

# THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

Biblical Principles of Leadership

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## **Dedication**

To the only wise God and Savior, Jesus Christ. As the Father in heaven, He was only accustomed to giving orders and expecting His creatures to submit. When He robed Himself in flesh and came into the world, He submitted Himself to every ordinance of man. It beggars belief to comprehend how He – the First and the Last – meekly obeyed Joseph and Mary, the Rabbis who “taught” Him as He grew up in the Synagogue and others invested with diverse civil and religious authority. The One who claimed, “...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18), submitted Himself to every ordinance of man leaving us a shining example to follow.



# CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	i
1	Chapter Name	1
2	Chapter Name	Pg #
3	Chapter Name	Pg #
4	Chapter Name	Pg #
5	Chapter Name	Pg #
6	Chapter Name	Pg #
7	Chapter Name	Pg #
8	Chapter Name	Pg #
9	Chapter Name	Pg #
10	Chapter Name	Pg #



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Much has been written on the topic of church administration by many men of God well-placed to teach on the subject. Few, however, are more qualified to weigh in on the subject than Bishop Teklemariam Gezahagne. In a ministry spanning over 40 years, he has been used by the Lord to lead a church numbering over three and a half million souls in Ethiopia and worldwide. We have been singularly blessed to sit at his feet and learn.





# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **God's Order Before the Creation of the World**

### **Introduction**

This book approaches the subject of God's divine order in five stages: before the creation of the world; the period before the Law; the period of the Law; the Church age and order in the millennial kingdom and beyond. The five stages are explored more closely in five chapters. The aim is to consider the precepts of God's divine order as He engaged first with angels and then humans as recorded in the Holy Writ.

The overall objective, however, will be to extract insights which will help us better understand contemporary Church administration, because the Church indeed is the embodiment and climax of the mystery of Christ. The Church, the beautiful Bride of Christ, is expected to draw the world to Christ through its shining example of love and submission to the One who gave His life for her.

Rebellion breeds rebellion and submission alone can serve as the antidote. In a world where authority is under severe attack, with society struggling to cope with the rebellion of our youth, among others, I believe the Church's example of

meek submission to Christ can assuage the ever-burgeoning tide of defiance. It is incumbent, especially upon us as members of the body of Christ, to re-examine and understand the principles of divine order. Though a minister of some repute in his own right, Timothy was instructed by Paul in the precepts of Church administration.

***1Timothy 3:15*** *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

This first chapter will seek to elucidate God's dealings with angelic beings before the creation of the world. Obviously, this quest is somewhat limited by the paucity of Scripture references that clearly address the issue. Nevertheless, enough Scriptures exist to exercise students of the Word. As Moses of old declared:

***Deuteronomy 29:29*** *The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

What, then, is revealed about God's dealings with angelic beings, and what does this tell us about His sovereignty, personality and order? And, finally, what lessons can we glean from this with reference to our own current Church age? Let us begin at the beginning.

## 1.0. Cherubims and seraphims

The word angel (Strong's Hebrew 4397 *mal'ak*) is a generic term which is employed to refer to powerful and glorious supernatural creatures who serve as God's messengers and ministers. If one looks for books on angels on Amazon, the search will turn up countless hits testifying to the interest in angels even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nearly all of them, however, are theologically inaccurate, with many entertaining demonic entities. The subject generates such great interest that one researcher (Heathcote-James, 2009) did an entire PhD examining the phenomena of angels. Emma Heathcote-James, interviewed about 800 candidates in the UK, many of whom were reluctant to admit their experiences. The book is a very interesting read demonstrating the activity of angels in our contemporary age.

The Bible does not delineate when these beings were created but we do know that this occurred sometime *before* the creation of this world as we read in Genesis 1. Evidence for this can be found in a poetic description of the fall of one particularly powerful angel better known as Satan today.

***Ezekiel 28:14*** *Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.*

***Ezekiel 28:15*** *Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.*

Satan, then, was initially anointed as a sublime cherub (singular) having access to the very presence of God and perfect in his ways from the day of his creation until sin changed all that. Who or what are the cherubims (plural)? A careful study of the Scriptures reveals certain characteristics about cherubims. They are often portrayed as surrounding the throne and innermost sanctuary of God. God is declared to be dwelling between cherubims:

***Isaiah 37:16*** *O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.*

In fact, they rarely seem to leave His presence. Not only in heaven, but in the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon, they enjoy very close proximity to the very throne of God as evidenced by their position atop the Ark of the Covenant. “And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat” (Exodus 25:18). Undoubtedly, God has bestowed unique honor upon these creatures. Each time the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, he gazed not only upon the *shekinah* glory of God hovering above the Mercy Seat, but he also took note of the two cherubims bowing down with wing tips touching. Intriguingly, cherubims are described as *covering* the throne of God with their wings.

***Exodus 25:20*** *And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be.*

The above corresponds to God's description of Lucifer as the "anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezekiel 2:14). Isaiah, too, recorded that he saw seraphims hovering above the throne of God in heaven.

***Isaiah 6:2** Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.*

It is difficult if not impossible to try to distinguish between cherubims and seraphims. The original connotations of the Hebrew are debated. Significantly, the same word for seraphims (Strong's Hebrew 8314 *saraph*) is also used to denote fiery and flying serpents or dragons elsewhere in the Old Testament (Numbers 21:6; Isaiah 14:29). It would be incongruous, however, to associate the angelic seraphims near God's throne with the same fiery serpents which bit the children of Israel in the desert. Some believe that there is a crucial distinction between cherubims and seraphims. Cherubims guard the glory of God while seraphim sometimes make reconciliation between humans and God, as when a seraph carried coals from off the altar to expunge the sin of Isaiah (Berkhoff, 2003). One point which we can agree on, nevertheless, is that there seems to be an undisclosed order of angelic beings created by God to perform diverse functions.

Ezekiel witnessed a remarkable vision in Babylon. A most fascinating description of cherubims is depicted in Ezekiel chapter 10. Each cherub had four faces – that of a cherub, a man, an ox and a lion. Apparently, they embodied the most exalted qualities of the various representatives of God's

created order. Each face was at the head of a particular family group of creatures – cherubs were at the head of the angelic order, man was given dominion of the earth, the ox was chief among the domesticated order and the lion of the animal kingdom. However, in the vision, the fact that the cherubs moved about in a wheel guided by the Spirit of the Lord, demonstrates the headship and sovereignty of God over the entire created order. The wheels responded only to the move and direction of the Spirit of the Lord.

***Ezekiel 10:16** And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them.*

***Ezekiel 10:17** When they stood, these stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also: for the spirit of the living creature was in them.*

Keep in mind that the children of Israel lived in rebellion against the Lord at this particular time. In fact, their sins and intransigence had moved God to cast them out of Israel and into the hands of their most hated enemy – Babylon. In stark contrast to their insubordinate state, God showed Ezekiel the harmony and perfect order of submission in the heavenly realms.

Let us summarize what we know of cherubims so far.

- They were created before the account in Genesis 1.
- In the hierarchy of God in heaven, they form the vanguard, the chief of angels.

- They are associated with *covering* and shielding from common view the most holy things of God.
- As we have seen in the case of Lucifer, they do possess the ability to make independent choices.
- Ezekiel witnesses their fabulous peculiarity and perfect harmony with the Spirit of God.

From the perspective of the divine order of God, several lessons can be drawn from the above. It has always amazed me that such an indescribably powerful and sovereign God chooses to bestow so much honor and prestige on His own creatures. We are told that God rides upon the cherubims. “And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind” (2 Samuel 22:11). Just as the cherubims covered the glory of God from common view and indolent curiosity, they stood with flaming swords in the Garden of Eden barring the way to the tree of life.

***Genesis 3:24*** *So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

Why did they enjoy such privilege? What do we learn about God through the manner in which He delegates authority? Firstly, it is clear that God loves to create creatures resplendent with beauty and glory. He is a master architect and artist who prides Himself in fashioning creatures such as the cherubims upon whom He bestows honor. The first principle, then, is to understand that God desires to bless and honor those who submit to Him and understand the purpose for which they are created. Cherubims were made the

custodians of the secrets and very presence of Jehovah - they cover and shield the glory of God. Surely this is no small honor. Submission to God opens the door for promotion and prestige. It is a sin to covet the promotion and prestige of this world, according to Jesus, but an honorable quest when applied to the Kingdom of God.

**John 5:44** *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*

We should not for one moment imagine the cherubims to be robot-like subservient beings who serve God out of dread and fear alone. The Bible tells us that one-third of the angels fell with Satan in the first act of cosmic rebellion.

**Revelation 12:4** *And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.*

Clearly, the cherubims had ample opportunity to confer with their fellow-cherub, Satan, and join his cause, but they loved God and voluntarily submitted to His order. They believed that submission to the God of mercy, above whose Ark of the Covenant they bowed and worshipped, was infinitely better than the doomed path chosen by Satan and other lower-order angels. Apropos Satan, I have often wondered why he was not content with the august position and influence God had bestowed upon him. Ezekiel 28 sheds light on the nature of the rebellion of Satan. Decked in gold and every imaginable precious stone, there it can be seen that this cherub was unable



to restrain himself from indulging in and reveling in his own beauty.

***Ezekiel 28:17*** *Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.*

A second lesson ought perhaps to be discerned from the above. Could it be that God determines each Christian's gift/s and status in the Church according to our ability or inability to handle his gifts? I say this because the alternative would be to conclude that God distributes His gifts and calling randomly in the Church. Fortunately, we witness in the pages of the Bible that the majority of those called by God remained faithful to the end, except for a tiny minority among whom were Saul and Demas (2 Timothy 4:10).

One of the most vital lessons we draw from a brief study of the divine order of God in the pre-earth era, is that rebellion against the heavenly order of God was a gross aberration which had devastating consequences. Satan's rebellion against the heavenly order set in motion events which have distorted and done immeasurable harm to God's creation. Wars, famines, diseases, atheism and a plethora of evils have become the mainstay of civilisation ever since. It is of significance that God compares rebellion to witchcraft.

***1Samuel 15:23*** *For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*

Witchcraft, among others, is the act of soliciting malevolent supernatural powers to manipulate events. At its core is pure selfishness; a covetousness devoid of all compassion and love for one's neighbour, and singularly focused on self-gratification. In 2008, I did my Master's thesis research<sup>1</sup> on the topic of witchcraft in Kumasi, Ghana, among others. I interviewed 5 elders from an organisation called "Afrikania Mission"<sup>2</sup> who claim to be representatives of traditional African religions which, they contended, was supplanted by Christianity and Islam (Thomas, 2011). When asked whether they practice witchcraft, they responded that witchcraft is integral to their religious beliefs and practices. One elder shared that clients have come to them asking for their opponents to be killed. The elders justified putting "death curses" on individuals on the basis of what they perceived as just retribution. "A man who destroys the crops of a hard-working farmer deserves to die" said the elder. Practitioners co-opt the role of judge, jury and executioner. Witchcraft places the self at the centre; it actually deifies the self rather than crucify it. Every other individual is seen as a means to an end namely self-exaltation. Satan was not called Satan to begin with. His name was Lucifer meaning "light-bearer". From our earlier study we see that cherubims and seraphims were

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<sup>1</sup> Article published in the *British Journal of Religious Education* (2011) and available at the links below:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01416200.2011.592823?journalCode=cbre20#preview>  
<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/cbre/2012/00000034/00000001/art00006>

<sup>2</sup> <http://afrikania.tripod.com/> Retrieved 12.01.2012.

named so because of their brilliant light (burning ones). What did Lucifer do to deserve such a wicked reputation and horrific fate? Isaiah exposes his sin:

**Isaiah 14:12** *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!*

**Isaiah 14:13** *For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:*

**Isaiah 14:14** *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*

**Isaiah 14:15** *Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.*

5 times in the verses above Lucifer said “I will”. The German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), coined the phrase “will to power” (*Der Wille zur Macht*) found in several of his books such as *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. For Nietzsche, the will to power is a raw, brute life - force that drives all human beings to secure greater power, creativity and vitality. As one writer puts it, “It is for Nietzsche an essential feature of life that the strong oppress the weak” (Warburton, 1998, p. 177). He argued that most humans deny this fundamental truth, but a few free spirits (e.g. philosophers) embrace it. Nietzsche idealized the notion of the “Superman” (*Übermensch*) who discarded the slave-morality of Christianity in favour of the will to power. Simply put, he rejected any castigation of the “master class” by the subjugated classes. His radical morality, captured in the title of his book, *Beyond Good or Evil* (1886), praised the morality

and mannerisms of the “master class” who are falsely labelled “evil” by the subjugated.

*While a slave morality is suited to those with a slavish, “botched and bungled” nature, its message of humility and pity emasculates those “higher men” who are capable of rising above what Nietzsche calls “the herd” (Mautner, 2005, p. 426).*

The influence of Nietzsche’s “will to power” on the writings and subsequent policy of Hitler are debated. However, in more than one way, Hitler personified the “will to power”. Hitler was the narcissistic “Superman” that Nietzsche poetically prophesied about. The Führer identified the Jew (slave class) as the element which weakened and undermined the Aryan (master class) and vowed to exterminate this slave class. What was Hitler’s ultimate goal? In his own words,

*A state which in this age of racial poisoning dedicates itself to the care of its best racial elements must someday become lord of the earth (Hitler, 1943, p. 688).*

Nietzsche died having suffered from a mental breakdown. Hitler killed himself, but not before his “will to power” unleashed unprecedented suffering and chaos in the world. All this, however, is dwarfed by the repercussions of the “I will” of Lucifer in heaven. The “I will” of Lucifer coveted to be Lord of heaven and earth. One is hard-pressed not to conclude that the same nefarious spirit motivated Lucifer and Hitler.

What a terrible contrast all this is to the earlier picture of harmony and submission to God in heaven! Where do we put the “I” is pivotal. The Lord called for us to *die* to ourselves (John 12:24). “I” is placed smack in the middle of *d(i)e*. It is,

frankly, a colossal waste of time and energy to “will to power” since all power in heaven and earth belongs to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). Jesus says, “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:12).

In the Church, then, it becomes our holy duty to understand and appreciate the principle of loving the eternal divine order of God. Only the meek shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). Peter warns us:

**2Peter 2:4** *For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;*

Lucifer became Satan which means the “opposer”. What is he opposing today? The divine order of God obviously. The best way we can oppose and frustrate his plans is to cheerfully submit to the order of God in the Church. Upholding the government of Jesus Christ and recognizing His sovereignty over the Church, defeats the purposes of Satan. It is our privilege to “will to submit” to the Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ.

Our consideration of the divine order of God before the creation of the present heaven and earth cannot be limited to cherubims and seraphims alone, though. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider every incident where other, lower-order angels feature, but we will need to take along a few examples to get a more rounded understanding.

## 1.1.The order of archangels and angels: Michael

***Daniel 10:13*** But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

***Jude 1:9*** Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

According to the verse above, there is a separate category of angels called archangels which basically means “chief of angels”. Michael is one example. There is very little in Scripture to expound more authoritatively on archangels, but from the above verses we can glean certain insights.

Perhaps the first thing to notice is that we are dealing with super-powerful beings endowed with differing levels of strengths and capacities. The prince of the Kingdom of Persia could either be Satan himself or one of his most trusted and enormously potent minion. This entity mounts a formidable attack against the angel who was sent to hearten Daniel. Matthew Henry and other Bible commentators believe this messenger to be Jesus Christ, but this cannot be accurate. Would Christ be so weak as to need help from Michael? Perish the thought! This messenger had to be an angel whose might was insufficient to overcome the colossal powers of the prince of Persia who withstood him for 21 days.

What we can conclude from the above is that God, for undisclosed reasons of His own, has delegated varying degrees of power, authority and glory to the angels. Clearly, Satan has not been divested of his power, given that he can halt the advance of such a powerful entity as the messenger sent to Daniel. It took Michael, an archangel, to break the deadlock. Michael is described as “one of the chief princes”. We will hear more of him. This means that among the angelic order also, God has seen fit to appoint some angels as princes and others in lesser, junior ranks. Again, for reasons of His own, God permitted such a “clash of titans” above the skies of Persia. No doubt it would have been an easy task for God to paralyze the Devil and his cohorts, but He has seen fit to allow such a struggle to ensue.

There is a fundamental lesson which may not be easily discernible in Daniel 10:13. I found it hard to digest that this remarkable messenger states, “...but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me...”. I am perhaps not alone in feeling a little disappointed; angels are supposed to be benevolent, but ultimate “fighting machines”, warriors with no equals. Doesn’t the Bible say, “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Psalm 91:11). The angel in Daniel 10 was actually quite matter-of-factly admitting difficulties. Let’s not forget that this messenger had been sent by God on an important mission to Daniel. To his surprise, the prince of Persia intercepts his mission and keeps him at bay for 21 days until Michael came to the rescue. What’s going on?

I believe that God, in His inscrutable wisdom, has deliberately ordained that angels form one united fighting force through the pooling in of their differing strengths and gifts. It is significant that God did not intervene Himself; at least there is no record of this in the text. The angels solicited help from each other; when one angel, however powerful, is hampered by fallen angels – who also work in admirable harmony – others, such as Michael, the prince launch into the attack. It dawned on me that the messenger to Daniel was actually teaching us the need for unity. If angels cannot accomplish simple tasks without working together, how do we expect to fulfill the commandments of our dear Lord Jesus Christ? This messenger's admission of difficulties now takes on new significance. He humbly acknowledges the role played by Michael, the prince of Israel. He did not begrudge or envy Michael his power and position. No doubt Michael, by virtue of being an archangel, wielded more clout than him. The messenger to Daniel gave credit where it was due.

All this may sound counter-intuitive because we are so accustomed to envisioning angels as individual, super-beings who can never be overwhelmed. Daniel 10 teaches the opposite: angels may have varying strengths and capabilities, but without working as a team, they can be defeated, unless God steps in. And lest we forget, Psalm 91:11 does not say, "For he shall give his *angel* (singular), but *angels* (plural) charge over thee..." This brought a discomfiting thought to my mind: if an angel working alone can be assaulted by demons, how much more children of God, particularly those



who reject the divine order of God? If the heavenly messenger needed help, surely we need help also.

Now, who is this mysterious Michael? His name means “Who is like God?” (Strong’s Hebrew 4317 *miyka’el*). Now consider how great an angel this being is in that when Jude wanted to highlight a prime example of someone with great authority and dignity, he mentioned Michael.

***Jude 1:8*** Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities

***Jude 1:9*** Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

In other words, despite his lofty credentials as, among others, the chief of angels (archangels), Michael showed restraint and dignity in contending with the Devil, choosing not to engage in a lengthy and useless debate with him (although he could), but rebuked him in the name of the Lord. Clearly, this Michael is highly favored by the Lord among the billions and billions of angels in heaven. We have already considered how his intervention smashed the fearsome opposition mounted by the prince of Persia. It took one prince to demolish another prince. We have also just touched on the fact that Michael, unlike Lucifer, was humble, preferring to rebuke Satan in Jesus name, rather than rely on his own authority or power to engage with Satan. This speaks of self-abnegation. Like his name (who is like God?), he desired to draw attention to God alone.

Sadly, whereas Michael rebuked the Devil for trying to steal the body of Moses in order to promote idolatry, Michael has been less successful in stopping many deluded people from worshipping and venerating him. I can imagine Michael's dismay at those who have attributed heretical characteristics to his person. Catholics say the *Prayer to Saint Michael* petitioning him to defend Catholics. The Byzantine and Russian Orthodox church celebrate the *Miracle of the Archangel Michael at Chonae* on September 6 where it is believed that Michael appeared to divert a water stream which was deliberately diverted from a nearby river by pagans to destroy a sanctuary built in his honor. This is all patently nonsense. It is unnecessary to labor the point that Michael is after all an angel who cannot be worshipped. Paul warns:

***Colossians 2:18*** *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,*

Coming back to Scripture, Michael is assigned the role of prince of Israel. Speaking prophetically about the end times, the messenger to Daniel states that Michael is the prince of his people – the Israelites. After all, Daniel was fasting and interceding for his people, the Israelites, which were in captivity in Babylon at this point.

***Daniel 12:1*** *And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.*

The divine order of God has decreed that Michael stand as the prince of Israel, the one who fights for the nation of Israel, securing the covenantal promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Indeed, one wonders if this was the reason Michael assisted this messenger in the first place. The messenger was sent to comfort and encourage Daniel, the representative of the people of Israel in captivity. Michael was not going to sit idly by while the messenger to Israel was buffeted by Satan.

Another lesson presents itself here for our consideration: it is incumbent upon each Christian to ascertain through prayer and fasting what role one has been assigned in the divine order in the Church today. Michael fully well knew his role and performed it diligently. He sprang into action when Israel was threatened and will one day engage in a fierce apocalyptic battle when Israel will be threatened with annihilation (Daniel 12:1). As I am not an advocate of “replacement theology” which states that the Church has replaced Israel, I believe there is a future global-scale war coming where the nation-state of Israel will be attacked by Satan-inspired forces. What we see, though, is a clear-cut, unambiguous division of labor, if you will, among the angels. Each one seems to know his duty and performs it well. We need to diligently pray, “Lord, what is my role in your Kingdom?” Paul told Timothy:

***Colossians 4:17*** *And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*

## 1.2 The order of archangels and angels: Gabriel

The Scriptures amply show that God loves order and delegates responsibilities. We have seen in the previous section how Michael, the archangel, was ordained to be prince among the angels and defend the nation of Israel. In this segment, another archangel, Gabriel, will be the focus of our attention. Gabriel means “warrior of God” or “man of God”. Most Bible readers readily recognize him to be the special messenger of God – the one who heralded the birth of Jesus to Mary, among others. Although this is true, the Scripture does not reduce the role of Gabriel to that of messenger alone: a careful study of the role of Gabriel demonstrates that he was sent to reveal the mysteries of God to selected individuals.

***Daniel 8:16*** *And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision.*

Daniel chapter 8 begins with an end-time vision of a ram whose power was shattered by a he-goat charging in from the West. The goat's horn was broken and out of it proceeded four horns. Again, an ominous little horn emerged from among the four horns which dominated the entire world with its diabolical power. In verse 15, we are told that Daniel “sought for the meaning”. That was the moment that the voice called for Gabriel “make this man to *understand* the vision”. We note the immense power that Gabriel possessed for Daniel writes:

***Daniel 8:17*** *So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face: but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision.*

Gabriel, thus, is an archangel with tremendous powers, yet whose main role was to be an illuminator – one sent to lift the veil on the mysteries of God. I like to liken Gabriel to a prophet among the angelic order for he spoke about the future and comforted individuals favoured of God. It did not take long before Gabriel was once again dispatched to enlighten Daniel about the great long-term plans of God. How admirable a character this man Daniel is in that God sends an archangel twice within a short span of time to give him “skill and understanding”.

***Daniel 9:21*** *Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.*

***Daniel 9:22*** *And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.*

Let us reflect on the efficient and sublime division of labor that exists among the angelic order. Michael fought wars against Satan and his demons, while Gabriel was tasked with bringing the great secrets of God to selected saints. We do not see them envying each other or mistakenly crossing over into the other’s domain of authority. Yet, when facing opposition in executing their tasks, they united and fought to fend off Satan and his forces. Interestingly, God had already revealed

to these powerful angels the role they would be playing in the future to accomplish the eternal purposes He has ordained. Michael knows today that the time will come when he will lock horns with Satan and his accomplices and expel them from heaven. I imagine that he can hardly wait to get the go ahead.

***Revelation 12:7*** *And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,*

***Revelation 12:8*** *And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.*

We see the same scenario played out again in the days prior to the birth of John the Baptist. Again, we observe that the occasion was a historic one indeed: John the Baptist represented a watershed point where the Old covenant was soon to give way to the New through the person of Jesus Christ. The messenger chosen to break the glad tiding of his birth was none other than Gabriel.

***Luke 1:11*** *And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.*

***Luke 1:12*** *And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*

What an apt location Gabriel chose to break the world-changing news: the altar of incense which symbolizes prayer. How many years did Zacharias pray the same prayer before this altar, “Lord give me a child?” Indeed, God’s silence is not a rejection. “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). True to his

ministry, Gabriel prophesizes about the future of John the Baptist, declaring all that God had revealed to him about this remarkable child. Once again we note the depth of insight and prophetic knowledge granted to Gabriel. Unlike Daniel, however, Zacharias refused to believe the words of Gabriel which turned out to a risky decision. He was to soon find out that Gabriel was not just a messenger whose message could be believed or discarded. It was not wise to offend Gabriel. He is, after all, a prince among the angels too. He had power to inflict punishment on humans, even those beloved of God.

***Luke 1:19*** *And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.*

***Luke 1:20*** *And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.*

It appears from the above that angels take serious offence at human disbelief. These magnificent beings, who stand in the presence of God where innumerable angels receive orders and faithfully dispatch them, are appalled by the human proclivity for disbelief, argument and recklessness. Keep in mind that they also possess a free will and can choose to rebel. They are not soulless robots. I have often wondered: why did Gabriel strike Zacharias with muteness? To my mind, it was because God did not want Zacharias to go about spreading unbelief. When the time comes for momentous prophecies to come to fruition, God looks for individuals who will facilitate the birth of these prophecies through faith and prayer. When Daniel

understood that the time of captivity was soon over, his faith in the prophecies given to Jeremiah led him to declare a fast.

***Daniel 9:2*** *In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.*

Daniel *believed* the Word of God and prayed; Zacharias *saw* and *heard* Gabriel, but disbelieved. This was the crucial distinction between these men of God and the reason for the judgment that followed. Gabriel basically decided that it was better to silence Zacharias rather than give him license to disseminate disbelief.

I have so far looked at two archangels and contrasted their ministries. Several lessons can be drawn from their activities in Scripture:

- They are highly exalted beings created with immense power. We understand that God delights in bestowing such honor and prestige upon beings created for special purposes.
- Though possessing tremendous strength, they work together to accomplish the purposes of God.
- Angels avoid encroaching into each other's domain of authority. For example, Gabriel was called upon to give understanding to Daniel, while Michael was sent to fight the prince of Persia.
- Finally, angels can be offended at human disbelief and can, in some instances, punish disbelief even in the life of saints.



### 1.3 Conclusion

What is clear from our discussion so far is that God had made angelic beings which differ in might, glory and rank long before He made the present world. It has delighted God to invest these creatures with various degrees of beauty and distinctive offices. This had nothing to do with the actions or lack of it on the part of angels, but the inscrutable will of the Almighty.

I would like to reflect on some points with regards to the above. We do not read anywhere in the corpus of Scripture whether angels will receive rewards for their faithfulness and diligence in service or not. I would like to think so but that would be an unwarranted speculation. We can only assume that the default biblical position is that they will *not* receive any particular recognition or promotion for their service. If this is true we have much to admire and learn from angels. It is generally true of humans that we must be offered the prospect of recognition, admiration, promotion, monetary profit or some other incentive in order to concentrate our effort. This is apparently the way God made us. The Bible says:

**John 6:27** *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

**Hebrews 11:6** *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

So Jesus Himself gives eternal rewards as the *raison d'être* for all Christian labour. Sadly, evolutionist biologists like Richard Dawkins, who do not believe in the concept of eternal life, dismiss the notion of altruism altogether. Dawkins suggests that altruism is motivated by egoistic reasons such as kith and kin, social approbation and the principle of reciprocity (Ward, 2008, p. 205). Dawkins compares our “selfish genes” to Chicago gangsters who have shrewdly survived millennia of competition. He goes on to say:

*I shall argue that a predominant quality to be expected in a successful gene is ruthless selfishness... Much as we might wish to believe otherwise, universal love and the welfare of the species as a whole are concepts that simply do not make evolutionary sense (Dawkins, 1989, p. 2).*

Needless to say, such an interpretation of evolutionary altruism is the antithesis of Christ's love and compassion for humanity which finds its apotheosis in the Cross of Calvary. Furthermore, it fails to explain why countless individuals throughout history have for example given away all their possessions to the poor and chosen a life of self-denial out in the forests or deserts. Dawkins suggests that all altruism is motivated by selfish reasons such as family, social approval or the hope of receiving something in return. This fails to grapple with why the Egyptian monk, Anthony, (AD 251-356) or Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889-1929), to name just two, renounced everything for Christ and actually stayed away from the limelight (Singh only sought out humans to share the Gospel).

If one chooses the life of a hermit, we will have to rule out any benefit for the family or hope of reciprocity as possible motivations. That leaves us with social approbation. The argument that they did this for social esteem wouldn't make sense as the hermit existence, by definition, seeks anonymity and seclusion away from the hustle and bustle that characterizes daily life. In reality, the Bible shows us the powerful influence Christ had on Peter, James and John, for example, who forsook all and followed Him believing in the words of the Lord. Eternal rewards are lie at the core:

***Matthew 19:29*** *And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

Returning to my earlier point about angels and their incentive for steadfastly serving the Lord, it becomes clear that they do so despite the fact that they do not share in the promises given to humans. What then is their motivation? What carrot dangles before their faces? Apparently all that motivates them is the love of God and no ulterior motives whatsoever. Obviously, Bible-believing Christians discourage any inclination to praise or admire angels too much for fearing of committing idolatry, but, undoubtedly, angels can be admired as servants par excellence. We must not conceive of them as mechanical beings who stoically attend to the commands of God. Jesus said:

***Luke 15:10*** *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

Angels rejoice, worship, demonstrate righteous indignation and a plethora of other emotions we are familiar with.

Another point, one which is more closely pertinent to the subject matter, is that of the angelic hierarchy. The word hierarchy itself may perhaps be treated with skepticism by some readers. For people in the West, this may conjure up images of the medieval feudal system with its barons and serfs or perhaps the sordid conditions of the working class so aptly captured in Charles Dickens' novels during the Industrial Revolution in England. Understandably no one wants the bad old days of zero social mobility or the stratified Victorian society back. In God's divine order every angel is a vital part of the whole Kingdom of God. As mentioned earlier, the messenger angel to Daniel solicited the help of Michael the archangel. Rather than perceive themselves as rivals due to their differing strengths, these angels capitalized on what the other had to offer. We detect no envy or jealousy. Regrettably, we all know of churches where internal rivalries propelled by the lust for power has brought the name of Christ into disrepute. Paul warned the Galatians:

***Galatians 5:15*** *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*

Angels do not perceive hierarchy as a threat. They understand that with higher positions comes a greater obligation to serve. They know their "job descriptions" well and do not encroach into the other's territory except to facilitate the overall will of the Lord. Here I recall the words of the apostle Paul who

remonstrated with those who took issue with the election of God.

***Romans 9:20*** *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*

***Romans 9:21*** *Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*

Indeed, the Potter is sovereign. He has distributed gifts according to His prerogative. “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men (Ephesians 4:8). What kind of gifts? Paul was speaking about the divine order in the Church. He continues, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). This will be covered in a subsequent chapter.

It is incumbent upon us to follow the example of the angels in serving the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord asked us to pray that His will be done on earth as in heaven. Heaven is the perfect model and the angels demonstrate this perfection in the divine order.

## CHAPTER TWO

### God's Order on earth before the Law

#### 2.0. Introduction

In this chapter, the emphasis will be on the government of God in the pre-law era after the creation of the world and sentient beings. Before the creation of this world, God had already dealt with the rebellion instigated by Lucifer in heaven and order had been restored. Lucifer, who now became the “opposer” (Satan) of the order of God, realized that there was no more room for him to brew further trouble in heaven. God's will reigned supreme among the holy and elect angels. With the doors closed in heaven, he decided to move his theatre of operations to the new world God had created.

The biblical account portrays God as a methodical and systematic Creator. He first begins with the diverse Laws which were to remain constant and sustain life on earth. Light, heat, gravity, magnetic forces etc were first spoken into

existence. The Sun was commissioned to *rule* over the day, while the Moon the night.

***Genesis 1:16*** *And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.*

Isn't it instructive that the Bible uses the word "rule" or "have dominion" to describe the powerful role assigned to the Sun and Moon in illuminating the earth? Here, again, we see God, albeit metaphorically, delegating authority even to the physical aspects of His creation. The Sun was to have dominion (Hebrew *memshalah*) over the day, while the Moon presided over the night. We observe that God characteristically confers different degrees of beauty and glory upon the celestial bodies, just as he did with the angels. Paul reminds us, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory (I Corinthians 15:41). The sea was commanded, "...Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" (Job 38:11).

One of the world's foremost physicists, Professor Paul Davies, of the University of Arizona wrote a book entitled *The Goldilocks Enigma* (2006). The title borrows from the old Nursery Tale of the little girl who entered a house in the forest hungry and tired. She found three bowls of porridge on the table, but could only eat of the third bowl which was neither

too hot nor too cold. The same went for the chairs and the beds. Professor Davies wonders why the earth is the only planet that we know of which has life-sustaining properties balanced on a knife edge, for example the right distance from the sun and the right composition of gasses. It is worth quoting him at length as this chapter, which contemplates the creative majesty of God while also instructing us about His divine order, cannot avoid the temptation of challenging our atheist friends:

*It appeared to Hoyle [i.e. the British cosmologist Fred Hoyle] as if a super-intellect had been ‘monkeying’ with the laws of physics. He was right in his impression. On the face of it, the universe does look as if it has been designed by an intelligent creator expressly for the purpose of spawning sentient beings. Like the porridge in the tale of Goldilocks and the three bears, the universe seems to be ‘just right’ for life, in many intriguing ways. No scientific explanation for the universe can be deemed complete unless it accounts for this appearance of judicious design (Davies, 2006, p. 3).*

The answer is simple: because there is a Designer behind the universe. Those who reject such a premise find themselves having to believe that an endless series of accidents or luck brought our present conditions about. Davies goes on, “The fact that life exists, seemingly against vast odds, is attributed to an extraordinary accident. And appealing to luck, like appealing to miracles, is not a very satisfactory explanation. That life has evolved mind has to be accepted as another stupendous accident of history” (Davies, 2006, p. 296). Paradoxically, despite such cogent arguments, Davies does not believe in God himself. The tragedy with an atheistic



mindset is that it becomes impossible to explore a Bible study of this nature which assumes that there is one God who expects His creation to understand, embrace and exemplify the principles of divine order. Sadly, such a stance places one firmly in the camp of the “opposer”, Satan. From the perspective of the Bible, atheism is a grievous sin. Genesis to Revelation is predicated upon the existence of God.

## **2.1.The one command in Eden**

When God fashioned Adam from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life, Adam became a living soul, he was now God-conscious. This was because God breathed into him a portion of His own Spirit, for He is the source of all life and spiritual consciousness “The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life” (Job 33:4). In other parts of Scripture, God is referred to as the Father of the spirits of all flesh:

***Numbes 16:22*** *And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?*

***Hebrews 12:9*** *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

In Scripture, God is never spoken of as the Father of the flesh, only the spirit. It is our spirits that He seeks to mould, cultivate, discipline and prosper as we communicate with him

through prayer. An individual can only fully surrender to the divine order of God in so far as he is cognizant of this unique relationship he or she has with God. Submission implies an intimate knowledge and love for the Creator. Pharaoh had no such relationship whatsoever which explains his question:

***Exodus 5:2** And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.*

Now, in the Garden of Eden, Adam was given only one explicit command by God: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). Some have asked me through the years why God placed the tree in the Garden in the first place. “Surely, He knew Adam and Eve would sin. So why put such a temptation in their way?” they ask. It has always puzzled me that they do not rather marvel at the benign headship of the Almighty. Rather than focus on the *one* tree that they were forbidden to eat, why don’t we acknowledge the liberality of God in giving them *countless* trees to eat from? We humans are a curious lot. It seems hardwired into us somehow to ask, “But why not?” Most people do not worry themselves sick about all the poisonous plants and fruits in nature. We are happy with what is edible and healthy for us and, fortunately, this is found in abundance.

We do not know how large the Garden of Eden was. But let us say it covered a land mass the size of contemporary Iraq (some scholars believe this to be the location, but is debated).

Now imagine the whole country of Iraq dotted with a thick foliage of trees and bushes. Why would one ignore all those trees and flora and travel to the one spot where the forbidden tree was planted? What is this obsession with this *one* tree?

The answer to the question: why did God plant a tree in Eden and forbid them to eat from it? can be answered with a counter-question: how else could they demonstrate their submission to God? Who were they accountable to? Adam and Eve were lords of all they surveyed. God had given them dominion over everything in their environment.

***Genesis 1:28*** *And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

For someone to suggest that it was not right for God to place the tree in Eden is to suggest that Adam and Eve were created to be autonomous agents free to do as they pleased. This misses the entire reason for their creation. God made us for His glory – not our self-indulgence. “Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for *my* glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him” (Isaiah 43:7). The 24 elders in heaven repeatedly remind us why God created all things:

***Revelation 4:11*** *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

Actually, there were 3 additional commands given in Genesis 1:28: “To multiply”, “replenish the earth” and “have dominion

over all living creatures". Adam and Eve were expected to obey and fulfill them. Nevertheless, these were divine decrees in a different sense than the one explicit command not to eat from the tree. Let us refer to the first set of commands as positive commands and the latter as a negative command (Genesis 2:17). This has nothing to do with any moral qualities at all, for all the commandments of God are upright and intrinsically moral. The first set of divine decrees are positive in the sense that they seem to align more readily with human predispositions hardwired into us. In other words, engaging in these activities appeals to the state of being human. Who would not want to "multiply", "replenish the earth" and "have dominion" over everything? It is for this reason Genesis 1:28 prefaces the positive commandments with the phrase, "And God *blessed* them".

Succinctly put, there were 3 positive commandments and just 1 negative command. This is a testament to the munificence of God. Contrary to what some people envision, God wants us to be blessed and thank Him for His goodness. God is no tyrant for a tyrant expects no gratitude from his subjects and any gratitude expressed is extracted through fear of punishment. The Book of Psalms is proof positive that those who serve God love Him deeply and voluntarily shower praise upon Him.

*1Timothy 6:17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;*

Since it is the “thou shalt not” we seem to have problems with, let us explore this one negative command more closely.

Berkhoff (2003:222) states that the divine command not to eat of the tree was intended to test the obedience of our first parents. It was not the act of eating of the tree or any toxic material in the tree which was the cause for the restriction, but to ascertain:

- a. *Whether man’s future state would be good or evil.*
- b. *Whether man would allow God to determine for him what was good and evil, or would undertake to determine this for himself ( (Berkhoff, 2003, p. 222).*

In essence, is this not what all principles of divine authority and submission are about? There was nothing about the tree which was evil in and of itself, but, rather, the utterance from the Word of the Lord which now made the difference. It is the act of disobeying the Word of God which is of the essence, and we should refrain from the temptation to speculate about the tree and other physical objects. I am reminded of the good prophet in the book of I Kings 13 who lost his life because he chose to trust the lies of an old man who claimed to have seen an angel, rather than seek the Lord for himself. If the Lord had spoken so explicitly to him, why did he not trust the Lord to confirm or deny the claims of the old prophet?

***1Kings 13:21*** *And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee,*

**1Kings 13:22** *But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which [the LORD] did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.*

The same goes for Joshua. Rather than pray and seek the will of the Lord, he accepted the fallacious testimony of the men of Gibeon who pretended to have come from a far country with victuals to make a peace treaty with them. The truth is that they were next door neighbors to Joshua. We are told: “And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them” (Joshua 9:14,15). The enemy sometimes comes disguised as a harmless and well-meaning individual. We are to recognize him for who he is with the discernment of the Lord, and make no treaties with him, for else he will have the space to be a thorn in our flesh.

Returning to Adam, we note that God did not make any attempts to justify his prohibition. God expected Adam to trust and defer to His judgment. Modern man has come to expect reasons to be given for everything under the Sun. Particularly in the “liberated” West, we pride ourselves in this entitlement. Our politicians are expected to convince and persuade us that they are worthy of our votes, and talk-show hosts invite “experts” of every stripe to give us the inside scoop on issues ranging from health to relationships because there is a huge demand for such information. We must *know*

what is being “hidden” from us. Will our ears ever be filled with all the hearing we are exposed to? Perhaps not.

***Ecclesiastes 1:8*** *All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*

Take the mind-boggling success of the internet. It is one colossal super-highway of knowledge where discrete bits of information jostle each other on the broadband highway at ever-increasing speeds to satisfy our insatiable hunger for knowledge. Who owns the internet? We. God knew that there would be a crescendo of information in the last days:

***Daniel 12:4*** *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*

Unfortunately, it is this ingrained curiosity to know which led our first parents into trouble. They wanted to know what it was God was concealing from them. In fact, Eve’s response to the serpent belies a certain sense of dissatisfaction with God’s prohibition. “But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die” (Genesis 3:3). God did not say, “neither shall ye touch it”. This was an interpolation on the part of Eve. I am sure her tone of voice was one of frustration at the perceived unfairness of this command, to her mind. Dissatisfaction and perceived grievances have a way of taking on a life of their own. Like a snowball, they build momentum slowly at first, but with greater speed eventually picking up

gravel, sand, moss and whatever else happens to be in the way. One commentator puts this into perspective:

*Would he [Adam] “trust and obey” because he loved the one who had shown such love for him; or would he doubt God’s goodness and resent His control, rejecting and disobeying His word on even such an apparently trivial restriction as one forbidden fruit in a whole paradise of abundant provision? (Morris, 1976, p. 93).*

Grudem (1994, p. 493) observes that Eve’s disobedience undermined two pillars of truth: firstly, it attacked the integrity of God by denying what is true. Whereas God said that eating of the fruit would bring death, Eve believed that it would bring life. Secondly, it struck at the pillar of moral standards – what is right? By choosing to experiment with the fruit, Eve was in essence negating God’s standard for what constitutes as morally right. She chose to trust her own evaluation of the situation although fully aware that it contradicted the word of God.

In summary, we learn that our first parents actually had very few commandments to observe compared, for example, to the era of the Law. Whereas they had no problems with the positive decrees to multiply, replenish the earth and have dominion over it, they failed miserably at obeying the one prohibition in Eden. The prohibition against eating the fruit may sound trifling, but this would be to miss the point: God was testing them to assess whether or not they valorized His Word. In this they were found woefully lacking. In the next segment we will explore the consequence of their sin. In the



economy of God's divine order, punishment for disobedience is a vital component in upholding its inviolability.

## **2.2. Divine order and punishment**

**Genesis 2:25** *And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

**Genesis 3:7** *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.*

As long as Adam and Eve obeyed and submitted to the divine order of God, shame and its debilitating effects were alien to their universe. Submission to the divine order serves as a merciful covering from shame, anguish, fear, guilt and unpleasant experiences. They were naked, but they were not ashamed appears to suggest that somehow as long as they loved and stayed within the bounds of God's will for them, their surrendered state acted like a shield blocking out even the knowledge of shame. Nakedness was not until then associated with depravity because the principle of obedience made them oblivious to their nakedness. We could say in a sense that they were clothed with "God-consciousness" to such a degree that it negated any association of nakedness with shame.

The above reminds us of the glory God covered the cherubim with. I have in the last chapter mentioned how beautifully adorned Lucifer was - a fact which went to his head and led to

his downfall. As long as he stayed within the confines of the divine order, God saw fit to clothe him with unspeakable garments and glory. Submission to the principles of divine order truly robes us with resplendence, not only inwardly, but outwardly too.

***Daniel 12:3*** *And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.*

The association of sin with nakedness was a novel experience for Adam and Eve. The earlier sense of peace and holiness which was a natural derivative of their submitted states was now shot through with confusion and shame. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Jewish scholar, Maimonides, sums up the predicament of Adam and Eve, “The fall consisted in man's losing his understanding of his true priorities. Finally, he ended up as an irrational animal—man controlled by his passions” (Lawrence, 2009, p. 12).

Many speak about rationality as if it only pertains to the natural order. To be rational is to think along lines agreeable to reason. However, what is reasonable about not eating a fruit from a particular tree in the Garden of Eden? In other words, from the perspective of divine order, reason alone cannot arbitrate on what is good or bad. It is, rather, as Maimonides states, man’s “understanding of his true priorities” which transcends reason. These priorities, needless to say, are intimately bound up with the divine order – God’s decrees. Furthermore, it all depends on who does the defining.

For many in the secular West reason is falsely equated with only that which is empirically testable and verifiable. In such a narrow definition, it is argued that the concept of God is redundant. However, as the noted theologian (with a DPhil in molecular biophysics), Alister McGrath, cautions:

*If there was a flaw in human reasoning processes, reason itself would not be able to detect this. We'd be locked into unreliable patterns of thought without any means of escape. Some say rationalism liberates. Wiser souls suggest that it has the capacity to entrap and imprison (McGrath, 2011, p. 67).*

Ultimately, the whole matter boils down to whether we will trust and obey God as the Creator and upholder of the divine order irrespective of what our intellect and powers of reasoning suggest. It is a matter of understanding the principles of divine order. One man who more than any other demonstrated such an understanding was the Roman centurion. Though representing the conquering party, he nevertheless perceived something which was concealed from the rest of his countrymen – and even the majority of the Jews of his day: he recognized the identity and authority of Jesus.

**Matthew 8:8** *The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.*

**Matthew 8:9** *For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*

What was unique about this man's understanding of the principles of divine order that Jesus commended highly? For

one, he believed that Christ's authority over sickness was of such a nature that it was absolute, unquestionable and transcended spatiotemporal limitations. He described himself as "a man under authority having soldiers under me". No doubt he took seriously the power he wielded as a centurion. He had the power to sentence someone to death – a power he no doubt took very seriously. He knew full well that his orders would be meticulously carried out to the last detail without him having to follow along to ascertain that this was so. God help the careless soldier fails to carry out his orders.

The question the Fall of man throws up at us is this: do we truly understand and appreciate the divine order of God, and are we genuinely cognizant of the seriousness of contravening the divine decrees of God? There is an instructive parallel between Jesus' rebuke to the Church of Laodicea and the judgment which accompanied the Fall in the Garden of Eden.

***Revelation 3:17*** *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:*

As long as Adam and Eve upheld the divine order they were rich, spiritually discerning and clothed with innocence. Disobedience unleashed divine judgment which rendered them poor both spiritually and physically, spiritually blind and visibly naked. The power of God to bless is intrinsically connected with the attitude and degree of our submission. Nowhere is the need to both *submit* to God and do so with a

*humble* spirit more clearly portrayed than in the story of the prophet Jonah which will be discussed in the next segment.

### 2.3. The divine order and Jonah

***Jonah 1:4*** But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

***Jonah 1:17*** Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

***Jonah 4:6*** And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

***Jonah 4:7*** But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

In the four verses above, we read that God *prepared* (1) a great wind (2) a great fish (3) a gourd and (4) a worm. It took all four to *prepare* Jonah. There were two reasons for this: the first two were prepared to discipline Jonah and bend him towards the will of God, and, secondly, the last two were prepared by God to reveal to Jonah his lack of love for souls, and induce him to repent. When seen together, these four players demonstrate the great compassion God has for the lost – no matter how ungodly and sinful they are. The Book of Jonah was written with the intent of inducing some soul-searching;

to ask ourselves whether we are disciplined enough to obey the will of the Lord, and whether we have compassion and love for lost souls. What is it God could be using today to prepare us individually?

The story of Jonah begins with the prophet attempting to escape from the commandment to travel to Nineveh and preach repentance. We are told in 1:3 that Jonah fled to Tarshish. Surely, Jonah was not that stupid to think he could escape from the presence of the Lord as if the Lord's Spirit was confined only to the land of Israel. It is plausible to assume that Jonah actually decided to engage himself in business and trade in the hope of shutting out the command of the Lord to go to Tarshish. I say this because Tarshish was famous in those days for its gold and immense wealth. Solomon, for example, traded often with Tarshish:

***2 Chronicles 9:21** For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram: every three years once came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks.*

If this is true, then there is a lesson for us modern believers. We need to ask ourselves whether we have unconsciously allowed the quest for riches and status to blind us to the call of the Lord to reach out to the lost and dying. Has our lifestyle become a form of escape into a mental Tarshish? We need to ask ourselves whether, like Jonah, we have deliberately gone to sleep in the hope of escaping from the command "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Matthew 28:19). Such is the

concern of the Lord God for the lost and dying that He assaulted this particular ship with a great wind. Let no one say that God takes pleasure in the death of the wicked.

*Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

Rather than be a blessing for those in his company, Jonah's disobedience endangered their lives. There is a warning for us here: a man or woman of God who does not obey the command to witness and disciple the lost, can actually endanger the people around him or her. In contrast, Jacob's presence was a blessing for Laban and all his material wealth – a fact which Laban confessed (Genesis 30:27). But now, the other fellow-passengers in the ship reluctantly had to cast Jonah into the sea to save the others. Just as our obedience to the Lord brings a blessing to others, our disobedience can bring much anxiety to them.

Jonah was, nevertheless, a man of God. He confessed and gave glory to the Lord God in the ship in the hearing of the pagan crew, and asked them to throw him overboard. Here we have some evidence of the concern of Jonah for other individuals – he didn't want them to suffer because of his disobedience. Though a man of God, somewhere in his walk with the Lord, Jonah appears to have become cold in his relation with those he was supposed to be ministering to.

There is always hope for Christians who know when to repent and accept the chastisement of the Lord.

Jonah 1:1 says...*now the Lord had prepared a great fish...* Such was the determination of God to reach the lost souls of Nineveh that He prepared a mobile, high-security prison in the sea for Jonah. He was confined to total isolation with God acting as his prison warden. This had a reforming effect on Jonah. Naturally, Jonah prayed like he never did in his entire life. Again, though, we see the great compassion of the Lord, not only for the Ninevites, but this man with all his faults and defects. Just as God prepared a fearsome wind and an equally fearsome fish to reform Jonah, He has the privilege to prepare some wind to stop us from pursuing a goal or objective which is contrary to His will. Perhaps the jobs we lost or the disappointments we faced were blessings in disguise to keep us from going to Tarshish. In this sense, the wind and the fish testify of the love God had towards Jonah, His erring servant.

The wind and the fish had done their job. Jonah was released from God's prison fearful and penitent. When the word of the Lord came to him a second time, he duly went and preached "...*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*" (Jonah 3:4). We must note that, with regards to lost souls, God never changes His commandment to reach them. He never compromises or accepts any excuses – it is a matter of utmost urgency. The Lord Jesus first attempted to persuade Peter gently with a sheet from heaven to go to Joppa, but when this



failed, He plainly commanded him to go without doubting or asking any questions.

Although Jonah was obedient, his heart was far from compassionate. His attitude was nasty. When Jonah realized that God had forgiven the sins of Nineveh, he was furious:

***Jonah 4:1*** But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

***Jonah 4:2*** And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

***Jonah 4:3*** Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

According to his own words, he had fled to Tarshish because he knew that God was compassionate and would forgive the sins of the Ninevites. He plainly desired to see the Ninevites eradicated like Sodom and Gomorrah. Other men of God have also been diagnosed with a similar misguided nationalism in the Bible. James and John, aptly named “the sons of thunder”, tried to secure Jesus’ approval in sending fire down on the Samaritans.

***Luke 9:54*** And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

***Luke 9:55*** But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

It is significant to note that God did not deal with the condition of Jonah's heart until after he had preached to the Ninevites. Faith and repentance come by hearing, and hearing by the word of the Lord. Let us always first prioritize the preaching and teaching of the Word. The pertinent question for us always is: what manner of spirit are we of? God now solicited a gourd and a worm to reveal the callous condition of the heart of Jonah. The gourd which God had *prepared* sprang up quickly to give him shade from the scorching sun. The Bible records that Jonah was "exceeding glad" for the gourd (Jonah 4:6). We do not read, however, that he gives thanks to the Lord for this. That night, God *prepared* a worm which quickly ate up the gourd. This was followed the next day by an East wind which God *prepared* once again to buffet Jonah. This is God's justification for the series of punishments:

***Jonah 4:10*** *Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:*

***Jonah 4:11*** *And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?*

Gourd is often bitter and worms are unpleasant in appearance. The object lesson God sought to convey to Jonah was simple: his attitude was obnoxious. In God's reckoning, the attitude towards lost souls is just as important as the act of witnessing to them. With outreach there must be love and compassion. God began preparing Jonah with a wind and finished His project with a wind. We are not told whether

Jonah repented of his negative attitude, but we do know what God is saying to us. If we truly love Jesus, there are no Ninevites to hate. Everyone is a potential brother or sister waiting for us to share the message of salvation. Jonah preached salvation to the Ninevites, but he did not embrace them as fellow worshippers of the One True God. He actually isolated himself from their company. He gave them the plan of salvation but failed to show them the love of God which inspired salvation. It was because God so *loved* the world, that He gave His only begotten Son... (John 3:16). May the Lord show us what manner of spirit we are.

The next chapter looks at the divine order of God through the prism of the Law of Moses. For the first time we witness a comprehensive set of rules and ordinances that God requires a whole nation to observe. The necessity of obedience is stressed over and over again, encapsulated in verses such as the one below:

***Deuteronomy 27:10*** *Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day.*

## CHAPTER THREE

### God's Order and the Law

#### 3.0. Thou shalt not

*The law that is meant to bind is necessary for the unrighteous, who would not abstain from sin without “the fear of prison [and] the sword of the hangman”. Because most human beings are unrighteous, are not Christians (or were not yet Christians), there is a need for the law. This is God's “mighty hammer” (Martin Luther, 1961).*

Immanuel Kant once said that nothing straight was ever made out of the crooked timber of humanity. The Law indeed appears to be aimed at binding unrighteousness as Martin Luther remarked. Almost all the 10 commandments are negatively stated in the format, “Thou shalt not”. Why is there this fixation with censorship or a “binding” as Martin Luther puts it? Especially in our licentious world, where a relativistic mindset considers all absolutes to be bigoted anomalies, “thou shalt not” is perceived as an intolerable restriction upon the human spirit.

“Thou shalt not” actually says something about the chasm that existed between God and those whom He set out to convert into a nation of kings and priests. “Thou shalt not” can only be understood within the framework of what was considered normative and permissible in the world both then and now. Murder and violence (e.g. the killing of Abel and the days of Noah), sexual promiscuity (e.g. Sodom and Gomorrah), idolatry (e.g. the idols of Laban), lying and

stealing (e.g. Rebekah's conspiracy) all serve to highlight the profound disregard for truth. Let us remember that before the Law came, humans were aware of the rudimentary truths of the moral law of God, as Paul declares:

***Romans 2:14*** *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:*

***Romans 2:15*** *Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)*

In essence, “thou shalt not” was a holy reaction to the unremitting defiance against the holy witness of God in the hearts and consciences of humans. The Law, in this sense, was an avenger of this defiance against the divine order. It was as if God's patience with the flagrant violation of His divine order had worn thin, and He would now demonstrate His holy zeal for His order. The Law was given in a location and under circumstances that were quite daunting. “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly” (Exodus 19:18). It was God's turn now to instill a holy fear and reverence for His divine order.

It was for this reason that an element of violence is evident in the Law. Any man or animal who touched the mountain would be stoned to death. Blasphemers were to be stoned to death too. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was given God's covenant of peace for killing a adulterous Israelite male and a

Midianite woman. His zeal pleased the Lord who's Law was revealed to "bind" unrighteousness.

***Numbers 25:11** Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.*

***Numbers 25:12** Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace:*

From the moment the Law came, violence was visited upon the noncompliant. From the moment of its inception, violence and blood became a mainstay of the Law as evidenced in the daily blood sacrifices for the expiation of sin. It was this violence which defined the life of Saul of Tarsus. Saul misunderstood and misapplied the violence of the Law in his zeal to uphold its integrity. He failed to discern that the Law would be a curse for anyone who believed it could be practiced perfectly. Only later did he realize that the function of the Law is to lead us to Christ, for only Christ could appease the wrath of God – only Christ could successfully face the violence of the Law becoming a curse for us on the Cross.

***Galatians 3:13** Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*

On the Road to Damascus, Saul's life, lived in fear and trembling before the demands of the Law, was radically challenged. Saul expected to face the full penalty for his persecution in the service of the Mosaic Law, but was astonished when Christ forgave him and chose him to declare

the righteousness that comes through grace. Who better understood the violence of the Law than Saul, and who better to proclaim the message of justification by faith than Paul?

*At that moment Paul went over from the side of the executioner to the side of the victim, and instead of carrying on the crucifixion of Christ by pursuing his followers became a victim of Jewish violence himself (Hamerton-Kelly, 1990, p. 102).*

### 3.1. The Schoolmaster

I have attended an Anglo-Indian boarding school in India (1978-1988)<sup>3</sup>. I felt I was enrolled into a military academy rather than a civil school. Teachers barked orders and waived their sticks menacingly at us. Imperative orders were issued round the clock which we were expected to kowtow to without hesitation because the penalties were severe. Teachers and prefects screaming “double up!” on our way to and from buildings still rings in my ears. At 9 p.m. sharp, the dormitory matron would shout, “lights out!” I still shudder at the thought of the matron whacking pupils who failed to jump out of bed at 6 a.m. sharp when the school bell rang. Corporal punishment was the norm – I still recall kneeling on the tarmac in the hot afternoon sun for what can only be described as a minor infringement on the school rules.

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<sup>3</sup> School website

[http://www.barnesschool.net/barnes\\_html/biographies/BharatJagoowani.html](http://www.barnesschool.net/barnes_html/biographies/BharatJagoowani.html) I have been informed, on a subsequent trip to the school that corporal punishment is no longer practised.

Many of the rules didn't make sense at all. For instance, the Head Boy would shout like a drill sergeant, "school at ease!" followed by, "school alert!" before we queued in order for our meals into the school mess in our uniforms. Woe betide the pupil who forgot to stand to attention and greet the teachers with a "good morning sir or ma'am". As you can imagine, no pupil I knew liked the school at all. Later I was appointed House Prefect and was expected to uphold and perpetuate the harsh disciplinary regime of the school. In a new twist, the oppressed became the oppressor. When I finished my upper secondary and left school, I found it hard to function for a while without the sound of teachers issuing orders and school bells regulating my day.

Some years later, while studying the Epistle to the Galatians, I came across this verse:

***Galatians 3:24*** *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*

In light of my experience in the boarding school, this made perfect sense. Paul's words served as a useful scaffolding to help me understand not only my own difficult experience in the school, but, more importantly, the function of the Mosaic Law. I realized that I had misunderstood the objective of the *prima facie* pointless school rules. The uniforms (very unimaginative), rules, orders, punishments etc, like the Law, were designed to prepare me for life outside the school. They had no intrinsic value in and of themselves, but were necessary to inculcate discipline, values and other non-



quantifiable attributes which would serve me well later. The Law and my old school were underpinned by a common ethos or understanding of human nature: humans are fallen creatures with a natural propensity for evil. The rules and harsh discipline were deliberately designed to rein in rebellion by enforcing conformity to rules and regulations. This is captured in the second stanza of our school anthem.

*Awkward cubs we were when first we came to School  
Often grimy, spoilt & slack;  
heavy was the way till we had learnt the rule.  
Learnt to know and keep the track<sup>4</sup>.*

Significantly, the Greek word translated “schoolmaster” is *paidagōgos* (Strong’s G3807) which is elsewhere translated “instructor” (I Corinthians 4:15). We get the word “pedagogue” or “educator” from *paidagōgos*. In the Greek and Roman world, children from the more affluent strata of society were assigned a slave whose job it was to instruct and guide. These children would rarely leave the home without these *paidagōgos* at their side. The Law is our *paidagōgos* – it instructs, guides and disciplines us. Why was the Law given in the first place? Paul writes:

***Galatians 3:19*** *Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.*

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<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed history of the school and the anthem see [http://www.barnesschool.net/barnes\\_html/web\\_zines/HISTORY.htm](http://www.barnesschool.net/barnes_html/web_zines/HISTORY.htm)

Not only was it given because of transgressions, but as the apostle reveals, "...But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become *exceeding sinful*" (Romans 7:13; emphasis mine). In other words, the Law was given not only for the purpose of convincing us of our sinful condition, but that our sinful condition may be thrown into sharp relief against the holiness of the Law of God which is commensurate with the character of God Himself.

The Law of God is the eternal yardstick of measure against which every son and daughter of Adam is found woefully wanting. The Law is the balance which weighs us all and finds us all wanting. It defines what is good and acceptable in the sight of God. It actually reveals the true divine order of God. Paul states, "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Romans 7:9). A modern analogy would be salutary. It is like someone today protesting when told to repent, "I believe that I am a good person giving generously to charity work. I don't need to repent." Many such "do-gooders" fail to grasp that the concept of "good" must be assessed in light of God's Law.

Paul declares that he was alive before the Law came. In other words, there was nothing to prick his conscience and reveal his true depraved state. When the Law came, however, "sin revived" and he died. Humans are notoriously adept at self-deception and self-absolution. Fidel Castro's now famous speech in 1953, where he defended himself at his own trial, ends with the words, "Condemn me. It does not matter.

History will absolve me.”We all have a little Castro in us. Such boasting becomes gratuitous when seen in light of the standard of God’s Law.

Regrettably, many Jews still have not understood the purpose of the Law. They still cling tenaciously to every jot and tittle believing that salvation lies in the stringent observation of the Law. Orthodox Jews observe 613 commandments (mitzvot) believed to have been identified by one of the greatest Jewish scholars ever – the aforementioned Maimonides (AD 1135-1204; also called Rambam, an acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon)<sup>5</sup>. In reality the Law was given to amplify sin and convince us of our utter inability to fulfill it. As Paul declares, “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14).

Remember that the concept of sin was alien to Adam and Eve before the Fall. After the Fall, their descendants delved ever deeper into sin and lawlessness. By the time the Law was revealed, our collective heart had gone into cardiac arrest overwhelmed with the weight of sin. The Law was intended to work like a defibrillator upon the spiritually dead heart of humanity, if you will. “Thou shalt not” acted much in the same way that cardiopulmonary resuscitation does on someone whose heart is unresponsive. That the Law often reads like a manual of shock and awe is abundantly evident in the Old Testament. For example, we read of the jarring account of the death of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron,

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<sup>5</sup> For the list of 613 commandments see <http://www.jewfaq.org/613.htm>

in Leviticus 10. They offered “strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not” (verse 1). Their judgment was swift and without mercy – God’s fire devoured them instantly. The sternness of the Law is once again evident in the days of King David when Uzzah touched the Ark of the Covenant to stabilize the ox-drawn cart. Once again the fury of God was kindled and Uzzah was instantly killed for his error (2 Samuel 6:6). Thus, although the Law was holy and revealed to quicken man’s conscience, it also paradoxically put everyone who failed to adhere to all its commandments under a curse.

***Galatians 3:10*** *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*

Thankfully, we are not left to tremble in fear in the shadow of Sinai. The Law was our schoolmaster leading us to Christ. All who are weary of the myriad observances, threat of judgment for minor infringements (much like my former school) and the never-ending stench of animal blood and sacrifice breathe an eternal sigh of relief at the sight of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who takes away the sin of the world and gives us liberty. “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). As one writer puts it:

*At any rate Paul does clearly say that the law is abolished; its regime has ended, it itself pointed forward to this end, and Christ's death has liberated us from it (Wedderburn, 1985, p. 615).*

### 3.2. Moses – called of God

***Numbers 12:7*** *My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.*

***Numbers 12:8*** *With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?*

Before the Law was given, God called out a man whose life would become the preeminent model of service and dedication to God. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, God was on the hunt for a man who would love and submit to Him. He found such a man in almost every age: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Much as these men were remarkable in their own right, none of them was asked to approach the super-power of the day, Egypt, demand that close to 2 million slaves be released, and then lead them through a sea and a blistering desert for 40 years kicking and screaming. How often do we read that Moses was weary and fed up with the stiff-necked people he was ordered to lead?

***Exodus 17:4*** *And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.*

***Numbers 11:14*** *I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.*

***Numbers 11:15*** *And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.*

What we see is that in the divine order of God, He always chooses and prepares a man to whom He reveals His will and through whom He leads His people. Now keep in mind that the children of Israel had been slaves for 400 years. They were intimidated, bullied and beaten into obedience by the Egyptians. It is plausible to infer from this that slavery had left them cynical and distrustful of leadership. In reality they did not know what true leadership was. All they had experienced was a consistent misuse and abuse of power. Slavery had bequeathed an “oppositional identity” (Cross, 2003) to these Hebrews.

Their querulous attitude is perhaps best understood within the framework of a history where the negative propensities existed all along just below the surface waiting for a crisis to unleash the suppressed frustrations into full-scale self-destructive patterns. In Moses, the Israelites had a benign and enlightened leader – a man called of God. In fact, he had already sacrificed much for their welfare when he killed an Egyptian who oppressed a fellow-Hebrew in his sight. They had no reason to vex him as they so often did to their own detriment. There are several lessons we can draw from the perspective of divine order. Clearly, God always seems to look for a submissive leader whom He can use to fulfill His purposes upon the earth.

***2 Chronicles 16:9*** *For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.*

It was a sad day when God decided to hide his servant Elijah for three and a half years from the Israel because of their idolatry. For God's people to be leaderless is an enormous tragedy. As long as Elijah remained hidden, the heavens refrained from blessing the land with rain (I Kings 17). Similarly, the day Moses stepped foot on Egyptian soil marked the beginning of the end of Hebrew slavery. Those who rejected Moses rejected God. God protested to Miriam and Aaron that he spoke mouth to mouth with Moses (Numbers 12:8). He defended and honored Moses confirming his call over and over again. Note also that God spoke mouth to mouth with Moses. This means that a leader called of God must hear from God. The call is of such a nature that it affords the called leader the special privilege of hearing directly from the Almighty. This is a cornerstone feature of the divine order in the Old and New Testament dispensation.

In the West, the issue of authority and leadership is, at times, treated with reservations and misgivings. This is somewhat understandable given the excesses and abuse of power during the first and second world wars. Nevertheless, we believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God valid for all societies and times. In what follows, I will briefly address the challenge of congregationalism<sup>6</sup> which is practiced among some church denominations.

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<sup>6</sup> "Congregational" is a Latin-derived word and was first associated with John Cotton, a minister of the Church of Massachusetts, New England, USA. Local assemblies were run by "the self-selected godly" (MacCulloch, 2009, p. 721).

### 3.3. Korah and congregationalism

Congregationalism is the rule of the people in the church (Boh, 1995). Elders may be appointed but only as functionaries devoid of authority. In a sense, it lowers the leadership structure forcefully down to the level of the congregation. Conversely, the congregation is elevated to occupy the now vacant slot left by the demotion of the leadership. This can only be a perversion of the divinely mandated order established by the Almighty Himself. The Anabaptists (16<sup>th</sup> century protestants of the Radical Reformation who re-baptized believers), fed up with the abuses of power by the clergy, decided to champion congregationalism. One can only sympathize with the Anabaptists who did indeed suffer much. However, to condone establishing a flawed pseudo-church structure is no different from condoning the violent Bolshevik revolution as a sound alternative to a flawed Russian Czarism. Early in the history of Israel, we encounter an attempt to actually set up a Congregationalist form of government in Israel. Korah, Abiram and Dathan had this to say to Moses:

***Numbers 16:3** And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?*



The above verse in a nutshell captures the skewed logic of congregationalism: it rejects leaders and elders because, according to their reasoning, “...*all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them*”. Korah and company willfully ignored the fact that Moses and Aaron were the ones the Lord chose to deliver Israel after 400 years of slavery. Why didn’t the Lord just deliver Israel as a nation without the need of a leader when He could have done that? Why is it that the Scriptures consistently show that God always selected, prepared and anointed an individual before He carried out His plans? I suspect, I daresay, that envy and the lust for power (ironically) is at the heart of congregationalism.

Congregationalism in its pure form is actually a mere chimera. Firstly, every congregation tacitly recognizes that individuals vary in their natural and spiritual endowments. There will always be someone with more experience, knowledge, wisdom, gifts, talents and drive than others. All elders should be able to teach, but some can teach better than others. The whole congregation is holy, indeed, but some are more dedicated and consecrated than others. God sets in the church officials and has specified the qualification:

***Ephesians 4:11*** *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

***Ephesians 4:12*** *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

**1Timothy 3:2** *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;*

**1Timothy 3:3** *Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*

**1Timothy 3:4** *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;*

**1Timothy 3:5** *(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*

**1Timothy 3:6** *Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

**1Timothy 3:7** *Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

Congregationalism is an oppressive form of egalitarianism. It seems to be guided by the maxim, “the nail that sticks out is hammered down”. God, knowing the human heart, determined that His ministers must be recognized publicly in their capacity as ministers. The act of publicly ordaining a minister before the whole congregation, along with the accompanying charge to fulfill one’s call, all serves to solemnize the task ahead. By downplaying the above, congregationalism is open to the charge of shirking responsibility and, by extension, neglecting duty. What one has not solemnly bound oneself to can easily be renounced or even worse, betrayed. Congregationalism, clearly, is a cul-de-sac. Several Scriptures endorse the call and rule of pastors and elders.

**Numbers 27:18** *And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;*

**Numbers 27:19** *And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.*

**Numbers 27:20** *And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.*

**1Timothy 5:17** *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.*

**Hebrews 13:17** *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

### 3.4. The exclusiveness of the Law

There is another aspect of the Law which merits closer consideration as it impacts on our quest to understand the divine order of God. It is the fact that God envisioned the Law to apply exclusively to the children of Israel; other nations were ignored. Indeed, the incipient parochialism of the Law can be discerned from the moment Moses went to Pharaoh. God demanded that Israel, as His firstborn, be released so they could serve Him in the desert.

**Exodus 5:3** *And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.*

Keep in mind that the children of Israel lived in the land of Goshen and not among the Egyptians. Why, then, was God

insistent on separating Israel from Egypt altogether? Clearly, it was because God wished to radically change the hearts and minds of the children of Israel. This could not be done while they were in contact with the Egyptians, however tenuous this proximity was. Abominable Egyptian pagan traditions had long influenced many Israelites. In fact, we note that on several occasions, all the way to the Land of Canaan, the Israelites murmured and complained that they had it better in Egypt, even building a statue to Apis, the divine bull-god of the Egyptians in Sinai.

It is a truism that proximity to other cultures and ways of thinking impact us in many ways. Some researchers of religion have shown that the modern age with its mass immigration and cross-cultural pollination has diluted religious exclusivism. One example is the Catholic church. In accordance with its doctrine of *extra ecclesiam nulla sallus* (no salvation outside the church), it declared in the Council of Florence (1438-1445 ), "...those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also Jews and heretics and schismatics, cannot participate in eternal life..." (Denzinger, 1957). The onset of modernism witnessed a new spirit of tolerance which was reflected in Vatican Council II (1962-1965) with regards to other denominations and religions.

*Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation (Flannery, 1975).*

Karl Rahner (1904-1984), a German Jesuit priest and one of the most influential Roman Catholics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, emboldened by the accommodating formulation of Vatican II, spoke in terms of “anonymous Christians” – a kind of universal salvation not very different from Origen’s concept of apokatastasis. What he meant by this is that all religious experiences, even false ones, can be legitimate as God wills the universal salvation of mankind, hence many adherents of non-Christian belief traditions are “anonymous Christians”.

*In Rahner’s view, then, one’s culture shapes one’s experience. But if God has a universal salvific will, then salvation must be possible in all cultures, regardless of how false the beliefs as the heart of the culture in question may be (Harrison, 2007, p. 203).*

The above digression reinforces the point that cultural cross-pollination, especially the kind which flourishes under the auspices of a secular state, tends to adulterate pure doctrine and practice. Seen in this light, the insularity of the Law is understandable. Not only did God wish to inculcate His holy Law into their hearts and minds, but Israel was expected to be a model for the world to emulate subsequently.

***Exodus 19:4*** *Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.*

***Exodus 19:5*** *Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:*

***Exodus 19:6*** *And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*

What lesson can we draw from the above? There are those, even in the Christian world, who struggle to reconcile the apparent inclusiveness of the New Testament with the provincial ethos of the Old Testament. Indeed, even in the new Testament, one can genuinely be taken aback at the Lord's own response to the Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter was vexed by a demon:

**Mark 7:27** *But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.*

Contrary to the liberal views of the likes of Karl Rahner and John Hick, the divine order of God during the era of the Law reinforces the truth that God's decrees supersede and nullify every other contending narrative. God is not a dictator in that He never compelled Israel to accept His offer of deliverance from Pharaoh. Moses was sent to make the offer to the Elders of Israel who were convinced that God had visited them (Exodus 4:31). But once when a people or an individual has entered into a pact with God of their/his own volition, then the Law of exclusiveness comes into force.

**2 Corinthians 6:14** *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*

**2 Corinthians 6:15** *And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*

**2 Corinthians 6:16** *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

**2 Corinthians 6:17** *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,*

**2 Corinthians 6:18** *And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

God will not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8). His exclusivism hinges on the assumption that He alone is the sole author of all truth, and other claims to truth are incompatible with His revealed truth. The Law demonstrates that God will not countenance any competition. This may be tough for many, conditioned by a relativist modern ethos, to swallow. Nevertheless, God is still the I AM (Exodus 3:14); He still declares, "For I am the Lord, I change not..." (Malachi 3:6).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### God's order and the church

#### 4.0. The church predestined

***Ephesians 1:4** According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

***Ephesians 1:5** Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,*

The concept of church, as understood in the verses above, was not a novel idea invented in the New Testament. It was already established “before the foundation of the world”. In this sense it predates every other organization every formed. Whereas every other organization is conceived in the mind of an individual or group, only the church was conceived in the mind of God since eternity. In theological jargon, we are speaking about God’s attribute of omniscience – the divine characteristic of knowing all things infinitely. Few things have been more determinedly willed, declared and meticulously nurtured by God as the concept and subsequent reality of the church. It may have offended Peter when Jesus spoke about His death at Jerusalem, but Jesus, as Jehovah, had already decreed His own death on the Cross *before the foundation of the world*.



**Revelation 13:8** *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

The word “church” has its source in the Greek word *ekklēsia* which was used to refer to citizens who left their homes and assembled in a public place. The Greeks considered themselves to be more civilized and privileged in relation to other countries and nations, often referring to them as barbarians. Part of this sense of privilege was reflected in the notion of democracy and citizenry in particular. This nuance and distinction in citizenry and rights can be seen in the city-state of Sparta (10 BC to 146 BC), for example. There was a hierarchy of citizenship with *Spartiates* (Spartans who could trace their ancestry to the ancient inhabitants of Sparta) at the top followed by three other tiers: *Mothakes* (foreigners brought up as Spartans), *Periokoi* (freed slaves) and Helots (non-Spartan slaves or serfs).

There is a parallel we can draw with the church. Paul declares that the church consists of individuals who have been predestined from eternity to become children of Jesus Christ. The Spartans who wished to enjoy full citizenship rights had to demonstrate an ancient ancestry. Born-again Christians can now trace their ancestry to the Lord Himself, for we are indeed born again of His very own flesh and blood.

**Act 20:28** *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

**1Peter 1:23** *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

Modern states have struggled to identify a common and universally valid set of rules or criteria which define terms of citizenship. Take the United Kingdom, for example. In 1948, in the aftermath of WW2, and due to the huge demands for manpower, the Nationality Act of 1948 created the status of “Citizen of the United Kingdom and the Colonies” which extended citizenship to immigrants from the colonies. The unmanageable numbers of immigrants from the colonies led to the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act which stipulated that immigrants must secure employment vouchers from the Ministry of Labour to enter the UK. A further restriction was witnessed with the “patriality” clause of 1971 which permitted entry only to those with a British grandfather, thus weeding out most non-White applicants. Finally, a fatal blow was dealt the earlier concept of *jus soli* (law of the soil, i.e. place of birth) which was replaced by the concept of *jus sanguinis* (law of blood) with the introduction of the 1981 British Nationality Act<sup>7</sup> (Gundara, 2000, pp. 29,30).

Due to global immigration, notions of citizenship, inclusion and integration will be debated for a long time to come. Constitutions and bills of rights will be modified with the ebb and flow of public opinion to reflect the changing populace

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<sup>7</sup> According to Professor Gerd Baumann, the constantly evolving British legislation is occasioned by the lack of a written constitution or bill of civil rights (Baumann, 1999, p. 16).

and prevailing zeitgeist. In comparison, membership into the eternal and glorious church of Jesus Christ has immutable entrance criteria. One man was given the keys to the Kingdom of heaven and charged with the solemn task of setting forth the terms of entrance. In Acts 2 Peter begins his discourse explaining the phenomenon of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by declaring this to be a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel (2:28). Jesus is declared to be the Son of God whom they wickedly crucified, but God has vindicated Him by raising Him up from the dead. Peter puts forward the credentials of Jesus as the prophesied seed of David who would sit on the throne of David. Following this, he declared Jesus to be Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The anointed, powerful sermon of Peter triggered the response:

***Act 2:37** Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

In what followed, Peter spelled out the terms of entry into the Kingdom of God. In contrast to contemporary governments who widen and then restrict the terms of citizenship, Peter's declaration stands for all time – as long as the Lord our God calls souls.

***Act 2:38** Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

***Act 2:39** For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

Entrance into the Kingdom of God actually does contain an element of both *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*. Jesus testified before the baffled Pilate, "...My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36). Again, the Lord declares, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you (John 14:2). The *jus sanguinis* (by blood) is evident in the fact that the born-again Christian puts on the body of Christ Himself in the waters of baptism: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

With reference to God's predestination of the church, we must not imagine that God overrides human will and freedom. Contra Stoic determinism and astrological fatalism, God permits human freedom which works in compatibility with divine prescience. The 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, Augustine, mistakenly believed that some humans are saved through divine election in order to replace the fallen angels:

*If some receive while other resist the gospel, the only theological explanation is that God has decreed that a portion of human beings shall come to the heavenly city to make good the number of angels that have fallen (Fergusson, 1993, p. 459).*

Calvinists whether Presbyterian or Reformed believe in the doctrine of predestination – often summarized in the TULIP acronym: total depravity; unconditional election (Romans 9:11); limited atonement (John 10: 11, 15 (one Calvinist states that Jesus died for the sheep not the goats) & Hebrews 9:28

(for the “many”, not all, they contend); irresistible grace and perseverance. Calvin received a response from James Arminius a contemporary in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Arminius argued that election was based on God’s foreknowledge in that God knew who would embrace Him through voluntary free will. In addition, Christ provides unlimited atonement (I John 2:2; 2 Peter 3:9; I Tim 2:3-6). The other three points are: natural inability (salvation is through the grace of the Lord and not of ourselves), prevenient grace (grace is supplied to all which works in conjunction with one’s free will) and conditional perseverance (only those who freely continue to persevere will be saved).

#### **4.1. The church as the Ark of the Covenant**

*The function he [Samuel Taylor Coleridge] assigned the church in his idea of a balanced constitution was the basis of this concern. The church was to him “the ark of the covenant of his beloved country, the sign of its nationality” (Gloyn, 1934, p. 298).*

The industrial Revolution in Britain forged a new social landscape where, in the words of the then Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), society was “two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy”. Living in the shadow of the French Revolution, literary figures like Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), warned that any undermining of the national Anglican Church, which was an integral component of national identity, would be replaced by,

“a swarm of clever, well-informed men: an anarchy of minds, a despotism of maxims” (Gloyn, 1934).

His analogy of the church as “the ark of the covenant” is a very fascinating and relevant one. If the church is the community of the called out, then they are called out for the express purpose of becoming the body of Christ where His glory dwells.

***Act 15:14** Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.*

***2 Corinthians 6:16** And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

In order to comprehend the manner in which the church may be compared to the ark of the covenant, we will need to briefly revisit the ordinance of this very important item in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The first point of comparison is the fact that the ark was called the “ark of the *covenant*”: “And they departed from the mount of the Lord three days’ journey: and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days’ journey, to search out a resting place for them (Numbers 10:33). We recall that the ark contained, among others, the tablets of stone upon which the finger of God inscribed the Decalogue (Ten Commandments).

***Deuteronomy 10:5** And I turned myself and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the Lord commanded me.*

By virtue of its function as the holy receptacle for the Word of God, the ark of the covenant bore testimony to the presence of Jehovah. Each time the priests carried the ark atop their shoulders, the inseparable linkage between God and His word was reinforced. As long as the children of Israel honored this association, the glory of God rested on the ark signifying His approval of Israel and readiness to defend the covenant with them against all enemies. In a similar vein, the church today is the ark of the covenant between God and His people. Where is the receptacle that contains the Word of God today if not His people? How else can the church be identified as the body of Christ if not for the fact that we have the ink of His word written upon the tables of our hearts? As Paul writes so eloquently:

**2 Corinthians 3:3** *Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.*

As the custodian of the Word of God the church is the living, breathing ark of covenant upon which the glory of Christ now descends and fills. Let us take one simple but important example. Peter declares in Acts 2:38 that the gift of God, the Holy Spirit, will always be accessible as long as the Lord our God calls people to salvation. Tragically, many denominations concluded that this gift was only available to Christians in the days of the apostles but has now ceased. This truncated understanding of the covenant of God contravenes the terms of God's covenant with the church.

The ever-increasing phenomenon of church closures, low-church attendance and secularism, especially in Britain, is a case in point. According to the *MailOnline* (April, 2011), “In Britain, only 15 per cent of people go to church at least once a month” (Macrae, 2011). This is because the glory of God cannot be attracted to a church where the Word of God no longer is given pride of place. With the glory departed, the article reveals some of the pathetic antics the Church of England is forced to resort to in order to woo people back:

*And with over-65s accounting for more than a quarter of regular churchgoers, churches are desperately trying to reach a younger audience. The Church of England, for example, has in the past resorted to radio adverts featuring rap-style poems and using a slogan that described Christmas as a ‘bad hair day’ for the Virgin Mary (Ibid) .*

Israel had been tempting the Lord for too long in the days of the judges, but one day the glory did depart.

***1 Samuel 4:21** And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.*

Another important parallel between the ark of the covenant and the church of Christ is the order of priesthood as evidenced in the rod of Aaron that budded – another token preserved in the ark of the covenant.



**Hebrews 9:4** *Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;*

So what did the rod indicate? The rod was to be placed as a token in the ark to silence would-be rebels who seek to challenge and supplant God's sovereign choice of priests. The purging of Korah and his acolytes was intended to send the strongest possible message to Israel that the priests, who bare the ark of the covenant and perform the holy duties in the Tabernacle, have been selected by God Himself. It was to be a constant reminder that God operates within the framework of a divinely preordained plan which is revealed and implemented in stages. In His omniscience, God knows the names of those who will perform sundry functions within His body, the church, from eternity. He doesn't make a mistake, and it would be foolishness to imagine that human dissatisfaction, power to lobby or a mutinous attempt like Korah's can alter His divine order. Note Paul's words:

**Galatians 1:15** *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,*

**Galatians 1:16** *To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:*

Almost three centuries before king Josiah was born, God inspired a prophet to declare his name before an altar at Bethel which the wicked king, Jeroboam, used to sacrifice to pagan gods. "And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a

child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee (I Kings 13:2). This is another astounding example of God's omniscience. Seen in this light, Korah's sin takes on greater significance as it questioned the integrity of God's divine prerogative in bringing to pass His divinely ordained plan.

The above finds its parallel in the church age also. There is no doubt that God has called out ministers whom He has divinely ordained since eternity to serve His people. Like the dry rod of Aaron, these called out servants have no gifts or abilities of their own but are divinely enabled and empowered to become fruitful, bud and blossom like Aaron's rod. The church as the ark of God's covenant must have ministers who are fruitful just as the ark in the Tabernacle featured token evidence of this divinely enabled fruitfulness.

I have only highlighted two points of similarity to draw attention to the fact that the church is the spiritual embodiment of the ark of the covenant today. One note of caution, however, before I proceed. Israel began to look upon the ark of the covenant as a fetish and gradually shifted their gaze from the God of the ark to the ark alone. We see this in their declaration:

*1Samuel 4:3 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant*

*of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.*

The church must never fall into the same error as Israel did. It would be a fatal error to idolize the church as a holy relic in the manner of some contemporary churches who make a spectacle of the outer trappings of religion but deny the Word and power of the Almighty.

In the next section some of the roles, criteria and character for ministers in the church will be considered.

#### **4.2. The Pastor – the shepherd**

The words “shepherd” and “pastor” are used interchangeably in the Old Testament (Hebrew *ra’ah*). To shepherd the flock of God was the highest and most privileged call. Significantly, two of Israel’s perhaps greatest leaders, Moses and David, had firsthand experience shepherding sheep for several years before leading the people of God. Without doubt, the arduous life of a shepherd served as an ideal training ground for men who would later tend God’s own flock. To understand the call of the pastor, a good place to begin is the lengthy quote below from *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* which I will flesh out more closely:

*The duties of a shepherd in an unenclosed country like Palestine were very onerous. "In early morning he led forth the flock from the fold, marching at its head to the spot where they were to be pastured. Here he watched them all day, taking care that none of the sheep strayed, and if any for a time eluded his watch and wandered away from the rest, seeking diligently till he found and brought it back. In those lands sheep require to be supplied regularly with water, and the shepherd for this purpose has to guide them either to some running stream or to wells dug in the wilderness and furnished with troughs. At night he brought the flock home to the fold, counting them as they passed under the rod at the door to assure himself that none were missing. Nor did his labours always end with sunset. Often he had to guard the fold through the dark hours from the attack of wild beasts, or the wily attempts of the prowling thief... (Easton, 1897).*

Note first of all the shepherd's act of leading the sheep "to the spot where they were to be pastured". Shepherding necessarily involves seeking out a spot or a location where the act of pasturing transpires. In fact, the importance of a physical location was such that Abraham and Lot parted ways amicably in order to assuage the tension between their shepherds and herders.

**Genesis 13:5** *And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.*

**Genesis 13:6** *And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.*

It goes without saying that one cannot shepherd sheep which are scattered over an indefinite territory. The work of a pastor, then, is one of consolidation and gathering. Practically this involves praying and procuring premises and facilitating the work of gently guiding the souls to this location where they

are fed. Often, the pastor will be called upon to drive individuals from their homes to the church premises much like a shepherd who carries the lambs or injured sheep on his shoulders.

Next, the citation from *Easton's Bible Dictionary* refers to the shepherd "marching at its head". A pastor leads from the front. His leadership is clearly visible and undisputed. He enters through the door and the porter opens the door for him because he recognizes his authority to lead the sheep, "But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." (John 10:2,3). There is something immensely reassuring about seeing a loving and caring pastor stand in front of his congregation. Among others, two main reasons account for the sense of calm authority he exudes: his knowledge of the Word of God and, significantly, the fact that he also wields the power to gently discipline the unruly. The church knows that both endowments are necessary for their souls to prosper. These two vital Christ-given powers can be likened to the rod and staff that David speaks of in the famous Psalm 23.

***Psalm 23:4*** *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

The rod of the shepherd was used to count the sheep at the end of the day to ensure that none were missing. In fact, this was the manner in which the tithe of sheep was determined.

“And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD” (Leviticus 27:32). The staff, on the other hand, was used to fend off predators and, at times, discipline the wayward sheep. The good shepherd is loathed to use the staff, but the sight of it assures the sheep that protection from predators is at hand. The twin-barreled task of the pastor – teaching the Word and reproofing sin – is stressed by the apostle Paul.

*2Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

Furthermore, once the shepherd led the sheep to the appointed location to graze, we are told that, “Here he watched them all day, taking care that none of the sheep strayed, and if any for a time eluded his watch and wandered away from the rest, seeking diligently till he found and brought it back” (Easton, 1897). Few jobs if any were as demanding as that of a shepherd. There was no time to day-dream or doze off; it was a full-time occupation in every sense of the word. One of the most painful experiences a pastor will ever go through is that of members backsliding. For sheep to leave the flock on his watch is a source of much anxiety for him. David could smite the lion and the bear plucking the lamb out of their mouths (I Samuel 17:34-36), but reconciling humans back to Christ and the church is a far more difficult undertaking.

Ultimately, the efforts of the shepherd were aimed at procuring both pasture to graze in and water to drink for the sheep. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, “pastor” is derived from and related to the act of leading sheep to pasture.

***Pastor (n.)***

*mid-13c., “shepherd,” also “spiritual guide, shepherd of souls” (late 14c.), from O.Fr. pastur “herdsman, shepherd” (12c.), from L. pastorem (nom. Pastor) “shepherd,” from pastus, pp. of pascere “to lead to pasture, graze,” from PIE root \*pa- “to tend, keep, pasture, feed, guard” (see food). The spiritual sense was in Church Latin (cf. Gregory’s “Cura Pastoralis”). The verb in the Christian sense is from 1872 (Harper, pp. 2001,2002).*

It is this occupation more than any other which defined the pastor. It was evident from the condition of the sheep whether the pastor was diligent in his responsibility or otherwise. Interestingly, most references to the term “pastor” in the Old Testament are found in the book of Jeremiah. This was the same period in Israel’s history when King Nebuchadnezzar came from Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple and carried off many of Judah’s inhabitants as captives in 587 BC. Jeremiah is often called the “weeping prophet” and God indicted the pastors for failing to feed the children of Israel.

***Jeremiah 23:2*** *Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD.*

In other words, a breakdown in the ministry of shepherding precedes divine judgment. The shepherds serve as the last buffer between God's people and His wrath. Indifference and neglect seemed almost de rigueur among the pastors in Jeremiah's day.

Obviously, given the onerous nature of pastoring, what kind of individuals does God often call to become pastors? What we find in the pages of the Holy Writ is that although there are some characteristics and dispositions clearly spelled out in the pastoral epistles (I Timothy 3 & Titus 1), for example, God has seen fit to call the most unlikely and unconventional candidates to pastor. Here are a few examples: Moses initially declined the call pleading poor eloquence; Peter was a hot-headed, prejudiced Jew; Timothy was timid and suffered from constant ill-health. Indeed, as Paul knew only too well:

***Romans 9:21** Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto 90eighbor?*

#### **4.3. The tyranny of the majority**

***Jeremiah 1:8** Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord*

***Jeremiah 1:18** For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and 90eighb walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land.*

***Jeremiah 1:19** And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.*



Almost all the qualifications for those seeking the office of a Bishop revolve around character traits. There is no better way of winning souls to Christ than a life that reflects the exalted truths of the Word of God. Generally speaking, especially in our relativistic times, most people have little time for abstract discussions about morality and doctrines of truth, but pay close attention to a life which practices such truths consistently. The American essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson says it best when he stated, "What you do speaks so loud I cannot hear what you say." In fact, it is because leaders are susceptible to the influences of the masses that it is crucial for the Bishop to be called of God. Only a genuine call can offset the lure of hypocrisy so common in the secular world.

A Bishop called of God has no greater obstacle to face than the intense proclivity to kowtow to majority opinion. Only resolute faith and character can defeat what Alexis de Tocqueville calls the "tyranny of the majority". The famed French thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859, while studying the USA, once interviewed an inhabitant of Pennsylvania about the absence of Black voters at the polling booths in the 1830s. Below are a few excerpts from that conversation:

**de Tocqueville:** Be so good as to explain to me how it happens that in a state founded by Quakers, and celebrated for its toleration, free blacks are not allowed to exercise civil rights. They pay taxes; is it not fair that they should vote?

**Pennsylvanian:** You insult us. If you imagine that our legislation could have committed so gross an act of injustice and intolerance.

**De Tocqueville:** Then the blacks possess the right of voting in this country?

**Pennsylvanian:** Without doubt.

**De Tocqueville:** How comes it, then, that at the polling-booth this morning I did not perceive a single negro.

**Pennsylvanian:** That is not the fault of the law. The negroes have an undisputed right of voting, but they voluntarily abstain from making their appearance.

**De Tocqueville:** a very pretty piece of modesty on their part (de Tocqueville, 1998, pp. 101,102).

Finally, the Pennsylvanian faces up to the truth that although the law grants Blacks the right to vote, “they are afraid of being maltreated”. He goes on to state, “In this country the law is sometimes unable to maintain its authority without the support of the majority. But in this case, the majority entertains very strong prejudices against the blacks, and the magistrates are unable to protect them in the exercise of their legal rights” (de Tocqueville, 1835, 1998, pp. 101,102). De Tocqueville was quite impressed with the enlightened democratic model practised in the USA, particularly the manner in which power was invested in the hands of the people through town councils and the semi-autonomy of the various states . However, he warned that it was precisely the investment of so much power directly in the hands of the majority which could become a liability for the fledgling American democracy . The paradox of Blacks having the right to vote but abstaining for fear of the prejudice of the majority is a case in point.

*When an individual or a party is wronged in the United States, to whom can he apply for redress? If to public opinion, public opinion constitutes the majority; if to the legislature, it*

*represents the majority and implicitly obeys it; if to the executive power, it is appointed by the majority and serves as a passive tool in their hands...However iniquitous or absurd the measure of which you complain, you must submit to it as well as you can (de Tocqueville, 1998, p. 101).*

The dangers of a man of God paying too much heed to public opinion is so obvious that one need not labour the point. Nevertheless, there is perhaps never a more fitting time than the present to pay closer attention to the subtle and, often, fickle, influences of the majority. In which other age has there been such unrestricted cross-pollination of ideas, opinions, interactive communications and a host of other exchanges enabled by the modern global digital revolution? According to one estimate, “900 000 blog posts, 50 million tweets, more than 60 million Facebook status updates, and 210 billion e-mails are sent off into the electronic ether every day” (Pariser, 2011, pp. 10,11).

We see a clear instance of what peer pressure can do to a man of God. Aaron, the High Priest, was not an idolator, but the overwhelming demands of the people broke his resolve:

***Exodus 32:1*** *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*

Faced with the prospect of a mutiny, Aaron succumbed. I have often wondered whether this was the reason God initially seemed reticent at granting Moses an assistant. God in

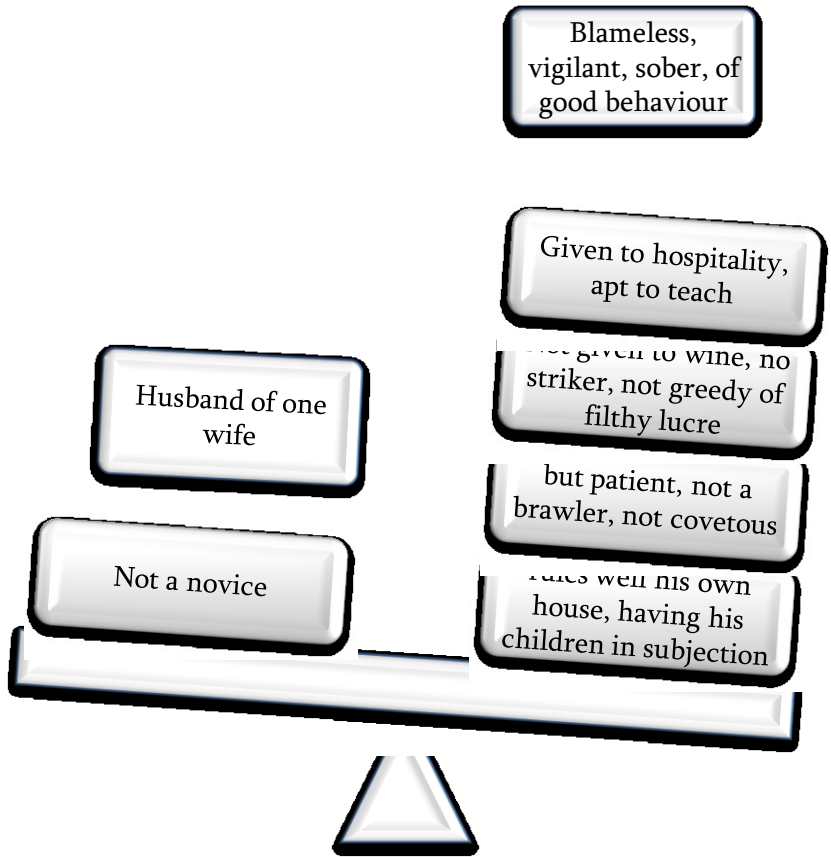
His omniscience had already adumbrated the sin of Aaron his brother. It was the persistence of Moses which God acquiesced to. Could this be one reason God often separates men He calls to the ministry for a season so that they can be weaned off the influence of the masses? Moses was exiled to Midian while Paul was in Arabia for three years (Galatians 1:17). Those called of God often find themselves in the unenviable position of at times being misunderstood, even frowned upon, by those whom they serve as they seek to uphold the principles of the kingdom of God. Samuel was deeply hurt when the people asked for a king:

***1Samuel 8:5** And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. The closer he is to the Lord the more successful and less fraught will his ministry be. Samuel's response reveals a heart faithful to God, saddened at the ill-advised decision of his people and yet constant in love and ministry.*

***1 Samuel 12:23** Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way.*

#### **4.4.A premium on character**

**Figure 4.0.** Based on I Timothy 3:1-7: Social/professional status (left side) compared with the aggregate of moral qualities (right side) required in a bishop.



Several observations can be made from figure 4.0. I have elected to compare them in the manner above only to highlight the emphasis placed on the moral characteristics of the bishop. That the weight is stacked in favor of the moral personality traits in no way diminishes the significance of the social/professional side. Beginning with the latter, what is denoted is the standing or experience level of the potential seeker for the office of bishop. Few can doubt that a divorcee or a bachelor will face some challenges adapting to the

demands placed on a bishop. Whereas the former will encounter some awkwardness in marriage counseling, for instance, the latter will struggle with fulfilling the hospitality criterion, as it would be unseemly for a single bishop to invite female members of the congregation to his house, for example. In relation to being a novice, it stands to reason, as Paul indicates, that an inexperienced young man may easily become intoxicated with pride and bring both himself and ministry into disrepute.

The moral criteria are what confirm and endear the bishop to his congregation. Indeed, many may have the right social/professional qualifications but come woefully short in the critical areas of self-control and demonstrating genuine compassion and love for the sheep (see right side of figure 4.0). A minister who relies on his training or educational background alone soon alienates himself from the sheep. The confrontation between Peter and the sorcerer, Simon Magus (Acts 8), was intended to amplify the ugliness of power devoid of the criteria for service we find in I Timothy 2, for instance. Simon believed that miracle-working was a commodity which could be bought with money. Then, armed with this money-bought gift, he could continue with his project of self-aggrandizement which is diametrically opposed to the call of a bishop.

In addition, one would do well to take heed to the constraints and challenges inherent in local cultures. In her book, *The Integrated Church: Authentic Multicultural Ministry* (2011), Tracey M. Lewis Giggetts draws attention to the formidable

challenges facing American churches. She homes in on racial fear, prejudice and a myriad related filters which continue to perpetuate the segregation of churches into Black, White, Asian and Latino. It is difficult to argue against her contention that Christians are failing the Great Commission: “Our filters, however, should not take precedence over the manifestation of the Word of God in our lives; a manifestation that includes a mandate to teach “all nations” (Matthew 28:19)” (Giggetts, 2011, pp. 37,38).

The above does not mean that culture must be marginalized or, worse still, denigrated. In our relativistic world, political correctness is erroneously understood to mean that all differences should be downplayed or ignored. Giggetts (2011) shares an incident where a Caucasian friend of hers felt she could get along with anyone because she did not see race. Giggetts reflected on this and found she could not agree with this well-meant, but misguided, ethos. She writes, “If a person doesn’t see my color, if he or she doesn’t see my culture, then in essence, that person doesn’t see me. He or she has negated, or at least made inconsequential, a large part of what makes me who I am” (Giggetts, 2011, p. 19). What this means is that we live in a world which since the dawn of civilization has operated with cultural filters which have almost always been skeptical and disapproving of all difference. In His wisdom, God does not condone such prejudices, but He takes it into account when calling leaders. It was no accident that David almost instantly became the darling of Israel – he was a commoner conversant with what social scientists refer to as

the proxemics and kinesics of cultural communication such as eye-contact, facial expressions and other no-verbal culturally-based communications. This competence served David well:

***1Samuel 18:14*** And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him.

***1Samuel 18:15*** Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him.

***1Samuel 18:16*** But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.

Moving on to the character of the bishop, four qualities mentioned in the list have to do with temperance and watchfulness: vigilant, sober, not given to wine, no brawler. Few can doubt that imbibing alcohol and violence (brawling is one aspect of violence) are closely interrelated. In England, the National Health Service reports that, “Up to seven out of ten killings, stabbings and beatings are directly related to alcohol” (Sigman, 2011, p. 8). Why do the Scriptures take a negative view of the ministry and alcohol? Why were the priests and the Nazarites forbidden from imbibing alcoholic beverages? Speaking of the Nazarite vow, God says:

***Numbers 6:3*** He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.

***Numbers 6:4*** All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.

However one wishes to analyze the scandalous account in Genesis 9:20-27, one thing is clear: had the patriarch Noah avoided becoming drunk, there would have been no need for



the subsequent curse on his own son, Ham. The lesson behind the whole sordid episode is that once alcohol is imbibed, we surrender our faculties of temperance and self-control; what occurs after that almost always leads to shame and guilt. This can be compared to our bodies as the Temples of the Holy Ghost. The priest of the Temple cannot permit events to occur willy-nilly in the Temple. What transpires in the Temple *at all times* is his responsibility, and to fail to exercise oversight in this arena has grave consequences. Because Eli the high priest refrained from rebuking his sons who committed perverse sins in the holy precincts of the Tabernacle itself, he brought the anger of God down upon him.

***1Samuel 2:22*** Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

***1Samuel 3:14*** And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

Finally, the apostle Paul stresses the need for the bishop to avoid violence and contention. It is to be lamented that religion today is blamed for some of the excesses in history. Some have seized upon this to attempt to nullify all faith. The high priest of atheism, Richard Dawkins, for instance makes the claim, "The Afghan Taliban and the American Taliban [read fundamentalist Christians] are good examples of what happens when people take their scriptures literally and seriously. They provide a horrifying modern enactment of what life might have been like under the theocracy of the Old Testament" (Dawkins, 1989:326). Christianity should be

judged by the example of its founder – Jesus Christ. Far from the practice of some of His so-called followers, be it the Crusaders or an Oliver Cromwell, Christ epitomized the exalted principles of love, meekness and non-violence, fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah:

**Isaiah 42:3** *A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.*

**Isaiah 53:7** *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

Mosab Hassan Yousef, the son of Sheikh Hassan Yousef, a key member of the Islamist organization, Hamas, gave his life to Jesus after reading the Scripture, “But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you” (Luke 6:27). In his book, *Son of Hamas* (2010), Mosab reveals how the sheer radicalness of Christ’s commandment to love our enemies turned his world upside down. As a Palestinian and son of a Hamas leader, he had been brought up to hate Jews with an implacable hatred. Arrested and jailed on several occasions for his terrorist activities, he decided to cooperate as an informant with the Israel intelligence agency, Shin Beth, with the intention of double-crossing them. It was while reading the New Testament in prison that force of Christ’s love hit him leading him to abandon his venomous hatred. The apostle Paul himself, as earlier mentioned, was radically converted from hatred to love when he encountered Christ on

the Road to Damascus. Filled with an equally blinding dislike for God, the likes of Dawkins can never seem to bring themselves to a place where such testimonies moderate their prejudice.

Leave aside Christians who emulate the love of Christ, anti-theists rarely bother to mention historical figures like the Indian emperor, Ashoka the Great (304-232 BC), who, disgusted with violence, turned his back on it, and ushered in an enlightened and prosperous era in Indian history following the principle of *ahimsa* (religious principle based on non-violence) also adopted by Mahatma Gandhi. Having embraced *ahimsa*, Ashoka became perhaps the first emperor in history to ban the death penalty and slavery; he called for women to be educated and advised his people, whom he called his children, to promote love, unity and tolerance. Ashoka's legacy is evident from the Ashoka wheel (chakra) which graces the flag of India. Paul, again, admonishes the minister:

**2Timothy 2:24** *And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,*

Much more could be said on the subject of the bishops/pastors and their calling but space constraints lead to me to consider the ministry of deacons. It is easy to overlook the fact that the ministry of deacons was in *response* to a specific problem that arose in the church at Jerusalem. As cultural challenges were at the root of the issue, I will approach this ministry from within a multicultural framework.

#### **4.5 Deacons: addressing multicultural needs**

*Act 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.*

*Act 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*

*Act 6:3 wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*

*Act 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*

*Act 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:*

The above Scriptures reveal that there was a serious flaw in the affairs of the infant church. This sentence, " ...because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" zeroes in on the crux of the problem. Keep in mind that this was centuries before the advent of the modern welfare state which guarantees a minimum of education, housing and other basic needs to all its citizens. It was, and should continue to be, the task of the church to support the poor such as orphans and widows. Let us look at some Scriptures that exhort the church to provide for widows:

*1 Timothy 5:3 Honour widows that are widows indeed.*

**1Timothy 5:16** *If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.*

**James 1:27** *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

Although doing their best to honor the Word of God in this department, the early church found itself in a moral and ethical dilemma in dispensing of this very vital task. Due to a lack of cultural sensitivity they found themselves actually showing partiality: the Greek widows were neglected while the Hebrew ones were treated well. Such was the state of affairs that the murmuring reached the ears of the apostles who had to temporarily suspend the all-important work of ministering to the lost and the dying. One lesson we can draw from this case study in the Bible is that church leaders can be guilty of jeopardizing other essential ministries in the church if they do not pay closer attention to proper problems arising from cultural differences. Furthermore, God does not censor and condemn all murmuring in a church if the cause is just, as it was in the widows' case. Obviously, there is such a thing as evil murmuring: We recall how the children of Israel murmured against God and, as a result, forfeited the blessing of entering the Promised Land.

**Numbers 14:29** *Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,*

However, the murmuring that arose due to the neglect of the widows was, unlike the case of the Israelites in the desert, not a murmuring for the dainty dishes of Egypt but, rather, a murmuring for equality, justice and true fraternity, which without dispute, are universal human aspirations. Let us not seek to hastily gag and condemn all murmurings, voices of disagreement or criticism in the church. Rather, we ought to determine the true source of discontent and, like the apostles, seek a just and viable solution with the aid of the Spirit of the Lord. The apostles did not stifle the criticism but appointed seven deacons.

*Act 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*

Let us humbly study the example of the holy apostles. Observe first of all that they did not alter the office of their calling. Elders, as the apostles were, are to engage, above all things, in the pursuit of prayer and studying the word of God diligently. Let this be etched into our minds and hearts always if we are to follow biblical principles that generate efficiency, vitality and revival in a church. I say this because experience has demonstrated the lopsided effect any change in the pastor's fundamental task of preaching, teaching and prayer can have on a congregation. A pastor who doesn't get sufficient time to pray and study the word will soon discover a host of problems in the church ranging from carnality, murmuring and even the dissolution of the church.

***Act 6:3*** *wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*

The Greek word for honest in this Scripture is *martureo* and, in most cases in the New Testament signifies someone who witnesses, bares record or testifies. In other words, the first quality the apostles prescribed was a person who is a good witness both in testifying of the Lord and having a good report among all people. Was this not what the apostle Paul admonished when writing to Timothy?

***1Timothy 4:16*** *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*

This recommendation has its own plausible logic. Someone who testifies and witnesses concerning the Lord Jesus Christ will naturally also endeavor to the best of his/her ability to live a life that is compatible with this testimony. The Lord will not have neutral people serving Him in the ministry. A good deacon is a good witness for the Lord.

***2Timothy 1:8*** *Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;*

Furthermore, they are to be full of the Holy Ghost. Clearly, the underlying message here is that, since they were to engage in a very sensitive task – ministering to widows with different cultures in the same church – they needed to be men of tact and wisdom. Today, we would call this the study of multiculturalism. As our global world keeps shrinking and

diverse cultures intermingle in the churches, more and more pastors are calling for seminaries and other ministerial training foras to incorporate courses on multiculturalism.

One pioneer of multicultural education, James Banks, listed what he called social categories which need to be studied and understood before one engages with other cultures. He mentions, among others, ethnicity, gender; exceptionality (gifted and challenged people for example) and social class as examples of social categories that are sensitive and need to be fairly and equitably dealt with. Multicultural education, he contends, is not only for the minorities but rather, for all to study. It started in the USA in the 1960s with the Black American demand for desegregation in schools and equal opportunities in the employment market. Then it went on to feminist pedagogies that demanded women receive equal pay for equal work.

Furthermore we had the likes of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, who wrote a book called, "The pedagogy of the oppressed" where he shows how the powerful construct knowledge and a way of thinking that helps keep them in power and free to oppress the poor through the educational system. The schooling system was found to favor men's learning styles which mainly is fact-centered, abstract and objective whereas women often favor knowledge acquired from experience and anecdotes/story-telling. Exceptional people, i.e. with a handicap, for instance, had to fight through political channels to be able to attend the same schools as



mainstream people. All these injustices in the schooling system had to be addressed before we got to where we are today. Some of the measures Banks advocated (modified for church purposes below) and referred to as the five dimensions of multiculturalism<sup>8</sup> are:

- **To think content integration:** this means to integrate ethnic and cultural aspects from other cultures into the curriculum. For instance, to not mention a group which comprises a significant majority in a particular country is the same as not acknowledging their identity. This will be a recipe for trouble and disunity which will weaken the nation
- **Critical look at the process of knowledge construction:** For example, two Harvard researchers, Hernstein and Murray, wrote a publication in 1994 called “The Bell Curve”. This study contended that low-income groups like the Afro-Americans performed poorly because they had inferior cognitive abilities which were inherited. Few would doubt that such explicitly racist arguments must be challenged. Much bogus “research” has been disguised as science.  
**Prejudice reduction:** we need to identify and find methods to reduce and eliminate negative prejudices towards other groups. Teaching others to think

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<sup>8</sup> I have skipped over the third dimension “equity pedagogy”. For the full list please see *Multiculturalism’s Five Dimensions* (Dr James A. Banks).  
<http://www.learner.org/workshops/socialstudies/pdf/session3/3.Multiculturalism.pdf>

equality, cooperation and encouraging acquaintances across cultural demarcations is vital. The challenge is to bring God's people to a place of reflection and honest appraisal of our current prejudices against other cultures and pray the good Lord helps us deal with them.

- **Empowering culture:** It is necessary to empower the weak to address imbalances. When the apostles chose the seven deacons, they empowered the Greek widows because they chose deacons who were mostly from Greek backgrounds. They exercised wisdom knowing that these Hellenistic deacons would understand the culture of the Greek widows. It was an early form of minority empowerment.

Now bring all this down to the level of the church and I am certain that we can benefit greatly from these principles because what lies at the heart of it is cultural sensitivity which really is respect for identity and human dignity. We understand ourselves through the prism of our cultures, upbringing and society. These are dear to us and, we should acknowledge, to others also. Every war and strife among nations can one way or the other be attributed to a lack of this understanding. Above all, Christ's command hasn't changed:

***Mark 12:31** And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

One might say, "I love my neighbor," but are you talking about the one who comes from the same culture as you come

from, who speaks the same language, eats the same food, sees the world as you see it? What about the enemy of your people? In the days of Jesus it was the Samaritan; in India it is the *Dalit* or untouchable whom Mahatma Gandhi renamed, *Harijan* or the children of God to change their status in the eyes of his countrymen.

Before I conclude this section, a disclaimer is in order. In recent times, there has been some criticism of the concept of multiculturalism most famously encapsulated by the declarations of British Prime Minister, David Cameron and German Chancellor, Angela Merkel. Speaking of Merkel, the BBC reported that:

*She said the so-called “multikulti” concept – where people would “live side-by-side” happily – did not work, and immigrants needed to do more to integrate – including learning German (BBC, 2010).*

All this anti-multiculturalism sentiment took on a macabre expression when the Norwegian terrorist, Anders Breivik, bombed government buildings and killed 69 people, mostly teenagers, in Oslo and the island of Utøya. Breivik claimed he was a freedom fighter liberating his country from multiculturalism which was eroding the identity of Norway. The poor quality of the discussion on multiculturalism in Norway in the public domain, in the aftermath of 22 July, 2011, led me to send in two articles which eventually were published in 4 newspapers all in all.<sup>9</sup> In one of the responses, I

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dagsavisen.no/nyemeninger/pthomas/>

tried to show the distinction in what is termed sociological multiculturalism and multiculturalism as envisioned by the state – two different things. Many people react to government policy on multiculturalism which turns out to be misplaced. For example, the Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, warned that the British government's policy of promoting communities at the expense of a national identity is leading to a "federation of religions" model (Sen, 2006).

But the multicultural model assumed in this section has nothing to do with multiculturalism as a state-concocted ideology. Sociological multiculturalism, on the other hand, takes cognizance of the facts on the ground – diverse languages, ethnicities, religion, gender, etc. The fact that I converted from Islam to Christianity, for instance, has nothing to do with the government. In this light multiculturalism becomes a human right. Culture is not static but dynamic and trying to control and superimpose a structure on it is futile.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **God's order in the millennial kingdom**

#### **5.0. Introduction**

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The last three chapters reflected on the government of God before the fall, the era of the Law and the church age. This chapter will concern itself with the millennial reign of Christ in this world for a thousand years. The Bible does anticipate a period when Christ will assume the mantle of government. The mandate to “have dominion” (Genesis 1:26) over this earth will expire, and Christ shall rule the nations. The Author who bestowed *authority* upon man, shall now see fit to allow this authority to revert back to Him.

***Revelation 20:4*** *And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*

Milovan Đilas (1911-1995), the famous Yugoslav dissident, opined that the lust to possess and the lust to rule characterizes the evil in man. To his mind, the will to power and domination goes beyond material greed (Bockmuehl, 1980, p. 147). Stalin ruled by the principle, “Trust is good, control is better”. This “weed of evil” in man warped his ability to rule benevolently as God intended. Rousseau examined the roots of inequality and traced it to man’s immorality. Left to their own devices, the strong bend the will of the weak and establish a plutocracy. Besides a miniscule few, the pages of human history demonstrates this abject failure of man to bring about lasting peace through equality and justice. This dream is encapsulated in the words of the

prophet Amos, whom Martin Luther King quoted, “But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24).

In what follows I shall attempt at a justification for such a millennial kingdom.

### **5.1. Why a millennial rule?**

Adam’s abysmal failure to fulfill the command to “have dominion” has yet to be fulfilled. In our modern times, words like *authority* and *dominion* carry connotations of lust for power and, in extreme cases, despotism, especially when seen in the light of the countless wars constantly waged around us. Henry David Thoreau famously said, “That government is best which governs the least, because its people discipline themselves.” But there must be a benign and exalted kind of authority and dominion or else why would the Almighty command man to exercise such power? Anarchism is a chimera; civilization has yet to produce one successful society without governance and order.

Surely man is created with an innate need and appreciation for governance and order which finds its apotheosis in the rule of God Himself. How else are we to explain man’s voluntary submission to the numinous concretized in the form of diverse and, at times, spectacular edifices for religious purposes? Why have humans, apparently without any coercion, prostrated themselves before the supernatural?

Obviously, this bespeaks some intrinsic perception of a compassionate Deity and the inexplicable belief that such a thing as “good power and good rule” exists.

Years ago, while I was ministering in India, I arrived early for breakfast at a local restaurant in Kalyan on the outskirts of Mumbai. The restaurant had not yet opened but I was asked to have a seat while the workers prepared food. I observed the manager remove his shirt and trousers and don the traditional loin-cloth (dhoti), much like Mahatma Gandhi. To my surprise, he began to take some milk and other liquids and carefully pour them out just outside the threshold of the restaurant. Intrigued, I asked him what this was all about. He responded that this was a daily offering in recognition of God’s providence.

To understand why there must be a millennial rule we must explore the theology of dominion as outlined in Genesis 1:26:

***Genesis 1:26*** And God said, *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

Few would argue that man has been a responsible custodian of this planet which God entrusted in his care. Greed has led to exploitation of natural resources on a colossal scale. Deforestation, desertification, water-contamination (just think of the British Petroleum oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico) and a host of other damages have been inflicted on the environment through man’s lust for monetary gain. On May 13, 1952, at

Madison Square Garden in New York City, Dr Du Bois delivered the keynote address at a meeting sponsored by the American Labor Party which launched its campaign for the 1952 presidential elections. Although overstated, Dubois captures what in essence is the reason for the current disenchantment with the promises of politicians:

*There are no two parties...There is no choice of candidates whether his name is Eisenhower or Taft, Kefauver or Stassen or Warren, Dulles, Dewey, Joe or Charlie McCarthy. All of them listen to their master's voice, the steel trust, the aluminum trust, the rubber combine, the automobile industry; oil, power, plastics, the railroads, tobacco, copper, chemicals and Coca-Cola, telegraph and telephone; liquor, radio and movie – all of the more than two hundred giant corporations which wield the power that owns the press and the magazines, and determines what news the news agencies will print, and what the movies will screen. They are united in that super-congress of which the National Association of Manufacturers is the upper house and the United States Chamber of Commerce is the lower, which are preparing world war to rule mankind and reduce again the worker not simply to slavery but to idiocy (W.E.B., 1970, p. 284).*

Because Jesus is the true federal head of the born-again race of humans, He succeeds where Adam failed. One of the titles of Christ is “King of kings”: “And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16). The Lord assumes this title, engraved upon His thigh, when He will return to usher in the millennium. That Christ shall return to rule the nations as King is also confirmed in the exchange with Pilate:



*"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me (John 18:37).*

Commensurate with Irenaeus' "recapitulation theology", Christ not only successfully retraces the failures of Adam with regards to sin alone, but dominion too. In other words, Adam may have failed to rule well, but Christ shall reign a thousand years in what will only be the most sublime form of government and order – a true utopia. As mentioned earlier, humans have been created with a God-shaped need and appreciation for the rule of justice, equality, brotherhood and liberty. The French Revolution promised precisely such a state of affairs but soon descended into the infamous "Reign of Terror" spearheaded by the so-called "incorruptible" Robespierre. The collective tears, disappointments and sighs of the "huddled masses yearning to break free", to borrow from Emma Lazarus' sonnet, engraved on a bronze plaque and mounted inside the lower level of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, will dissipate when the Lord assumes His rightful throne during the millennium.

In the classical study of millennialism, three views have dominated the eschatological landscape: postmillennialism, amillennialism and premillennialism. A brief consideration of each stance is necessary for us to better arrive at an understanding of Revelation 20, the chapter of the millennial kingdom.

## 5.2. The malaise of postmillennialism

Postmillennialism was popularized by Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), a Unitarian Englishman. In short, it postulates that the present age will culminate in unprecedented peace and prosperity brought about by the Christianization of the whole world. It is *post* millennium in that it places the return of the Lord after this supposed Christianization of the world. Way before Whitby, Augustine also propounded a return of Christ after the millennium. However, his ideas were so alien to a literal understanding of a kingdom on earth that he is best categorized under amillennialism (no millennial kingdom).

Postmillennialism piggybacked on the advent of liberal theology. The schools of higher criticism, documentary hypothesis (undermining the Mosaic authorship) and modern humanism is believed to have influenced the development of postmillennialism. In order to woo the critics of religion, the Prussian theologian considered the father of liberal theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher (b.1768), jettisoned authoritative, objective revelation in favor of *Gefühl* – “deep, inner awareness” (Olson, 1999, p. 543). He declared the Bible to be fallible and not inspired. These tenets were enshrined in the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism of the 1640s. The spirit of liberal theology, which first saw the light of day in the crucible of the Enlightenment, reached its zenith just before the first world war. John F. Walvoord, an authority on the study of eschatology, describes the period before WWI:

*Liberals were outdoing each other in the race to see who could disbelieve the most. Postmillennialism was at its peak and homilies poured out glowing accounts of the triumphant progress of Christianity, recognition of the universal brotherhood among men, and the power of the church in world affairs. The first world war brought these trends to an abrupt halt (Walvoord, 1959, p. 8).*

The horrors of WW1 trenches, the ghastly use of gas warfare, the introduction of tanks, the mindless and efficient slaughter of hundreds of thousands in places like Verdun and the Somme (one million casualties in less than 5 months) all served to dash any notions of human progress.

We humans frequently suffer from a tendency to exaggerate our abilities and competence. Those who called themselves Christians were not immune to this hubris. In the hope of making Christianity more palatable to a world that was growing increasingly confident in its omnicompetence, they doctored the Scriptures to align with the prevailing ethos of the secular world. What a different picture one finds in the pages of the Holy Writ. The Lord's lack of confidence in human promises is evident in the statement:

**John 2:24** *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,*

**John 2:25** *And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

In the post WW1 and WW2 era, postmillennialism, having been exposed for its vacuity, began to decline. Douglas C. MacIntosh of Yale stated, "The recent crisis is not the first in the life of the Church, but it is undoubtedly one of the worst,

perhaps the very worst in all protestant history...On the whole, evangelical Christianity has been an ebbing tide in this twentieth century (MacIntosh, 1942, pp. 232,234). What we are dealing with in essence is the debate revolving around literal vs. allegorical/spiritual interpretation of Scripture. The hermeneutic lens one chooses to adopt will, obviously, determine the millennial position of the student of eschatology.

The premellennial stance, one which this chapter espouses, was first denied by Origen (185-253) who employed an allegorical/figurative interpretive schema. That the same Origen was also notorious for making the claim that, "We think that the goodness of God, through the mediation of Christ, will bring all creatures to one and the same end" (De Principiis I.6.1-3), is noteworthy. In other words, his doctrine of universal restoration (*apokatastasis*) implied that even the devil will be saved. Origen was condemned posthumously at the Second Council of Constantinople (AD 553).

Closer to our time, James H. Snowden, a postmillennialist writing in 1919, expounds on his understanding of the kingdom of Christ on earth:

*The sense , however, in which it is commonly used is the rule of God in the hearts of obedient souls. It is a general designation for all those in all ages who turn to God in faith and constitute the total society of the redeemed...Jesus expressly set forth this inward spiritual nature of the kingdom in contrast with the outward materialistic form of the Jewish expectation of his day (Snowden, 1919, pp. 51,55-56).*

The likes of Snowden spiritualized Scriptures which talked about the kingdom of God on earth. One Scripture was, “And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20,21). Now, let us dwell on this argument for a moment. Does Christ mean by the above that no tangible signs or events will accompany His return? Was the Lord ruling out a particular timeline of prophetic fulfillments heralding His physical return? The answer is no, for barely a few verses after that, we read, “But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. *Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed* (Luke 17:29,30; emphasis mine).

Since the days of Lot and Noah were real events culminating in devastation, we are to assume that the return of the Lord will firstly be characterized by similar lawlessness culminating in divine judgment. The apostle Paul confirms such a linear progression of events. One criterion for the physical return of Christ to be fulfilled is the manifestation of a man of sin who’s coming causes vice to increase exponentially until the Lord destroys him:

**2Thess 2:9** *Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,*

**2Thess2:10** *And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

Unless one goes down the perilous road of allegorizing the judgment upon Noah's generation and Sodom, Snowden's postmillennial stance is indefensible.

The Achilles heel of postmillennialism is an unfounded belief in the promise of a golden age spurred on by human progress. Snowden writes,

*All our achievements, industry and invention, science and art, education and social progress, liberty and brotherhood, ethics and religion, are only in their bud and will put forth their full bloom and ripened fruit. Even now [1919] world unity is looming up on the horizon and will be achieved tomorrow; and then the path will be cleared for unified and speeded-up human progress (Walvoord, 1959, p. 29).*

Clearly, his tenacious faith in human progress led him to either excuse the excesses of WW1 or consider it an unfortunate interlude along the way to inexorable global peace and prosperity. On the contrary, we who have the advantage of hindsight, can look back at Snowden's naïve and misplaced trust in humanity with some condescension. Postmillennialism fails abjectly in its understanding of human nature and its perception of history. Given that these were theologians, the naivety is amplified. Paul declares, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Timothy 3:1). The Lord Himself declares, "And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days" (Mark 13:20).

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Paul Thomas is a minister in the Apostolic Church International Fellowship. He has lived in countries as diverse as Saudi Arabia, India, Norway and the UK. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in Education (King's College, London,

University of London). His main research interests center around epistemological issues relating to faith in the context of schooling and the curriculum.

**For further correspondence:**

[hpaulsilas@hotmail.com](mailto:hpaulsilas@hotmail.com)

Website: [www.apostolicinternational.org](http://www.apostolicinternational.org)