifling thing. The forgiven man could not forgive—believe it or not. He grabbed his debtor by the throat and was within an ace of strangling him, so deep was his anger.’ I was thinking about what Lionel’s psychiatrist had told him, ‘If you don’t forgive the
Japanese you will never be a well man,’ yet how can one person forgive another until first he be forgiven by God?
Lionel looked at me directly. ‘How could the guy not forgive when he was forgiven so much?’
I thought of Lionel himself. I knew he couldn’t forgive until he was forgiven. I was also thinking of the anger of the forgiven man. I had often thought he was too proud to be forgiven, that inwardly he had not really accepted forgiveness. He seemed to think he could have made it on his own, that is, he could have paid back the impossible debt—given the time!
I said, ‘I think the guy was too proud to accept forgiveness, and so he couldn’t forgive the man who owed him so little.’
We sat silent at that thought, and then I looked directly at Lionel. ‘Lionel,’ I said, ‘how can we knock back such forgiveness? And how can we not forgive?’
I saw a tear trickle down the man’s cheek, and we knelt on the floor of that room whilst Lionel asked for total forgiveness and total freedom from his complicated past. He also bared his heart to Christ and asked him to come and live within it.
We both stayed within that strange silence, and when—after a time—Lionel lifted his head and looked at me, I knew he was liberated. He was breathing freely.
I said gently, ‘Lionel, what about the Japanese?’
He laughed and said, ‘Oh, that fifteen dollars worth of debt! Why Geoff, it is nothing!’
He was forgiven, and he had forgiven, and a great weight had rolled away from him, and Lionel was free—free ever! Amy and Laurel knew that when they returned from the kitchen, and they were delighted as Lionel told them what had happened. The four of us knelt and quietly thanked the Heavenly Father for such forgiveness.

I suppose the story should conclude there—at the powerful and beautiful climax of that night. There was enough success in that evening to last any man a lifetime, and even an eternity, but it was on that night that the transforming work began. Lionel and Amy were yet to go through more suffering, but then they were to have experiences beyond even their imagining. The rest of the story ought to be told, even if I only sketch it briefly. Of course, Lionel’s story would make a novel on its own, and maybe one day I will write it, but in this brief account I would like to show that Lionel’s experience was not transitory. Most ex-prisoners of war of our old 8th Div. Sigs Unit now know something of the transformation of Lionel. The news spread quite quickly.

I had not known much of Lionel’s life either in Malaya, Singapore, Japan, or when he had returned to Australia. Over the years he has told me bits and pieces and so I put it together in a brief survey, since it helps us to understand the man from the varied life he lived.

In action, Lionel was despatch-rider to the Colonel of the 2/5th Field Regiment. Starting at Segamut, the Australian Forces—along with the British troops—fought a rearguard action down the Peninsula, using their heavy 25-pounder guns. Lionel on one occasion swerved to avoid a bomb crater, and received severe lacerations down the
right side of his arm and leg, and, in spite of these, carried on his despatch-riding. After three days he was ordered into hospital because his wounds had become deeply infected. He reached Singapore Island before the artillery regiment but was discharged from hospital to take part in the fighting. For a time he manned a switchboard which had been deserted by those trying to escape from the Island.

As a prisoner of war, Lionel, being able-bodied, had to work like the coolies. In some cases it was wharf-labouring, and in others, road-building. One day, when he was coming up with a shovelful of dirt, he was hit by a pick coming down, and in a moment there was an uproar. Lionel told me, 'All hell was let loose. Blood was coming out of my head and Japs were shouting all sorts of things we did not understand, so I was taken back to the camp to be attended to. This resulted in three days' light duty. Later we were sent to Adam Park to another camp.'

In this camp Lionel took over the cooking, and the troops liked the way he handled the job. In typical Aussie fashion he devised ways and means of improving the cooking. Then came the severe restriction of daily rations, and the need to use papaws as vegetables—and so on.

Lionel was packed into the Japanese vessel which was to take them to Japan. The conditions were horrific. They eventually arrived at Nagasaki on the 8th December, 1942. From there they were transported to Osaka and taken on to Kobe, there being put into a camp at Takatorimitichi. They had to work in the ship-building yards at Osaka, where prisoners tried secret sabotage. With the advent of American bombers over the dockyards, the prisoners were taken to a mining town—Fukuoka—to re-open previously abandoned coal-mines in which the work was quite dangerous.

Then came the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, and the realization that the end was near. It was futile to venture outside the camps. Unbelievably, conditions in the camp were better than those outside, at least so far as rations were concerned. Then came relief—dropped from the American Flying Fortresses in double 44-gallon drums floated down on parachutes. Eventually the liberated prisoners were taken to Nagasaki, deloused, fitted out with uniforms, and transported by air, first to Okinowa, then to Manila in the Philippines, where they were nourished back to something like normality.

Writing these words reminds me of the men with us who died simply from receiving food they could not digest, or from putting on weight too rapidly. Some got drunk on a single bottle of beer. There was a certain tension in all this. Lionel had come from Japan with a leg ulcer, and he was stunned when he saw a nursing sister stuffing a whole kidney bowl of antiseptic gauze-bandage into the hole made by his ulcer.

Lionel and others reached Darwin on the old Catalina Flying Boats, flying via Mauritius. In typical fashion the returned Signalman stooped to kiss the Australian soil and to thank his lucky stars he was back in ‘good old Aussie’.

The welcome in Adelaide was a beautiful one for Lionel. His family were there, including his wife, and his own father had arranged a great party. Afterwards, Lionel and his wife travelled to Victor Harbor for a second honeymoon. That
night Lionel suddenly had a breakdown. His nerves snapped and, as he said, 'I went off my head.' The doctor gave him a needle which put him out like a light.

The account of the years between return and Lionel’s eventual move to Encounter Bay do not make easy reading. On the one hand there was joy in the birth of children, and on the other a certain unhappiness in the marriage. Lionel often had to spend periods in hospital. Not being able to go to his trade of painting, he tried other things. One of these was driving buses and—later—taxi-driving, and he gradually built the taxi work up into a business. There were the houses and a business bought or built, and all sold. What happened in those years makes a complicated and amazing story. It would appear that Lionel was no fool in his sales and purchases.

The last chapter in these events was the break-up of Lionel’s marriage and Lionel’s meeting with Amy, his childhood sweetheart. She had had great difficulty in her marriage, so that the two abandoned their first marriages and looked to live together. There was some guilt in this arrangement, remembering that they had both had a church upbringing. The children—fairly grown by now—were having their own problems facing life. Lionel had to spend longer periods in the Repatriation Hospital and his doctor warned him that something would have to be done or he would have only six months to live. All the years were catching up, and Lionel was in the full-disability pension category.

Selling his shares in the taxi company and realizing on what assets he had, he and Amy—long married by this time—made their way to Encounter Bay and the general store they had purchased. Everything looked like a new and peaceful existence. That, as we have seen, was not immediately to be the case. Amy—once a Salvation Army lass—was looking for more in life even than material security. She, too, had things she had to work through. It was in this mind that she met Pastor Trevor, and it was in this state that the mills of God were grinding purposefully.

Pastor Trevor was delighted to have a fresh new member in his congregation. He didn’t waste much time in welcoming Lionel, and using him. It was not long before Lionel was a deacon, as a trustworthy man of some maturity. I remember the first Thursday night that he attended our teaching course which was for non-students of the Bible College. There was Lionel—large as life—and beside him in the desk was Amy, full of smiles and anticipation. I introduced Lionel into recording the lectures, helping to get him a special cassette-recorder. With notes and recordings Lionel began steadily to make his way through doctrine and Bible exposition. Whilst the going was a bit tough in the beginning, it was no time before Lionel was lapping up all he heard, and telling it to others.

Many incidents of those days come to mind: the time when Lionel found his back complaint to be healed through prayer, the time when he dropped his heavy medication as he no longer needed tranquillizers. Then there was the time when he met the man who had owed him a considerable
amount of money and he told him that he need never repay the debt. The man was suspicious. I think guilt at refusing to pay his debt had made him antagonistic to his creditor, and he wondered what Lionel was doing. Lionel told him simply that since God had forgiven him—Lionel—all his debts, it was right for him to forgive this debtor. It took time for the man to believe Lionel had changed, but as the years passed it became evident to him that the power of Christ had worked in the life of his former creditor.

There was also the occasion when Lionel believed God had spoken to him through a dream. He woke up with the Bible reference of Romans 2:3–6 on his lips. Lionel and I talked a lot about these verses:

Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgement of God? Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgement will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works.

The outcome of our chat was that Lionel knew he was to forget the past for ever and get on with the new life which had come to him. It was then that he felt he ought to enter the Bible College and do the Diploma Course. In four years he completed the Diploma and became head of the Communications Studio, sending out thousands of recorded tapes to a hungry listening public. How strange it was for me to see him sitting there in the class, a man almost as old as myself, and preparing himself at that time of life-aged 53—for the ministry which was ahead. In all those years he was ably supported by Amy, who was thrilled with her new man.

Just prior to his coming into College they received the news that Lionel’s son Ian had died of a self-administered dose of sleeping tablets. It was a shock to us all, because Ian and I had talked at length, and the boy—deeply impressed by the change in his father’s life—had come to Christ. He had been so different and we wondered how it was he could have taken his own life. He left a gentle note saying that he loved everyone, naming them one by one, and concluding with the statement that he loved Christ even more and wanted to be with Him. Sixteen years later Lionel’s other son, Raymond, was accidentally electrocuted when using a faulty hand-drill on his hobby farm. Both of these events deeply affected Lionel, but did nothing to shake his faith in God. Indeed, it was his knowledge of the sovereignty of God which sustained and further matured him.

Not long after entering College, Lionel began to have ministry at the Adelaide City Mission. At first it meant relieving the staff during the Christmas vacations. Lionel had to substitute for the Superintendent and Administrator, and his work took him amongst needy and depressed people at the ‘Hope Haven’ Women’s and Children’s Shelter. Because of his years of suffering he was able to help those in need, and for the most part they trusted him, knowing that he understood their problems. For years Lionel has been closely linked with the work and has had great opportunity to
share his faith in the One who so changed his life.

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Two happenings stand out greatly in my mind, and I doubt not that they always figure largely in Lionel's thinking.

The first incident was that of the coming of Kazuo Sekine to the Bible College in the year prior to Lionel's admission. He was the first Japanese student we had received into training, and it was a test both to Lionel and me as to whether our love for the Japanese was genuine. I can remember welcoming Kazuo. I felt no trace of hostility for him. In fact I was delighted to have him at the College. He seemed to me to be a fine young man--taller than most Japanese I had met. I was to go to Japan later and I was eventually to meet Kazuo's family and friends, and the members of his church--a wonderful and unforgettable experience.

Kazuo had a rich gift of humour--something I had not suspected was part of being a Japanese person. The young Sekine picked up teaching rapidly. He was enormously moved by the doctrine of forgiveness. Perhaps Lionel and I were a quiet witness to the truth of it. On my desk at the moment is a letter written to Lionel a couple of years ago,

Dear Lionel and Amy,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus! It was a good surprise to receive your address through Hideko Sorimachi. How are you doing? I have not seen you for ages now! I have written two books. One is all about my experience in Australia. The Lord has taught me much through the life at A.B.I.-B.C.S.A. Through men like Mr Bingham, Dr. Hardman--

through you, Lionel!

What I'd written in my book about you was what you taught me the first time we met with each other at the funeral of Vicki Randall. That was when I was in First Year at College. Do you remember? I shall never forget the time you shared your testimony with me--also the time you invited me to your house.

Surely it was of the Lord I spent time in Australia. I will try to write to you soon. I'm now working at Ochanomiju Student Christian Centre as a director of Evangelism as well as Pastor at Mission Aid Christian Fellowship. The life is very busy and demanding, but I'm happy!

In His love,
Kaz. S.

Lionel had been the first to invite our Japanese student home to a meal, and they became fast friends. Kazuo's book on Lionel's testimony has been widely read in Japan. Kazuo himself is recognized as a dynamic preacher and teacher. I think the richest point of this story of Lionel is that his hatred for the Japanese was melted away by the love of Christ, and for that reason is a story which could well be read, not only by fellow prisoners of war, but by all who hold hatred and anger in their heart for their fellow creatures.

No less important to us all was the funeral service of Vicki Randall, a young woman-student who died of terminal cancer. I have written her story in another book, *under the title 'Vicki--the Gentle Teacher'. Kazuo not only had opportunity to see the remarkable last months on earth of this young person, but also to see the living reality of Christ in her life. The funeral service was incredibly joyful--so joyful, in fact, that a few

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* Three Special Stories, NCPL, 1983.
seriously-minded people were somewhat scandalized. Kazuo was introduced into something he had not seen before, and it left a strong impression upon him. Indeed, the effects of Vicki's life and ministry seem never to have ceased—not even after all these years. Her own brothers and sisters have come—one after another—to find their peace in Christ and his grace. Certainly this young Japanese student went through living experiences with both Vicki and Lionel which deeply affected him and have stood him in good stead through the years, and will doubtless continue to do so.

At the time of writing, Lionel and Amy are in reasonable health. Some six years ago Lionel had a heart attack and the doctor told him that this had not been his first. The E.C.G. showed old damaged heart muscle, perhaps at the time when Ian had died. Lionel and Amy a year or so ago returned to Adelaide and the sedate and tranquil suburb of Kensington Park. Lionel is on the committee of the Adelaide City Mission—now affiliated with the Sydney City Mission—and is an active member of the South Australian 8th Div. Sigs Ex-POW Association. They attend a small but warm-hearted local church, and a Bible Study is held weekly in Lionel and Amy’s home, and they continue to care for their children and grand-children. Lionel’s eyesight is not as good as previously. From the time of his transformation of life he has continued to study, having developed a useful library. Now he tends more to listen to cassettes, and to go back over old recordings. His sermons—when he gives them—are practical, and witness to what is happening in his and Amy’s lives.

Recently my wife, Laurel, and I had a midday meal with them in the serenity of their leafy suburb. Nothing disturbed the tranquillity of their quiet home, except, perhaps, our laughter as we reminisced. I was thinking, however, that a quiet and wonderful miracle had taken place in our four lives. I am sure you will not mind if I try to conclude this brief account of a remarkable man’s life with a personal evaluation.

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One of the highlights for me of recent years was to be asked to meet some of my old 8th Divisional Signals friends—men who had been with me in action, men who had gone through the traumas of prison life in Changi, Burma-Thailand and Japan. Most of them I had not seen in forty-five years. It was a very moving experience being warmly received by them and sitting down to lunch with them. One had to walk with the aid of two sticks. Another was partially paralysed. Some looked quite aged and frail and yet others looked young and robust, although our ages must have been fairly similar.

Over the years I have not been active in Returned Servicemen’s clubs or Ex-POW organizations. I guess I have been too busy to spend time on these matters, but have lately regretted my neglect of these things. I have written a number of books on the war we fought in, and the prisoner of war situations we once knew. I have been visited by a number of old Army friends, and as I sat at the invitation midday dinner I admired the men who talked with me.
One man seemed not to be able to keep his eyes off me. When some had left us to fulfil other engagements he suddenly flared up, almost shouting. 'I reckon I can forgive the Japs for what they did to us, but I'm damned if I can forgive my former wife for what she did to me!' There was silence at the table—a sympathetic silence. He had come home to a woman who had been faithless, and for years she had led him merry hell. I had a small book with me that I had written a year before, and it was to do with being forgiven by God and forgiving others. I felt reluctant to intrude on the man’s agony, but I offered him the little volume.

He gladly accepted it, tucking it away in a pocket. 'I'll read it,' he said quietly. Then he went on, 'The hardest thing in all the world is to forgive. Maybe you can forgive, but you can't forget.'

I have heard that statement a thousand times and more during my ministry. I didn't feel like being a corrector of him. I know that maybe you can't forget, but then you don't have to remember. Deliberately remembering fuels the fires of anger and bitterness. Bitter memories can corrode the human spirit. True forgiveness means we can remember—when remembrance comes—and be wholly unhurt by the past. What was once a stumbling block to us can be a stepping stone to genuine tranquillity.

I think, then, that Lionel's story—and thousands of other stories like his—should be told to the human race continually. We cannot afford bitterness and resentment, and an extended sense of injustice in our world community. Christ's death was for the whole human race—a race which from its beginning has sinned against God, its own people, and its environment. Christ came not just to set favoured persons free but to liberate nations and emancipate the human race. Whilst it is true that many are careless about the matter, preferring to extract as much pleasure and power as possible for personal purposes, yet much of the human race deplores cruelty, selfishness and unnecessary injustice.

In the face of these things, I think the story of Lionel—along with those of Vicki Randall and Kazuo Sekine—are enormously significant for all the human race. We cannot say there is no way out of our dilemma. There is a way, and it is a simple way, though at the same time deeply profound. I hope we will not be superficial in reading stories such as Lionel's. I trust many will come to find the liberation of total forgiveness—forgiveness that flows so freely from the Fountain of Life.
Last night I was down on Skid Row.
The others were there—the ones I always knew,
The druggies and junkies,
The alkies—the winos—
And the mumbling incoherents.
They were all there, dumb-faced and shuffling.
Hiding their silent shame
As though it were not there,
And—anyway—it did not matter.

Inside me the junky rebelled, the wino,
The degenerate me that clung
To insubstantialities. I grew
Red in the face with restrictions
Of my own sin. Long I ago
I had started the ascent
To very heaven itself, and now
I had slipped back within an inch
Of the inevitable hell.

Last night I was down on Skid Row
And I heard the sad mutterings
Of my own inner heart.
But it sounded as though

Never had anything changed.
I wore the old livery of the cheat,
The defeated, the spiritless,
The broken. It showed my decease
From the proud joyousness
Of true unlost humanity.

Oh my God! I thank you
For those moments on Skid Row.
They showed me myself
As I am without You,
As I am left to myself.
I mourned over me with horror,
And wept over me with a sadness
That still pervades my waking mind,
Out of that dark nightmare
Of human recession. I mourned
For the moving millions
Staring in their dereliction
As they shuffle in their nothingness
Towards nothing.

Oh dear God! I found grace again,
Found it as I toiled upwards
To Golgotha's heights, Golgotha's shame.
There all bloody—bared to sight
As human shame for shame,
And bowed that bloody head of him,
As bowed am I and bloody too
In all my shame—the same.
I wept afresh for sins forgot,
I wept for me who once was not
As now I am—swept clean and pure
And given a holiness so free
That I before His face may be
Without the endless shame.
THE VANDAL

Oh Christ my Lord!
Afresh I weep, as once I wept
For those bereft of life—your life—
That flowed those timbers down
Into the dust of death—your death
That was the taste of death itself.
For me you bore the inner pain,
The outer pain, the shame
That drives the shuffling line alone
Of broken minds and bodies bent
Into perpetual death.

Last night I was down on Skid Row
And there my heart full broke
For grace that once redeemed—
As now again it came and saved
The sinner whose proud mind
Had almost gone beyond the grace it knew.
Some righteousness had come
Which I had thought my own,
But in your visitation cracked full,
And broke, and fell, and shattered lay,
And I was new in love again,
Made fresh by love, and Calvry's sweet—
The new sweet wine of love—
Poured from the goblet of his heart
Into my own. Then did I live again,
And now I live and never will
Despise such love again, or be away
From endless, saving grace.

KINGTIDE OF LOVE—I

KINGTIDE OF LOVE—I

THE PREACHER'S PLEASURE

Pastor Ethrington Preaches to His People

Even in the vestry he could hear the sounds of the congregation. He called them 'sounds' because he had read in Genesis 3 that Adam had heard 'the sound of God in the garden', and at the time he had thought, 'What a wonderful title for a sermon—"The Sound of God in the Garden." ' His mind had raced in its imaginings. 'Is your life a garden? Is it a beautiful garden? Do you hear the sound of God in it? Are you a true gardener within the garden of God?' Likewise he could never cease to be thrilled with the sounds of the congregation. Before the service began they would have a slight rustle of coming in and seating themselves, of whispering to neighbours, of warm loving greeting. He knew these sounds very well, and at that moment he knew that if he quietly peeped through the slightly-opened door of the vestry that
he would see it all, and his spirit would rise with the wonder and fascination of it. His honest spirit had to admit it was a bit like ‘theatre’ and that there was something of ‘drama’, and that all-in-all it was like holy entertainment. But then, were there not such noises before a great symphony orchestra began its wonderful music—a sort of voluntary, so to speak?

Each Sunday they gathered in great anticipation. The morning worship was a delight to them. They felt so enriched by it, so lifted up. How blessed they had been! God had given them a fine pastor, a good man, a born orator, a man with a noble mind. He had given them good leadership, personally as well as under pastors who attended to everything: to the vast Sunday School with its teachers and pupils; to the choir so richly robed, and the musicians so dedicated and competent; to the young people who had formed themselves into an earnest band, some being students in College and University, and some already out working, that is, the young marrieds who knew the value of a Christian community and were grateful for the bringing up of their children in a secure environment—anyway, as secure as one could have it in the contemporary world. There were also the professional business men and women, competent tradesmen, and a band of folk of different callings, who added greatly to the quality of the congregation—especially to the finances needed so much to carry on the spiritual industry of the church. Then, of course, there were the older folk, many of them inhabitants of ‘The Village’—that haven of rest which the church had built at great cost so that none might feel lonely in his or her old age. These older folk

appreciated the Sunday morning worship, although few of them could make it to the evening service.

On this day the pastor and congregation mused over these things prior to the service. Pastor Ethrington, as he moved around the deep-carpeted vestry, traced his slight restlessness to human nervousness. He knew the principles which related to stress, and he knew the power within which would quietly but strongly overcome even this slight tension. His mind drank in the sounds from outside which always encouraged him. He saw himself again in the high pulpit, and the congregation looking up to him in anticipation, and his spirit freshened. The tension died away. Confidence came on welcome wings. His pastoral team filed in quietly, with happy but subdued greetings. They—with their pastor—knew what this hour was about. They murmured their prayers and processed out to their ministries within the congregation, along with the choir in its rich and colourful robes. Some of the pastors led the music, some the prayers and Scripture readings, and others simply identified with the various groups they led.

The service proceeded well. He could not remember a time in the life of this congregation that worship had not been as it ought to have been. Much thought, preparation and practice was given to its conduct throughout the week, so that nothing happened by chance. He could always sit back in serenity whilst the congregation sang the hymns led and aided by the choir. This singing time was an opportunity for him to contemplate the sermon he had prepared so well during the week. He knew he had limits as a pastor, that the intimate and the personal counselling was not his
forte, but then there were others on the pastoral team who were very good at that sort of thing. He knew himself to be a preacher, but with it also a leader of the people. What he might lack in counselling ability in the study, he more than made up for in his teaching from the pulpit. He was content to accept his limitations, and to fill out his native skills—in the interest of the fine flock that he led.

This morning, no less than other days, he watched the conduct of the worship, the earnest participation of the people, the rich leadership of the choir under the music director, and the quiet acceptance of the Scripture readings. The mellow tones of the vibrant organ, the rich voice of the contralto soloist, the blending of the choir in the anthem, and the contemporary singing of the young people and their orchestra all helped to build towards the climax—the sermon which was yet to come. As on other days, so this morning, he had encouraged the people to keep in mind the many privileges that they had, the gifts which served them in life and worship, the band of pastors who ministered to their psychological and emotional needs, and who were well-trained therapists when it came to the strains, stresses and tensions which confronted all in this age in which we live. That encouragement had come during the time of the notices, for finance was always needed for new projects. New projects, too, were a blessing, since they were a stimulative challenge to an ever-widening ministry, and to even richer accomplishment within the Kingdom of God.

Now it was the time for the sermon. The congregation had responded well. They had sung a grand hymn prior to the moment of ascension to the pulpit. As the last strains died away their faces were upturned to him, and he thrilled quietly to the opportunity he was about to grasp with proper power.

His gaze roved over the congregation. He knew he was the shepherd of this flock, and, as such, he sought to know them all, to speak personally from his heart to each one, and to instil in them that confidence in God which would enable them to face the coming week. His eye fell on his wife, and a slight uneasiness came into his spirit. She was not looking up at him. Her head was bent, though not, he thought, in devotion. He knew she found these times a strain, although there was no need for that. Had it been that she felt for him, and took up the tension of supporting him as he preached, then that would have been something he would understand. He knew, however, that she did not support him in his preaching. There was a kind of neutral loyalty she had to their marriage, his fatherhood of their children, and for his ministry, but there was not that warm appreciation of the things he said, of the leadership that he gave, and the pastoral teaching which issued from hours of earnest study and preparation.

He sighed within himself, for he remembered their early days of marriage when he had been at Seminary, and she had helped to support him by working. That was before the children came, and she had not counted it a burden, but a delight. She had loved his sermons in those days, although now he almost blushed at the memory of them. How naive and unpolished he had been, and how awkward and even crude many of those addresses
had been. Even so, they were good days. He sighed again. If only she would show the same love and admiration in these days.

He steeled himself against the momentary intrusion. He opened his Bible on the plush velvet cushion, settled his notes, and began with his peroration. It was an old word of the Apostle Paul. ‘Let everything be done in love.’ He knew the text was superb. He knew the theme of love to be, itself, beloved. He understood the dynamics of love as against those of hatred. He knew also what love could accomplish in a world that had within it so much class-struggle, so much division and bitterness, so much of war and selfish ambition. The scope of this sermon was broad, and its application most relevant.

Now he was in his true métier. It was here that he could communicate. He knew the power of communication, and the skills required for it—skills that were linked with the gifts of oratory, expressions of the face and eyes, the movements of arms, and hands, and even fingers, the gripping of attention by the rise and fall of voice, of suspended silences, of animated cries, and of appeals to the noble spirit of man. He knew they loved every minute of it, gripped as they were by his declamatory charisma.

There came a point in his address when he almost faltered. Some momentary paralysis seized his mind, and it was at a time when his wife had looked up at him. She seemed to be sending an appeal to him as she had done in old days—an appeal for intimate and passionate declaration of love beyond the ordered eloquence of his preaching—but surely she had come beyond that kind of thing! It almost unnerved him, but—trained as he was to use even an emotional impediment—he kept on, his magnificent voice pealing out in silver tones across the vast congregation. His confidence was further strengthened as he knew his words were being broadcast through many a television channel and radio network.

The pain of her look had touched him, but in a fragmentary way. He knew that if he had to steel himself against her, then so be it in the interests of wider ministry. She was one amongst many, and if she was not blessed by the riches he was sharing with others, then that was how it must be. Old fragments of sermons kept coming back to him even as he talked—fragments which spoke of true discipleship even to hating one’s life and one’s wife. Yet even at the moment he was being firm in his spiritual commitment, he knew his wife was a woman of integrity, a person with an uncanny knowledge of what was genuine, and what was not. It was her intuitive discernment and judgement which troubled him. He wished for the day when she would understand the high level of his pastoral endeavour, and applaud it.

There had been the days, of course, when he and she had known little success. They were the pioneer days when he had been enthusiastic, but had lacked training. What things they had done together when they had taken a burned-out church in a slum area and had built it up into something! What evangelism had been theirs as they had searched out young people and brought them into the life of the church! What earnestness had been in his preaching, so much so that sometimes he could not eat a meal before a service, or would come back almost vomiting from the emotions.
which had moved him, and the love and longing which he had had for men and women and young people!

It was strange, this morning, that he could carry on a soliloquy whilst he gave forth the rich teaching that he had accumulated over the years, and which he had put together in this format. It was as though his mind and voice were so trained that they could carry on without his concentration whilst this soliloquy-unbidden-pressed in on him. He kept wishing that Adrienne would not keep looking up at him, for it stimulated his memory of other days, hindering him from giving attention to his present task.

The pictures persisted—pictures of the days of his adolescence when he had been gripped by what he had then called ‘the truth’. Now he had to admit that some of it had been close to uncouth.

It had not sprung from an understanding of the deeper issues of life. It was an evangel which he did not now hold as once he had. Time had taught him much about the human mind and spirit. It had taught him the great nobility of man, even if at certain times he—man—seemed to exhibit elements of beastliness. He saw that this was not true man, the creature God had made in his own image.

How grateful he was for the insights of modern scientific man, for the treasures of psychology and psychotherapy, for the good warmth engendered by men and women of understanding—that vast army of helpers who were assisting the human race to move towards richer and higher endeavour. What a blessing it was to open up to his hungry people the truth of what lies within man, the vast potential within his mind and his spirit to reach up and outwards, and possess this vast universe which God—in His grace—has given to the human race.

‘Do everything in love’—why, that was the highest endeavour of man, and truly, he was declaiming, man can accomplish it. Now he had forgotten his wife and her non-acceptance of his preaching and he was soaring away in high oratory. He knew he had his congregation in his hands, and he unashamedly revelled in it. This Sunday morning they were being elevated spiritually. Hope was rising in them with the ascending of his voice. They gathered courage from his pleasant exhortations. Their fears and apprehensions, their tensions and stresses melted in his enthusiasm of love. They were transported beyond themselves, or—more properly—saw the great possibilities for life in true thinking, in positive faith, and in assurance of the goodness of God and man.

At the height of his powerful proclamation he saw that his wife’s gaze had dropped from him. He knew in his deepest heart that she was ashamed of him. Once he had been embarrassed by her silences when they had walked from the church to the Manse, but he had not been ashamed. He had known the truth which he was compelled to bring to his own generation, even if she did not agree with it. This had always been the lot of those whose ministry was prophetic. Even in their own family there might be non-acceptance, and the prophet would have to live with that. How could he betray this great congregation which so depended upon him for the words of life he brought to them?

For some reason that he did not know, he was
unnerved by the action of his wife. He was glad his voice went on undeterred, but a kind of sickness, a nauseous emptiness in his stomach was taking him over. Outwardly he was urbane, superbly in control of his native oratory, but within it was different. Unbidden scenes kept coming to him out of his past, scenes which dismayed him because they seemed almost uncouth, times of unrestrained enthusiasm and emotion when he had preached, and when tears had flowed from him, so deep had been his feelings.

He remembered how folk had been transformed by what he said, and by what he and Adrienne had done. He remembered those early days in the slum when their Manse had been filled with children, young people, and older folk also. They had been suspicious of him in the first days of ministry, but had come to trust him. Pictures came to him of broken homes, broken people, confused children, and young people being hardened by the battle of life. He had brought hope to them. It was the message of a gospel from which he now shrank somewhat. True, he still kept to elements of it, but could see how crude much of it had been.

The strange and unnerving thing was that it had worked. As it had been for Paul and the apostles, and for Augustine with his renewal of grace to the human race, so too it had been for Luther, Calvin and Swingli, the Pietists who followed them, and the later Puritans on the continents of Europe and North America and no less in Great Britain. For them all it was grace, and 'grace upon grace'. Yet again there had been the miners under the Wesleys, the Welsh rural folk under Howell Harris, and the people of hamlets and cities of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, under George Whitefield. Of course, under all these men of grace there were many failures, for life was pretty raw in those days, the standard of living low, and the struggle for life often grim. Even so, the ages of the Reformation, the times of the Puritans and Evangelicals were outstanding eras in which the grace of God had showed itself to be most potent.

Even whilst he was ruminating, his mellow tones vibrated through the great building of The First Church of the Resurrection. Almost as though he were also a spectator, he could hear the sermon coming to its climax. He himself was taken along on the tide of fine oratory. People leaned forward, feeling rose, and when he brought home his climactic conclusion there was a silent applause, sealed by a great sigh that swept through the auditorium.

As always they walked back together to the Manse. Their children—now in College and University—were caught up with other young people. Here and there a person would stop them to deliver an eulogy on the sermon. How helped they were! Even so, the triumph of it all was diminished by his wife's silence. Even worse was her harmless conversation in which the address was not mentioned. The strange anomaly was that he knew she loved him, even as she was disappointed in him.

Sunday lunch-time was generally pleasant. Often the children would bring a friend or two, and the meal was full of fun and laughter. Rarely did the family comment upon the sermon—something
he longed for them to do. After lunch the children would go to the tennis courts, or play pool in the rumpus room of the basement, or lie out under the sun on the lawns. He and Adrienne would generally take a nap.

Today he was too restless to sleep. He went to his study, and sat in the comfortable swivel chair, extended it, and lay back, his eyes to the ceiling. He gave himself to contemplation, but nothing seemed to help him out of the deep misery he knew in his spirit. In one way it irritated him that he gave such high value to his wife’s assessment of his preaching, when in fact she was critical. Something within him determined to get to the root of the matter. He knew that to ask her again about it would fret him as on previous occasions. They always ended up in strong argument. He would win the debate of course, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. He won by sheer weight of argument, sheer force of logic. Each time he won he lost. Nothing changed, for she remained unpersuaded.

An idea came to him, but it was with some reluctance that he followed it. He went to a part of his library shelves where he kept certain books, books that had made up much of his reading in the early days. He took down a handful of them, went back to his chair, laid the volumes on a casual table beside his chair, and began browsing through them. In spite of his tiredness he found himself gripped. What he read was clearly authentic. He closed his book after a time and lay back. His mind was restless. He realized that if he undertook a renovation of his present ideas it would be a mammoth task. It would also represent a revolution in his life, and in his ministerial modes. For a time he felt tired, and lay back. Sleep overtook him, but it was not restful. Thoughts were a turmoil in his mind. Ideas came breaking in. Memories flowed back—memories that had lain buried over many years. He let them flow, and gradually his sleep deepened and all ideas faded from him.

When he awoke there was a resolution in his mind. He stood up and went to the shelves of his contemporary reading. He took down book after book. He read the titles, opened up the pages, and scanned the contents. The sickening emptiness and the near nausea he had felt in the church returned to him. At one time he had one of his older volumes in one hand and a new volume in the other. It was as though he were weighing them up, assessing their several values.

He went back to reading the theology of his early days. He let his keen mind work out where his thinking had changed. He tried to understand why it had changed. He had a strong sense of nostalgia for the days when they—he and Adrienne—had battled in their slum parish. Events and incidents kept returning to him. Also the close companionship he and his wife had known.

Suddenly he stood up and went to the bedroom. Adrienne was lying quietly, and she barely looked up when he entered. He felt a little apprehensive, but plunged into his enquiry. Then he waited for her response.

He let her tell him everything, and he said nothing. She was clear in her thinking, and plain in her statements. He was surprised that he had no reaction to what she said. In a way it pleased him.
For her part she, too, was also surprised. There was no angry protest, no argument about the rightness of the path he was taking. There was just quiet listening. When she finished he leaned forward and kissed her lightly. She heard him making his way out into the kitchen, and shortly afterwards he returned with a cup of tea, which she received with silent appreciation. He sipped thoughtfully at his own cup, and after a time returned to the study. She wondered what was in his mind. He had made no attempt to tell her, but in the study he began preparing his next week’s sermon. He was lost in it, and when she came to the study door and told him it was time for the evening meal he was surprised.

The evening service was different from the morning worship. The younger pastors led it, and after contemporary worship folk broke up into groups for studies and discussion. Contrary to his practice, he did not join them. They may or may not have missed his pleasant presence. Tonight he was gripped by what he had discovered afresh. When he joined her for a warm drink before retiring, she knew something had happened to him.

Pastor Ethrington Preaches Again to His People

Paul Ethrington was human enough to feel a line of fear in his heart, as he announced his text, ‘As we have said before, so now I say again, ‘If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.”’

They were strong words. To begin with, no one seemed alerted to the fact that the man who was preaching to them was vastly different from the one who had preached last week. It was just that they were not prepared for the radical change in his thinking. They soon detected it, however, as they also realized he was not using his usual charming style, his planned gestures and rhetoric. There was a bluntness about his speech which surprised them, and which offended some.

‘Normally,’ he told them, ‘I do not read my sermons, although I always have the text of them in front of me in this pulpit. I want to present what I have to say very carefully, and for that reason I will read every word, and not depart from the text. Those who would wish to go over the text, please get a copy of the address from my office during the week. For this time do listen carefully, for what I have to say is important.’

He then read the text of his sermon:

‘It is many years since Paul warned his readers at Galatia not to depart from the gospel, and not to veer off into another gospel. Whilst I do not intend this morning to present that gospel in detail—the gospel which Paul preached—I do intend to share with you how one can drift from the heart of its message, and shape up a gospel which is not the true gospel. Paul said that the gospel he had preached was not fashioned by man. He said, ‘I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.’ He meant God had been pleased to reveal His Son to Paul and in Paul. Elsewhere he reported,

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.’
‘The heart of this is found in one of his Letters to his protégé Timothy:

‘I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners.’

‘We gather from all this that the nature of the gospel is simple and obvious. Christ died for sinners. He rose again so that forgiveness could be sealed for sinners, by God, and could be given to them as a free gift of His grace. For the moment we will not debate that, but let it stand.

‘Next, I need to show to you that few of the Letters of the early apostles were free from polemic, i.e. argument about the nature of the gospel. The Letter to the churches in Galatia was one of the first Epistles written by Paul, and that church stood in danger of moving into a false gospel, namely justification by keeping the law, so that doing works of the law would justify the followers of this different gospel. In other churches people were saying the Resurrection was already past, and if this had happened then the nature of the gospel was radically changed. Some churches had come under the influence of Greek religious mysteries, and held to philosophies which Paul called false. Titus was sent to the Island of Crete ‘to amend what was defective’, for there were ‘many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers’; they were ‘upsetting whole families by teaching for base gain what they have [had] no right to teach’

‘The apostle John had folk in his church who were really antichrists, and those who said they had no sin. He exhorted his readers not to admit to their homes those who did ‘not abide in the doctrine of Christ’. Peter had to write against antinomianism—

the teaching that believers were no longer bound to keep the law, since they had been freed from it. Jude appealed to his readers to ‘contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’. In his seven letters to the church in the Book of the Revelation, Jesus spoke against the infiltration of false teaching and practice and warned of the judgement which was coming to these false teachers.

‘I do not need to enlarge on the problems the early church experienced through departure from the gospel. Church history shows the decline in truth which began shortly after the apostolic age, and which has continued in some measure up to this day. It is not my intention that we should pause this morning to put out false fires. That would be a heavy task, and might divert us from the main issue.

‘What I now have to say is most painful for me, and doubtless will not be easy for you. I have to say, to my sorrow and shame, that I have inadvertently departed from the gospel of Christ in the teaching I have given you. I have preached another gospel.’

When Paul Ethrington said this, his congregation, who had been following him closely, drew a breath. He sensed the tension and the astonishment. The normal gracious acceptance of all that he said, and the hanging upon his words, had been present to this point. Now he detected unease and bewilderment, but he did not pause.

‘I wonder how I could be so deceived, and in saying that, I put no blame on anyone but myself. I now perceive what has happened. If anyone ought to have kept firm to the truth it should have been I. I had preached the simple gospel with great power during the early years of my ministry, but as the years went by I have drifted from its essentials.’
Adrienne Ethrington looked up with a kind of wonder. He had not said one word to her during the week, and although she had sensed a difference in him, he had disclosed nothing. Now she was trembling for what had happened to him, and what would happen in their congregation.

‘I have to tell you that I was brought up on the doctrine of the depravity of man, the teaching that man has gone bad in every part of his being. It is not a very attractive doctrine, and the day came when I reacted against it. I began to read the works of scholars who said that Paul, Augustine and the Reformers—to say nothing of the later Evangelicals—had overstated man's depravity and understated the doctrine of man being created in God's image.

‘This correction fascinated me, because it showed me how it is that very debased human beings can do wonderful and beautiful things. The image of God in them compels them to go against even their depravity. I think if I had received this insight and kept it in tension with the fact of human depravity, things might not have changed so much.

‘Unfortunately I reacted, then, against the early teaching and training I had received. To me depravity was an unwholesome and negative subject. I had preached on the sinfulness of man and missed the inner glory which he has. I noticed that when I preached the baseness of fallen man that congregations seemed to lose interest, even to freeze up, but when I spoke of man as the image of God they showed deep interest. My whole mind, then, was set to get to people where they were. Anything that was not relevant had no immediate value. To this end I began to read modern writers—theologians who put the old preachers quite out of court.

‘I became excited with the possibilities that lay within human beings—their given capacities, their immense potential. After all, if God had put all things under their feet and given them glory next to His own, then why should we not tap those inner resources?

‘You will know what I am referring to. It goes by many names, and I will not mention those, for fear your minds will veer away from what I am saying. However, all the positive things, such as power to accomplish, goals to be reached, joy to be known, prosperity to be received, light to be lived in, happiness to be experienced, were always the substance of my addresses; that is, up until last Sunday.’

Adrienne heard the sibilant sigh, and she sensed a line of hardness in those around her. Doubtless they were thinking their minister had deceived them, and now he was going to cheat them of what they had learned. Paul, her husband, continued:

‘I see now how my mind changed, and how subtle, and how gradual this was. I wanted you all to have the light and joy of the gospel, without first understanding the sinfulness of man which demanded such a work as that of the Cross, and required essential repentance and faith in us all. I am convinced that the image of God in man has never been obliterated, but I see that that image is only truly effective and powerful when a man is in union with God, and he can have no such union without reconciliation with Him through the death of His Son, via the blood of his Cross.’

He could hear faint murmurs. In some it may have been astonishment, but in others it was the murmur of protest, reaction against such old-fashioned teaching.

‘I do not intend today to speak of that death of Christ or his Resurrection and the liberation of man from his
ego, but simply to say that when I drifted from the truth I once knew, I devised another gospel than the one Paul knew. Doubtless some of you have little time for Paul, for, like some theologians, you may think he adulterated or perverted the simple gospel of Christ, found, as we sometimes say, in the four gospels themselves.

‘Before writing Paul off, I think we should try to examine what he taught. I doubt whether any one of us has as fine a mind on the matter as that apostle. I shall not make that examination this morning, but on another occasion. What I want to do is to apologize to you for what I have done amiss. This week I have been deeply shocked within myself, and given many hours to reviewing the nature of the gospel, and tracing where it was I went wrong.

‘I was so astray that I taught against three basic biblical truths, the first being original sin, the second the depravity of man, and the third the doctrine of predestination. As you know, these were originally three strong tenets of our own denomination, but we have moved a long way from them. So much had I come to dislike them that I preached against them, calling them noxious weeds planted by Augustine and the Reformers which now needed to be rooted out.

‘I was convinced that we were in the age of a new Reformation. The church had cowered under these three doctrines, but now it was being liberated, and I was one of the new great reformers. I delighted in that. I delighted in the joy I brought to many of you, but now I hear the voice of the ancient prophet saying, ‘They say, ‘Peace! Peace!’ where there is no peace.’ I hear him saying, ‘They have healed the wound of the daughter of my people very lightly, i.e. as though it were a mere scratch.’

‘My friends, the wounds of sin, the evil of man, the deceitfulness of the heart are deep matters. When it was said by God Himself that ‘every imagination of every thought of man’s heart is evil only continually,’ then how could I speak against the reality of human evil? When Jesus said, ‘From within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, licentiousness, slander, pride and foolishness,’ then how could I oppose such teaching?

‘Now, it is not my intention this morning to take up the three teachings which I formerly called noxious weeds, but to say that unless we come to see these elements of the truth, then we are tackling the human problem on a very superficial plane indeed. Humanism arouses great optimism, and optimism can blind us to the realities we need to face. The cleansing of the human conscience is no light matter, and the taking away of guilt is necessary for true peace of heart.

‘I believe that our unholiness is only ever recognized in the light and presence of the Holy Father, that our need for repentance and faith can only be seen in the light of Christ bearing our sins upon the Cross, and that the truth of it all can only come by a personal revelation of the Holy Spirit, and not simply by some theological harangue or explanation.

‘Firstly, then, I ask your forgiveness for having failed you. I would like to claim—as did Saint Paul—that I did it in ignorance, and if in one sense I did, then in another I was reprehensible for departing from what I already knew. I have been in an awful place these last seven days, and have said not a word to any other person. Even my wife, who is in great part responsible for the change of this week, has been left uninformed. I do not want to play politics with a gospel too sacred to be the object of human manipulation. I am ready to be dismissed from the pastorate if that is your wish, under God. However, I must first deliver my soul, that is, I must proclaim that simple gospel until no one here can say he or she has not heard it.

‘I propose, next Sunday, to preach on the death
and resurrection of our Lord. To us they are historic facts, and must have some meaning. I desire to set out that meaning before you. I will do it in a simple way. I will not be polemical. I believe the grace of God has wonderfully received me back into the truth, but I will not be contentious for that truth, even though I contend for it.

‘I ask your consideration, your pity, and pray that you may suffer with me through these next weeks. Whatever is the decision of your Church Council I will accept, but I pray this will come only when I have preached fully the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I plead for that time of rehabilitation for us all.’

Prior even to announcing the closing hymn and before leaving the pulpit he felt the accusations beginning in his mind. They crowded in. Was he not merely a reactionary against his former reaction? Was he not, indeed, a revisionist? Did he have the right to speak in such forthright fashion? Was not that aggressive and abrasive dogmatism? Was he writing off all he had learned from his latest mentors? Had this great congregation grown from nothing? Were not his words an insult to their intelligence, since they were truly people of a good mind?

What cheered him most was the joyful face of his wife. She smiled up gently at him. Of all people she would now be at peace. Did he then value her praise above the praise of others, and if so, was that good enough? He brushed this and other accusations aside, and came down to the door to shake hands with people.

Some looked at him dumbly, as though they had not understood all his talk. Others were plainly resentful, and some hostile. Their looks and words indicated this plainly. Others were neutral: as yet hostility had not come. There were yet others who were plainly delighted, pleased beyond measure. They gripped his hand strongly; they spoke encouraging words. A few even told him they had been waiting years to hear such teaching from him.

This time his wife and children walked back to the Manse with him. His eldest daughter brought him a cup of coffee and lingered by his chair, sitting on one arm of it. The boys said, ‘Good stuff, Dad!’ and they had not said this before. During the lunch they chattered away, mentioning some of the things which had come to them—things they had liked. His wife simply seemed to be living within a glow of happiness, and she eyed him with new respect.

He was glad of the respite of an after-lunch rest. The parishioners gave him that time, and then the phone began to ring. It was the mixture he had expected of anger, criticism, acceptance and congratulation. It seemed the stream would never cease, but later in the afternoon he had time to go to his study, and he quickly immersed himself in the things he had studied through the week.

Paul Ethrington's Second Sermon

The next Sunday morning the church was packed to the doors. It was true some regulars were absent, but new persons were present. That week there had been a lot of talk in the local suburb. Clergy of his own denomination—as also members of the local Ministers' Fraternal—had rung or visited him. Some of the elders had
talked to him, but as yet there was no overt opposition.

At the time of the sermon he told them he would be speaking on the death of Christ, and its significance for all areas of human living and human history. Mostly he wanted to talk about death as the substitutionary act of God to effect the forgiveness of human sins. He wanted to show that by nature of the case there could be no way other than the Cross by which God dealt with man’s sinfulness and guilt in the light of His own holiness, and His wrath upon sin and all evil. He warned them that substitutionary atonement was greatly disliked by many theologians and preachers because it was said to be immoral, since no man should have to bear the sins of another or be punished for them. He said this did not obtain, since Christ voluntarily bore the sins of man and was contented to be named among the transgressors that they might be redeemed. There could be nothing immoral about this.

Having given that brief introduction, he began his sermon:

‘Those of you who are readers of the New Testament will, I believe, agree with me that the Cross or the death of Christ is central to its action and its teaching. Three times in one Gospel—that of Mark—Jesus said it was imperative that he go to the Cross. The matter of the Cross was uppermost in his mind. He saw it as the fulfilment of many of the prophecies. One-third of the text of the four gospels is given over the events of the Death and Resurrection.

‘Jesus gave little teaching regarding the Cross, but spoke of being lifted up as a serpent so that men should not perish but have eternal life; that being

lifted up he would draw all men unto him. He spoke of giving his flesh for the life of the world, that his blood was that of the new covenant, and was for the forgiveness of sins. After his resurrection he showed from the prophecies that his death was indispensable, and through it repentance and remission of sins could—and should—now be preached among all nations, i.e. to Gentiles as well as Jews. There was nothing in all this that conflicted with the teaching of the letters of the apostles. Since Jesus had given them understanding of himself, it was natural they would enlarge on the few statements he had made concerning his death.

‘The apostles—even excluding Paul—give clear teaching on the death as being for the salvation of men. The term ‘the blood’ is used enough to link it with the Old Testament sacrificial system. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks extensively of the necessity of the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Paul, of course, teaches strongly about the power of the death of Christ, and has been accused of going beyond what Christ taught in regard to the Cross. Indeed, it is said that he devised a new gospel, but this is to be doubted, since his teaching comports with the other apostles.

‘However, it is Paul who certainly teaches the substitutionary death of Christ. Some will contend even this claim, but whilst some modern teaching on substitution may be deficient, Paul is certainly expounding it. I will now read you a number of his sayings, as well as sayings of other New Testament writers, and I think you will see by the prepositions they use that the substitutionary atonement was what Christ effected:

‘This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins’; ‘Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures and rose again in accordance with the scriptures’; ‘God made him to be sin for us’; ‘Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age’; ‘Christ
redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us'; ‘He was delivered for our offences and raised for our justification'; ‘Sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh'; ‘Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood'; ‘The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me'; ‘He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself......Christ having been offered to bear the sins of many'; ‘Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins.......for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified'; ‘The blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified'; ‘He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree'; ‘For Christ also died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous'; ‘He is the propitiation for our sins'; ‘He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins'; ‘Has freed us from our sins by his blood.'

'I think you will all agree that the Cross is both powerful and central in New Testament teaching, but if some doubt still remains, then let us also read the following:

‘Through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is justified'; ‘It was necessary for Christ to suffer and rise from the dead'; ‘In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace'; ‘Having forgiven all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside nailing it to the cross'; ‘He disarmed principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him'; ‘We have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus'; ‘The blood of Christ, who.......offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works'; ‘May the God of peace.......by the blood of the everlasting covenant equip you'; ‘You were ransomed.......with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot'; ‘By his wounds you have been healed'; ‘The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin'; ‘They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

'I now want us to see that the model for sacrifice in the Old Testament was one of substitution, and it is apparent that this will be--indeed must be--the case in the New Testament, especially as the idea of propitiation is present in both. Propitiation means generally that God provides the apparatus of sacrifice in order

to deal with the sin and guilt of man, especially in regard to His wrath which is upon evil. Leviticus 17:11 says,

‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life.’

'We will look more fully at this in a moment.

‘All of this quoting and reasoning may make you think I am unduly technical this morning. This is not the case. My previous preaching to you would have been more profitable had I gradually and constantly opened up these things, but I didn’t.

'Now we come to look at the act of substitutionary atonement in the Book of Leviticus. We could use one of many chapters to do so, but we will concentrate on chapter 1. Rather than detail the text to you, I will give you the general principle. The worshipper went into the court of sacrifice within the temple, and brought with him an animal, the one which was to be the victim. He laid his hand firmly and heavily upon its head, thus identifying himself with it. He was then handed the knife by which he slew the animal, the priest collecting the blood, after which he--the worshipper--washed the dirty parts of the animal and chopped it up to be burned. This was called atonement, and was said to effect the forgiveness of his sins. The animal became the victim in his place. No one thought this was immoral, because it was the way God prescribed it to His people.

'Doubtless, in this very beautiful sanctuary in which we are worshipping God this morning, that old act of atonement must seem crude and primitive to us, but Jesus did not think so. It was the model to which he and others pointed. John the Baptist said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' and later writers spoke of him as 'the Lamb of God'. The prophet Isaiah described his work of suffering, when he said,'
'Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.'

'The fact is that the action of atonement was prescribed meticulously. No one could make atonement in his own way. God has set out what it should be, and Paul said 'God has set him forth as a propitiation [atonement] by his blood.' Thus the requirements of true substitutionary atonement were fulfilled, and God saw to that!

'What I want us to see this morning is that there was no other way our sins could be dealt with, and no one has a right to tell you otherwise. If they do, they will be preaching a gospel other than the one Paul proclaimed, in which case they must be accursed.

'I put it to you all, then, here this morning in this sanctuary, that you need the sacrifice of Christ. Your sins do matter: we are depraved, but God has made provision for our forgiveness, the cleansing of our consciences and reconciliation with Himself—the God against Whom we sinned. I am sure that most—if not all—our troubles stem from the guilt that is within us, and the righteous wrath which is upon our evil.

'In closing I simply read some Scriptures which should alert us to the need of personal repentance and living faith in Jesus Christ, by whom we have the atonement, and saving love of the Father. Please, please accede to this:

"Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins"; 'Repent, therefore that your sins may be blotted out'; 'Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name'; 'They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus'; 'Those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness [shall] reign in life'; 'By one man’s obedience many shall be made righteous'; 'Our old humanity was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and that we might no longer be enslaved to sin'; 'Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died'; 'You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'; 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins'; 'His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins'; 'Christ gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God'; 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'; 'The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men'; 'Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity'; 'He saved us by the washing of regeneration which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life'; 'The Lamb that was slain.'

'Before I go, let me ask you a question. Do you know that your sins demanded such a Cross, and in fact the Cross happened because of them, and so in this sense you were one who slew Christ? Whether you like it or not, he was your sacrifice. It is best then that now you place your hand on his head and say, 'You were my Lamb. You were my Substitute. Today I gratefully acknowledge this, and am bound to you for ever, in love and gratitude.'

'Now, then, you will know how powerful is this true gospel. You will see it deals with all our past, our present and our future. No wonder Paul said, 'I resolved to know nothing amongst you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.' No wonder, either, that he said, 'God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which I am crucified unto the world, and the world unto me.'"

Having said these things, the minister—Paul Ethrington—descended from the pulpit and
came amongst his people for what was to be the outcome of all these things in his congregation.

I am not proof against Your love,
I am not strong against Your joy;
Though I am strong against all else,
And though my powers I may employ,
I am not proof against Your love,
Oh Father, Son and Holy Dove.

I have not found my powers to be
Strong when the Lord of Hosts draws near.
His songs of love unsettle me,
And all His hosts dispel my fear;
I am not proof against the love
Of Father, Son and Holy Dove.

My citadel so long was locked,
Lone, grim and firm upon its place
Until the Lord of Hosts encamped
And all my powers of sin laid waste.
I proved not proof against the love
Of Father, Son and Holy Dove.
My gates were lifted up that day:
   My portals broke and opened wide.
The King of Glory and His hosts
   Flowed in for ever to abide–
The glory of eternal love
   Of Father, Son and Holy Dove.

I was not proof against that love;
   The hands I saw were scarred with nails;
The eyes—that once were filled with pain–
   Spoke love to me that never fails.
I gladly bowed to conquering love
   Of Father, Son and Holy Dove.

Ah, You—the One Eternal Love!
   I thank You that You entrance made
   Into this needy heart of mine
   By grace, and by the price You paid.
And now I love You for Your love,
   Dear Father, Son and Holy Dove.

The Somewhat Bewildered Congregation

We could leave Paul Ethrington to carry on in his church. Doubtless some of his congregation were incensed by his preaching and felt they had been let down or even betrayed. They had come to know, trust and love him for the kind of encouragement he had given them, the system of thinking and practice which he had inaugurated, and understandably felt cheated by the new—or, rather, the older—approach. Others were simply puzzled, whilst yet others were glad of his new (old) preaching in its contents and effects. Let us see what we can salvage from the events, and then let us try to learn from them.

The Point of Pastor Ethrington

The first section of this article is fictional, although—strangely enough—fiction is rarely wholly fictional.
It springs from the realities of life. Pastor Ethrington—as we call him—would be a person derived from many others, a kind of composite character, but nonetheless representative of some real person. There is the minister who, fresh from seminary, and strong in faith and doctrine, will act as our Pastor acted. Few lay folk understand how many temptations assault the pastor who is a G.P., i.e. a general practitioner. Ambition is certainly a powerful temptation, as it is a strong drive for action. It is generally unrecognized for what it is, especially by the minister who wishes to bring people to faith, to new birth and to mature Christian life. I would think this is the primary temptation, and the others are subsumed under it.

It needs to be said that often there is an unspoken conflict between the pulpit and the pew. This is not always the case, and does not have to be so, but people in congregations may live their lives with an inner conflict. On the one hand they may wish to know God, and on the other they may not desire to know Him. Knowing God is a confronting matter and a demanding event, and so people dilly-dally about coming to a climactic personal knowledge of God. Hence they are wary of the pastor or evangelist who seeks to draw—or even to force—them to God. At the same time they have the universal problem of human guilt and they wish to solve it, and how can one do that without coming to know God? There is a pressure on every guilty human being to prove himself, to justify herself, and this is often attempted through techniques of self-atonement. These—by the way—can be most painful, and can lead to states of morbidity.

Our fictional Pastor Ethrington is the man who knew initially that the grace of God redeems man and sets him free from human bondage, bondage of sin, and bondage of evil powers. The seeming cost to human pride—of repentance and faith—is really very little when compared with the rich freedom that comes to the human spirit through the grace of God in salvation. Even so, many of us indignant repudiate the need for repentance and faith, feeling they are too humiliating for words. God can, they say, effect our forgiveness without that sort of thing!

To return, then, to the temptations that pastors face; the desire to have people accept, and even praise one, is difficult to resist. This can lead into problems. One of these is the matter of apologia. Apologia is ‘the reasoned setting forth and defence of one’s case’, and is certainly not apology. I have observed that when apologia becomes an attempt to win a person (for his or her own good, of course), that often things which are offensive are deleted from the apologia, in which case it—the reasoned setting forth and defence—loses its real power. Something is sacrificed which means the gospel in some way loses its dynamic. I would think that much liberal thinking is not deliberate unbelief so much as an attempt to make the truth of Christianity acceptable.

I have sympathy with Paul Ethrington when he thinks that his original presentation of the gospel was sometimes aggressive, abrasive, and even crude and inappropriate. Perhaps much of it was. The flaw in his thinking, however, was to assume that the gospel, itself, was aggressive, abrasive, crude and primitive. It is not. Whilst ‘the word of the Cross’ will always be a scandal to the religious,
and foolishness to the intellectual, yet, of itself, the gospel is wonderfully powerful, effective to change lives and to transform personalities. The pastor of the First Church of the Resurrection believed that by taking a new and gentler approach he would win folk to the gospel, and so to Christ. Instead he found himself paring off elements that seemed to be offensive. From that point onwards he was in the drift.

What About the Drift?

Theologians are often the butt of jokes made by those who would call themselves 'non-theologians', or rate their spirituality higher for not being linked with theology. Since theology is simply the study of God, then everyone ought to be a theologian, and in fact, everyone is—no less the atheist who is often quite an authority on 'The God Who is Not'. There may be a valid objection to theologians who are so much into theory and propositions that the reality of God is dimmed, but genuine theologians have a large part to play in our society. They are called upon to be objective enough to sort out loose and woolly thinking, heresies that easily crop up, and to discern between what is authentic or unhealthy subjectivity, between false theology and true biblical objectivity. They can help stem the drift towards pseudo-teaching and false experiences of faith.

As our preacher pointed out in his first sermon on the gospel, we can unwittingly form a ‘good news’ we think to be good, when it is not the genuine gospel of Christ. We will find in almost every case of departure from the truth that we are trying to please people, and generally for those reasons which we think are good.

The Matter of Honesty

Paul Ethrington honestly thought that his initial proclamation of the gospel was defective, that he had given unnecessary offence, for if one thought about the gospel then one saw that it was not heavy, severe and judgemental, but rather a matter of liberty, of light, and of love. Of course, the gospel is a matter of these three latter things, but it has to deal with profound matters such as the nature of God as Creator, the rebellion and impurity of sinful men who cannot redeem themselves and who are rightly under the holy wrath of God. His holy wrath is, of course, not an animus towards man, but God’s unchanging intention to destroy evil. Only God, then, can provide a way out of this terrible dilemma.

I have long been aware that the gospel of salvation appears disgusting and crude to moderate human beings, especially well-cultured and educated men and women. The root of their scorn is the conviction that men and women are not too bad, really. Pelagius and Arminius—though the latter to a lesser degree—thought that human beings can behave well—if they will. It seems that fallen man is incurably Pelagian*

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* Pelagius was a theologian in the fifth century who said that created human nature was virtually unimpaired by Adam’s Fall, so that there is no original sin, no guilt or innate depravity transmitted from Adam to the human race. Thus a human being—especially a baptized Christian—is capable of a life of perfect holiness, since God commands and will thus enable him.
and Arminian* at heart. Hence he has belief in himself that he can right what is wrong, and even accomplish noble morality.

When Pastor Ethrington began his preaching he was fervent in the belief that man is corrupted, depraved, and in need of salvation. He saw the Cross as the radical act of God to save man from his sinfulness. He was one with Jeremiah, Paul, Augustine, Luther and Calvin in this belief. Then he began to read wider than his usual circle of theology. He heard statements like the following:

We must accept the fact that man is depraved, but since he is made in the image of God, then he cannot be wholly debased and corrupt. The fact of sin has been blown up inordinately, and its nature emphasized out of proportion. Man has great gifts, abilities and capacities, especially moral capacities. True enough, God sent His Son to die for man–whatever that was intended to mean–but the so-called crisis of sin is now over. Man is free to be himself. He can now live by faith–and faith means positive and possibility thinking. It means dreaming at a high level. There is almost nothing a man cannot do. He can rise to heights hitherto never dreamed of. Man no longer has to grovel. He must be careful not to exaggerate his failures or to be caught in senseless guilt. If he follows this new order of life, then he can become as a god, if not, in fact, be one.

* Arminius lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and rejected that view of predestination that says grace is dependent on election. He believed that election followed grace, that man can turn to God–of himself–repent and believe. Man can believe if he will. Man’s will is free, and whilst it may co-operate with God it can resist him. God’s foreknowledge is simply seeing who will respond, and not effecting their response. It can be seen that modern Christian humanism springs from the roots of Pelagian and Arminian theology, and propagates an optimism that is not truly biblical. Incidentally, there is no biblical pessimism. The Scriptures are simply realistic.
Without evaluating these reforming and reviving movements, we can draw a helpful observation. Each movement, in its own time, and for reasons related to its drives, proclaimed the gospel in the idiom of its day, addressing itself to contemporary mores, behaviour and culture. Its language and thought terms expressed the gospel just as powerfully as the apostles did in Jewish, Greek and Pagan cultures. The value of this observation is that it should prevent us absolutizing any age or stage of the church's life.

For example, if we try the Augustinian métier, the Lutheran thundering, the Calvinistic reasoning, the Pietistic emphasis on spiritual experience, and the Puritan insistence on religion of the heart, in the ways that these were originally expressed, then we may be guilty of archaism. We think the power of their gospel lay in the way they presented it, and in the very thought forms which belonged to their age. It is obvious that the gospel is dynamic in all ages, but must be expressed in the thought forms of each day and culture. Whilst the gospel was native to Hebrew thinking, it was foreign to Greek culture. Christians had to bring a new meaning to the Greek words they used, and they succeeded. They succeeded not only in breaking into cultures, but even changing much of the thinking of those cultures. The Creeds devised by the ecumenical Councils of their day had to be stated in the thought forms of their times, but that did not break or alter the innate reality of the gospel. We need not here discuss the methods used, or the reasons for the triumph of Christian expression.

What we can do is to learn that we do not—for example—have to slavishly follow the language and expressions of the seventeenth century Puritans, the eighteenth century Evangelicals, or even the early twentieth century modes of Evangelical and Pentecostal communication.

I think Paul Ethrington's mistake lay in thinking that the gospel, as he had known it, was no longer relevant to his age. The latter part of the twentieth century has seen vast changes in particular cultures, in a growing international sense of identity, and in the movements of ideologies. It is clear that if one seeks to adapt the gospel to sociological and psychological changes in living, then one must be careful not to change the gospel. Strictly speaking, scientific research simply gives us further insights into the phenomenology of the universe, and whilst these may be valuable for human living, they themselves are subject to further discoveries which may again alter our perspectives and uses of them.

Man changes little, if at all. The gospel may meet the world in its historical, social, racial, cultural, philosophical, ideological and religious changes, but it will not have to change in order to be authentic, to survive and to be effective. Humanism will come and go, rise and fall, but the gospel does not have to adapt to it. Man is either a tolerable creature and reasonably benign, and will one day fashion into an equable war-rejecting and peace-establishing creature, or he will not. The whole truth of Scripture is a remarkable unity. This truth is concerned with the nature of God as Creator, Provider, Redeemer, and Reconstituter of all things. In one sense all is history and in another nothing is history, but is the continuous act of the living God—the God who continually acts. The Scriptures are not a mixture
of ideas, actions and events, but the dynamic revelation of God Himself, His will and counsel for all time and eternity and His moral and prophetic address to humanity and His other creatures.

I wonder how many of us will understand the paragraph above. Let us reduce it to its simplest form. The gospel is eternal. The gospel is innately dynamical. By nature of the case it is relevant in any age, always 'fitting the bill', and irrepresibly being effective, whether for the redemption or for the judgement of its hearers. It is for us, then, to understand the gospel, and so live in it that we will express more in the way of witness than in the brilliance of theological communication.

On this score, then, Pastor Ethrington was able to be effective in his early ministry—meeting the agony of the human situation by the power of the gospel. He was less effective when he tried to approach the gospel—and communicate it—in the light of contemporary anthropological insights, and he was most effective when he recanted of his drift to religious humanism and human autonomy. He was greatly effective when he recanted of his mistaken evangelism, and emerged into an even greater understanding of the eternal living gospel.

A Conclusion to ‘The Kingtide of Love’

We have said very little, really, about ‘the kingtide of love’. What do we mean by this? We mean that God is holy, and fallen man is sinful. We mean that God does not destroy man in his sinfulness, yet does not ignore his sin. Sin may minimize itself, and rebellious man may hate God with a perfect hate, but God moves in grace, love and mercy in His creation. Because He has created all things and has created them wisely, He is rightfully wrathful upon all evil, and must— and will—judge it. To speak of sin lightly, or to say that we could over-emphasize its terrible and evil nature, is not to understand sin at all.

It is also not to understand the inner dislocation, distress, anguish and terror that the guilt of sin brings to man who was made in the image of God. To say that a human being can get over sin, as though it were a common cold, is to be hopelessly inadequate to deal with the sorrows of the human race. It is to denigrate the high and holy love of God in the incarnation, ministry and death of His Son. It is to fail to see the vast love of God in effective defeat of all sin, of Satan and evil powers, of the proud unbroken spirit of depraved man. It is to miss the love that—before time—initiated the action of the Cross and stood by it in history, and will stand by it to its climax. It is to miss the personal love of the Father, and of the Son in that great act of the Death, and in the vindication of the Resurrection.

We must therefore feel pity for the man who said sin has been over-emphasized and the powers of man underrated. He who says the doctrines of original sin, the depravity of man, and the predestination of God ought to be eradicated as noxious weeds is flying in the face of the reality of them, for they are written ineradicably into the Holy Scriptures, and are part of the very utterance of God.

We conclude that Paul Ethrington was caught up afresh on the kingtide of love, and anyone who
knows what a kingtide is will agree that it is irresistible, sweeping all before it, and in our case lifting us up on to the shores of eternity and establishing us there.

He came to me the other night—this figure. In the midst of the soft darkness And my gentle meditation— I was thinking of God and man and all things— He came cowled, his face in darkness, A dark and ruminative spirit, Typically clothed as death, as corruption And portending putrefaction. He came, saying to me in my contemplation, 'There is death in your writing, and putrefaction. There is an inherent corruption. Nothing you write will live for ever, But it must die. Its destruction Is innate to it.'

Because I was calm at that moment I could cogitate with equanimity. Other times I had shuddered, Had felt the horror of non-success, The tragedy of wasted hours— Hours of thought and of writing— But that would have been in the days Of early and insistent ambition.
Had I then died? Had I grown weary
With the non-apprehension
Of the intelligent multitude?
Had I become cynical, bitter
That my penetration and discernment
And apprehension of all
Was remarked of no account,
Or rated in the area of the banal?
Had I withdrawn to an ivory castle,
There to contemplate the Philistines—
To rate and berate them?

When the cowled figure came,
The hands of my mind were clean,
The palms of my spirit without sweat,
And the heart of me was sound and good—
Though without strength, without power.
I nodded to him who was dark in spirit—
Eyes cowled, face hidden, the dark accuser—
And I agreed with him.

‘Who knows,’ I asked, ‘that he is immortal?
Who may say that what he writes is likewise so?
What fountains are we to bring forth
Immortal thought and writing of ourselves?
We can but use the gift we have
And if that gift be lowly, sure,
Its fruits are lowly too.
Yet lowly folk eat lowly fruit,
And none believes the fruit itself
Sustains for ever. Who dares believe
His fruit itself is life itself, is fullest fruit,
Sustaining life for ever?
Who thinks this way has brought his death,
His own corruption into it. Ambition is the stuff
Of death and putrefaction.

Ambition brings its own corruption:
Its seeds are everywhere; they sprout
And soon the good is choked.
Were we to see this curse
Is part of every man and bow to fact,
And nod to truth, and know beyond the curse
Lie gifts that are from God: were we to use those
gifts,
Then questions of immortal art,
Of lasting fame and non-corruption
Would die for ever from our minds.’

The cowled face bent low,
And lower bent the hooded head
Until I thought he almost prayed
And even worshipped. Bent low,
Until he could not lower go,
These were the words he spoke:

‘They matter not—the words we write,
The songs we sing, the art we give,
The raptures of our mind and heart,
The heady thought, the brilliant thought,
The wisdom of our sagelike understanding:
Nought matters when we see that death
Is in our bones, and in our mind,
And touches all we do, and are.
We leave behind the things corrupt
With death within them. Then their death
Brings death to all—the victims of our art.’

‘That’s half the truth,’ I, spirited, replied.
‘The half that’s not the truth at all!
‘Tis God Who gives the gifts, creates the fruit—
And this through mortal hands and brain
And heart. ‘Tis God Who gives the pain,
The Vandal

The gift of shame, the humble tears,
The inner comprehension. He brings
The death of death to death,
And life of life to life,
And with it gives the final gift
Of immortality. What if, upon the way,
The things we do and make may perish?
What if our vaunting pride today
Result in acclamation—the cheers of men,
The praise of crowds, the nod of kings?
These matters do not count at all.
The final count's the matter—His count—
And that's a thing of faith.'

The hooded one went on his way
Without a word, then turned to see
As I resumed my thought.
'Well played!' he said, 'Well played, O man!
And I heard laughter in his voice,
As though a careless cascade played
In raptured merriment. I looked and saw,
No hooded face or cowled head,
But in its place instead
The laughing eyes of immortality.
I bowed my head to worship and to praise.
To know that all's not death—
That takes the rub from death
And brings the life of life to us.

I think that long as life is life
I'll hear his raptured merriment
And careless cascade played.