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1

Missionary Theology and Jesus Christ

CHRISTIANITY is Christocentric. Christ, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is its object of faith and worship. Since He provides the supreme example and pattern of conduct, service, attitude and direction for life, a study of His life is illuminating and inspiring.

We concern ourselves here only with His relation to the world and to worldwide missions. What was Christ's attitude toward non-Jewish people? Does He relate His ministry to the world of nations? Was Christ a nationalist, particularist and provincialist, or was He a universalist? Was He an internationalist with a world mission? Were the benefits of His life and death designed for one people? Or was His ministry directed toward the nations of the world? Was Jesus in the days of His flesh conscious of His racial significance and of a universal mission? Did He have a universal horizon, a wider outlook than to restore Judaism?

Christianity would answer the last questions in the affirmative, seeing that present-day Christianity is substantially made up of peoples from the nations, so the universality of Christ is taken for granted. However, considerable debate has revolved around this point. Well does Dr. Samuel Zwemer summarize four historic views:

The first is the extreme view of Hegel, Tolstoi and others that Jesus was anti-Semitic and conscious only of a universal mission! The exact opposite view is that Jesus was at heart a Jew and limited His horizon and message to the house of Israel. Reimarus, Strauss, Wellhausen, and Harnack are representatives of this other radical view and they have had many followers. A third school of critics says that Jesus was at first narrow and Jewish and that only toward

the end of His life did He become conscious of a world-mission (Keim, Hausrath, Bertholet, Bernard Weiss).

Against all of these radical views is the traditional one held by believing scholars, Roman Catholics, and Protestant — namely, that Jesus from the outset of His ministry had a view of humanity as a whole, but felt that He was sent especially to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and that His earthly ministry was mainly to the people of Israel. Nevertheless, He taught His apostles by degrees that He was to be the Savior of all men and finally gave them their universal mission.¹

Because His earthly ministry was mainly to His people, the question arises: Was such restriction a matter of principle or a matter of methodology?

THE PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

The four gospels present an authentic record of the life, words and work of Christ. But they are not written as a “life of Christ”; they are too brief and too sketchy for that purpose. Rather, they are four portraits of Christ or four presentations of the same Person from four points of view. Each of the evangelists portrays Christ accurately but according to his own purpose and intent, within his own frame of reference and design, without contradicting, destroying or minimizing his Coauthor’s arrangements.

We admit that serious limitations and difficulties are encountered in an attempt to build a harmony of the gospels or a “life of Christ” upon the gospel records. However, a marvelous beauty appears when we synthesize the four portraits rather than harmonize the records. As we see Christ in His fullness and behold an ever enlarging view of Him as portrayed in the gospels, His missionary thrust and compassion become overwhelming. He shines forth as the ideal Missionary, the Apostle of God.

Assuming that Mark was the first to write his record, we note his historical-existential manner of presentation. Having been personally acquainted with Christ and having accompanied Peter on his journeys, Mark writes as a Christ-filled Jew. He introduces Christ as the Prophet of God and as the Servant of Jehovah. His whole portrait is that of the Prophet of God speaking forth the message of God and the Servant of Jehovah ever active, accomplishing the will and purpose of

God. Beautifully he summarizes it in a quote from the Master: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45).

The urgency of such a ministry becomes emphatic in the constantly recurring words, "and," "immediately," and "straightway." The scope is expressed in the command to herald the gospel to all the creation (16:15-16). He is the Prophet whose message must be heralded in all the world (13:10).

Matthew principally accepts the portrait of Mark. However, he proceeds to enlarge it and add to it the royalty of Christ. The authoritative kingship of Christ becomes most prominent in Matthew. Fusing beautifully the various aspects of Christ's life, the writer proceeds to set the portrait of the royalty and kingship of Christ into the frame of Old Testament revelation to give it the full authority of the God of creation and history. He points out how Christ is the fulfillment of the visions and prophecies of Old Testament seers, the embodiment of anticipations and aspirations of mankind, and the reality behind all Old Testament typology. In Christ, spiritual reality has appeared and the shadows must flee. Beautifully, Matthew beholds the King to whom universal authority has been committed, issuing a command that all nations be discipled and united into a single body under the lordship of the triune God.

To the already enlarged portrait, Luke adds the priesthood and saviorhood of Christ which, though implicit in the previous presentation, had not been so fully amplified. Luke, no doubt, had first learned it from Paul; he had then experienced it in his life. Finally, diligent research led him to accept the fact and theology of it. This enlargement he then places into the framework of universal history which begins with Adam and which he sees as God's theater of activity without blurring the line between *Heilsgeschichte* (sacred story) as seen in Israel and general history as seen in the nations. The universal validity of the priesthood and saviorhood of Christ is evident from the genealogy which begins with Adam and culminates in the universal significance of the death and resurrection of Christ and the offer of repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ among all nations as expressed in the commission of Christ.

The largest portrait is painted by John. In no way does he contradict the previous writers, nor does he erase or modify these por-

trayals. Though not explicitly stated, the reader “senses” that John appreciates all that has been said by the previous gospelers who are reflecting the views of the writers, numerous eyewitnesses, and the testimonies of Peter (Mark) and Paul (Luke). John, however, swings beyond and above them and lifts the curtain that we might see the position of Christ as the eternal Son of God, coequal and coeternal with the Father in His metaphysical and cosmic relationships. In the gospel of John, Christ is known as the *Logos*, the light which lighteth every man, the life, the Son. These concepts directly or metaphorically express unqualified deity.

In Christ, God directly relates Himself to this world spoken of as *kosmos*. Seventy-nine times John uses this concept and sets forth the various relationships of God to the *kosmos*. In the strongest possible terms, John presents the universalist activity of God. God is not a particularist in His interest, love and relationships; He has the world upon His heart and in His purpose.

We are informed that “God so loved the world, that he gave . . .” (3:16). “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (3:17). We are told that Christ is “the Lamb of God, which taketh away [beareth] the sin of the world” (1:29); “the Saviour of the world” (4:42); “the bread of God is he which . . . giveth life unto the world” (6:33); “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5; 12:46). The Holy Spirit is spoken of as the Comforter who will convict or “reprove the world” (16:8).

Whatever else the above passages may teach, the fact is firmly established by John that God is in benevolent contact with the world. In Christ Jesus there exists a redemptive relationship between heaven and the *kosmos*. The Holy Spirit is at present actively involved in this redemptive relationship. While this may be mysterious, it is nevertheless real. The Holy Spirit is convicting men everywhere (16:8), and He is drawing men from among all nations to Christ (12:32).

Thus we have an ever enlarging and deepening circle in the gospels. It is personal and cosmic. It is highly individual — “whosoever,” and it is racial and includes all.

We are moving first into the historio-existential (Mark), next into the scriptural and revelational (Matthew), next into the universal history (Luke), and finally into the cosmic and metaphysical (John).

Time and eternity, heaven and earth are spanned in Christ, and God and man become reconciled.

We have the portraits of Christ as the Prophet of God and the Servant of Jehovah in Mark, as the Messiah of God and King of kings and Lord of lords in Matthew, as the Priest of God and Saviour of mankind in Luke, and as the Son of God in truth and reality who comes to bring life and immortality to man in John. Thus in Christ the fullness of God dwells bodily, a fullness adequate and available for all who believe.

The missionary movement and implications of such presentations are evident and overwhelming. Progressively but certainly Christ will triumph in all spheres of His relationship because He is indeed a missionary Christ – the Christ of all mankind and the Lord of the whole *kosmos*.

THE MAJOR THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF CHRIST

The sense of the missionary thrust of Christ comes into clear focus as we consider His basic theological concepts and presuppositions. All of them are filled with missionary content and charged with missionary dynamic. They only awaited Pentecost to be discharged with full fervor and force. We summarize these basic theological concepts and presuppositions of Christ by pointing to His focal point of proclamation, central revelation, unique self-identification, supreme purpose, declaration as final Judge, and the Great Commission.

THE FOCAL POINT OF CHRIST'S PROCLAMATION – THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Mark summarizes the proclamation of Jesus Christ in these words: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (1:14-15).

Even a cursory survey of the gospels will soon convince the reader that the concept of the kingdom of God was most prominent in the teaching of Jesus and formed the focal point of His proclamation. He began with its preaching (Mk 1:14-15) and ended with a discourse on it (Ac 1:3). In between, numerous references point to it. Direct statements about it and parabolic interpretations of it characterized His preaching. Christ was, indeed, a Preacher of the kingdom of God (compare His more than sixty references to it in the gospel records).

The author is well acquainted with the literature that has either sought to identify and/or to differentiate between the designations of "kingdom of heaven" (in Matthew's gospel) and the "kingdom of God" as found in all four gospels and in the epistles. Since these technicalities do not enter into the present thesis, no pros and cons need be discussed.

We are interested in the meaning of the concept "kingdom of God" as it reflects either the particularism or universality of Christ. This concept is not altogether an Old Testament concept. In its full form it does not appear in the Old Testament. While its roots are there, its full blossoming forth is found only in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament we find the following facts: God is the King of Israel in a particular way; God is the King of all the nations in a general way; God is the King of all creation in a providential way.

To this the New Testament adds a new dimension: It is emphatic that God is the King of the inner man. It adds the inwardness, immediacy and actuality of the kingdom and kingship of God, making it personal, spiritual, moral and social. The kingdom of God is in you. God is the King of eternity and immortality, thus indicating the "otherness" and otherworldliness in value and nature of the kingdom and kingship of God. It lifts the concept of the kingdom out of space and time in origin and ultimate design and transplants it into the realm of the transhuman and transearthly in quality and duration.

The kingdom of God includes all of these aspects. It is individual, national, racial, cosmic. It is personal, spiritual, moral, social. It is worldly and timely. It is also transworldly, transhuman and eternal. It is history, yet it is ultimate. It is timely, yet it is eternal. It is qualitative, yet it is also spacial.

From the above it is evident that a simple definition of the kingdom of God is not sufficient. It is also well illustrated by the literature on the subject and the three basic hermeneutical systems of Scripture interpretation which have grown up around it: postmillennialism, premillennialism, and amillennialism.

It may be well to think of the kingdom of God in qualitative and quantitative terms. *Qualitatively* we may consider it as threefold:

a. The rule of God in the heart of man. The kingdom of God is within you. It is immediate and actual. As such it is moral, not na-

tionalistic; it is spiritual, not materialistic; it is actual, not idealistic (that is, it is present and not totally futuristic).

b. The rule of God in the church. Neither God nor Christ is ever spoken of as the King of the church. Christ is the Lord of the church and this is but a Roman modification of the king or rulership concept. As Lord He is sovereign over His church. Thus Paul went about preaching the kingdom of God (Ac 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). In the epistles he uses the kingdom concept at least fourteen times. Certainly Paul did not feel that the church was not related to or a part of the kingdom of God. The content of his references, however, betrays that he thought of the kingdom more in moral and ethical terms than in terms of authority, royalty and rulership.

The fact remains, however, that Paul knew Christ as the Lord of the church. He is the Head of the church, and the church is His body (Eph 1:23; Ro 12:5; Col 1:18). To Christ belong all right, authority and rulership in the church. He bestows gifts and He dispatches His ambassadors. He is sovereign Lord of the church (Eph 4:7, 11; 2 Co 5:20).

c. The rule of God in the world. As such, though it is personal, it has strong social implications through the ministry of the individual Christian and the general impact of the gospel upon the conscience of society. The presence of the gospel in this world constitutes judgment, modification and enrichment of the order of society. It is strongly social in its general impact, regulating all relationships according to the will and purpose of God. As such, though it is local within the individual believer and the church of Jesus Christ, it is universal in the sense that the gospel is to be preached to all nations and that the church is to be constituted of believers from among all nations. As such, though it is present within the individual, within the Christian church, and within the providential government of God in this dispensation, its full manifestation is futuristic – first in the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth over all nations and, finally, in the consummation when the last enemy shall have been destroyed and the Son shall have subjugated all things, “then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Co 15:28). It is immediate, progressive and cataclysmic.

Quantitatively the kingdom of God concept implies a realm, an objective reality. Repeatedly Christ admonishes man to “enter the

kingdom of God,” “receive the kingdom of God,” “to give you the kingdom of God,” “sit in the kingdom of God,” “eat in the kingdom of God.” Such expressions emphasize primarily realm and objective reality rather than a reign, though the latter is not excluded.

From this brief survey it is evident that there is nothing particularistic in the focal teaching of Christ. To the contrary, as God is not the God of the Jews only but of the nations also, so the kingdom of God is not the Jews’ only, but also the nations’. The kingdom of God concept is definitely universalistic in designation and implication.

THE CENTRAL REVELATION OF CHRIST — THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

Christ has unveiled for us the riches of heavenly truth. Indeed, he is the truth, for “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” However, in the midst of all the splendor of revelation which came in and through Christ, the manifestation of the *Father* towers above all other truth. “The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,” or as the New English Bible translates, “No one has ever seen God; but God’s Son, he who is nearest to the Father’s heart, he has made him known” (Jn 1:18).

The Fatherhood of God stands out in the teaching ministry of Christ and forms the core revelation of the message of the Son of God. This is evident even from the fact that the gospels record the frequent usage of the word by Christ: In Matthew, 44 times; in Mark, 5; in Luke, 16; in John, 109 — a total of 173 times.

The Father concept of God is not altogether new with Christ. God had been known as the “Father” of the nation of Israel (Deu 14:1-2; 32:6; Ps 103:13; Pr 3:12; Is 9:6; Mal 2:10). He had also been spoken of as Father in relation to the King and the coming Messiah (2 Sa 7:14; Ps 2:7).

However, in contrast to the Old Testament Elohim and Jehovah idea, Christ made the Father concept the controlling image of God, thus advancing and completing the revelation of the God of the Bible and leading us to the deepest and most intimate God-man relationship. We have thus the following unfolding of God in the Bible:

a. The *Elohim-God* concept as the earliest revelation of God portraying principally God’s relationship to man as Creator.

b. The *Jehovah-God* concept presenting God’s covenant relationship to man and particularly to Israel.

c. The *Fatherhood-God* concept unveiling basically but not exclusively God's filial relationship to man.

Thus in the New Testament are men individually known as "children of God" and "sons of God" and only in the New Testament do men address God as "abba Father."

It is well to take note of this marvelous and completing result of progressive revelation of the concept of God, for it is a fact that the God concept remains the regulative concept of all revelation and relationships.

In the revelation of God as Father, our Lord distinguishes a three-fold relation. He speaks of God as "my Father" and indicates His essential or metaphysical relationship to the Father. He was uniquely the Son of God, and God was uniquely His Father. He speaks to His disciples and followers of God as "your Father," thus establishing the filial relationship of God as Father. Finally, He speaks of God as "Father" or as "the Father," relating God as Father providentially to all mankind. Man as a creation of God is related to Him as Father.

Thus there is a fatherhood of God by creation which is universal to all mankind, a fatherhood of God by redemption which is particular to all believers, and a fatherhood of God by essence which is unique to the Son of God.

The first is providential and relates to time and space only, the second is filial and relates to time and eternity, the third is metaphysical and relates from eternity to eternity.

However, in no sense does the fatherhood relate God especially to the Jewish people. Thus in the central core of Christ's revelation, national particularism disappears and universality prevails. God is peculiarly the Father of all who believe, irrespective of nationality or race.

CHRIST IN HIS UNIQUE SELF-IDENTIFICATION — THE SON OF MAN

Though His human name was Jesus, His favorite designation was "Son of man." The gospels record eighty-four such references — in Matthew, 32; in Mark, 14; in Luke, 26; in John, 12. Dr. Wayland Hayd lists sixteen relationships in which the Master used this self-designation.²

The question for our studies is: What did Jesus mean to impress upon His hearers by using this self-designation?

Let us consider the title, "The Son of man." Five facts, all rooted in the Old Testament, stand out:

The reality of the humanity of Jesus. "Son of man" is a Hebraism which expresses the possession of true human nature. Jesus, by taking the name "Son of Man," signified His sharing in this lot at once with the low and with the high. He also expressed by it His community of feeling with men, His sharing in human affections and interests, His true experience of human life, His liability to temptation, His exposure like other men to hunger and thirst, suffering and death.

The ideal Man. Jesus Christ as the Son of man is the ideal Man in whom humanity finds its fulfillment, hope and pattern. He is "the son of . . . Adam, which was the son of God" (Lk 3:23-38). In direct fulfillment of Psalm 8:3-4, He is the true Son of man and not the son of any nation or race; He is the Man of universal relationships; the Son of man is His generic designation and title. In Him humanity is summed up, and the fullness of the race is made visible. He is the Head and Representative, not of the Jews only, but of all nations of mankind. This is a title by which Jesus de-Judaizes Himself and places Himself in such relation to the whole race of men that their enemies are His enemies, their sorrows His, their burdens His. He is bound up with their life and destiny. And as the race is so summed up and represented in Him, He is in St. Paul's language, the second Adam.

The Successor to the prophets. Jesus Christ as the Son of man is the true Successor to the prophets of Israel. Indeed, He is "the Prophet." In the prophecy of Ezekiel the phrase "Son of man" occurs with ninetyfold iteration. Jehovah constantly addresses the prophet by this term. The title becomes a designation for the man whom God addresses in a unique way and who represents God to the people.

The promised Messiah. Jesus Christ as the Son of man is the promised Messiah of Israel. In keeping with Psalm 80:17, Daniel 7:13-14 and intertestamental Jewish writings, the designation "Son of man" had become a technical word and title among the learned Jews for the Messiah they were expecting.

We need to note that in the three synoptic gospels the designation "Son of man" emphatically expresses the Messianic consciousness of Christ. The numerous passages roughly fall into three categories as follows:

Eschatological references

Matthew	Mark	Luke
16:27	8:38	9:26
24:30	13:26	21:27
26:64	14:62	22:69

Soteriological references

Matthew	Mark	Luke
17:9, 12, 22	8:31	9:22
20:18	9:9, 12, 31	9:44
26:24	10:45	22:22
26:45	14:21, 41	

References expressing Messianic authority and missions

Matthew	Mark	Luke
9:6	2:10	5:24
12:8	2:28	6:5
13:37	3:28-30	19:10
12:32		12:10

Yes, Jesus knew Himself as the Anointed of God, sent from God and by God to the people of God for the mission of God and in the authority of God.

Uniquely related to God and His reign. Jesus Christ as the Son of man is uniquely related to God and to the establishment of the reign of God. This is presented in Daniel 7:13-14. From the world vision of this passage, we note that Jesus Christ as the Son of Man not only identifies Himself with mankind, but He is the hope of Israel and the world, and the surety of the purpose of God. He Himself becomes the fulfillment of all Old Testament anticipations and promises.^a

We note, however, that there is no narrow particularism attached to the title. It relates Christ to mankind. He is, indeed, the Saviour of the world.

CHRIST IN HIS FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE —
HIS ATONING DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Did Christ come into the world to give mankind a perfect pattern of life? Did He live to declare to man the way of God? Did Christ come to manifest the Father by living and to unveil Him by teaching? To all these questions we must give an affirmative answer. Yes, Christ

is our pattern; He is the way; He is the supreme, perfect and final image and manifestation of the Father. However, in all of these ministries He would only quantitatively distinguish Himself from the prophets of old. They, too, upheld ideals in the way of God and unveiled God in His person and purpose before man. As significant and marvelous as the contributions of Christ are in these areas, He is not absolutely unique in this field. This, therefore, neither fully explains nor justifies the great fact of incarnation. Neither does the New Testament make this central to His coming.

John the Baptist focuses the thrust of the New Testament when he points to Christ and declares, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This is in keeping with the declared purpose of our Lord when He says, "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Explicitly, he tells us that the good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (Jn 1:29; 10:11; Mk 10:45).

Here is the real purpose of the coming of Christ. Here is the heart of the incarnation. Christ Jesus came to deal effectively with sin, to become the atonement for sin, the liquidator of man's guilt, as well as the Conqueror and Annihilator of sin. That He did so is objectively evident in His resurrection and enthronement at the right hand of God the Father. Subjectively it is convincing in the experience of forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the power of sin of believers in Him who learn to appropriate His merits and power.

The vicarious death of Christ is difficult for the believer to deny. It is confirmed both in the message of the Bible and in personal experience. The question, however, remains: For whom did Christ die?

There has been a rift in Protestant evangelical theology. There have been advocates of limited atonement of the efficacy of the death of Christ. Others are teaching the inclusive atonement or the sufficiency of the death of Christ for all mankind. However, few if any have advocated the efficacy of the death of Christ for the Jewish people only. National particularism has never been attached to the atonement of Christ. We deal with the ideas of limited and unlimited atonement later. Here it suffices to note that, in the fundamental purpose of Christ, universality rather than national particularism breaks through. Christ purposed the salvation for all mankind.

CHRIST IN HIS POSTRESURRECTION COMMISSION

The prominence of the postresurrection commission is evident to every reader of the gospel records. The missionary thrust in it is quite pronounced. The phrases, “all nations,” “all creation,” “all the nations,” “whosoever” and “the extremity of the earth” in the commission leave no room for particularism. Christ sent His apostles into all the world, commanding them to disciple all nations. Particularism has no place here.

CHRIST AND THE FINAL RECKONING

Paul said that God will judge the world righteously by one man, Christ (Ac 17:31). This is not Paul’s speculative invention. Already Christ had said, “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father” (Jn 5:22-23). And in a similar vein He said, “All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” which certainly includes universal judgment. Vividly our Lord set forth this truth in the scene of judgment when all nations shall be gathered before Him to be judged by Him and to receive their irrevocable verdict of reward or punishment (c.f. Mt 25:31-46 with Jn 5:24-29; 3:17-19). Clearly, the world is being judged and will be judged by the Son.

Again the missionary thrust rather than particularism shines through in the teaching of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Christ Jesus in His basic theological concepts and presuppositions undeniably sets forth the implicit universality of salvation and the gospel. All His major theological concepts – kingdom of God, fatherhood of God, Son of man, sin and salvation or redemption, the purpose of His life, His commission to disciple all nations and judge all nations – lift Him above His own nation, culture and religion, and place Him into race relationships and make Him the Redeemer of mankind and the world. Christ, indeed, has world significance – not because Christianity has made Him such, but because biblical Christianity incarnates Him.

It is well to remember again that these fundamental concepts are not merely theological concepts. First and foremost, they are vital, dynamic missionary ideas and ideals which Christ boldly proclaimed and deeply imbedded in the mind and conscience of His disciples. After Pentecost the Holy Spirit progressively unfolded the missionary

dynamic of these ideas and fashioned the disciples into flaming, irresistible and unconquerable missionaries throughout the Roman Empire and beyond its borders. Thus the centrifugal force nurtured by the missionary ideas of Christ overcame the traditional centripetal force, and Christianity shattered the bonds of Jewish nationalism and particularism and became a true missionary movement in keeping with the racial promise of Genesis 3:15 and the idealism of the Old Testament.

THE EXPLICIT UNIVERSALITY OF CHRIST

Implicit universality is definitely substantiated by an explicit universality of Christ. We merely present an outline of this aspect as recorded in the gospels:

THE UNIVERSALITY OF CHRIST IN THE ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. By the angels – Luke 2:10-14, The joy shall be to all people, and peace shall come upon the earth and goodwill to mankind.

2. By Simeon – Luke 2:25-32, He is the Salvation of God which God has prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the nation and the glory of the people of Israel.

3. By John the Baptist – Luke 3:3-6; John 1:29. In his early preaching he announces that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” And seeing Jesus coming to him, he points to Christ and proclaims Him as the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

THE UNIVERSALITY OF CHRIST IN HIS MINISTRY

We refer to the following recorded incidents which relate Christ to persons outside of His own people:

John 4:1-42, the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans.

Matthew 15:21-28, the Syrophenician woman who obtained help for her demon-possessed daughter.

Matthew 8:5-13, the centurion of Capernaum whose servant was restored to him.

John 4:43-54, the courtier (nobleman) of Capernaum who effectively pleaded for the healing of his son who was at the point of death.

Mark 5:1-20, the Gadarene from whom Christ cast out a legion of demons.

Mark 7:31-37, the deaf man of Decapolis who was healed of his impediment.

Of special interest in this connection is the cleansing of the temple as recorded in John 2:13-17.

We need to remember that the temple consisted of a series of courts leading into the temple proper and to the holy place. The first court was designed for the nations, next was the court for the women, then came the court for the Israelites, and finally the inner court for the priests. Buying and selling were going on in the court of the Gentiles, depriving the people of the possibility of worship within the precincts of the temple. Yet, Mark tells what the temple was to be called: "My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer" (11:17). Thus, by cleansing the court, Jesus provided a place for the worshiper from among the nations in keeping with the purpose of the temple. At the same time He clearly emphasized the divine order in the universal worship of the living God.

This interpretation seems to be substantiated by the quoted passage from Isaiah 56:7 (ASV) in which it is clearly stated, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples [all nations]." The indifference and callousness of Israel in relation to the religious plight of the nations, and her utter neglect and abandonment of any mission toward the nations of the world become consuming motives in the seeming violent reaction of Christ to religious ceremonialism and performances devoid of compassion for the spiritual well-being of others.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF CHRIST IN HIS TEACHING

We merely classify some leading synoptic passages which explicitly state universality and then we refer to a number of parables teaching the same truth in parabolic form.

Some explicit statements:

Matthew 5:13-16, "Ye are the salt of the earth. . . . Ye are the light of the world."

Matthew 6:10, "Thy will be done in earth."

Matthew 21:43, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you [the Jews], and given to a nation."

Luke 13:29, 28 "And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God . . . and you yourselves [the Jews] thrust out."

Mark 14:9, "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world. . . ."

Parabolic teaching:

Luke 10:29-37, the good Samaritan.

Luke 14:10-24, the great feast for which a universal invitation is extended.

Luke 15:11-24, the beautiful story of the unchanged gracious Father who deals kindly with the prodigal son (a picture of the world of the nations) as well as with the self-righteous elder son (a portrait of the Jewish nation), hoping that both will return to the house and to the Father to enjoy Him forever in blessed fellowship.

Matthew 13:36-43, the story of the wheat and the tares, with the field being neither the Jewish nation nor the Christian church, but the world.

Matthew 21:28-32, the parable of the husbandman and his two sons, which may represent the two worlds of mankind: the Jewish world and the world of the nations.

To the testimony of the synoptics we add the witness of John, where we find these marvelous statements:

Concerning the Father —

John 3:16, "God so loved the world"

John 3:17, "God sent . . . his Son . . . that the world through him might be saved."

John 3:19, "Light is come into the world."

Concerning the Son —

John 1:9, Christ is the light "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

John 1:29, Christ is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

John 4:42, He is "the Saviour of the world."

John 6:33, He is "the bread of God which . . . giveth life unto the world" (cf. v. 54).

John 8:12, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (cf. also 9:5; 12:46).

John 12:47, He came to save the world.

John 17:21, He prays for the unity of His people "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

Concerning the Spirit —

John 16:8, “when He is come, He will reprove [convict] the world.”

Thus the world is the sphere of the operation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Add to this the “cloud of witnesses,” “whosoever,” “any man” and “all men,” and the evidence of universality is overwhelming.

With this cloud of witnesses it becomes difficult to question the fundamental thrust of the life, ministry, mind and doctrine of Christ. He is the Son of the race, the Representative and Champion of mankind, the Saviour of the world.

CHRIST'S METHOD

In spite of this implicit and explicit universality of Christ, there is an undeniable particularism in the ministry of Christ.

1. It is an obvious fact (at least according to the gospel records) that Christ conducted no extended mission to the Gentiles or on Gentile soil. His major ministry confined itself to Judea and Galilee.

2. He explicitly tells us that He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 15:24).

3. He specifically forbids His disciples to go beyond the confines of Israel, even as He had not been sent to the nations but to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 10:5-6; 15:24; 23:37).

4. In several sayings of the gospels, Jesus speaks of the non-Jewish nations and individuals in a distinctly uncomplimentary, even disparaging, manner:

Their prayers are “vain repetitions” (Mt 6:7).

They are earthly minded and think in terms of eating, drinking, and clothing — that is, they are this-life minded (Mt 6:32).

An excommunicated brother is to be considered as a heathen man and publican — separated, unclean and unworthy (Mt 18:17).

The Syrophenician woman is compared to a dog in contrast to Israelites who are children (Mk 7:27; Mt 15:26). The diminutive form of the translated “dog” does not eliminate the sting.

They are power-hungry and exercise authority with little wisdom and mercy (Mk 10:42).

These are facts recorded by the gospel writers, seemingly without

sensing any discrepancy between the obvious universality and seeming particularism of Christ.

Have we a contradiction here? Is it one of the insoluble polarities of the Scriptures? How can the seeming paradox be resolved?

The conflict between seeming particularism and obvious universality in the life, ministry and teaching of Christ does resolve itself in the light of two considerations:

1. It must be realized that there is no real gospel message – good news – for the Gentiles before the cross and resurrection of Christ. In His cardinal and redemptive facts of incarnation – sin-bearing, death and resurrection – Christ identified Himself with mankind. In His life, culture, and earthly ministry He identified Himself with Israel as predicted in the Old Testament.

2. Concerning the life and ministry of Christ, it is well to distinguish on the one hand His sympathies, thinking, ideals, principles and plannings, and on the other hand His methodology of accomplishing His purposes. The former are unquestionably and obviously universal; the latter seems particularistic and is determined by the methodology of the Old Testament. It must be kept in mind that universality can be either centrifugal or centripetal. Centrifugal universality is in effect when a messenger of the gospel crosses frontiers and carries the good news to the people of no faith. Centripetal universality, often mistaken for particularism, operates like a magnetic force, drawing distant peoples to a central place, people or person. The latter is the methodology of the Old Testament, with Israel and the temple as the center designed to draw people to themselves and to the Lord.

In keeping with this principle, our Lord addresses Himself first to Israel in order to restore the Jews to their place, purpose and destiny. Israel was to have the opportunity to be made into a servant of the Lord in order to draw the world to the Lord and/or to be transformed from centripetalism into a centrifugal force through the dynamic of Pentecost.

It may at first seem that Christ failed in winning a hearing among His own people. Indeed, John tells us that “He came unto his own, but his own received him not” (Jn 1:11). Through its leadership the nation rejected Him and demanded His crucifixion.

However, we must not interpret this as total failure. A substantial remnant came out of the rejection. The apostles, including Paul,

were all Jews; the first Christian church was a Jewish Christian church in the city of Jerusalem. Judea, Samaria and Galilee had large numbers of churches, and tens of thousands of Jews became believers (Ac 9:31; 21:20). The first missionaries to the nations were Jews — Philip to Samaria, Peter to Cornelius, some Hellenistic Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene to Antioch, and then, of course, Paul to the world.

Thus the Jews gave us the Bible, the gospel, the missionaries and the first churches. Let us always keep this in mind.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

Having established the missionary intent of Christ, we naturally ask: Where did Christ find His missionary idea? How was His mind molded into a missionary mind? Was it intuitive or scriptural? Did He learn it from the Old Testament? Was it special illumination?

It is a fact that Christ claimed to have come to fulfill the Old Testament. It was His Bible, His guide, and His stay. He used it richly; He preached it freely; He honored it humbly; He believed it firmly. The Old Testament was for Him the very Word of God written. While He was its heart and content and all Scripture pointed to Him, He was also its true Interpreter. Indeed, the Old Testament reveals Christ while He unveils it. He is both its content and interpretation. But it is also true that He found not only His major theological concepts here but also the scope of God's redemptive plan. The latter was universalistic and included the totality of mankind, not merely a nation. This is the thesis we need to establish, for it seems strange to make such a claim for the Old Testament. However, even the Old Testament does not fully disclose the secret of Christ's missionary mind and purpose.

It is evident to every reader of the gospel records that Christ lived in a unique God-consciousness and self-consciousness. He knew Himself to be the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father. He walked and labored in the full consciousness of having been sent into the world, of having entered the earthly realm from a higher realm. He had come here on a very specific mission, a mission essential to the consummation of the eternal purpose of God. As a Member of the eternal Godhead, He shared in the counsels of eternity which find their ground in the nature and character of the eternal triune God.

Therefore, before we turn to a biblical survey to study the uni-

versalistic purpose of God which underlies the missionary thrust of the Bible, we need to consider briefly the nature and character of the God in whom the missionary purpose is grounded.