

Dressing “Virtue Ecclesiology” in Deification Garb

Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion by Paul M. Collins. London: T & T Clark International, 2010. Print.

For the majority of Western Christendom, the proposition that man might become God remains dubious, if not blasphemous. This has not always been the case, and it never has been in the East. Among the Orthodox churches of the East, deification continues to occupy a central place in theological reflection, often a hotly debated one. With the emigration of Russian Orthodox theologians to France in the mid-twentieth century, East and West have begun to discourse once again, and Western talk of deification has begun to blossom anew. Interest in the doctrine has taken a few different forms. The majority of works have highlighted the doctrine’s central place in the Christian historical tradition. A few works have attempted to map Eastern conceptions of deification onto various Western classical thinkers (e.g., Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, etc.). Fewer still have proposed some form of a revived doctrine of deification in the Western context. Paul M. Collins, priest in the Anglican Church and former Reader in Theology at the University of Chichester, has contributed to the discourse on all levels in his *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (henceforth *Partaking*). Collins provides a historical survey of the doctrinal development of deification from its biblical and cultural beginnings to its present manifestation, both East and West. He then goes further to present a proposal for the “architecture” of a Western, ecumenical revival. The survey is unparalleled in its breadth and well worth perusal; the proposal suffers from a lack of definitional clarity and reads more like a conjunction of Eastern Orthodox thought and Western “Virtue Ecclesiology” without a genuine synthesis (190). Still, the desire to revive and not merely analyze the doctrine is certainly a move in the right direction. *Partaking* represents an advancement of the discourse and deserves engagement.

In the first chapter Collins introduces the methodological approach and theological project of the book. He notes that the doctrine of deification strikes many Western ears, both inside and outside of the academy, as an “abhorrent or presumptuous, esoteric or irrelevant idea” (1). Present theological interest in all things “practical’, ‘political’ and

‘public’” (1) dismisses the interiority of deification as a form of inward escapism from the church’s societal obligations (2). To allay this concern, he proposes a “functionalization” of the doctrine of deification by employing the concept of communion—a concept that he borrows from the modern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas. “The project of this book is to investigate the corporate and collective dimensions of theosis in Scripture and Tradition and to relate these to an understanding of the dynamics of the divine-human relationship premised on an appeal to communion [koinonia]” (2).¹ By appealing to the communal dimension of the doctrine of deification, Collins hopes to avoid the individuality often attributed to its more spiritualistic construals and to suggest that “the analysis and discussion of the doctrine of ‘theosis’ is of crucial importance for the Church today” (2).

Historical Survey

The majority of the book (chapters 2 through 5) takes the form of historical survey. While drawing heavily upon and conversing with previous historical surveys (e.g., Jules Gross’s *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers* and Norman Russell’s *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*), *Partaking* extends the narrative substantially. While Russell briefly considers the Syriac and Latin traditions in one of his appendices, both he and Gross limit their primary analysis to the patristic period. *Partaking* traces the doctrine, East and West, to the present day, including a helpful survey of extant scholarship on the topic. This alone is reason enough to peruse its pages, particularly if one is in need of a brief introduction to the history of the doctrinal development of deification. Many of the authors will be familiar, but perhaps some will be new to the reader. In each case, Collins provides a brief historical sketch and presents the author’s understanding of deification within the broader scope of his or her theological vision. In chapter 3 *Partaking* surveys early church witnesses; in chapter 4 it surveys proponents of the doctrine of deification in Orthodoxy; and in chapter 5 it surveys the use of the metaphor of deification in the West.

While even a sketchy summary of the historical narrative in *Partaking* is beyond the scope of this review, chapter 5 at least requires comment. Collins is aware that “on the whole, the metaphor of deification has been absent from mainstream theological discourse in the West” (111). Still, he contends, “within Western

traditions there are constant traces of the metaphor of deification, both within the mainstream as well as in what are perceived to be the ‘peripheral’ traditions” (111). These “traces” primarily take the form of “appeal to (religious) experience” (111), and Collins suggests that these have failed to enter mainstream discourse because of the suspicion of experience in Western Christendom as a whole. While these traditions do not necessarily use the explicit language of deification, Collins reinterprets these texts in an attempt to “re-receive the use of the metaphor of deification in Western sources and reclaim a tradition which was pushed to the margins and exists only in traces” (112). His basic thesis in the chapter seems to be that the doctrine of deification is not the particular possession of the East, because fragments of its basic form and, at times, its explicit invocation, have continued throughout the Western tradition.

A Western “revival” of deification would thus not be an adoption of “Eastern” thought but a movement of a “peripheral” or “marginalized” strand of the Western tradition to the more central position that it deserves. Collins sees the shared heritage of the patristic tradition developing simultaneously in the East and the West under radically differing cultural and ecclesiastical circumstances. His historical presentation sets the stage for his final chapter, in which he presents a proposal for a modern, ecumenical synthesis, to which we will turn shortly.

All in all, Collins’s narrative is valuable in several ways. It better acquaints the reader with the variety of ways that the doctrine of deification has developed throughout history in a variety of circumstances. It also introduces the reader to the present interest in the doctrine and the issues that constitute the present discourse. Given the wide scope of thinkers whom Collins is engaging, it is possible that he misrepresents some of them. The range of witnesses is impressive nonetheless, and that in itself should do much to assuage the reticence of the uninformed. Deification occupies a solid place within the Christian tradition and deserves more attention in our present day. Concern should be directed not toward the doctrine itself but toward theological systems that have ignored so rich a heritage and reduced the hope of the gospel to a present moral imperative and a future imaginative fantasy.

Partaking’s Proposal

In chapter 6 *Partaking* presents a proposal for a modern, Western, and ecumenical synthesis of the doctrine of deification. *Partaking* presents four themes that are distilled from the tradition already narrated and that, it suggests, are necessary to reconstruct the doctrine in a modern context: mystical theology, dynamic participation, the sacraments, and the practice of the virtues.

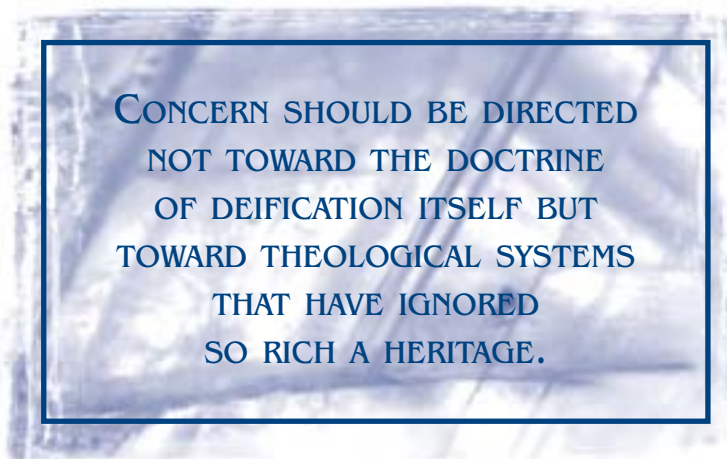
The core of the proposal is not easily extracted amidst the profusion of quotations pulled from various sources. Ultimately, the proposal reads more like an eclectic combination of sometimes drastically different conceptualizations of deification rather than a genuine synthesis. The fundamental tension in the proposal has its source perhaps in Collins’s decision to speak of the “metaphor” of deification, a categorization that he takes

from Norman Russell. Russell suggests that there are three uses of deification language: nominal, analogical, and metaphorical:

The first two uses are straightforward. The nominal interprets the biblical application of the word ‘gods’ to human beings simply as a title of honour. The analogical ‘stretches’ the nominal: Moses was a

god to Pharaoh as a wise man is a god to a fool; or men become sons and gods ‘by grace’ in relation to Christ who is Son and God ‘by nature’. The metaphorical use is more complex. It is characteristic of two distinct approaches, the ethical and the realistic. The ethical approach takes deification to be the attainment of likeness to God through ascetic and philosophical endeavour, believers reproducing some of the divine attributes in their own lives by imitation. Behind this use of the metaphor lies the model of *homoiosis*, or attaining *likeness* to God. The realistic approach assumes that human beings are in some sense transformed by deification. Behind the latter use lies the model of *methexis*, or *participation*, in God. (1-2)

Russell’s distinction between analogical deification (becoming God by grace) and realistic metaphorical deification (becoming God by participation) is difficult to discern, but for him to include both ethical deification (becoming like God) and realistic deification (becoming God) under the single label of metaphorical deification creates a category that is too large to be helpful.



The distinction between ethical and realistic metaphorical deification, while noted by Collins in the beginning of the book (25-26), is unfortunately absent in his proposal, making it difficult to ascertain which he is proposing. Certainly, both notions can claim historical support, sometimes within the same author, but the demands of modern scholarship require greater clarity, particularly in a proposal such as this.

Collins' use of the equivocal category of "metaphor," perhaps in the interests of gaining ecumenical consensus, ultimately hides a deep tension between a genuine patristic and Orthodox rendition of deification and an emerging Western, ecumenical, and postliberal understanding of the Christian tradition. While the former is genuinely "realistic," the latter is primarily "ethical." According to the former understanding, deification involves human beings who have been both created and called for the express purpose of being joined and united with the Triune God (176). This union of humanity and divinity was accomplished in the person of Christ and is experienced by the believers through their union with Him (180). In this union the believers become the Body of Christ, "the corporateness of the Incarnate Lord" (179). This "organic relationship (e.g. Vine)" (185) causes the church to be

the divine presence of the Kingdom of God in human forms on earth, the mystery of the fullness of the divine being and life, truth and love, dwelling in the community of human persons headed by Christ and animated by His Spirit. (186, quoting de Chardin).

The latter understanding paints a very different picture. It is informed primarily by postmodern sensibilities, draws heavily from postliberal theologians (MacIntyre, Hauerwas, Adams, and Mannion, among others), and attempts to construct a vision of the Christian tradition under the conditions of postmodernity. Accordingly, the praxis of the church (the sum total of its practices, including its liturgy, reading of Scripture, communal relationships, taking care of the poor, etc.) culturally constitutes the personhood of its adherents. In opposition to the individualistic, consumerist, and violent culture in which they live, the believers are taught to live a life of love, forgiveness, and justice. Such a life is understood to model the relationality of the three of the Divine Trinity (190), and through the practice of the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love, the Christian community acts in turn as a force in the world "in the struggle for human dignity and liberation" (188).

In the end it is difficult to believe that these two understandings can be combined. While the language employed often sounds the same (e.g., both speak of the believers' participation in the life of the Triune God), careful investigation demonstrates a fundamental distinction in meaning.

In the former the church as the Body of Christ is understood as a fellowship of believers who are growing daily in their experience of the divine life to manifest the fellowship of the Divine Trinity in the life and ministry of the church. In the latter the practices of the church culturally construct the personhood of the believers as members of a community of virtue, modeled after the relationality of the Divine Trinity, as a sign of egalitarianism to the broken world around them.

Collins's language gradually shifts from the conceptual-ity of the former to that of the latter as he moves through the four themes of his proposal, which indicates that his allegiance may ultimately lie in an ethical understanding of deification rather than a realistic one. The proposal begins with a recommendation for serious theological reflection on mystical experience in order to "democratize" the experience of a few mystics for the benefit of the common believer in their pursuit of the experience of and union with God. The proposal ends with a concept of "Virtue Ecclesiology" in which believers are formed by the Christian tradition to live a life that emulates the relationality of the Triune God for the good of society (190). The reader is left to ponder which is being proposed and whether the two have any commonality. One statement in particular seems to betray Collins' suspicion of the former and preference for the latter. He suggests that "dynamic participation is no mere sharing in a divine essence rather 'we become *in our human way divine*'" (182). Ultimately, *Partaking's* portrayal of deification looks much more ethical than it does realistic. Rather than becoming divine in any real sense, the believers are called only to emulate God in their social interactions within the church and toward the world.

Conclusion

Collins's historical work is helpful and will likely broaden the awareness of literature on the doctrine of deification for any reader. It deserves both engagement and development to better elucidate the way that the doctrine of deification has developed over time and in different circumstances. But the proposal of the final chapter seems too great an adaptation to be true to that historical tradition. Rather than balancing and enriching a Western theology more comfortable with objective truth than subjective experience, it instead ennobles Western ethical Christianity by calling it deification and suggesting that it fits within the historical narrative presented. Ironically, the "'practical', 'political' and 'public'" (1) Christianity that *Partaking* begins with is the Christianity with which it concludes. While it was set over and against deification in the first chapter, the two have been combined in the proposal. The language of deification has been applied to "Virtue Ecclesiology" to the effect that the former has been emptied of its true force and the latter has been lifted up but not altered or enriched. The desire to return to a doctrine

of deification in the West is encouraging, but better proposals² can certainly be found.

by Mitchell Kennard

Notes

¹While John Zizioulas is not considered in a section of his own in chapter 4, Collins engages him throughout. In recent decades Zizioulas has been at the head of a movement in Orthodox theology that has attempted to overturn the “realistic” understanding of deification represented by his predecessor, Vladimir Lossky, and replace it with a more “ethical” understanding, using the concept of communion and its role in the constitution of human personhood. While Zizioulas’s influence can be found throughout the book, Collins ultimately tries to keep both Lossky and Zizioulas in his constructive proposal, as indicated by the title of the chapter in which the proposal appears: “Transformation and Community.” If he is taking Zizioulas’s side in the current Orthodox debate, he should be more forthright in his rejection of Lossky’s, and if he rejects Lossky’s, he must also answer to the long tradition that Lossky represents.

²For an introduction to deification in the ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, see the October 2002 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, entitled “Deification.” Although Watchman Nee and Witness Lee appear in Collins’s historical narrative (165-166), they play only a minor role, perhaps prompted by the translation of Jules Gross’ book *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers*, published by A&C Press. Collins’s quotation of Watchman Nee is germane enough, highlighting Christ’s dual status as the only begotten Son of God according to His divinity and as the first-born Son of God according to His humanity through the many sons partaking of the divine nature. His presentation of Witness Lee is less impressive. It is not inaccurate, merely deficient. Collins references the language of mingling, blending, and sonship in Witness Lee’s hymnody to describe “the outcomes of salvation” (166). In point of fact, Witness Lee taught explicitly and extensively about deification and represents, perhaps, a unique example of a genuine doctrine of deification in the West, one which undergirds not only salvation but the entire compass of the divine economy.

Works Cited

Russell, Norman. *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print.

An Eastern Orthodox View of Transfiguration

This Is My Beloved Son: The Transfiguration of Christ, by Andreas Andreopoulos. Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2012. Print.

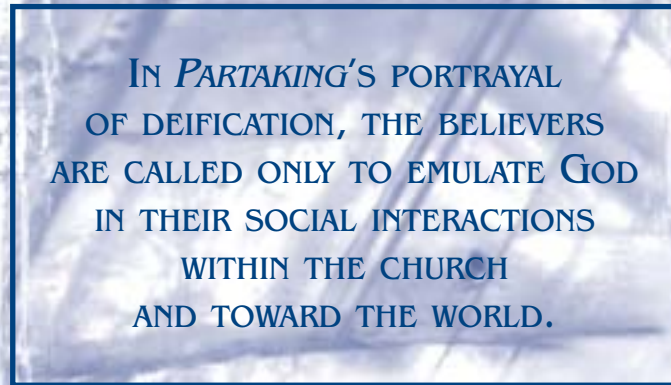
From Paraclete Press, “publishing arm of...an ecumenical monastic community” (back material) comes *This Is My Beloved Son: The Transfiguration of Christ* (hereafter *Beloved*) by Andreas Andreopoulos, Reader in Orthodox Christianity at the University of Winchester and author of *Art as Theology* and *The Sign of the Cross*. *Beloved* thoughtfully explores New Testament portions pertaining to Christ’s transfiguration and correctly observes that the event foreshadows an aspect of the believers’ full salvation, but because the book disregards relevant Scriptures, relies on iconology and apocrypha to find meaning, and promotes deviant Eastern Orthodox practices, it fails to adequately present what was revealed on the mount concerning Christ or His Body.

Synopsis

Beloved’s introduction opens on a fittingly humble note by admitting the incomprehensibility of the transfiguration to human faculties. The book then outlines its two-fold approach—didactic

and narrative, that is, to incorporate both “the voice of knowledge” and “the voice of experience” (ix). *Beloved* next situates Christ’s transfiguration in the Gospel narrative as being lesser known but somehow deeper than His crucifixion and resurrection. The book arrives at the first of its many recommendations of religious images in only its sixth paragraph, holding up the “glow” on the “serene faces of the saints in iconography” as the standard to which an elderly parishioner’s face after communion compares. Next, it concludes that understanding of both the transfiguration and resurrection can come to us only with experience, specifically by making “the Cross part of our own life” (xi).

After acknowledging the “trap” of “eloquent wisdom” and observing that “Christianity is not a philosophical system,” *Beloved* frames the faith as “a way of life, an insight that flows out of living experience, which includes things we see, touch, and understand, and also things that we do not comprehend even if we see and touch them” (xii). The next paragraph identifies “the continuous Transfiguration of Christ in the church” as one such seeable and touchable



yet incomprehensible thing (xii). *Beloved* then argues for a “lateral, iconological” approach to the subject through “the language of symbols and images” (xiii). The introduction concludes with the author’s admission of “a feeling of incompleteness” after writing an earlier book (xiv), *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, which espouses an even more overtly iconological point of view.

Chapter 1 presents a brief qualification that “much of what makes Christianity what it is” lies outside the Bible (i.e., tradition) before affirming that the scriptural revelation is “a sufficient basis for our salvation” (2). It then embarks on a discussion of the three Gospel narratives of Christ’s transfiguration as well as one Petrine and two Pauline allusions to it. *Beloved* also notes the thematic congruence between the transfiguration and the Gospel of John, based especially in its emphasis on *glory* and *light*. The book stresses that the Gospel accounts were originally “written in order to be read aloud, heard, and prayed in the Eucharistic gatherings” and argues that these sacred texts exist primarily to aid in the “sacramental sharing of the body and blood of Christ...and the kingdom of heaven to which it led,” thereby paradoxically promoting the healthy use of the Bible in church meetings yet unmistakably subordinating its importance to the “sacraments” (2,6). This mention of the Eucharist foreshadows a repeated emphasis throughout the remainder of the work.

In chapter 1 *Beloved* identifies three themes: the revelation of the Logos, the second coming, and the transfigured church (19-21). This chapter states that Christ demonstrated to His disciples He was God in order to show them that His crucifixion was not forced upon Him but taken up “by choice” even though He was “fully human” (19-20). In order to support the creedal doctrine that Christ’s dual nature did not change, the book argues that what actually changed on the mount was only “the perceptive capability of the apostles” (14). After explaining that the Old Testament prepared for Christ’s first coming, *Beloved* contends that the New Testament and Christian tradition analogously prepare for His second coming, for which the transfiguration in the Gospels is the model (20). The book argues that we need “theology and the tradition of the church and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” to understand the Bible (17). It affirms the need to know Christ simultaneously as a historical figure and as the living and present Word of God. Even when it is emphasizing the inward operation of the Holy Spirit, *Beloved* praises the church’s tradition—“its ascetics and Fathers” (17). *Beloved* notes that Christ’s uniting of divinity and humanity in Himself allows the believers to “participate in the eternity and in the inexhaustible source of life in God” (20). Chapter 1 alludes to the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist as the fundamental application of Christ’s transfiguration to the believers (15). The book speaks of

the believers being transfigured like Christ and their being crucified, resurrected, and transfigured with Him when they “receive his sacramental resurrected body and blood” at communion (21).

Chapter 2 examines parallels between Christ’s baptism and transfiguration. It asserts that both reveal “the common activity of Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (27) and “how the three persons of the Trinity operate in relation to each other” (28). For example, *Beloved* explains, “The Holy Spirit is God who operates inside us,” and “the Son, the god-man who acts as a priest...unites the divine and the human nature” (28). The book adds, “The operation of the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus’ divinity” (28), and “Ultimately the Son connects us with the inaccessible God” (29). Based on events in the transfiguration scene, *Beloved* makes an argument for the Orthodox doctrine of double procession. Nevertheless, the emphasis here is that the “work of Jesus” is not primarily for “enhanc[ing] our knowledge of theological matters...[but] is about making God and the kingdom of heaven *present* among us and inside us” (32). In the Father’s love, the Son’s incarnation, and the Spirit’s transforming, *Beloved* finds “the whole mystery of salvation” in Christ’s transfiguration (42).

According to *Beloved*, the main function of the Holy Spirit is leading people to “acceptance of Christ” and transforming them into His Body in oneness with other believers (39). However, the book also refers to asceticism as the issue of the Spirit’s inward energizing, and it praises monks as model Christians (29, 32). On a more encouraging note, it states, “A Christian is someone who is in love with God,” and exhorts, “the confession of faith we make at our baptism is only the beginning...of a continuous change in Christ” (33). This change, the book remarks, “sometimes can be seen by others,” such as in older Christians who “look ten to twenty years younger than they are” (33) and “in the fragrant relics of the saints, centuries after their death” (34). It is ironic that the change *Beloved* attributes to the inward operation of the Spirit is entirely related to physical characteristics and elements.

Chapter 3 explores the matters of separation and ascent related to the historical transfiguration event, first linking them to the monastic separation of Eastern priests and the physical height of a bishop’s throne (45). It traces the biblical and philosophical roots for “ascetic ascent toward God” (47), which it describes as a “struggle along a three-fold process of purification, illumination, and union with God” (48). According to *Beloved*, purification is achieved through penitent humility; illumination is reached by “pursuit of truth” (50), “observation and...interpretation of the created world” (51), and “a lifetime of asceticism” (52); and union with God comes “by turning inward” to contemplate God apophatically (53). In the context of the

latter method, the book weakly attempts to utilize the unutterable transcendence of God in order to justify the physicality of various Eastern Orthodox practices (55).

Chapter 4 approaches Christ's transfiguration as a miracle. It argues that like all miracles, the transfiguration is an "act of revelation" (80). In the book's discussion of historical icons, it claims that Christ ascended to the Father as soon as He died on the cross, ignoring or lightly dismissing significant New Testament portions that plainly reveal His three-day descent into Paradise—the pleasant section of Hades—before resurrecting (e.g., Luke 23:43). *Beloved* acknowledges Christ's transfiguration as the fulfillment of the promise He made in the immediately preceding verses that some would see Him coming in His kingdom (83), but the book takes the apocryphal *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Peter* as its base for understanding what exactly was revealed concerning the kingdom (84-87).

In this section *Beloved* repeats the view that the resurrected Christ is knowable primarily in the Eucharistic elements. It contends, "The main work of the church...is to make manifest the sacramental presence of Christ, and to give a foretaste...of the kingdom...in the Eucharistic act" (86). The book continues, "The normal experience of the presence of God" is not in "the beatific or ecstatic vision" of individuals but through the ritualistic liturgy of the church (86-87). *Beloved* relies on Eastern Orthodox iconography to discuss what the Lord's transfiguration reveals concerning salvation (92-93). As in the transfiguration icon, the book argues, the Lord "Christ-ifies those who step into his light and become part of his extended body" (93).

Chapter 5, subtitled "The Experience of the Uncreated Light," asserts, "A long tradition of experiences of the same metaphysical light...can be traced in the Eastern Christian world," defining this light as the "presence, manifestation, and operation of God" (95). In this chapter *Beloved* reproduces two autobiographical and predominantly physical descriptions of ecstatic experiences recounted by revered Orthodox monks. The book tempers its credulity toward such accounts by mentioning the many false visions of the young and the proud. Next the book clarifies that "visionary experience is connected to the operation of the Holy Spirit...to bring people together...and to introduce them here and now to the kingdom of heaven" (102). The Lord's ignoring Peter's

request to build three tents on the mount is taken to mean that those who receive a vision must return to the world. The book concludes, "It is impossible to love God...and also not love humankind" (104). In this context it seeks to vindicate monasticism in spite of its willful separation from the world that is in need of salvation.

After again endorsing asceticism and the Eastern Orthodox liturgy of the Eucharist as the Christian's primary access to the divine, *Beloved* relates St. Symeon's "insights" (113), introduces prayer to saints, and unabashedly advocates for icons: "Christianity is a religion based on the cult of saints—in liturgical tradition we pray to saints, we ask them to pray for us, we decorate our churches and our homes with icons of saints" (115). The book imagines a necessary balance between partaking of the Eucharist and reverence for the saints.

Chapter 6, which connects Christ's transfiguration and resurrection, describes in detail Greek Easter rituals and festivals, including fireworks and kissing strangers (117-118). *Beloved* soon returns to the Eucharist, calling it "the sine qua non of the church" (121) and exalting it as "the way the church experiences and participates in the Resurrection of Christ

continuously" (122). The book then reverts to the iconographic expertise of its author, comparing icons of the resurrection with those of the transfiguration. It also uses the whiteness of Jesus' garments and the proximity of the Feast of Tabernacles to claim that His transfiguration revealed Him to be a high priest.

Beloved seems to temper the official Eastern Orthodox doctrine of transubstantiation when it states, "The Eucharistic body of Christ is not a magic spell" (122). Confusingly, the book's author then seems to go beyond the common understanding of transubstantiation when he expands the notion to include communicants, hoping aloud to "become as much alive as that tiny piece of bread soaked in wine" (123). *Beloved* transgresses the limits of revealed truth, logic, and faith when it concludes,

We participate in the life of Christ when we become the consecrated bread and wine; when our body becomes the body of Christ—not only the historical or the ecclesial body of Christ, but his sacramental body...Our body is broken when the bread is broken. (133)

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In contrast to this unsupportable hypothesis of extended transubstantiation, *Beloved* notes that we can experience transfiguration by daily participating in Christ's death and resurrection (129). The book also rightly identifies the goal of the Christian life not as morality but as "union with God," and the believers' relationship with God not as "a code of regulations" but as "a living, dynamic thing" (130-131). Here and elsewhere, *Beloved* emphasizes the love of God toward humanity over His righteous requirements. Chapter 6 explores this aspect of the divine-human relationship as far as possible and perhaps farther by speculating as to the spiritual meanings of "gender dimorphism" and the physical consummation of marriage (132-133). Finally, the book returns to its favorite topic by claiming that the ultimate spiritual reality of the symbolic man-woman relationship is the ritual of the Eucharist (133).

Christ's Transfiguration as a Revelation of His Divinity and the Operations of the Trinity

Beloved correctly notes that Christ's transfiguration revealed His divinity (18, 88). However, in its effort to uphold the orthodox formula concerning the two natures of Christ, *Beloved* feels the need to contend that only the disciples' "perceptive capability" changed (14, 34). No change to either Christ's divine or human nature needs to be suggested by the transfiguration of His body. Rather, His divinity was merely manifested in His human body. In other instances, for example, He appeared to His believers in bodily form after His resurrection and then disappeared. Christ's flesh was a tabernacle in which God dwelt on earth (John 1:14). His divine element was confined in His humanity, just as God's shekinah glory had been concealed within the tabernacle. At His transfiguration His divine element was released from within His flesh and expressed in glory. Then it was concealed again in His flesh.

Beloved's emphasis on the coordinated operations of the three of the Trinity is commendable (27-29, 106-107), but it may be overreaching when it insists on the revelatory role of the Holy Spirit on the mount and its transmission to the disciples at that early stage (34-35, 39, 90, 108). Although other Scriptures clearly demonstrate the Spirit's frequent function in conveying revelation, *Beloved's* claim of the Spirit's role at the scene of Christ's transfiguration is based on an uncorroborated identification of the Spirit (and the Father's divinity) as physical light (34, 38, 90), and it is unnecessary, given the obvious character of what the disciples witnessed. An operation usually carried out by one of the Trinity need not be construed as strictly belonging to Him in every conceivable instance. For example, Christ plainly states in Matthew 16:17 that Peter's revelation of Christ as the Son was given to him by the Father. By arguing that the Holy Spirit

entered into the disciples in an essential way on the mount and caused them to become part of Christ's Body at that point (39, 41), *Beloved* minifies the necessity of faith in our receiving of the Spirit and negates the impact of Christ's subsequent crucifixion, which accomplished a judicial redemption and released the divine life, and resurrection, which imparted the divine life for the producing of His Body.

In addition to straining to ascribe a function to the Spirit at Christ's transfiguration, *Beloved* fails to fully recognize the import of the Father's activity. The book takes note of the Lord's ignoring of Peter's suggestion to build three tents but misses the more salient reaction of the Father to interrupt him "while he was still speaking" (17:5). The book also neglects to find meaning in the immediate disappearance of Moses and Elijah. In *Life-study of Mark* Witness Lee expounds both matters:

Peter's absurd proposal was to put Moses and Elijah on the same level with Christ, which means to make the law and the prophets equal to Christ. This was absolutely against God's economy. In God's economy the law and the prophets were only a testimony to Christ; they should not be put on the same level with Him...The law and the prophets were shadows and prophecies, not the reality...Now that Christ, the reality, is here, the shadows and the prophecies are no longer needed. No one except Jesus Himself alone should remain in the New Testament. Jesus is today's Moses, imparting the law of life into His believers. Jesus is also today's Elijah, speaking for God and speaking forth God within His believers. (228-229)

Beloved's misappropriation of Moses' separation before he ascended Mount Sinai as "the basis for the ritual purification of priests before they celebrate the Eucharist" (68) also demonstrates the mixture of the Old Testament and New Testament things in Eastern Orthodoxy, including its reliance on a class of priests and many of its physical trappings. The New Testament unequivocally states that Christ is the "one Mediator of God and men" (1 Tim. 2:5) and reveals that all believers should function as priests and ministers (1 Pet. 2:5; 4:10; Eph. 4:12, 16; Rev. 1:6).

Christ's Transfiguration as His Glorification, Prefiguring His Resurrection

Beloved finds a connection between Christ's transfiguration and His resurrection with reference to iconography, which misleads the reader toward relying upon extra-biblical sources for essential truths. Once such a door is opened, it is easier for extra-biblical sources to be utilized in turning the believers from the truth to myths (2 Tim. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:4). Moreover, the relation that the book sees between Christ's transfiguration and His resurrection is woefully incomplete. Christ's transfiguration on

the mount was a temporary foretaste of His actual, full transfiguration, which was His resurrection, for in resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit, the pneumatic Christ (1 Cor. 15:45). The book states that the disciples eventually knew Christ “as the crucified and resurrected God” (xi) but neglects to identify this crucified and resurrected One as the life-giving Spirit (John 7:39; 14:16-18; Rom. 8:9-11).

Beloved hints, “As a revelation of his glory, [the transfiguration] says something about his power over death and his Resurrection” (106-107), but it provides no further explanation. Christ’s resurrection was His glorification (Luke 24:26; 12:50; 1 Cor. 15:43; Acts 3:13, 15; John 7:39; 12:23; 17:1), and glory is God manifested and expressed. Temporarily on the mount and fully in resurrection, the divine element, which was concealed within the shell of Christ’s humanity, saturated, permeated, and shined out through His humanity. Kerry S. Robichaux delves further into this significance:

Beyond the simple benefit of being released from death, the humanity of Christ entered into a new status after the resurrection. Formerly, His humanity concealed His glory. Before His resurrection the appearance of His divinity was sub-

ject to His humanity, except for the few moments on the Mount of Transfiguration...After His resurrection, however, His humanity became the means by which His divinity is expressed in glory. Now rather than hiding what He is in His Godhead, Christ’s humanity manifests it. By doing so, Christ brings humanity into its proper function, into its original intended service, which was ordained by the Creator. On the day of His resurrection, when His humanity was glorified...humankind reached the goal of its creation to be the image and glory of God (Gen. 1:26). (31)

Furthermore, resurrection incorporated the elements of Christ’s humanity, human living, death, and resurrection into the Spirit. Christ’s incarnation brought divinity into humanity, and His resurrection uplifted humanity into divinity (John 7:39; cf. “The Spirit of the Glorified Jesus” in Andrew Murray’s *The Spirit of Christ*). It is through the Spirit that the believers can subjectively know and partake of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection (Rom. 8:11, 13; Gal. 5:16) for their inward transformation (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18) and the ultimate transfiguration of their bodies (cf. Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:43, 51;

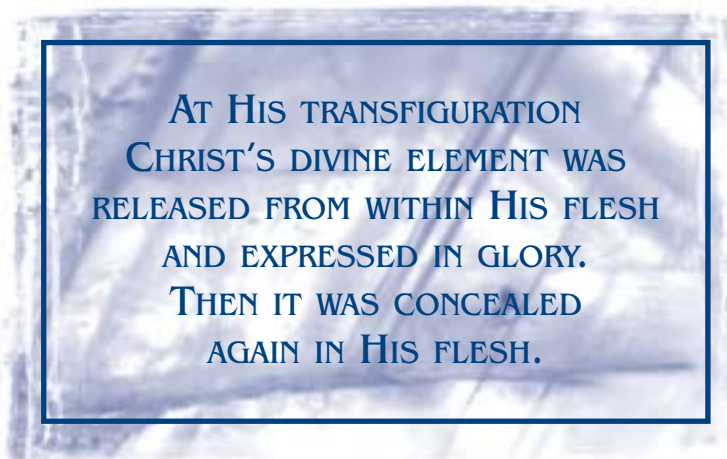
2 Cor. 5:1-8). Had He not become the life-giving Spirit, Christ and His accomplishments could not be intrinsically applied to and experienced by the believers. *Beloved*’s theme that the resurrected Christ is knowable primarily through the Eucharistic elements diminishes Christ’s transfiguration in resurrection into the life-giving Spirit, who is universally available to those who call on Him as Lord (1 Cor. 15:45; 12:3; cf. Rom. 10:9, 12). At one point the book correctly observes that the church needs to be “vivified” by “the breath of the Holy Spirit,” but then it incredibly suggests that this vivification takes place primarily through a “chain” of dead “saints” (114-115).

Christ’s Transfiguration as a Revelation of the Kingdom

The verse immediately preceding each of the three Gospel accounts of Christ’s transfiguration speaks of some of His disciples seeing Him coming in His kingdom. This clearly indicates that Christ’s transfiguration was His coming in His kingdom. Although *Beloved* does not quote these introductory verses with its reproduction of the Gospel accounts in chapter 1, it does refer to them in chapter 4. However, the book

relies mainly on the apocryphal *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Peter* to identify the transfigurations as a “foretaste of the kingdom of God,” which it uses synonymously with “heaven” and defines as being wherever there is “no separation between God and the Creation” (35-36, 84-86). *Beloved* eschews a strictly physical and spatial definition of the kingdom in favor of a relationship with God. However, its vague notion of being in God’s presence falls short of the scriptural revelation of the kingdom.

The New Testament reveals an intrinsic definition of the kingdom as well as pointing to its full manifestation in the future. The scene of Christ’s transfiguration presents a foretaste in miniature of the future, full manifestation of the kingdom in the millennium. Christ’s second coming will initiate this future manifestation. The transfiguration also shows that the kingdom is the spreading and enlargement of Christ. Intrinsically, the kingdom starts as a seed when Christ is sown into His believers (Matt. 13:3, 19, 23). This seed grows until it is manifested in glory. As such, the coming of the kingdom is gradual and from within believers. Because our humanity



is still natural, it needs to be saturated with divinity until it becomes glorious at His coming (Rom. 8:30; 2 Thes. 1:10). Thus, the reality of the kingdom is inward, and its future manifestation, as previewed in the transfiguration, is outward.

Beloved hints at a deeper definition of the kingdom when it says, “The role of the church and all Christians is to save inside them and manifest the image and the presence of Christ and the kingdom of God on earth” (66). However, the following sentences revert to the book’s narrow, ritualistic application: “We start with what makes Christ present among us—the liturgical life of the church. It is because of the sacramental presence of Christ in the church that we can say that Christ is present” (66). Rituals did not make God present in Christ, nor did they cause the divine element to be manifested from within Him on the mount. Similarly, the coming of the kingdom through the church is not a ceremonial procedure but a living expression of Christ in our daily walk as we are filled with the Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

Christ’s Transfiguration as the Model of the Believers’ Transfiguration

Beloved states that Christ’s transfiguration is “the model for the transfiguration of the individual members” before going on to assert that this is fulfilled in the Eucharist (21). Elsewhere it states, “The Transfiguration was a model of deification” (41), “the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ offered this glorified state as a model for our own glorification” (123), and “the splendor of the body of Christ [at His transfiguration] is a promise and a revelation of our own future with Christ” (135). However, the kernel of truth in these statements is woefully undeveloped and more harmfully distorted by the book’s repeated insistence on fulfillment through ascetic purification and traditional rituals.

By taking the Greek word *metamorphosis* as the limit of Pauline applications of transfiguration to the believers, *Beloved* misses significant portions pertaining to our experience of God’s full salvation. Although the exact word may not be used outside of Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, the thought of change in the believers’ tripartite being certainly is present. Man was created with a spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23). Based on our judicial redemption, the process of our organic salvation begins when we are regenerated in our spirit (John 3:3, 6) and continues as we are transformed in our soul (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The ultimate step of our full salvation will be the transfiguration of our body (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:43, 51; 2 Cor. 5:1-8). Because Romans 12:2 speaks of being transformed “by the renewing of the mind,” it must apply to a change in our soul, which precedes the change in our body. Since 2 Corinthians 3:18 refers to a

process in the present, it also refers mainly to the inward, organic transformation of our soul.

The Way for the Believers to Be Deified—Rituals, Asceticism, Icons, and Prayer to “Saints” or Partaking of the Spirit?

Beloved simultaneously touches the deep matter of deification and a low, aberrant view of its ritualistic realization when it says,

We live [Christ’s] life. We are crucified with Christ...resurrected with him...And we are transfigured with him... We become Christ when we receive his sacramental resurrected body and blood, and this is our personal transfiguration into him. (21)

After quoting the two-page account of the transfiguration in the *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Peter*, which depicts the curtain of heaven being temporarily pulled back for the disciples’ viewing, the book contends that the purpose of the transfiguration was to reveal to the disciples the “light... at the end of the tunnel of the Crucifixion” and their own “asceticism” (86).

We can and should partake of the Lord in spirit by remembering Him at His table, where we see physical symbols of His body and blood, but it is superstitious to think that these material elements transmit the divine element into us. Asceticism has a similarly errant physical focus and is contrary to the scripturally revealed practice of applying by faith the accomplished fact of our co-crucifixion with Christ (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:3, 6; Col. 2:20-23) and denying the self by turning to the spirit (Matt. 16:23-24; Rom. 8:6). It is by partaking of the all-inclusive Spirit that the believers experience Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection (vv. 11, 13; Gal. 5:16). In addition to frequently forbidding the making of or praying to idolatrous images (e.g., Exo. 20:4-5; Deut. 5:8-9; Acts 17:29; 1 Thes. 1:9), the Bible emphasizes the spiritual nature of God and of worship (John 4:24), along with the invisibility of the object of our belief and hope (Heb. 11:1). Other than scriptural forms of baptism and the Lord’s table, which were instituted by the Lord as outward signs of spiritual realities, believers do well to avoid physical implements of religion, which are often distractions and sometimes idolatrous.

Although *Beloved* briefly acknowledges the importance of prayer and the inner transformative work of the Holy Spirit (16, 28, 30, 82), it also repeatedly refers to the apparent inexplicability and randomness of the Spirit’s operation on and in both believers and unbelievers: “It is not possible to say whether the Holy Spirit will visit the saint or the sinner” (103). It is true that the Spirit may visit anyone at anytime, but it is also clearly revealed in

Scripture and confirmed in the experience of countless believers that calling on the Lord out of a pure heart will inevitably issue in the infilling of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3; cf. Rom. 10:9, 12). *Beloved's* portrayal of the Spirit's visitation as unpredictable and random implicitly discourages healthy spiritual practices, such as walking according to the spirit and calling on the name of the Lord (8:4; 10:10-13).

Conclusion

The basic premise of *Beloved*, that Christ's transfiguration reveals both His divine person and our own soteriological terminus, is correct. However, even if the reader can look past the aberrant practices of Eastern Orthodoxy that permeate *Beloved*, the divine significances and spiritual principles that the book extrapolates from Christ's transfiguration are superficial, incomplete, and undeveloped. *Beloved* demonstrates that the Eastern Orthodox view of transfiguration, as with many theological matters, is deeper than common Western notions but also warped by unyielding adherence to rituals and forms. In the end, the glimmers of light that the book offers concerning the person and operations of the Trinity and the deification of the believers cannot rise above the mire of degraded traditions.

by Peter Roberts

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A Natural King, an Objective Kingdom, and an Incomplete Priest

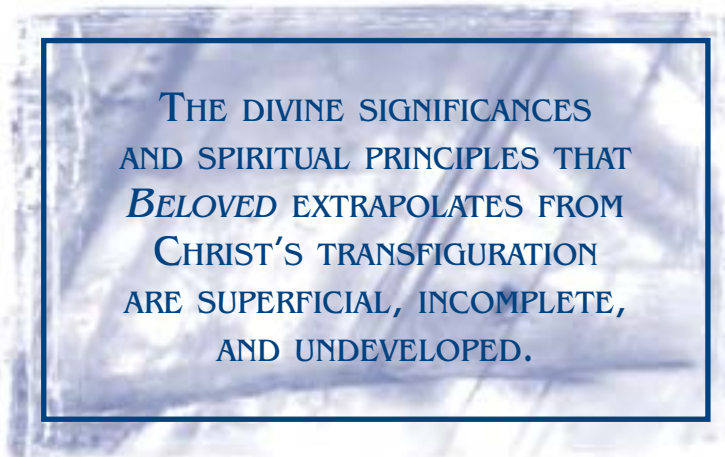
"Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah," by George A. Gunn. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169 (2012): 427-442. Print.

George A. Gunn's "Psalm 2 and the Reign of the Messiah" (hereafter "Psalm") is a verse-by-verse commentary on Psalm 2 and an evaluation of the New Testament references quoting or alluding to this psalm. In its commentary and analysis "Psalm" attempts to show that "Psalm 2 does not depict a coronation at Jesus' first coming, but rather predicts the coronation of the Messiah at a later date" (427). Whereas "Psalm" is sometimes informative in its commentary on the Hebrew terms used in Psalm 2, its analysis of this psalm based on its evaluation of related verses in the Scriptures misses the central revelation concerning Christ as the King in Psalm 2, relegates Christ's kingdom and kingship to an objective realm, and overlooks the significance of Melchizedek's priestly office.

A Summary

With the intent to rebut amillennial scholars, who assert that Christ's reign began at His first coming (427), "Psalm" is divided into four main sections: a commentary on Psalm 2, an examination of New Testament references and allusions to this psalm, a response regarding Christ's present session in heaven, and a conclusion. In the commentary "Psalm" focuses on Psalm 2:6-9 and argues that Christ's reign cannot begin until a future date if Psalm 2:7 suggests only an anointing of Christ rather than a crowning or enthroning of Him as king. "Psalm" seems convinced that this is true because it considers verses 6, 8, and 9 to be speaking of future occurrences and, thus, that Christ's anointing and coronation, which initiate His reign, take place at different times.

In the section addressing references and allusions to Psalm 2, "Psalm" analyzes seven New Testament quotations of Psalm 2 (Acts 4:24-26; 13:33; Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Rev. 2:27) and five allusions to it (John 1:49; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 12:5; 19:15, 19) in order to disassociate them from a coronation of Christ at His first coming. Of the seven portions cited by "Psalm" as quotations of Psalm 2, only five can be considered actual quotations of this Psalm. In brief "Psalm" argues that Acts 4:24-26, which speaks concerning the nations taking a stand against the Lord and against His Christ, is not a fulfillment of Psalm 2:1-2 but a preliminary expression of opposition to Christ (435); that Acts 13:33 only identifies "Jesus as the Anointed One of Psalms 2:7" and "affirms that He is indeed the Savior"



(437); that Hebrews 1:5 says nothing about Jesus exercising His kingly authority at His first coming (437-438); and that Hebrews 5:5 refers only to Christ's priesthood (438-439). Regarding the allusions, "Psalm" argues emphatically that since Christ's inheriting of the nations as His possession and His shepherding them with an iron rod, as spoken of in Psalm 2:8-9 and alluded to in Revelation 12 and 19, occur at a future date, then His reign and exercise of kingly authority are not until a future date as well (439-440). Essentially, "Psalm" strongly associates Christ's coronation and His reign as King with His inheriting the nations and ruling them with an iron rod (439).

In the section addressing the question, "Is Jesus' present session in heaven a fulfillment of His reign as King?" "Psalm" argues that Ephesians 1:20-22, which speaks of all things being subjected under Christ's feet, does not depict His reigning in this age with the exercise of authority. It argues that Christ's exercise of authority today is related only to the realm of "spiritual redemption" (441) and that His ministry in the heavens today is a priestly ministry not a kingly one. In its conclusion "Psalm" reiterates that Christ's ministry today is a priestly one designed to reconcile men to God and concludes, "Church ministry is not one of establishing a kingdom; it is a ministry of reconciliation, inviting sinners to find peace with God through Jesus Christ, the Messiah" (442).

Christ the King

"Psalm" claims that Psalm 2:7 does not refer to a coronation of Christ as King at "Jesus' first coming" (427), which, according to later developments in the article, includes the time following His death and resurrection (439-440). "Psalm" suggests first that since the verb translated "installed" in Psalm 2:6, which says, "I have installed My King / Upon Zion," literally means "to pour" or "to pour out," it is better to understand verse 6 to mean that Christ was "poured out" from heaven to the earthly Zion rather than understanding Zion as heaven (431). Second, "Psalm" argues that instead of considering Psalm 2:7 to be a coronation ritual, it is preferable to consider it in connection with the "Davidic kingship" based on 2 Samuel 7:14. It subscribes to a notion that "when David became king, God described their affiliation as a Father-Son relationship. So the expression 'son' took on the meaning of a messianic title" (432). Based on this premise, "Psalm" asserts that just as David was considered God's king at his anointing, which took place years before he was crowned king and began to reign, so also Christ's being considered King by virtue of His anointing precedes by an extended period of time His actual reign as King, which will occur at His coronation (432, 436).

While it is commendable that "Psalm" links Psalm 2:7 to 2 Samuel 7:14, it ultimately misses the significance of the

declaration in Psalm 2:7 and the promise in 2 Samuel 7:14. First, its attribution of the promise of the "Father-Son" relationship in 2 Samuel 7:14 to David and his natural heirs diminishes the importance of this promise. Strictly speaking, the promise—"I will be his Father, and he will be My son"—refers not to David nor to all his sons (432) but to Solomon in some measure and to Christ as the greater Solomon in its fullest measure (1 Kings 8:19-20; Matt. 12:42). The son spoken of in 2 Samuel 7:14 is the one concerning whom verse 13 says, "It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Whereas Solomon indeed built a physical house for Jehovah, his kingdom came to an end, but Christ, who builds the church as God's spiritual house, has His kingdom forever (Eph. 2:20-22; Dan. 2:44). Thus, the promise "I will be his Father, and he will be My son" refers mainly to Christ, and if it refers to Christ, then He has been installed as King.

Second, "Psalm" presents an understanding of the "Father-Son" relationship in 2 Samuel 7:14 that is at best objective, because it attributes the same relationship to all of David's heirs (432). The significance of the declaration in Psalm 2:7, "You are My Son; / Today I have begotten You," described in 2 Samuel 7:14; mentioned in Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; and explained in Romans 1:3-4 is not mainly related to anointing or coronation but to sonship. Even though "Psalm" attempts to explain that Psalm 2:7, as quoted in Acts 13:33, refers to Christ's exaltation rather than His resurrection, Romans 1:3-4 makes it exceedingly clear that the words spoken here refer to Christ's resurrection (437).

Romans 1:3-4 explains that the gospel of God concerns His son, "who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Here, according to Paul, Christ in His humanity as the seed of David was designated the Son of God in and through resurrection. Prior to His incarnation, the only begotten Son of God possessed only divinity, but through incarnation He became a man, putting on the human element. However, His humanity was not yet given the designation of the Son of God. When Christ passed through death and resurrection, His humanity was glorified and uplifted into the divine sonship; thus, He became the firstborn Son of God in His humanity. The central thought of Psalm 2:7 is that God's King is neither God alone, nor a man indwelt by God, but a resurrected God-man, the firstborn Son of God. Without this revelation, much of the significance of Psalm 2 is lost.

The Reign of Christ and the Kingdom

In its efforts to address the view of amillennial scholars, who suppose that there is no physical reign of Christ,

“Psalm” seems to dismiss any reign or kingdom of Christ today other than a general sense in which God is King over His creation (442). It regards Christ’s physical reign over the nations during the millennial kingdom as the only way in which Christ will reign with authority.

While Psalm 2:8-9 does speak of the future reign of Christ, to restrict Christ’s kingship, kingdom, and reign to the millennial kingdom and even further to the exercise of authority over the nations is to make Christ’s kingship, kingdom, and reign into purely objective matters. Such a view does not match the scriptural revelation concerning Christ’s kingdom and reign. According to the revelation in the Bible, the kingdom is first a matter of life. For this reason, some of the Lord’s parables in Matthew 13 describe the kingdom of the heavens as a seed, that is, a container of life (vv. 4, 19, 24, 27, 31). Out from the life of the kingdom comes the rule, authority, and reign of the kingdom (cf. Num. 17:1-9).

Colossians 1:13 says, “Who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” Here, *the authority of darkness* is contrasted with *the kingdom of the Son of His love*, indicating that the kingdom of the Son of God’s love is the authority of light, which is also the authority of the divine life and the reign of the Son as life (John 1:4-5). In other words, the kingdom of the Son of God’s love is concerned with the reign and authority of life in love. Christ’s reign as King is not only an objective reign in which authority is exercised over the nations outwardly but also an inward reign in which Christ as life governs the totality of the believers’ being and living. The fact that Colossians 1:13 speaks of the believers having been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love indicates that such a kingdom is not only in the future but also here today.

Whereas Colossians 1:13 provides insight into one aspect of the kingdom, the gospel of Matthew provides a detailed and complete view of the kingdom. In particular, the Gospel of Matthew uses the term *the kingdom of the heavens* to refer to a specific section of God’s general reign through eternity; that section, composed of the church age today and the heavenly part of the millennial kingdom in the coming age, is of three aspects: the reality of this kingdom in the church age presented in Matthew 5—7; the appearance of the kingdom, also in the church age,

described in Matthew 13; and the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming age depicted in Matthew 24—25.

“Psalm,” in contrast to the view of the kingdom in Matthew, takes into account only the earthly part of the millennial kingdom where Christ is reigning outwardly over the nations and considers that aspect of Christ’s reign to be the whole. For this reason “Psalm” argues that Christ’s coronation and reign do not take place until Christ’s second coming (442). To be sure, however, Christ today has not only been anointed and resurrected but also enthroned as God’s King ruling with authority. Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ has “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (cf. Mark 16:19); Hebrews 8:1 describes Him as “a High Priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”; Hebrews 2:9 says, “We see Jesus...crowned with glory and honor”; and in Matthew 28:18, the Lord, after His resurrection, said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” All these portions of the Word, and more, show clearly that Christ has been crowned and enthroned with ruling authority. Moreover, Christ as the King is ruling inwardly today in the church as the reality of the kingdom by expanding Himself as the kingdom seed within the believers in order to bring

every part of our being under His ruling by life so that we may be qualified to rule with Him as His co-kings during the millennial kingdom (16:18-19; Rom. 14:17; Luke 17:21; Matt 13:19, 23; Rev. 20:6).

Christ the High Priest and His Ministry

When addressing Hebrews 5:5, a quotation of Psalm 2:7, “Psalm” links the two verses with Psalm 110:4. This verse, which is quoted in Hebrews 5:6, says, “You are a Priest forever / According to the order of Melchizedek.” However, when responding to the question, “Is Jesus’ present session in heaven a fulfillment of His reign as King?” “Psalm” argues that “Christ’s present exercise of authority is related to the realm of spiritual redemption, not kingly rule. In other words Jesus’ present work is a *priestly* ministry (‘You are a priest forever,’ Ps. 110:4) not a *kingly* one (as in Ps. 2)” (441). In its conclusion “Psalm” also says, “Christ’s present ministry is a priestly ministry designed to reconcile men to God. His rule as King awaits His coming at His second advent” (442). In both statements “Psalm” inevitably separates Christ’s priesthood from His kingship,



even though it recognizes that Christ's priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek (438, 441-442).

Even though Christ's priesthood and kingship are distinct, to separate the two in the way that "Psalm" has done is not only to make Christ an incomplete Priest according to the order of Melchizedek but also to diminish the significance of that priesthood. First, a unique characteristic of the priesthood of Melchizedek is that it is a kingly priesthood; thus, whenever his priesthood is mentioned in Scripture, it is associated with kingship. Genesis 14:18, in which is the first mention of this priesthood, says, "Melchizedek the king of Salem...was a priest of God the Most High." The functioning priest is the king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," and his name, *Melchizedek*, means "king of righteousness" (Heb. 7:2). In Psalm 110 the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek is mentioned in the context of kingship, a fact that "Psalm" recognizes (438); and in the long discourse on Christ as the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek in Hebrews, the kingship is also mentioned (7:2, 14; 8:1). These portions of Scripture suggest that in order for Christ to fully function as a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, He must be a king not only in anointing but also in enthronement and reign; thus, for "Psalm" to suggest that Christ is functioning only as a priest today is contrary to the revelation of the Bible concerning the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek.

Second, Christ's priestly function and exercise of authority as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek is not limited to what "Psalm" describes as "spiritual redemption" (441). Hebrews 7:25 points out that Christ's function is "to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him;" that is, to not only make them the same as He is, kingly priests, royal priests, who reign in life over Satan, sin, and death but also to bring them into the realm of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit as the reality of the kingdom today, where He reigns as the King of righteousness and the King of peace (1 Pet. 2:9; Rom. 5:17; Matt. 16:18-19; Rom. 14:17).

Conclusion

In its attempt to correct the erroneous view that there is no millennial kingdom, "Psalm" ends up at another extreme of dismissing the genuine reign of Christ as a king today. Whereas "Psalm" recognizes that the revelation of Christ's reign in Psalm 2:8-9 is yet to come, it replaces the wealth of the revelation in the Bible concerning Christ's kingship, kingdom, and reign with only that aspect explicitly revealed in Psalm 2:8-9. As a result, it presents an argument that limits Christ's kingship and kingdom to an objective realm. "Psalm" also misses the central revelation regarding Christ in Psalm 2:7 and diminishes the significance of the decree concerning Christ in

that verse by applying that decree to David and his heirs. Finally, by neglecting the significance of Christ's priesthood and His priestly ministry, "Psalm" ultimately separates His priesthood from His kingship and sets a boundary to Christ's priestly function. All these shortcomings make it evident that the presentation of Christ's kingship, priesthood, and kingdom in "Psalm" falls short of the revelation in the Bible.

by Joel Oladele

To God Be the Glory

"A Biblical Theology of God's Glory," by Elliott E. Johnson. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169 (2012): 402-411. Print.

In his brief but meaningful article "A Biblical Theology of God's Glory" (hereafter "Theology"), Elliott E. Johnson, Senior Professor of Bible Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary, observes that "dispensationalists have not always given adequate attention to the glory of God in their teaching on dispensationalism" (403). "Theology" highlights Charles C. Ryrie as an exception to this tendency and focuses its exposition on the third of what Ryrie considers to be the three essential elements in dispensationalism, namely that God's purpose in the world is to bring glory to Himself. "Theology" explains:

This present study focuses on Ryrie's third sine qua non and seeks to show that God's overarching purpose in history is to reveal His own glory. While the theme of God's glory is shared by other biblical theologies, dispensationalism has a unique perspective. It focuses on God's glory revealed through the progress of revelation from creation to the new heavens and the new earth. Also the full range of historic divine purposes, when fulfilled, displays God's glory. (402-403)

"Theology" endeavors to demonstrate how "the three persons of the Godhead together accomplish God's historic purposes that contribute to His glory" (411), and for this the article is to be commended. However, its depiction of the persons of the Trinity in their operation to fulfill the divine purpose, while not unscriptural, neglects the organic relationships among the three and, therefore, does not recognize the organic implications of glory as the resplendent expression of the God of life in Christ. Nonetheless, "Theology" offers a welcome service to its readership by focusing on the desire of God to glorify Himself as the goal and end result of His

historic dealings with man in the dispensations in human history.

Viewing Scripture “as a whole that records the telling of God’s story” (403), “Theology” identifies Genesis 1 through 11 as establishing the setting of this story. Key to this setting, which precedes the dispensations in which God works out His purposes, is what “Theology” defines as “God’s initial purpose for mankind,” that is, for mankind to have “the right to rule the earth and thus to accomplish God’s plan (Gen. 1:26, 28)” (404). Before man could rule for God, however, a conflict was introduced into the story, as man disobeyed God and was brought under the rule of Satan. Following God’s promises of salvation, the defeat of His enemy, and the restoration of divine rule through the descendant of the woman (3:15), God entrusted His further revelation to human stewards, fallen though they are. “Theology” presents the continuation of God’s story, recorded in Genesis 12 through Revelation 3, as the operation of the Father as Governor, the Son as Servant, and the Spirit as Enabler, who accomplish the divine purposes in human history through man (403).

According to “Theology,” God the Father as Governor “guides and directs the course of salvation history as He speaks to those called to be His stewards” (405). His governance is based on His word and is manifested as He works out His purposes to save man from sin and its consequences, to overcome and defeat His enemy, and to have His rule on earth mediated through man. “Theology” speaks of four stages of revelation, or dispensations, through which “God’s governance will shine forth in glory” (407), namely the dispensations of promise, law, grace, and the kingdom.

In addressing the question of “what best accounts for the progressive changes in revelation” (407), “Theology” favors “a dispensational messianic explanation” (407), whereby the common thread in each dispensation is “a partnership between God’s word and a chosen steward” (407). Old Testament stewards who shared in a partnership with God’s word includes Adam, Abraham, and David. The “ultimate Steward,” however, is the Messiah Himself, Jesus Christ, who was glorified “when He took on human flesh and was born as one person with two natures” and “when by means of His human nature” He served and trusted in the Father “to overcome death and to defeat the enemy in judgment” (411). His incarnation

and death on the cross were a service to God and also to man, who was unable to accomplish the divine purpose entrusted to him by God (409).

As the Enabler, “God the Spirit *empowers* His people to be stewards of His word” (409). “Theology” emphasizes that the Spirit is the Substance into whom a believer is immersed in baptism and “the Agent with whom believers are related to Christ and to each other” (410). “Theology” cites James D. G. Dunn’s observation that the union with Christ’s death accomplished in baptism (Rom. 6:3) “extends to His burial and resurrection” and therefore enables God’s people “to live as stewards of His word” in resurrection (410). As believers are indwelt by the Spirit, they are “positioned to produce fruit (Gal. 5:22-23), to receive gifts (1 Cor. 12:4, 8-10), and to be empowered by His presence (Eph. 5:18; Acts 6:3, 5)” (410). Thus, such an “extensive ministry of the Spirit in God’s stewards displays God’s glory as His purposes are accomplished in the church” (410).

“Theology” is right to point out that Jesus, “God’s ultimate Steward,” fully trusted the Father in His human living, that He acted according to the Father’s word, and that “the Father acted in and through Him” (409). Its characterization of the relationship between

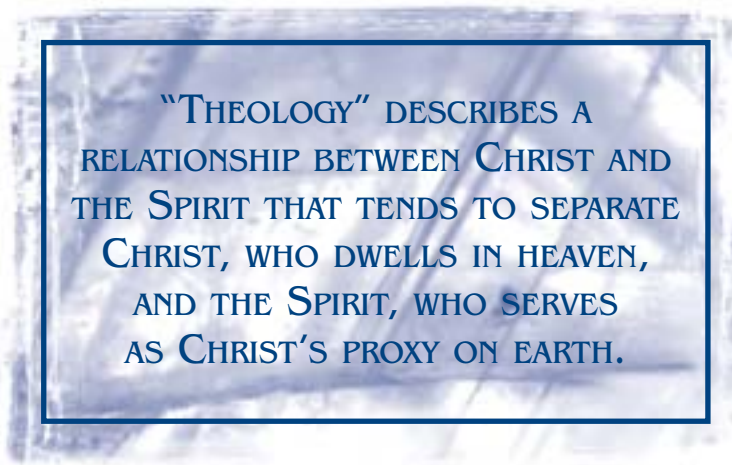
Christ and the Spirit, however, is less satisfying, as it is described in language that tends toward a separation between Christ, who dwells in heaven, and the Spirit, who serves as Christ’s proxy on earth and in the church:

While the ministry of the Spirit was awe-inspiring before Christ’s ascension, after Jesus’ glorification the Spirit was given to establish the identity of Christ’s presence on earth in the church. (409)

The Spirit’s ministry is central now while Jesus is in heaven, and the Spirit identifies God’s people as Christ’s body. (410)

Paul later noted that this union between Christ and the believers forms the church, Christ’s body, on earth in His absence (Eph. 2:22). (410)

The impression given by such statements is unfortunate, but it is not the intent of this review to make too much of them. It is worth noting, however, that while the designations “Governor,” “Servant,” and “Enabler” are in



keeping with the revelation of the Scriptures, a singular emphasis on them as descriptors of the three persons of the Divine Trinity in their economical move can obscure the more organic significance implied by the terms *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. While the former titles highlight God's activity in His economy, the latter emphasize His intrinsic organic nature and preserve the revelation of His oneness in life. Moreover, the mutual indwelling of the three, whose consubstantiality of essence precludes division, strongly indicates that where one is manifested, the other two are inseparably included in the same operation. The glory that they desire depends on this mutual indwelling, as the Father is glorified in the Son and the Son is glorified by and as the Spirit (John 17:4; 16:14; Luke 24:26, 1 Cor. 15:45), not as separate entities but as one God—coinhering eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—whose glory in His Trinity is manifested in the church as His corporate expression (Eph. 3:21).

"Theology" implies that glory is manifested primarily, perhaps solely, through the divine rule of the governing God, and it supports this point by referring to Genesis 1:26 and 28, which indicate, in part, that God's initial purpose in creating man was to delegate to him the right to rule the earth (404). The full content of verse 26, however, indicates that the delegation of dominion is predicated upon created humanity's capacity to bear God's image according to His likeness. In other words, the exercise of God's dominion, which to "Theology" is glory, is actually an issue of the expression of God's image. As the image of God, Christ rules by expressing God in glory. Furthermore, the believers participate in this expression and the rule that issues from it, as they are transformed "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18) and conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). While "Theology" is correct that God desires to be glorified, that He operates in the dispensations of human history to manifest His glory, and that His people will share in His glory, its argument would have been strengthened considerably if the same attention that was given to the relationship between dominion and glory (the second part of Genesis 1:26) had been given to the relationship between image and glory (the first part of Genesis 1:26) in the carrying out of God's eternal purpose to glorify Himself in the church and in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:21).

These critiques notwithstanding, "Theology" is a well written, tightly structured, and thoughtfully conceived article that merits affirmation for its Trinitarian focus and its faithfulness to elucidate God's purpose to glorify Himself as the goal of dispensational theology. Moreover, its recognition of man's participation in the divine purpose and, ultimately, in the divine glory resonates with genuine hope that God will indeed be glorified in His church.

by Tony Espinosa

An Old Book with a New Cover

The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For? Expanded Ed., by Rick Warren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. Print.

Rick Warren has written an expanded edition of *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (hereafter *Earth*). Having sold more than 32 million copies, this book could well rank among the bestselling non-fiction books of all time. *Earth* ambitiously embraces the most central yet least understood and mysterious topic of the Bible—the purpose of God. The first chapter of *Earth*, "Day 1: It All Starts with God," articulates its central thesis: "The purpose of your life fits into a much larger, cosmic purpose that God has designed for eternity. That's what this book is about" (25). In a later section of *Earth* there is the exhortation, "God wants you to grow up" (179). According to *Earth*, the processes of growth and transformation are central themes to arrive at becoming like Christ, which is one of five purposes that God has for man. *Earth* states that this lifelong process is one of developing the habits of Christlike character:

Becoming like Christ is a long, slow process of growth.

Spiritual maturity is neither instant nor automatic...Your spiritual transformation in developing the character of Jesus will take the rest of your life, and even then it won't be completed here on earth. It will only be finished when you get to heaven or when Jesus returns. At that point, whatever unfinished work on your character is left will be wrapped up...God is far more interested in building your character than he is anything else. (176)

Ten years have passed since the original publication of *The Purpose Driven Life*. It is therefore appropriate to ascertain whether there has been any further development, expansion, improvement, or refinement since 2002. Has the revelation of the truth in *Earth* become richer? Has the experience and application of its thesis grown deeper? Is there anything new?

Things New

Warren introduces *Earth* as "a new edition for a new generation" (15). The forty-day "Journey with a Purpose" of the original now requires forty-two days. These are "two new bonus chapters on the most common barriers to living on purpose" (16). The new Day 41, entitled "The Envy Trap," states that envy is a global sin, an insult to God, a form of spiritual rebellion based on ignorance and arrogance, and ultimately a destructive attitude prohibited by the last of the Ten Commandments (320-321). According to *Earth*, envy infects everything inside us and affects everything around us. To eradicate envy we must

stop comparing ourselves to others and, instead, celebrate God's goodness to others, be grateful for who we are and whatever we have, and trust God when life seems unfair.

Day 42, entitled "The People-pleaser Trap," opens with the question: "Whose approval are you living for?" (328). According to *Earth*, there are two sides to this matter. Spiritual health, development, and growth cannot come without the affirmation and encouragement of others, but "the desire for approval can be misused, abused, and confused. It can become an obsession that dominates our life and a fear that destroys our soul" (329). According to *Earth*, to break free from the people-pleaser trap we need to remember that not even God can please everyone, that we do not need anyone's approval to be happy, that what seems so important now is only temporary, that we have to please only one person (God), that one day we will give an account of our life to God, and that God shaped us to be who we are, not somebody else (334-338).

In recognition that the "new generation" is more likely to use alternatives to ink on paper, *Earth* has added internet links to online audio-visual material related to each chapter. With a suitable smart-phone or tablet app, no typing is required; simply point the camera to the barcode on the first page of the chapter and the video introduction of that day begins. Links to an audio Bible study for the particular day are noted at the end of each chapter.

Things Old

The bulk of *Earth* is unchanged from the first edition. It is structured around five purposes that God has for each person; (1) planned for God's pleasure; (2) formed for God's family; (3) created to become like Christ; (4) shaped for serving God; and (5) made for a mission (65, 119, 171, 232, 279). Throughout the book these five purposes are restated in various ways. To begin the journey to fulfill the five purposes described in *Earth*, a person must first commit himself completely to God by believing and receiving Jesus Christ, who died for our sins (61). "When we place our faith in Christ, God becomes our Father, we become his children, other believers become our brothers and sisters, and the church becomes our spiritual family" (120). We need to be baptized to acknowledge publicly our inclusion in God's family (122). To fulfill the second purpose of our life we need to be "attached to a living,

local church" (133). Personally we need to surrender and consecrate to God (79-80), grow through Bible reading and prayer (93), work to improve our character, which includes our attitude, habits, and behavior (217-219), and develop and utilize our God-given spiritual and natural talents for God's glory (234). We need to carry out our ministry, because we were shaped to serve God (232). As used in *Earth*, the word *shape* is an acronym for Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experience (234). While we are on earth today, we need to be active by serving others (227).

In Earth Growth Equaling Character Development and Behavioral Change

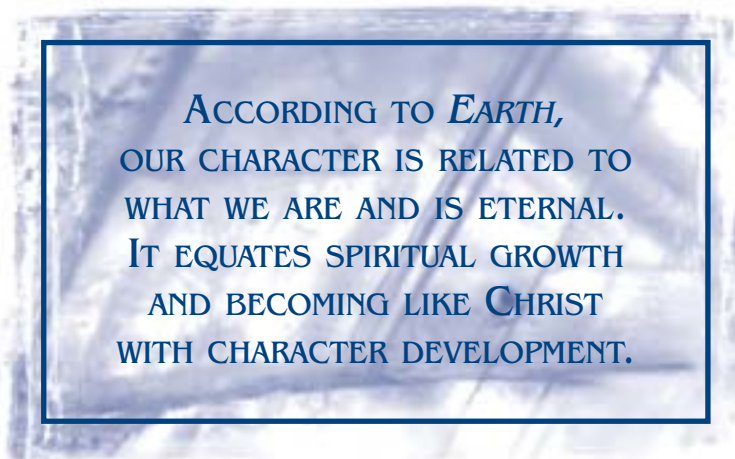
Earth's elaboration of the third purpose, "Created to Become Like Christ," warrants further consideration because it emphasizes that discipleship, growth, and change are essentially character development. According to *Earth*, "Your heavenly Father's goal is for you to mature and develop the characteristics of Jesus Christ" (179). The characteristics of Jesus are related to character:

God wants you to develop the kind of character described in the beatitudes of Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit, Pauls'

great chapter on love, and Peter's list of the characteristics of an effective and productive life. Every time you forget that character is one of God's purposes for your life, you will become frustrated by your circumstances...God gives us our time on earth to build and strengthen our character for heaven. (173)

According to *Earth*, our character is related to what we are and is eternal: "When you transfer into eternity, you will leave everything else behind. All you're taking with you is your character" (128). "God is far more interested in what you are than in what you do....God is much more concerned about your character than your career because you will take your character into eternity, but not your career" (177). *Earth* equates spiritual growth and becoming like Christ with character development:

God doesn't want you to become a god; he wants you to become *godly*—taking on his values, attitudes, and character...God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is not comfort, but character development. He wants you to grow up spiritually and become like Christ...Christlikeness is all



about transforming your character, not your personality.
(172)

Earth goes on to further define character as the sum of habits and to state that godly habits are equivalent to spiritual disciplines:

“Put on” the character of Christ by developing new, godly habits. Your character is essentially the sum of your habits; it is how you *habitually* act.

Habits take time to develop. Remember that your character is the sum total of your habits...You can't claim to have integrity unless it is your *habit* to always be honest...Your habits define your character.

There is only one way to develop the habits of Christlike character: You must *practice* them—and that takes time! There are no *instant habits*...Repetition is the mother of character and skill. These character-building habits are often called “*spiritual disciplines*.” (175, 218-219)

According to *Earth*, character is also related to conduct and behavior: “The Christian life is far more than creeds and convictions; it includes conduct and character. Our deeds must be consistent with our creeds, and our beliefs must be backed up with Christlike behavior” (183). *Earth* purports to provide a roadmap by which our character is transformed to make us like Christ and to cause us to grow in the character of Christ. Character is developed by the Holy Spirit, the Word, people, and circumstances along with our cooperation and choices (171-177). *Earth* equates this process to sanctification:

It is the Holy Spirit's job to produce Christlike character in you...This process of changing us to be more like Jesus is called *sanctification*...You cannot reproduce the character of Jesus on your own strength. New Year's resolutions, willpower, and best intentions are not enough.
(173-174)

Earth repeatedly sets the expectation that this transformation in character will take a long time, saying, “There are no shortcuts to maturity...The development of Christlike character cannot be rushed” (215), and “since most of our problems—and all of our bad habits—didn't develop overnight, it's unrealistic to expect them to go away immediately” (217-218).

Christlikeness or Job-likeness?

Earth's emphasis on the growth and cultivation of character is at best one-sided and at worst risks misleading God's children from the central thought and central line of God's eternal purpose. Witness Lee indicates that character is important, but he is careful to place this in

the context of the inward constitution with the life of Christ and knowing and denying the self:

Concerning our being useful in the Lord's hand, there are two aspects. One aspect about which we have heard much is the tearing down of the self. Formerly you may have felt that you were talented and very capable or that you were better than others. But now you have seen a vision that your natural life is nothing but a thorn-bush and your self, nothing but leprosy. Once you realize this, you will spontaneously fall down and collapse. To collapse is to be broken. Actually, God always shines upon us and leads us in the principle of breaking. On one hand, the Bible shows us that a person who serves God must be adequately broken. It is true that his natural life, self, temperament, and disposition need to be touched by the Lord, broken, and torn down. On the other hand, the Bible shows us that something must be built up in a person who serves the Lord. This building up refers not only to the inward constitution of the Lord's life but also to the development of his character. (Lee, *Character* 35-36)

Earth makes passing mention of taking up the cross and dying to self in the context of an initial experience of offering, surrendering, and consecrating ourselves to God as an act of worship to Him (80). In this context *Earth* quotes A. W. Tozer, saying, “The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they haven't yet come to the end of themselves. We're still trying to give orders, and interfering with God's work within us” (81). By confusing these matters with initial consecration, *Earth* fails to proffer deeper and more mature experiences of the cross as a counterpoise to an unbalanced natural pursuit of character development.

In the Old Testament Job is an example of a person who was God's servant, who had a flawless character, and who was highly appraised for his righteousness, uprightness, and integrity. God Himself said concerning Job, “There is none like him on the earth, a perfect and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8). We can therefore conclude that Job was a man who was perfect and upright in his character and who had a high ethical standard of integrity. If God's purpose for man was merely the development of human character, as posited by *Earth*, then Job would have been a perfect example of a life filled with purpose. Nevertheless, despite His high appraisal of Job's character, God allowed Job to be stripped of his natural character and integrity so that Job could arrive at God's ultimate intention—to gain God Himself, the only One whose attributes should be expressed.

In the case of Job, his perfect, but self-cultivated, character became an obstacle and hindrance that frustrated God from achieving His ultimate goal—to fill Job with Himself. In Job's case, his character and integrity were

from the wrong tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which had to be uprooted to make way for the tree of life. Christ Himself, not ethics or behavior, is the reality of the tree of life (cf. John 1:4; 14:6; 15:1). After God's dealings with Job, he no longer relied on his own righteousness or integrity. *Earth* says that "God gives us our time on earth to build and strengthen our character for heaven" (173), but God did not use Job's time on earth for this purpose. Quite the opposite, God exposed, tore down, and uprooted Job's character to make room in Job for God Himself. The case of Job refutes *Earth's* assertion that "God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is...character development" (172).

Growth Coming from the Experience of the Riches of Christ

Earth's concept of God's purpose is that we would be like Christ and that being like Christ is to have a developed and mature character, which is Christlike in expression. According to *Earth*, practicing Christlikeness consists of a habitual living comprised of conduct and behavior that is unique to the personality of the individual.

Earth's statement of God's purpose, especially in its articulation of the end result of growth, falls far short of Paul's presentation of God's purpose in Ephesians. According to Ephesians, growth is the increase of Christ and of God through the receiving of the riches of Christ and the building of this Christ into God's chosen people. Furthermore, the goal and end result are the church, which is the Body of Christ, the new man, the household of God, the dwelling place of God, the kingdom of God, the bride, the wife, of Christ, and a corporate warrior that stands in Christ's victory over God's enemy to accomplish God's eternal purpose (1:23; 2:15, 19, 21-22; 5:24-25, 27; 6:11-12).

Ephesians 4 through 6 speak of the living and responsibility needed in the Holy Spirit and in the Body of Christ, of the living needed in the daily walk and in ethical relationships, and of the warfare required for dealing with the spiritual enemy (Lee, Recovery Version, Outlines). A superficial reading of this section could suggest that Paul has turned from the revelation and experience of Christ in chapters 1 through 3 to very practical matters related to growth through the improvement of character. For example, Paul says,

I beseech you therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love, being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. (4:1-3)

Earth seems content with a superficial understanding that diligence, lowliness, and long-suffering are only examples of virtues and character attributes. In stating, "You were created to become like Christ" (171), *Earth* rightly correlates the image and likeness announced in God's intention in creation to the image of Christ, saying, "What does the full 'image and likeness' of God look like? It looks like Jesus Christ! The Bible says Jesus is '*the exact likeness of God*'" (172). In this context *Earth* makes clear, "You will never become God, or even a god...As creatures, we will never be the *Creator*" (172). However, in attempting to distance itself from these heretical extremes, *Earth* then veers to a less than satisfactory statement of God's goal:

God doesn't want you to become a god; he wants you to become *godly*—taking on his values, attitudes, and character. The Bible says, "*Take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct*

as God accurately reproduces his character in you" [Eph. 4:22-24]. God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is not comfort, but character development. (172)

However, a contextual reading of Ephesians 4 suggests something deeper. Concerning verses 1 through 3 Lee says,

In our natural humanity there is no lowliness, meekness, nor long-suffering...Any meekness or lowliness that we may seem to have in ourselves is a pretense and cannot survive any real testing...The more we are transformed, the more of the humanity of Jesus we have. By having the humanity of the resurrected Christ, we spontaneously have the virtues required to keep the oneness of the Spirit. (Lee, *Life-study* 308-309)

This understanding is corroborated by a further reading of Ephesians 4. Verse 3 speaks of keeping the oneness of the Spirit, but verse 13 says, "Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," implying growth and

EARTH'S EMPHASIS ON THE GROWTH AND CULTIVATION OF CHARACTER IS AT BEST ONE-SIDED AND AT WORST RISKS MISLEADING GOD'S CHILDREN FROM THE CENTRAL THOUGHT AND CENTRAL LINE OF GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE.

transformation. Especially note that to arrive “at a full-grown man” is to arrive “at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The goal of growth is to arrive at the fullness of Christ, not a perfected and developed character. Concerning verse 13 *Earth* says, “Discipleship is the process of conforming to Christ...Christlikeness is your eventual destination” (216). However, in the context of Ephesians this verse is speaking not of an individual matter but of the whole Body. The fullness of Christ is “His Body, the fullness of the One” in 1:23 and “the fullness of God” in 3:19. Contrary to *Earth’s* concept of individual character improvement and development, growth in Ephesians 4 should be understood as the growth of God, the growth of the members and of the whole Body through the increase of God Himself (cf. Col. 2:19).

In Ephesians 4 Paul goes on to speak about learning Christ, being “taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus,” putting off the old man, being renewed in the spirit of the mind, and putting on the new man (vv. 20-24). The new man in verse 24 should be understood not as an individual “new self” as mistranslated by many non-literal versions. The new man in chapter 4 should be understood as the same corporate entity (the Body, which is the church) that was created through the cross, as described in 2:15-16. The parallel verses in Colossians also make clear that in referring to the new man Paul is referring to a corporate, not an individual, entity. Colossians 3:10 and 11 says, “Put on the new man...where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.” The emphasis in Colossians is that in the new man, there should not be any natural persons, but Christ is all the persons and in all the persons. This further reinforces that Christ should be the constituents of the new man by spreading in the members and even becoming the members.

It seems that *Earth’s* concept of God’s purpose is merely to bring man back to his original state before the fall:

The Bible says that all people, not just believers, possess part of the image of God...But the image is incomplete and has been damaged and distorted by sin. So God sent Jesus on a mission to restore the full image that we have lost. (172)

God’s goal is not mere restoration back to the pre-fall condition of man. It is to dispense God into man to make him a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Through regeneration the Christ-believers are born of God to have God’s life and have become partakers of His divine nature to express God corporately (John 1:12-13; 3:15-16; 2 Pet. 1:4). *Earth* would have us concentrate on character development and change, but Paul would have us concentrate on Christ. Paul was a faithful steward of the

mysteries of God and of Christ, ministering the unsearchable riches of Christ according to God’s eternal purpose (1 Cor. 4:1-2; Eph. 3:4, 8, 11). The result of such a ministry was the rooting of the believers for growth and grounding them for building, thereby causing them to be filled unto all the fullness of God, issuing in the glory of God, wherein God is expressed in the church and in Christ Jesus (vv. 18-21).

Conclusion

Earth could be commended with Paul’s word, “You were running well” (Gal. 5:7), because it initially struck a resonating chord with God-seekers through its pragmatic presentation that God has a purpose for man. However, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (v. 9). Some things in *Earth* take the reader all the way back to being like Job instead of bringing them forward to God’s New Testament economy. In the New Testament God is doing a new work with a new life for a new creation to produce a corporate new man that will issue in the New Jerusalem. This New Jerusalem is not heaven but a corporate and built-up mutual dwelling place of God and man, the bride and wife of the Lamb, having the glory of God (Rev. 21:3, 9-11, 22). *Earth* subjugates the central process and objective of God’s purpose to individual character development and improvement. This ultimately misleads the readers to work toward self-improvement and human perfection and to be thereby distracted from Christ Himself and God’s central desire to dispense Himself into man.

Disappointingly, *Earth* does not take the opportunity with this new edition to offer further elaborations, clarifications, or expanded explanations from what was said before. Instead of providing something new (one indication of growth and development), there are no new examples and no fresh experiences. It gives no evidence that the hidden mystery of God’s economy is continuing to be unfolded and developed. *Earth* purports to take its reader onto the journey of God’s good pleasure, but it has misaimed. God’s heart’s desire, His purpose for the ages and the generations, is truly universal. There is much more to explore and to experience, yet it seems *Earth* is limited to a view that falls short of God’s eternal intention.

by James Fite

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