

HEAVEN

*What Is It?*

# HEAVEN

*What Is It?*

*by*

K. SCHILDER, Ph.D.

AUTHOR of *Christ in His Suffering, Christ on Trial, Christ Crucified, etc.*

TRANSLATED AND CONDENSED

*by*

MARIAN M. SCHOOLLAND

WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
Grand Rapids, 1950 Michigan

HEAVEN — WHAT IS IT?

*by* B. Schilder, Ph. D

Translated and Condensed by Marian M. Schoolland

*Copyright, 1950, by*

*Wm. Eerdmans, Publishing Company*

All rights in this book are reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

*Set up and pirnted, March, 1950*

Numbers in [brackets] indicate original page number of preceding material.

## CONTENTS

I. Concerning Our Difficulty With the Subject .....	[9] 6
II. Limiting and Evaluating Our Subject .....	[19] 11
III. Condition or Place .....	[29] 16
IV. The History of Heaven .....	[39] 22
V. God's Dwelling Place With Men .....	[59] 32
VI. The Great Supper .....	[73] 39
VII. Fulfilled Sabbath Rest .....	[101] 53

HEAVEN

*What Is It?*

## I

### Concerning Our Difficulty With the Subject

The poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is well known for his poetic writings on hell, purgatory, and heaven. The last of this trilogy of works, which he entitles “Paradise,” is prefaced with the following lines:

*“The glory of Him who moves everything penetrates through the universe, and shines in one part more and in another less.*

*“In the heaven that receives most of its light I have been, and have seen things which he who descends from thereabove neither knows how nor is able to recount;*

*“because, drawing near to its desire, our understanding enters so deep, that the memory cannot follow.*

*“Truly whatever of the Holy Realm I could treasure up in my mind shall now be the theme of my song.*

*“Oh good Apollo, for this last labor make me such a vessel of thy power as thou demandest for the gift of the loved laurel.*

*“Thus far one summit of Parnassus has been enough for me, but now with both I need to enter the remaining arena.*

*“Enter into my breast, and breathe thou  
.. . “1*

These lines at the beginning of Dante’s poem on Heaven are noteworthy because such an appeal to Apollo is not found in either of the other two books. When he

dealt with [9] Hell and Purgatory, the poet thought it sufficient to appeal to the Muses. But when he is about to discuss Heaven, he feels that he must invoke higher powers; the Muses alone are not sufficient. Hence he begs Apollo himself, the Patron of the Muses, to give wings to the poet’s spirit and to lead his imagination upon right paths.

The meaning is clear. Dante would have us realize that while it may be difficult to speak of hell and purgatory, to write of heaven is *far more* difficult. The assistance of the Muses is sufficient for the first; but for his final book, discussing the great subject of Paradise, help from the highest regions is needed lest the work be a failure.

Was Dante right? Is it truly more difficult to write of heaven than to write of hell or purgatory? In order to answer this question let us first ask how Dante came to think thus, and whether his concepts are fundamentally right; and if not, what the reformed confession has to say upon the subject.

#### *Medieval ideas.*

In seeking an answer to the above questions, we must first of all see Dante against the background of his time. He was a son of the medieval church, and the children of that church wandered in many directions philosophically. Dante was one of those who became hopelessly mired in

1. From a translation by Charles Eliot Norton.

medieval scholasticism and philosophy.

Two great thinkers in particular are generally acknowledged to have influenced Dante: Thomas Aquinas, and especially Thomas' teacher, Albertus Magnus. For many centuries, the neoplatonism of Albertus Magnus influenced the thought of dying heathendom and also, unfortunately, the thought of the still young Christendom. It was an influence [10] so baneful that only the power of God's Word, bringing about the Reformation, could effect the necessary purification.

Certain features of neoplatonism are of importance in our investigation. In the first place the neoplatonist replaced the Biblical teaching of creation with an unbiblical *emanation* theory, which conceives of a so-called godhead from which creation emanates or radiates, and which is in turn reflected in the creature.

This emanation is supposed to be graduated. That is, more of the power of God is manifest in one creature than in another. This "outflowing" of all things from God Himself implied, so they taught, a higher and lower order of things; the highest being near to God Himself, in the realm of brightest light. Thence there was a descension by degrees the power of divine emanation manifesting itself less and less, till we have the regions. of darkness, the depths of ungodly, sinful, weak and wicked powers.

***Implications of the emanation theory.***

For the neoplatonist, then, there was gradation from highest to lowest, but no antithesis between holy and ungodly, between God and Satan, between lawful and unlawful. Neither was there room for salvation by grace in their theory, for man could climb up from the lower spheres to the higher; he could work his way from

darkness to light by the exertion of his own will.

Moreover, there was an erroneous distinction between "nature" and "grace" which induced many thinkers to evaluate the *things of mind* higher than practical *mundane activities*. To philosophize about earthly things they deemed an activity of lower order; a theological pondering upon heaven, [11] on the other hand, and a mystical striving to penetrate to highest realms with one's spirit, such was activity of the higher order. By such mystical exercise one might lose himself in God and thus attain unto the utmost heights, where all differences would be absorbed and lost in the "higher unity." Unity—that was to them the ultimate heavenly glory; to be uplifted above all contrasts, lost in the one-ness of God. For did not all originally flow from the divine? And must not all find its one-ness again in that primal Light?

Contrasts such as good and bad, near and far, high and low, with which we concern ourselves now, lose their reality for the mystic who penetrates heaven with his spirit and finds enjoyment in God himself. Man is kept in bondage to contrasts because of his weakness; as long as he is upon earth he cannot wrest himself free from them except with greatest effort. This same weakness is revealed in the punishment of hell and the pangs of purgatory. But in heaven one is delivered from all such.

Weak man can, therefore, easily conceive of hell and purgatory, because they are so closely related to his world; but superhuman power and mystical grace are required to enable him to penetrate the heights of heaven, where there is unity that supercedes all contrasts.

The medieval thinker, then, envi-

sioned a heaven where the highest joy would not be work but meditation, where deeds should be replaced by silent wonder and the very losing of self in ecstasy. That is why Dante faced his task with awe. For earth-bound man, mired in the busyness of the world, can only with greatest effort transplant himself to a heaven with heroes of “meditation,” abstracting himself from things practical, uplifting himself above all earth’s contrasts. [12] It is much easier for him to peer into the dim darkness of purgatory or hell.

*Scriptural versus the medieval concept.*

Was Dante right in the mystical conception upon which his preface is based? Without hesitation we answer that the entire trend of medieval mysticism is erroneous. It is the philosophy of an age that had not yet risen above heathendom. Scripture teaches another doctrine.

As to the emanation theory, Scripture teaches us that “in the beginning God *created* heaven and earth.” The world has not “flowed forth” from God. It was brought into being by an act of His will and it will forever be distinct from Him. God is self-sufficient. Between Him and that which He has made there is a line of demarcation which none can disregard with impunity. He who loses sight of the distinction between God and His creature violates the fundamental concept of Scripture: “God is in heaven and thou art upon earth” (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Neither has God placed one “good” above another in His creation. All virtues are of equal worth in their potential of service to God. “Thinking” and “doing” are not goods of unequal value. All of thinking or doing, insofar as it is in accord with the will of God, is good—and equally good; all

that is contrary to His will is wrong—and equally wrong. We do not recognize a primacy of theology above philosophy or any other science. All knowledge should have its inception in the revealed Word; in this respect all sciences are on a par.

For there is no knowledge except by way of revelation. And all that the Bible reveals makes equal demands upon our understanding. Special revelation always reveals the [13] truth, but never exhausts it. In order to deal rightly with any biblical subject, one must accept that revelation by faith and ponder it theocentrically and christologically. The one indivisible God has revealed Himself in His one indivisible Word and work. There is no mystic way to knowledge. And one teaching of Scripture is not more difficult or less difficult than any other.

*No neoplatonic all-one-ness.*

Finally, we deny that mystical philosophy of all-one-ness in which all things are united in the godhead and all contrasts are lost. The contrasts which exist are eternal; contrasts between good and evil, between light and darkness, near and far, God and Satan, high and low, these will remain through all eternity. The biblical heaven is not a place where men will rise above all contrasts, but quite the contrary—a place where contrasts will finally come into their own and stand forth clearly, where the lines will no longer be hazy and blurred. Heaven may be the place of strongest bonds, it is also the place of sharpest contrasts. For it is the place where the creative and re-creative thoughts of God are brought to completion, where all that began at creation and was included in the grace of recreation, having been released from the bondage of sin, reaches the perfection of



development; where each seed will have unfolded *after its kind*, and all fruits of that seed will reveal their several natures. There will be no fruit abortive in the bud; there will be no stumps of trees hewn down; there will be no aptitude or talent dormant. There will be no need of lines of demarcation, for distinctions will be clear and unmistakable. [14]

*Our subject difficult, yet clearly revealed.*

Though we therefore cannot agree with Dante's preface to his treatise on heaven, yet we would not for a moment deny that our subject far exceeds our understanding. But that would be true as well if our subject were "hell," to mention just one other.

Dante once said of the sun that it makes itself invisible by too much light. The symbolism is eloquent. Even as the sun is too bright for the human eyes, so heaven is indiscernible for the poet's eye because of its exceeding brightness. The light overpowers, blinds, is so bright that it prevents seeing and knowing.

It is true that we cannot see into things heavenly. Our imagination is activated by the Revelation of John, wherein wondrous words are spoken of the city of miracles, of its gold and brightness and glory. But the details and even the vague outlines of the figures walking there in the light of heaven, these our imagination cannot describe. They are in a land of light that is too bright for us.

But that does not mean that we agree with Dante. For, though our imagination cannot fathom the regions of light, we can *read* that which is *written*. Moreover, the utter darkness of hell would make that place equally incomprehensible, just as difficult to "see." Utmost light and utter dark-

ness—these are extremes, and we can approach only to the border of either.

Therefore we undertake the study of heaven with fear and trembling indeed. But with no greater trembling than that which seizes us at the thought of any other theme which the Bible presents for our consideration. For we are directed to Scripture for our information, not to human thinking and philosophizing. Scripture unlocks for us the manifold [15] wisdom of God and utilizes various means of revelation to teach us clearly regarding both heaven and hell.

*The revelation itself is light.*

We stand in awe of hell and heaven, as places of "outer darkness" and "utmost light." But we remember that these are expressions chosen from the point of view of those who are in one or the other of these places. For those who "dwell" there, hell may be the place of outer darkness; but to the eye of faith the revelation regarding this place of outer darkness is light and clear. Conversely, heaven may be the place of utmost light; it is that only for its inhabitants. The Bible sheds as much light upon hell as upon heaven. We who are upon earth are limited to God's revelation. We can only think upon heaven while we are upon earth. And thinking upon heaven is no more heavenly than it is hellish to think upon hell.

We can know both heaven and hell only insofar as we accept by faith that which Scripture teaches us, and such teaching is adapted to our understanding.

Therefore the reformed thinker disregards those first lines of Dante's epos. He beseeches his God for light and wisdom, even as he would in the study of any other difficult subject, but not a whit more ear-

nestly.

For—to paraphrase Dante—“the glory of Him who moves everything penetrates through the universe, and shines in one part more and in another less,” because He has enriched one less than another, but His revelation concerning each is equally difficult and profound and marvelous . . .

*Reverencing the great disparity.*

There are, on the other hand, those who say that we can know nothing of that “other world.” The end of time, even [16] as its beginning, so they say, is hidden in a grey mist. We *have* no contact with “heaven” and cannot conceive of it, except, perhaps, as a tangent that touches our circle at one point and then speeds on its way.

We face a difficult conflict of ideas. Yet those who believe in Scripture have always taken for granted that, in speaking of heaven, it is just the end of history and the eternal glory that will follow with which we deal.

True, of ourselves we know nothing. But we may and we *can* speak about God and the things of God because He has given us His revelation—albeit we must continually subject ourselves to self-examination, for we are sinners. Nevertheless, the great disparity between God and ourselves need not hinder us. We recognize this great disparity and we reverence it. I admit I know nothing except He tell it me. The great difference between God and me may embarrass me in my effort to understand Him, but certainly He is in no way limited or hindered by any “impossibility” when He desires to reveal Himself to me. If He Himself declares that He is transcendent in His glory that He can tell me about Himself and His work and His world, perfectly though not fully, then I have but to be still. To

believe His immanence when *He* reveals it, is to tremble before His transcendence.

He has revealed that He wills to be immanent in the world, and that He is. *Because He is transcendent* He can be immanent and dwell with us. Who shall resist His will?

Faith acknowledges the power of revelation as a reality and as indispensable. Faith insists, contrary to Lessing, that has not “hidden” the eternal truths in “elementary books” but has made them clear and transparent. [17]

We maintain that to speak of heaven is not difficult; no more difficult than the first sentence of any sermon on any subject. But it is also no less difficult. We approach our subject with the ease, and also with the trembling, with which we would approach a subject such as baptism, communion, death, birth, or the sparrow upon the housetop that falls not except by the providence of God. [18]

## II

### Limiting and Evaluating Our Subject

Before going further, we should distinguish clearly what we shall and what we shall not discuss in this book.

There are some who conceive of heaven as “the dwelling place of God,” quite apart from creation. Others contrast heaven with earth. Still others think of heaven vaguely as a gathering place, a beautiful homeland for those who have passed out of this life. And finally there are those who prefer to speak of heaven as it will be at the last, after the judgment Day.

Each of these four ideas is, in our opinion, too abstract. Abstraction is dangerous, in that it blinds us to history, also to the history of heaven. Heaven, the dwelling place of God, is not to be thought of apart from earth, the dwelling place of man. At the end of Scripture we read, “The dwelling place of God is with men,” and in those words we find *history* come to rest. And so also the beginning of history, history in its “unrest,” must be taken into account whenever we speak of heaven.

#### *Heaven as part of creation.*

Heaven, even as the dwelling place of God, was created; and if created, it has its *history*. Nor is this a history *apart*, or a history within history, or a transcendent history. God’s

work is a unit, also as to its history. More of this later; we [19] merely note now

that heaven is not to be contrasted with creation, or with any part of it, nor abstracted from it.

#### *Heaven at rest.*

We purpose, then, to speak of heaven as it has unfolded throughout history, with the entire cosmos, and will further unfold; heaven brought to rest when its history and the history of all creation will once and for all be brought to its conclusion.

We do not plan to sketch the entire history of heaven, in all its phases; but, passing by investigation of the condition of men between death and the return of Christ, we shall consider what the Bible teaches concerning heaven at rest when, after the last day, it will have reached its eternal state.

This fixed and eternal heaven after Christ’s return is not at all another heaven than that which exists before the consummating catastrophe. We are merely limiting our investigation. We would pass by the subjective-individualistic questions of the state of those who have fallen asleep in Christ, and consider heaven itself. For he who undertakes to search out the history of heaven must not look upon heaven from the standpoint of men who depart out of this life, but from the *Scriptural* standpoint. Scripture proceeds from the principle of *God* as originator and mover of all things.

***No compromise between theology and unbiblical Philosophy.***

If we enquire what value this study of heaven may have, we must first of all protest against any compromise between theology and a *philosophy that is not founded upon Scripture*. Such a compromise has been sought, and men have thereupon concluded that the importance of our subject is [20] to be summed up under two heads: “axiology” and “teleology.”

In order to understand these terms, we must recall the double meaning of the word *eschatology*. For some, the word *eschatology* designates that which is absolute, that which as divine reality is the norm and measure of all human history, that which is outside of human history and passes judgment upon it. On the other hand there is the old conception which holds that eschatology is a matter of those things which fall at the end of time, as the word “eschata” (last things) implies. Parallel with these two ideas we have the distinction between the axiological and the teleological problem of heaven and the last things.

As to axiology, the word means “having worth, value.” It is the doctrine of the value of things and men. Windelband once pointed out the radical contrast which to a great extent moulded his thinking—the contrast between that which passes and that which remains and is imperishable. We and all that we have are destined to perish. We feel ourselves sinking away into a night of death, and there is no firm footing upon which we can stand to resist the flood that sweeps us onward. But on the other hand there are things eternal. There is a power not bound by the laws of beginning and ending. And as we are rushed toward destruction, with all that is about us, we conclude that nought has real worth but

that which is eternal and will remain.

Althaus, follower of Windelband, draws therefrom his evaluation of the eternal. It is the “ultimate,” the non-relative, which reaches down into the things of earth to limit and control them. We live amid the relative. The eternal is our norm. And when this thought lays hold upon us, we look upon the eschatology of heaven as *axiological*. [21]

Alongside of this axiology, Althaus and others present the *teleology of eschatology*. The *norm* points forward to that which is to be; we are moving on through time toward that which must come; and at the end of time is the “telos” the purpose of all things.

This has also been the view of earlier Christendom. And it is noteworthy that the axiological concept of the eternal leads quite naturally to the teleological. Recognizing the “otherness” of things eternal, we are prone to reach out toward the future, toward that which awaits us.

If this differentiation between the things that are passing and the things eternal is correct, there is a two-fold importance in a properly conducted discussion of heaven. It gives us an insight into the values or the valuelessness of this present life, and it proclaims to us the worth of things eternal. It teaches us to evaluate our daily lives in the light of heaven and heavenly glory. It constrains us to stretch forward toward the future, to look beyond our present with a strong desire for eternity, with longing for the fulfilment of our hopes.

***One good not to be weighed over against another.***

But we protest against this attempt to link the axiological and the teleological

import of eschatology. It will not do, as we see it, to thus weigh time against eternity, the things of now against the things to come, the value of “this” over-against the value of “that.” For both “this” and “that” are created, and only God himself can declare the value of either. We know nothing of values except what He reveals. We cannot measure this “city” of men here below with the “city of God” above. Every city is *created*, whether it be a temporary creation or intended to last throughout eternity. We [22] cannot compare a body that is perishable with one that is imperishable, for both are created and each is ordained to be either perishable or imperishable. Our measuring rod is not “the eternal”; hell, too, is eternal. Our only criterion is the revelation of God. We can know the function and meaning of things created only by noting the ways of God in history and grasping the meaning thereof from His Word. That Word reveals to us how each is interrelated with all others, and teaches us the meaning of time as bearing fruit for eternity.

*Nature and history.*

Another objection to the axiological view of eschatology arises from an erroneous idea of the relation between nature and history. These same philosophers tend to speak of nature as running in cycles and according to certain laws, while history flows on and never repeats itself. Thus the things of nature have value only as they affect the run of history.

While they admit that nature, too, runs its course and has its history, we are much more emphatic upon that point. The face of nature is ever changing. The earth is crumbling, and the fire within is eating away at its crust. All of creation runs its course, and

its history is controlled by the coming of *jom Jahwe*, “the day of the Lord,” in which the Lord God shall bring this world out of the misery into which it fell by sin and into the blessedness prepared for it by grace. Therefore nature and history are not separable.

Therefore it will not do to say: those things which are passing away have only relative worth; only that which remains has absolute worth. That which passes by and perishes is included in God’s decree, and hence has equal value with that which remains, which is established by His decree. [23]

All has worth *in* history, and therefore *for* eternity—all that is in accordance with the will of God. Heaven has great worth, but the earth of today also. Heaven of the future has great worth, but heaven of today no less. Because God works in history, the embryo is equal in worth with the matured body; the corpse with the healthy body. For in all He attains His purpose. Whether His Word calls a thing into being or causes it to return to dust, it matters not; by that Word all of history has its value.

*No polaric “patience versus impatience:”*

We do not, then, look for “the eternal” yet to come, but we recognize the always being and always coming of the Eternal God.

Turning away all attempt to compromise between theology and a philosophy that is not founded upon Scripture, we submit all theological and philosophical thinking to the Word. And a thoughtful perusal of what the Bible reveals concerning heaven teaches us that we must not contrast time with eternity. Since heaven is interwoven with our history and is constantly reaping the fruits of time (think of

our deathbeds) we must have done with the idea of a dualistic “tension,” as if the Christian patience (enduring time) and Christian impatience (longing for the glory to come) were opposites, as far apart as the poles. We shall have done with the theories which contrast as opposites “this world” and “the world to come,” “eternity” as absolute norm and the “temporal” as not-yet-having-attained-to-the-norm.

*Tension between sin and grace.*

There is indeed a tension in our flesh-and-blood existence, but it is a tension that will gradually solve itself. It is the [24] tension between sin and grace. Call it if you will the tension between the old man and the new.

This tension is there; for one lusteth against the other in my life. But it is not a polaric tension. For the old man is in the process of dying, and the new is rising up. The new is triumphing over the old, because it is fruit of seed planted *from above*; it is a fruit of the seed of new life, wrought by the second Adam in this life of mine which sprouted from the first Adam.

He who feels this tension will admit the antithesis of sin and grace, but deny all antitheses between nature and grace. If he did not deny the latter, he could not conceive of the “new man” entering into time, into the continuity of his own life. He does see the beginning of this “new man” within himself—no, not with his eyes, but by faith, on the strength of God’s Word. Thus he finds within himself, in his own history, that which he must maintain also for eschatology—that the eternal God, reaching down into time, lays the seeds of new life from which He can gather the fruit into His barns when it will have ripened.

And since the new man continues to

grow and develop, and to get the better of the old man, it is evident that the tension tends to lift him up. But the lifting up is not completed, and the “tension” is not wholly released, this side of the grave. For here below the old man, though daily dying, is never wholly dead; and the new man, though daily rising, is never fully risen, glorified, completed.

This continued imperfection is not to be ascribed to a polaric tension between eternity and time, but to the not yet finished sloughing off of all unrighteousness. When, upon man’s departure from earth, God will take away the last of his will-to-sin and grant him complete will-to-serve, then the [25] tension will be instantly lifted. Even so, man will yet be hoping for what is still to come; indeed, then more than ever. He will be hoping for that other instant, the last day, when the cosmos will come to completion, when his body will be restored unto him, matured, perfected, prepared to every service of God.

*The reality of heaven in life here below.*

On the basis of these propositions regarding the relation between time and eternity, a study of the Biblical revelation of heaven has this importance: the otherwise too often abstract teachings about heaven immediately become real in our concrete human life, as soon as one is born of the Spirit of God. One who believes himself reborn does not think of eternity” as a norm outside of time. He will protest: thanks be to God, even now there is *in me* something which measures up to that standard. The reality of the new creation is, by God’s grace, already in this world.

No one can deprive the believer of his faith in the *here and now* of the eternal, the here and now of salvation. And he does not

evaluate history according to philosophic speculations about time and eternity, but by the Word of God, which gives a clear and effectual revelation.

It should be clear, too, therefore, that the subject of this book is not one which we may arbitrarily discuss or leave untouched. For to think upon heaven is a part of the obedience which God requires of us. In this, too, thinking is living; and to think the good is to live obediently.

*Summary.*

The principal thought in all that has been said thus far is this: our theme is linked with all other Biblical subjects; [26] all the threads of life and of revelation lead eventually to heaven. To quote from the theological debates at the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619): “That which was first in God’s decree is last in the execution of his decree”—that is, last in history. That which God purposed in the beginning He brings about in the course of history, causing the several factors of history, each in turn, to lead toward that original purpose, toward heaven—to wit, toward heaven as it will be after the last day, when it will have come to its eternal perfection and rest.

He who does not long for heaven estranges himself from God; for the forward movement of God’s work, the unfolding of all history, impels us toward heaven. He also estranges himself from human fellowship in its perfection; for it is in heaven that humanity will come to the perfection of beauty. Do you seek a perfect man? Seek him in heaven, beyond the purifying catastrophe of the last day.

No, heaven is not the asylum of shortsighted folk who stumble along their restricted path toward a narrow and fantastic gate to glory. Far from that. Heaven is a

concrete state of perfection of all creation. It is more concrete than the heaven of Plato, richer and more pure than Augustine’s City of God. There we see the gathering of the perfected righteous, the congregation of the new humanity.

Or, in still broader terms: man is part of “the created”; and all of creation, insofar as it must serve the new humanity, which in turn must serve God, will be gathered into the expanded heaven. By the purifying fire of the last day, it will be exalted to fullness of perfection. “The whole creation groaneth, waiting for the day of the manifestation of the [27] sons of God.” If on that day creation will be freed from bondage, from sin on the one hand and imperfection on the other, then lack of interest in things heavenly is an affront against the whole of creation, against man also, and against God.

### III

## Condition or Place

Scripture gives us concrete and graphic representations of heaven and there is never any suggestion that heaven is other than a place. We find such portrayal of heaven throughout the Bible, not only in the apocalyptic and prophetic portion, where we might ascribe them to figurative language. And while such representations are necessarily drawn from the world of time and space, the Bible nevertheless tells the *truth* by means of them.

Many contend that the Bible *cannot* speak of heaven otherwise than in terms of imagery derived from time and space, and that therefore the Scriptural portrayal of heaven as of a place does not at all prove it to *be* a place. But we regard such limitation of the possibilities of revelation contrary to the assurance of Scripture, and a denial of the transcendent glory of God, who *can* reveal heavenly things to man in the language of earth.

#### ***Heaven as a “condition:”***

There are those to whom heaven is nothing more than a condition, a state of peace and happiness. All other implications of the word they scorn as superstition and mythology. At best they will venture a few steps upon the path of eschatology. A man may keep his soul pure, they say, may saturate his soul at the fount of beauty and purity, and may know the [29] deep reli-

gious desire for God or for “the divine”; such a gifted soul is in tune with the harmony of the universe and will be rewarded. Such a soul will continue to exist, even after death, and in some way or other will consciously enjoy its own inner beauty. Aware of having been transported into the universal harmony of all that tends toward God, he will be blessed with a feeling of peace. This feeling, then, is heaven—a state of consummated riches and beauty.

It is, with many variations, much the same idea as that expressed by George Eliot in her well-known poem!

*O may I join the choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In minds made better by their presence;  
live In pulses stirred to generosity,  
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn  
For miserable aims that end with self, In thoughts  
sublime that pierce the night like stars, And  
with their mild persistence urge man’s search  
To vaster issues.*

*So to live is heaven:*

*To make undying music in the world . . .*

*. . . . .*

*Rebellious flesh that would not be sub-  
dued, A vicious parent shaming still its child,  
Poor anxious penitence, is quick dissolved; Its  
discords, quenched by meeting harmonies, Die  
in the large and charitable air.*

*. . . . .*



*That better self shall live till human  
Time Shall fold its eyelids, and the human  
sky [30]*

*Be gathered like a scroll within the tomb,  
Unread forever.*

*This is life to come,*

*Which martyred men have made more  
glorious For us who strive to follow. May 1  
reach*

*That purest heaven ....*

***The Biblical concept: heaven as a place.***

Over against such colorless ideas, the Bible posits something quite different.

This is immediately evident from the fact that the Bible never pictures an individualistic heaven. Nowhere do we read of an individual soul losing itself in a certain “state.” But we read of a social group, people complete with body and soul, living before the face of God.

It must be granted that the Revelation of John, being apocalyptic, confronts the exegete with great difficulties. Nevertheless, not only the book of Revelation but the whole of Scripture speaks of a city, a “new city,” of fellowship, of a conjunction of all things created, of a kingdom. Imagery describing the future is borrowed from the concrete reality in which the poet or prophet lived. Though the New Jerusalem has no temple, as a city it is patterned after the Jerusalem here below, and it is a place even as the earthly Jerusalem is a place.

Someone may yet object that we refer again and again to visionary, prophetic and poetic portions of Scripture, and that we ought to take the characteristic symbolic language into account. But we are not limited to such apocryphal passages. Indeed, in the study of the Scripture we ought never cling to one or another statement but always see the great lines of thought that

run through the whole of revelation. [31]

For instance, we read that the angels came “from above” on Christmas night, but we cannot accept that as proof that heaven is a place. To us short-sighted creatures anything that appears from realms invisible seems to come from above. Neither may we draw proof from Christ’s assurance to the disciples, in John 14, “I go to prepare a place for you,” or from the expression in Acts 1, where we are told that Judas went “to his own place.” Such expressions, torn out of their context, have no power of proof. But they do bear weight in the interpretation of the entire Scriptural trend upon the subject. In all of the Bible we find terms which imply a “location” of heaven. The “upper” is contrasted with the “lower”—place over against place. In Ephesians 4 the ascension of Christ is spoken of as a going from one place to another, He having first come from the latter place to the former. The “spiritual world” is portrayed in technical terms which can be translated (according to the Greek root-word) as “the things which are in heaven” (Eph. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:40, 48,49; Phil. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:18). These suggest a sphere exalted above the earth, subject to ordinances other than those of the earth.

There is yet another motif. Once and again the Bible portrays the earth as a battle ground of good and evil spirits. And behind the front line of battle the drama of Scripture pictures a “headquarters” of the powers of evil and another “headquarters” of the good spirits. But this too, does not in itself prove that hell and heaven are “places.”

***The physical, and space.***

Rather than concentrate upon such isolated expressions, which may even lead

in opposite directions, let us note the historical relationship of Christ, Adam, and the last day. [32] In the center of history Christ ascended from earth to heaven, *bodily*. The glorified *body* of Christ was received into heaven, and appeared at the right hand of the Father, who is upon His throne surrounded by the angels who “behold” His face. In all this, the “physical” gives the exegete something concrete to hold to in the interpretation of figurative language.

As for Adam, we have already remarked that had he remained standing he would have been translated to a state of glory at a certain moment of time. Again we cannot escape implication of transition from one state to another with the *preservation of the physical* and therefore also of *space*. In this sense also the dwelling place of God would then have come to men.

And turning to the end of history, we again read of a moment of time, a “catastrophe,” which will bring man into a different state, again with the preservation of the physical. Man will inhabit the new earth—and also heaven—physically. Heaven also, because heaven will then unite itself with earth.

It is also significant that once and again heaven is called “the throne of God.” True, “God does not live in a temple made with hands.” But that statement was never intended to suggest that His dwelling place is not local, visible, and tangible. “Made with hands” often implies “with our hands.” Concerning the resurrection body we also read, in the figurative language of 1 Corinthians 5, that it is “a house not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens.” And that is intended to check any thought of its being fragile like human handiwork. In that sense, too, God’s dwelling place is

“not made with hands.”

Surely, the throne of a king should be in the midst of His kingdom. The throne is the place in the midst of the kingdom [33] where the glory of that kingdom centers. All creation is God’s kingdom, and even as creation is a reality and not a mere figment of our imagination, so heaven as the throne of God is also a reality, subject to the laws of space.

#### *Paul’s “third heaven:”*

Beyond such a general statement we cannot go. We do not know where heaven is. We cannot count the heavens, we cannot measure heaven, nor can we point to it. Of all this we know nothing.

The Jews, and also the early Christians, had a very detailed and carefully worked-out doctrine of heaven. But we discard it as largely a product of apocryphal and heathen influences, and later of gnostic speculations.

The Bible gives us little information. And theologians disagree. They contradict each other upon such questions as these: Is the paradise of which Jesus spoke to the murderer on the cross, and of which Paul speaks, the place of highest bliss? Is paradise *above* the “third heaven” of which Paul speaks, or within it? Such controversies only increase our distaste for theorizing. For that reason we also refrain from an exegesis of Solomon’s “heaven of heavens.”

As to Paul’s “third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2), there is also a difference of opinion. Some, convinced that Bible writers were subject to their environment and incorporated contemporary heresies into their writings, naturally think Paul was a victim of the speculations of his day when he spoke of the third heaven. Others, believing that inspired writers were not

subject to such false conceptions, conclude that he merely used terminology common in his day, without intending it as scientific statement; or they may interpret his words according to the well-known division of heaven into [35] cloudy firmament, as first heaven, stars as second, and the dwelling place of angels as third.

It is not at all impossible to conceive of Paul using terminology familiar to his Jewish contemporaries without in the least shouldering responsibility of how others might interpret it. We might even find defense for that explanation. But further investigation brings the following facts into view—facts which were clarified for me in a conversation with my colleague, Dr. S. Greydanus.

a. Paul's letter to the Corinthians was written to converts from heathendom, not to Jewish Christians.

b. Paul writes about the "third heaven" casually, without in the least attempting to clarify his meaning. He identifies the third heaven with paradise, and apparently supposes the terminology to be familiar to his readers, or at least not requiring an explanation.

c. Therefore we cannot conclude that Paul accepted Jewish ideas. For the Jews did not agree among each other. Some counted two, others three, five, seven or even ten heavens. If Paul's epistle had been directed to the Jews, he could not expect his readers to know what he meant without explanation. And since his readers were converts from heathendom, we surely cannot read Jewish speculations into the phrase.

d. The heathen, too, differed in their ideas regarding the number of heavens. The phrase "third heaven" would require clarification for them, too.

e. The conclusion is obvious: we must

accept Paul's term "third heaven" as a common figure of speech which the ordinary reader would interpret to mean the revelation of highest glory, above clouds and stars. The Christians to whom [36] Paul wrote knew of Jesus' ascension, knew that He had gone beyond the clouds to the very right hand of God upon the throne. They also knew that Jesus had told the murderer on the cross he would be with Him in paradise. Their conception was not geographic, but an unspeculative impression of the dwelling place of God as beyond our apprehension and beyond our reach. The eye of faith looks toward the unknown glory of the heaven of heavens, even as Solomon lifted up his heart in prayer to "the heaven of heavens."

#### *Speculations as to place.*

The common differentiation of heaven of clouds, starry heavens, and heaven of heavens is a result of naive observation, along with the development of language. Similarly, efforts to locate heaven upon a special star are based upon the naive world-concept of former ages. The idea of brightness tends to mislead poets, and many thinkers who wish to know more than they can know. In the Bible, light and brilliance are frequently associated with spiritual values, and it is but natural that heaven should have been associated with such regions of light. Some have sought to locate heaven in a central solar system; others were ingenious enough to name a certain star as the actual heaven, Alcyone in the Pleiades, for instance.

Such concepts are distressing. Poets may be misled to such errors; certainly thinkers ought not to be. The weakness of such an idea is immediately evident if we recall that the sun, from which we derive

our heat, could also be called the furnace of our solar system. And who would call the furnace the glory-place of his home?

*Tendency to separate space and time.*

In thus attempting to project heaven upon certain spheres and subject it to certain limits, we fall short of that which [36] is for us primary—we forget that heaven has a history. The tendency to separate the “space” question from the “time” question in regard to heaven is erroneous.

The Bible tells us that at a certain future time the dwelling of God “shall be with men,” that the New Jerusalem shall then descend from heaven to earth. And therein we have a change of *time* associated with a change of *place*. Yes, it is true that the apocalypse speaks in visions, and requires extreme reserve on the part of the exegete. Nevertheless we find here a change of time and a change of place, and these occurring together.

God dwells with His creation—from the beginning as well as at the end. Heaven, too; is His creation. It is possible for His creation to develop in an ascending line, or to retrograde. The former would have happened, as far as man is concerned, had the covenant of works not been broken. Through the fall of man there came retrogression instead. And the angels, who were originally servants of man, acquired a position above man, who was God’s son. More of that later. We have in mind at present this thought—the present world must always be viewed in the light of the beginning. There is no ground for declaring that this present order is fixed and absolute, that the present relationship between the dwelling place of men and that of angels is established and eternal.

Having chosen a dwelling place in the

midst of His creation, God now, in this present era, reveals His glory among the angels. When, however, the power of sin shall have been broken all down the line, and man is restored to his place above the angels as redeemed and glorified son, there shall be a change—God shall dwell *with men*. [37]

Thus a wide perspective opens before us. We must not attempt to classify the heavens or to locate heaven in the cosmos from our standpoint. We must begin with the idea that God chooses to dwell with His creation, that the entire creation is subject to the laws of motion, and that therefore also His created dwelling place where His glory shines forth pre-eminently, is included under this law of motion. God’s dwelling place may be “fixed” during a certain phase of history, but this fixedness is not lasting, is not eternal.

We should beware of fantasy. We know of no place in the cosmos where heaven is constant; we cannot even be certain that there is such a constant or fixed place *within history*. There may be; the Bible gives us that impression. And the coming of the dwelling place of God to man is perhaps a “transplanting” or at least a “spreading out” of that dwelling place. We dare not say conclusively. Exegesis and dogmatics halt before insurmountable barriers.

But we have gained from our considerations a reaffirmation of that which was said in preceding chapters, that heaven is linked with our *history*. If anyone objects that the Bible speaks of an immovable kingdom and an unmoved throne, and therefore an unmovable heaven, we protest that this does not at all justify the concept of a fixed heaven. For “unmoved,” as we have already noted, means much the same as “not made with hands.” *We* cannot move the throne of

## Heaven – What Is It?

God or broaden the foundations of God's city. But more than that is not implied in such expressions.

## IV

### The History of Heaven

There are many who think of heaven only as the dwelling place of God and of the angels and of the saints who die in Christ, or as the perfect state of things after judgment day. Heaven is “another world” to them, and in this “other world” concept they take refuge from all their miseries, all their resentments against *this* world, all their disappointments.

This may be well enough to a degree. But we have two objections. In the first place, it is too negative an idea. It places an antithesis between earth and heaven, where there is no antithesis. In the second place, it suggests that heaven has nothing to do with the history of earth; to use the popular phrase, that heaven just “falls from heaven.” But this is abrupt. For the things of the end-time acquire their rich meaning only as we relate them to the things of the beginning. Eschatology cannot be divorced from protology. History is the *frame* within which God works, and it also is His work. Only when we recognize this does history get its due. Eschatology harks back to all of history, back to protology—the doctrine of beginnings—also the beginning of heaven.

#### *Heaven separate from earth.*

If one would know the beginning of heaven, he turns to Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.” In this instance, the word “heaven” does

not indicate [39] a specific portion of the whole creation. For the phrase “heaven and earth” simply means the totality of things created, as man sees them from his standpoint upon earth—that is, the plane upon which the writer stands, and all that is above and beyond the earth, all other planets, the suns, and the stars and moons which he cannot reach and which he sums up in one word “heavens.”

But the book of Genesis also introduces the concept of heaven in a narrower sense, as the distinctive dwelling place of God, spatially “in diastase” from the dwelling place of man, that is, at some distance from the dwelling place of man. For God “appears” in Paradise; He comes from on high; He looks down upon men; along paths which man cannot discover, He comes from a sort of upper realm. In that upper realm God takes counsel with himself, “Let us make man.” “See, man is become as one of us.” The further we read into the Bible, the more clearly we see that diastase pattern worked out. Heaven is the place where the High Counsel presides over the cosmos, and where the effective powers, which work in the world, are sent out. In this high realm God takes counsel with the angels; He calls the spirits unto Him to discuss the fall of King Ahab, the troubles of job, and the manner in which rapport is to be maintained between “above” and

“below.”

Let us turn also to Revelation XXI, where we read that “the dwelling place of God shall be with men.” Here something new is introduced, the separation is dissolved, the diastase is overcome. The dwelling place of God is no longer separated from that of men.

This state of peace is to be attained by the descent of the New Jerusalem from God out of heaven. The New Jerusalem is the instituted church, the organized new humanity. [40] And it descends from God out of heaven; it does not blossom forth out of the earth now destroyed by fire; it comes from God. By His intervention the diastase is removed.

#### *The diastase and sin.*

The question naturally arises: this diastase, this separation between the dwelling place of God and that of man, did it result from sin? Or was it already present in creation itself? Did God withdraw himself after the fall, or had He already taken that position apart before the fall?

We might well attribute this separation from God to the entrance of sin into the world had not the first three chapters of Genesis implied such a separation already before the fall. The evidence of the diastase in Paradise throws a quite different light on the subject. Perhaps the *continued* separation is a result of sin. And quite certainly sin has caused the separation to become an instrument of wrath, making it antithetical. But the diastase concept as such does not necessarily include sin and its result. It is apparent that from the very beginning God places this *diastase* between the dwelling place of man and His own, between the dwelling place of man and that realm where He reveals His glory most excellently and

whence He descends to the world and man.

#### *The diastase concept.*

The relationship between Creator and created is, of course, determined by the Creator. That is His prerogative. Now God has ordained that He and His creation shall be (a) always differentiated yet (b) never divorced. (*Altijd onderscheiden, nooit gescheiden.*) [41]

Note that these are fundamentally two aspects of one concept, each untenable without the other. Indeed, if God were wholly divorced from His creatures, man would not even be able to speak of a differentiation between himself and God. To speak of the differentiation between God and man, and to work it out in some detail, is possible only because God and man are *not divorced*.

God has placed “above” and “below” over against each other, and therein forever differentiated man from God. Yet “above” and “below” lie in one field of vision; they are in one realm; heaven and earth have been brought forth by one act of creation.

God, having called things into being by the first fiat of creation (frequently indicated by the Hebrew word *bara*), then proceeded to unfold and set in order (Hebrew *asah*). He separated mountains and valleys, He differentiated between sun, moon and stars. This, too, is part of the creative act. That which He created in the first day He set in order by means of distinctions, separations, distances, in the following days. Finally He made man, with ability to think, to ponder, to observe also these differentiations.

Man knows that there is differentiation in time; he knows that he himself was the last to be created. And he knows God to be the eternal one, before and above time.

The diastase is there, even though God, before and above time, enters into time. And God suggests a further diastase when He speaks of death—a possibility of diastase-in-antithesis.

Man is also aware of differentiation in *space*. God has limited the animals to certain spheres—one lives below the ground, another upon the ground, another in water, each in its own element. But to man He gave the whole earth. “Multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.” Man is not hampered [42] by boundaries such as limit the animals. He has already conquered the depths of the sea and the heights of the air, and who knows what uninhabitable places he may yet make habitable? But the dwelling place of God is apart, is not “high” but “in the highest.”

Thus creation plainly teaches a setting apart, dia-stase. But, though God’s dwelling place is distinct from that of man, both live within the one “house” of creation; we may say it thus: there is disjunction within conjunction. God appointed man a dwelling place, but no sooner has He placed man there than He says to him, “Seek my face; know that in my will to love I bend down toward my creatures. From out of your dwelling place, your place of labor, seek ye me, in my dwelling place, from which my power goes forth.”

Thus heaven proclaims on the one hand that God and His creation are *forever distinct*. But on the other hand that God and man are *never divorced*.

There is a place where God lives, apart, in a glory not yet revealed to man. That is the center from which He reveals Himself, from which He governs and upholds. Man recognizes this fact from the appearance of angels, who are intermediaries between earth and heaven. Scripture

speaks of them as “ministering spirits.” They are sent out by God and they return to Him. Many of the events of world history are associated in Scripture with their activities. Heaven is the “transmitting station” from which the effective powers of God are dispatched to the dwelling place of man. Heaven preaches the diastase.

### *The diastase and history.*

When heaven preaches the diastase, what is involved? A twofold meaning: evolution and *jolt*. These two - the gradual evolution, and the “jolt” which will in a moment end the [43] historical process of evolution—these appear to be the two constituent factors in the history of heaven.

The implications of the word “evolution” need not be dealt with in detail. When God established the *diastase*, He spoke from out of His dwelling place to man, saying that the dwelling place of man must evolve and that man himself should be active in this evolvment. “Multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.” By the hand of man as coworker with God, the earth, and humanity with it, would develop. Wider and broader perspectives would open before him, life would become fuller and richer as he discovered more and more of the wealth of creation; his own position before God and in the world would become ever more firm and strong. For, as we have noted before, under the Covenant of Works man would have risen from a state of possibility of sin and death to a state where sin and death would no longer be possible.

The “jolt,” above mentioned, the “moment of shock,” needs little explanation either. All of man’s capacity for development and all of his labor with God in the evolving of creation could not bring



about the state of proposed perfection. Sinless man in Paradise gladly acknowledged the fact of evolution which God incorporated in creation; but he was prevented from becoming proudly *evolutionistic*, as if he were autarch of creation and it should unfold under his hand to a state of completion without the intervening power of God. As previously noted, from the very first there was the prospect of an acute change “in a moment of time.” This prospect warded off any dream of consummation without an acute intervention. Without such an acute “jolt” the world-of-the-beginning could never become the consummated world-of-completion. [44]

The dwelling place of God, then, as well as the dwelling place of man, was to reach its consummation by way of these two processes—by development within the continuum of existing things and by the sudden change which, in a moment of time, would bring this development to an end. The latter is the “moment of shock,” the “jolt,” of which we speak.

***Living soul versus life-giving spirit.***

Evidence that this two-fold process was designed from the very beginning is found in retrospect in 1 Corinthians 15: 45. “The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”

A two-fold contrast is found here. The first Adam is *soul*; the second *spirit*. The first Adam *receives* life; the second *gives* life.

The first Adam is “soul”; he is subject to the changes and fluctuations of time. He has not the innate power to direct his own life; then were he “spirit.” For “spirit” here implies being master of self, unhampered, independent of time and change. The second Adam is “spirit.” He stands above time

and change, having attained to this state by perfectly fulfilling the covenant of works. The first Adam is “soul”; his whole existence, his perceiving, his looking to God, his hoping, his adjustment of self to this world—all is subject to the fluctuations of time. He bears his treasures in earthen vessels. The second Adam is “spirit.” He is no longer bound by temporal laws, but lays down the law to things temporal. He bears his treasures in heavenly vessels.

The second contrast runs parallel to the first. The first Adam *received* life when, as Scripture so graphically puts it, God breathed life into his nostrils. The second Adam *gives life*. He has the power to give life to all who are His. He [45] *makes alive*. Man does not, in the final analysis, look to the powers within himself, with all their evolutionistic development. What is *in man* can never bring him to the state of “spirit.” *Christ* gives him life; in and through Him, and *with* Him, man’s humanity is consummated. In Him man becomes *free*; men become rulers.

***“Jehovah maketh a new thing.”***

Thus it is not only under the Covenant of Grace that “Jehovah maketh a new thing.” This *chedasje* was in prospect under the Covenant of Works, also. The diastase therefore takes on new meaning. It becomes an impetus driving us toward that unattainable goal, toward that “wonder world.” Indeed, the world of the future becomes more and more a wonder world. From the dwelling place of God powers will dart forth, in that “moment of time,” to transform the vacillation of earth to firmness. The changes will be such that a completely different order of existence will be necessary. A world in which we are physical, yet without growth and sexuality, is

indeed a wonder world—a world into which we cannot climb by way of the ladder of evolution.

From every mountain top the call came to man in Paradise: “Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” It is the call of God, a call to which man may not be disobedient. Love—the fulfillment of the law also in this respect—draws man toward the dwelling place of God, and toward that moment of time which shall bring about the end of time. And love makes him zealous as co-worker with God in the world-evolution, induces him to sow his seed eagerly, in order that the final harvest may come and the last of the fruits may be gathered in. [46]

But man cannot cross the borderline. For it is God who “maketh the new thing.” No man cometh unto the Father except he be *drawn*. (The Greek word may be translated “dragged.”) Even before the fall it was the work of God. For sinful man the word has added meaning—sinful man must be laid hold of by a power not his own, and must be drawn across the border even against his will, for his will is sinful. Unfallen man would have been drawn by a power not contrary to his will though above his power.

**“After the flesh and after the spirit.”**

We may find further illustration of the relation between evolution and the coming “jolt” in Paul’s discussion about Isaac and Ishmael (Galatians 4:28, 29). He speaks of Isaac as born “after the spirit,” and of Ishmael as born “after the flesh.” That is to say, Ishmael’s birth was a product of natural processes, and did not reveal Abraham as father of believers. In fact, Abraham made his plans in spite of God’s promises. But Isaac, the son of promise, was miracu-

lously born, was born of a power not inherent in Abraham and Sarah, by *intervention* of God.

Paul continues, finding a two-fold line of prophecy in the births of these two. Ishmael is in the line of the “flesh,” which builds the future upon innate evolutionistic powers. Isaac is symbol of the line of the “spirit,” born not by natural law but of faith, which does not exclude evolution but nevertheless relies upon consummation by intervention. Faith recognizes both evolution and the miracle as servants of God, both designed by His creative word and will. Faith therefore continues to look to God, amid the continuity of world development, for His transcendent intervention. [47]

This contrast of “after the flesh” and “after the spirit” is also applicable to man in Paradise. Paul himself prepares us for this when he makes Ishmael and Isaac types of the Old and the New Testament. Yet these were never antithetical: one *unfolded* from the other.

This brings us again to the *unfolding* which would have occurred in the original state of righteousness. If man in Paradise, under the Covenant of Works, sought to reach heaven, the dwelling place of God, and to step across the borderline between time and eternity, merely by way of evolution, disregarding the Word by which nature was created and its development ordained, he walked “after the flesh.” *That* becomes his sin—separation of the things created from the Word which has dominion over all things. But if man, while fully acknowledging and utilizing nature as it evolved, nevertheless submitted himself to the Word, he would have come to know that the Word bounds and limits evolution; that his hopes should rest upon the coming

“jolt” in a moment of time. Then he would be walking “after the spirit.”

Thus the fall has its place in history, as a question of eschatology and of protology, even for man in Paradise. The fall is insubordinated to the command which required Adam to live and work and beget “after the spirit.” In the fall and by way of the fall Adam lapsed into living, working and begetting “after the flesh.”

Heaven is ever an “adhortation,” a drawing power, beckoning us across the diastase to the wonder land. From out of heaven God draws man; and man strains heavenward, toward the dwelling place of God. From out of heaven God sends his angels to man; and from earth man reaches upward for heaven with all his soul. Man in Paradise, a “living soul,” [48] anticipated the time when God, the life giver, would make him “spirit.” And not only man, but all the world will be so overshadowed by God himself that there will be fruit—thirty, sixty and a hundredfold, to gather into His barns.

### *The riddle of the angels.*

In the foregoing paragraphs we were concerned with the thought of heaven within creation yet apart from man. And further with God’s will that creation should develop according to the powers He laid therein, yet should not reach its consummation without an acute intervention by God, a “jolt.”

Now the question arises, how did God reveal this to man? We have already implied that there was such a revelation. God indicated to man in Paradise, by way of the commandment and its promise, that there was a world to come. Adam was no ignominus. He was prophet, priest, and king, ambassador of God. He could name the ani-

mals in accordance with their natures. He had a deep insight into the relationships between himself and the things about him. Surely the covenant relationship with God suggested to him a future age. But God used other methods of revelation, methods of deed as well as of word.

Revealing Himself by way of that which He had made, God sent the angels to Adam. And in sending the angels, note that He placed before man a riddle; moreover, in this riddle and its solution, he accentuated the “jolt” idea, the change, of which we have spoken above.

Let us consider these thoughts more closely.

### *What is the riddle?*

We are not told in so many words that Adam met angels, but we may conclude this by comparing Scripture with Scripture. [49] For instance, we are told in one place that God gave the law to *Moses*, and elsewhere that that same law was given through the ministration of angels, which proves that the angels were a channel of revelation. And it is but natural to assume that the Lord when He appeared on Sinai was surrounded by his holy angels, and that they served Him in delivering the law to Moses. Revelation is hardly to be thought of apart from angels. Read, for instance, Galatians 3:19, Acts 7:5, Hebrews 2:2, and Deuteronomy 33:2. Surely when Adam met God, heaven must have been opened for him; he must have become aware of spirits living with him in God’s kingdom, though inhabiting another sphere of creation.

And in causing Adam to meet the angels, God placed a riddle before Adam, namely this: that the *greater* in God’s creation lives apart from God, while the *lesser* lives in His very presence—the greater

being man, and the lesser the angels.

***Relationship between men and angels.***

That man is the greater hardly needs demonstration. Man numbered only two in the beginning, and the angels were legion, but numbers do not constitute greatness; moreover, God saw all of mankind represented in the first pair. Furthermore, man has a richer sphere of life than the angels, and a broader function. The angels are called “ministering spirits,” sent out to do service for men who shall inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:7-14). Hebrews also confirms the superiority of man in the following chapter, which seems at first glance to teach the opposite, when it declares that God made man “a little lower than the angels.” This statement does not refer to man in his original state, for the context of the Psalm from [50] which Hebrews is quoted (Psalm 8) speaks of enemy and avenger; man is already in his fallen state. Yet he is pictured as an almost godly being. And if such is said of fallen man, what must not his high estate have been before the fall? The phrase “made a little lower than the angels” clearly means that man has been humbled; it suggests that he has been demoted from a higher state. Moreover, the Greek expression translated “a little” may also mean “a little while”—may, in fact, mean both at once. It is quite likely that “for a little while” is the first meaning intended, for the writer is contrasting what man is with what he will be, with the glory which will be his when all things are subjected to him—all things, including also the angels. For while this is said first of all of Christ, it is by God’s grace also true of man.

***The angelic state beckoning.***

It is true that in the fallen world the

angels have powers which man cannot claim. The faithful servant is “better off” than the unfaithful son. But when the son returns, the father restores to him the former things. Even as the lost son, when he returned, was set at the father’s right hand and served by the father’s servants, so shall the original relationship between men and angels be restored.

This relationship is evident in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation. There four-and-twenty elders sit upon thrones, while four “living creatures” stand about the Throne. The elders represent the church, the lost son who has been found. The four “living creatures” represent the cherubim, the faithful servants. And we note that the elders are seated; but the “living creatures” stand, ready to serve.

As we ponder the situation, we too begin to wonder why, if man is greater than the angels, the latter from the very first [51] should have been admitted to the dwelling place of God while the former was held at a distance. If the question puzzles us, how much more it must have disturbed Adam, who was perfect in understanding and insight. For he saw the angels, his servants, admitted to the presence of God; he saw them as unchanging beings who had reached their state of perfection. They are not born; they do not die; they do not eat and drink; they do not marry; they do not multiply. They are already free from the law of change; they are complete. And therein they picture for Adam a state for which he longs. He too will one day come to the perfection of no marriage, no eating, no increase in numbers and no further growth. It is that toward which he strains, even as Jesus also said: they shall be like the angels of God.

For the angels do not excel in rank.

They only precede Adam in time. They have reached their highest state. And Adam, though in his perfect state he could not envy, must have felt a strong desire to be like them—a desire the stronger because of his perfect insight and keen imagination and pure love. “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that shall I seek after, that I, the son, may forever live in the house of the Lord, even as the servants already do.”

Even before the fall there was mediation. The angels mediated between heaven and earth, passing from God to man and from man to God as on a Jacob’s ladder. Later, after the entrance of sin, the elements of reconciliation and substitution entered in. But in the beginning, in Paradise, God drew men to himself and to the heaven of consummated glory by means of the mediation of the angels. And in the riddle of the servants preceding the son He revealed to man that his cosmic state is *preliminary*, that history is eschatological. [52]

### ***The vision of Revelation.***

Turning once again to Revelation 4 and 5 we note three features of the vision: it is evident that the son excels; that the servant precedes; and that his relationship is not antithetical but in the nature of a tension that serves as a bond.

About the throne of God are the four-and-twenty thrones, upon which the elders, the renewed humanity, *are seated*. The cherubim meanwhile, the living creatures, *stand*. That illustrates the superiority of man; he who sits upon his own throne is greater than he who stands between two thrones.

The angels stand upon the steps of God’s throne, however. The throne is elevated, and an angel is upon each of the four stairs which descend on the four sides. But

though they stand and man sits, they are closer to God than man is. They are between man and God. So we see that the servant has precedence over the son. For the revelation to John was written from the standpoint of the not-yet-glorified earth.

But, though the angels are thus closer to God than the sons, there is no antithesis in their positions. Instead, the angels, represented in the form of earthly creatures—lion, calf, eagle and man—bind earth and heaven by possessing attributes of both. They represent all of creation, also man, and so serve as a link between God and His creatures.

And why should the precedence of the angels be painful to man? There, upon the great white throne at the right hand of God the Father sits the Son of God, who is also Son of man. He who has taken upon himself flesh and blood is their mediator with God, in all the rich meaning of that word, and therefore the living evidence that these sons will also one day reach the state of glory, of perfection, when as sons they will excel over the angels. [53]

To sum it all up: out of the dwelling place of God come the angels, the bearers of fixed glory. They reveal this glory to man and thus make him desirous to reach that “moment of time” when he too will attain to that state. And by making him more and more eager, they are ever thrusting him forward in the continuity of his and their history.

### ***Sin and Grace.***

The evolution of life upon the earth, and with it the rapport between heaven and earth was disturbed by sin. Everything was involved in this disturbance—including man’s thinking and knowing. And death, in its fullest sense, entered as punishment

for sin. That moment of time which should have broken the line of continuity by translation to heaven would now usher in instead the fixed forsakenness of hell.

But the grace of God intervenes. The Redeemer is announced immediately after the entrance of sin. He will become man; He will carry the burden of the world upon his heart and upon his shoulders. In Him heaven triumphs over hell upon earth, for grace restores the diastase to its first content, namely of conjunction rather than disjunction. Sin introduced antithesis and disjunction. But God by grace removes it. He seeks the world, rescues it, and will yet bring earth's history to a happy consummation in that "moment of time."

Thus the Christ enters into history— Lord of angels, Son of man, Son of God and son of Adam, spirit of spirits, God of God, light of light; but also as son of Adam subject to change, and dependent. Yet in Him, too, God and man are forever distinct, though never divorced. In the incarnation of the Word, heaven takes command of earth; He established [54] His throne here. And in sovereign right He prepares Himself a cross, a grave, and an ascension.

The Lord of the angels takes a position below them. He needs their help and they strengthen Him in Gethsemane. They minister to Him as they once did to Adam, ascending and descending between Him and God, keeping His foot lest He dash it against a stone. He who ought, even as Son of man, to excel above the angels becomes the accursed One. He takes upon Himself the curse which drags Him lower than man and lower than the angels. And when He dies, He suffers actual agony which will be the lot of those who will in that "moment of time" die the eternal death. For Him the diastase becomes antithesis: "My God, my

God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

### *Consummation of the history of heaven.*

But the Son of man arises. And in that moment He who as Son of man was a "living soul" becomes a "life-giving spirit." He arises from the grave with His spiritual body, clad in the glory which heaven had always desired for man, the glory of perfected humanity, which should follow upon satisfaction of the law of obedience.

And the Son does not immediately depart this earth. For forty days He remains here, in fellowship with earth, taking possession of earth. In Him heaven takes possession of earth, blessing it. And therein lies a parallel. For even as the Son of man has suffered the eternal curse of hell as it will be after that coming "moment of time," when He was forsaken of God, so also He brings into the continuity of time the glory of heaven; and He keeps it there for forty days.

It is a remarkable parallel. By suffering the eternal curse in time, in history, He revealed the diastase in antithesis, [55] in disjunction. But by remaining upon earth for forty days after His resurrection He revealed the diastase again in conjunction in time, in history. He appeared to His disciples in His spiritual body, which bore the wounds but had no pain; *the spirit dominates the flesh*. He comes miraculously, and goes in the same way, yet they sit at table, and at the fire by the lake; *the spirit dominates the flesh*. How He is all glorious, within and without!

His appearance with His spiritual body does not bring to an end the tension of which we have spoken. But it does bring about a change. The tension has been, until this time, a tension between men and the angels. Now it is a result of a living rela-

tionship between the church and Christ. It was a relationship between servant and son; now it is a relationship between body and Head.

Thus all things become new. Not fully, but in principle. Not fully; for the believer, though superior to the angels, still sees that the angels have precedence.

But in principle; for *Christ* becomes mediator between God and man. In principle the precedence of the angels has already ended, in the midst of history. The Son of man has entered into the eternal glory of heaven. The angels see Him now leading His church onward and upward toward that moment when all will suddenly be changed, when the highest angel will be servant of the least among men.

The ascension of Christ is therefore of special meaning in the history of heaven. It reveals anew that the history of heaven is closely bound up with that of the earth. The diastase and the conjunction are clearly revealed. For Christ withdrew from the dwelling place of His people. The Greek puts it thus: He made *diastase* between Himself and them. But there is conjunction also; Christ carried His physical body [56] to heaven, a pledge of the coming union between heaven and earth. And He sent His Spirit as a counterpledge—the Spirit who utters that longing of men with unutterable groaning, crying out, “How long, O Lord?” And heaven, too, awaits that consummation; the Son intercedes for the church, straining toward that end, that great moment of time. And the blessed cry out also, “How long, how long, O Lord?” How long before we shall reach that “moment of time” when earth and heaven shall be drawn together, as they ought to be?

Thus earth longs for heaven, and

heaven longs for earth. There is already a “deposit” of human nature in heaven; Christ is there. And the dwelling place of man has received the New Testament indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There is diastase—yet conjunction. And the believers, who are crucified with Him, dead and buried with Him, are also risen with Him and “set in heaven” with Him.

And God presses on toward the end of history. The Spirit draws all the “members” toward their “Head.” When the last member of the body of Christ is born—and—reborn—then God will bring the process of evolution to its end. He will tear aside the clouds and open heaven. He will bring catastrophe. Fire will sweep over the earth and join forces with the fire that has long lain hidden within the earth. The pattern of life will change—only God knows how. And all that is from God will return unto Him. Having run its course, all will rest the eternal Sabbath rest in Him. Earth having strained as far as possible toward the dwelling place of God, the great wonder comes upon her—the dwelling place of God comes to man. [57]

## V

### God's Dwelling Place With Men

When we ask what constitutes the blessedness of eternal Sabbath rest, the answer too frequently emphasizes only the negative aspect. Heaven is a place where there will be no sorrow, no sin, no mourning, no death; no sea and no destruction.

This view is provincial "axiology" at its narrowest, and very egocentric. It is concerned with that which is most important to us—the painful results of sin. In heaven these painful results will have ceased. But if such is the essence of our concept of heaven, we are forgetting God in His own dwelling place.

Not the drying of tears, or the annihilation of death, or the binding of Satan, or the downfall of the antichrist can be our point of departure. Nor the golden gates or the white crowns or the palm branches, for these too concern man. And we purpose in this chapter, as in the foregoing, to consider the relationship between God and man, between eternity and time, between the dwelling place of God and that of man.

Therefore our point of departure is taken from the words of Revelation 21:3, "*The tabernacle of God is with men.*" We shall consider this positive statement, and also the negative aspect expressed in verse 22, "I saw no temple there." [59]

#### *Tabernacle versus temple.*

In the above quotations from Revela-

tion we have two concepts, "temple" and "tabernacle," and our problem is to determine their meaning.

"Tabernacle" means "tent." The word suggests the tabernacle in the wilderness, which was a prototype of the temple. It is frequently used in that sense in the New Testament, as in Hebrews 8, 9, and 13, and also in Revelation 15:5. But the word may also refer to the common dwelling of the East. This is the meaning in Luke 16:9, Matthew 17:4, and Hebrews 11:19.

As to its meaning in our text, that might be difficult to ascertain if the text did not remind us of Ezekiel 37:27,28. There the prophet pictures the joyous future of God's people with a double promise: "My *sanctuary* shall be in the midst of them," and "My *tabernacle* shall be over them."

Here we have a twofold contrast: *sanctuary* is contrasted with *tabernacle*, and *in their midst* with *over them*. In the kingdom of peace God places His sanctuary in the midst of His people and spreads the canopy of His dwelling over their heads. These are not to be interpreted as one and the same. In the former the building is pledge of His dwelling with them, but the latter speaks of the actual presence itself.

#### *The forbidden becomes a covert.*

We note three elements in the prophecy: (a) the temple of God acquires the



attributes of a dwelling for man; (b) nevertheless, in accordance with the will of God, the temple remains primarily the dwelling of God; (c) these two concepts are so interwoven that the temple as such virtually ceases to exist. [60]

The temple of God takes on the appearance of a dwelling for men. It spreads over them. Formerly it was in their midst, with its court and holy place and Holy of Holies. And above each gate was a “No admittance” sign, each successively prohibiting a larger group of people from entering. Now, in the new life, it becomes a covert for them. They are not merely permitted to enter, nor merely invited; but the temple spreads itself over the citizens of that country.

However, though living “under one roof” with man, God remains lawgiver: it is He who reigns. “My house,” He says. “There is indeed fellowship with God, but it is by His decree.

And thirdly, the symbol is paradoxical. For when God’s dwelling thus becomes a covert for man, there is in effect no longer a separate temple. Whereas for the Israelite, natural life was always distinguished from temple life and service, and his dwelling distinct from God’s, now the temple of God is his dwelling place and *all* activity automatically becomes temple service. The contrast between nature and grace fails away. *All* is temple worship. Grace has redeemed and purified nature.

Noting now that Revelation 21 harks back to Ezekiel, the main thought becomes clear. God will spread His wings protectively over His people. He will make His dwelling with man. They are received into fellowship with Him, with all their capacities and functions.

*No more temple.*

This positive thought is negatively reproduced in the words of verse 22, that there will be *no temple* in the New Jerusalem.

Here prophecy has reached its limit. The hierarchical ladder of the priests and Levites, mediators between God and [61] man, is cast down. The temple is no longer a building apart; there is no longer restricted admission. All are *in* the temple.

The initial fulfillment of this prophecy occurred at the death of Christ, when the temple veil was rent from top to bottom and the Holy Place was thrown wide open; the priesthood as a class was discarded; the congregation was pronounced holy, priests of God, each having his task in the kingdom and each permitted direct access to the Father without human mediation.

But when the prophecy is wholly fulfilled, then all will be temple and all will be tent. Then the outgoings of my life will everywhere meet the outgoing of God’s life.

Neither is it strange that the old temple should be done away. For the temple was guarantee of God’s presence; and guarantees are done away when we walk no longer by faith but by sight. The temple was a place of shadows, of prophecy, of symbolism. Then all will be reality, fulfillment, fullness, truth, with no longer a distinction between holy and secular. God’s people will dwell in God’s tent; they will serve Him in His temple; the temple-tent becomes universal, identical with the temple city, where men will fellowship.

The *tent*: God receives humankind into His dwelling place.

The *temple*: God enters in unto His people and they to Him, so that their ways are one.

The *city*: The fellowship of men

becomes an institution established upon eternal peace.

*To see God.*

“Fellowship with God,” of which we have spoken repeatedly in the preceding paragraphs, requires further exposition [63] to make clear to us how God’s dwelling with man will become a concrete reality. To live under one roof is to intensify fellowship. And fellowship is first of all to see and know.

In previous chapters we have shown that heaven, just because it is heaven, is the place of sharp contrast between God and man. Does this interfere with fellowship? Not in the least. For the recognition of distinction and difference does not imply separation. In fact, recognition of difference is essential to true fellowship with God. A child who does not recognize the difference between himself and his father can have only *unnatural* association with his father. When the child remains a child, and the father a father, each filling his God-given place, then there is a natural fellowship *because* the difference is recognized.

For this reason we also deny the *visio Dei per essentiam* idea of the scholastics and the mystics, who believed that even now we can see and know God as to His “essence” by mystic transport, and that we shall one day understand the mysteries of His being and probe the depths of His nature, that is, “see through” Him.

Such a philosophy wipes out the distinction between God and man and ascribes to man that which is possible only for God. Paul declares (I Corinthians 1:10) that the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God. Surely the deep things of God are God Himself. It is not as though there were anything that the Spirit does not

know. Yet Paul avoids the word “know” and, using the present tense of the verb, implies that the Spirit is ever busy searching out. He means to say that the Holy Spirit knows the depths of God but His knowing is never complete, never ends. It is an eternal searching out. One can never make any such statement [63] regarding man, nor regarding the redemptive work of Christ as it took place in time. But concerning God and the Spirit of God we can posit a *perfectum praesens*, a perfect knowing that is continuous. For the Spirit is eternally busy knowing God. The Eternal is eternally busy with Himself. Words fail us. Strictly speaking we cannot conceive of a *visio per essentiam* of God, a “penetration” of God. Surely it is folly to hope that man shall one day see God in His essence.

God reveals Himself. Also in heaven God will ever be revealing Himself. There will be a full measure of glory, so that the revelation will be thirty, sixty, a hundred-fold richer than that which we now have. But it remains revelation. God remains God, though His dwelling be with men, and man remains dependent upon Him.

For the revelation of God, while it is always true, is never exhaustive—even when man’s perception is perfect, and he no longer misinterprets or forgets or wrests out of context. But it is, nevertheless, revelation, and fundamentally inexhaustive; it is adjusted to the *creature*.

In protest to our rejection of the *visio per essentiam* idea, as if that were the greatest gift of heaven, there are those who quote I Corinthians 13:12 where Paul says, “Then shall I know even as also I am known.” God knows us, sees “through” us, knows us in our very essence. In like measure we shall know Him; we shall also be able to penetrate His being.

This is clearly a sophism. The “knowing” of which Paul speaks is not merely a knowing *of God*. I shall know God, but also the things of God. More of this later. Moreover, the text is incorrectly interpreted, for it simply tells us that God sees us clearly, without any obstacle between and without [64] intermediary, and so shall we also see Him. Priests and prophets are no more; the wall of sin, the antithesis, the diastase, these are gone. “For now we see in a mirror, darkly, but then face to face.” The mirrors of olden days were beautifully polished metal, but the reflections were vague, and far from being the clear reflections of today’s mirrors. We shall then see “face to face,” clearly and directly.

Thus I Corinthians 13 beautifully supports the scheme of this book. The mediation is done away. Because the dwelling place of God has come to man, the diastase is lifted. But this union of the dwelling *places* does not at all imply that there will no longer be distinction between the *dwellers* there.

When one day we shall see all creatures “face to face” and God also, we shall see His name proclaimed everywhere. Upon everything we shall read His name, and every man will be a legible epistle of Christ.

### ***Seeing one another.***

As we have noted in the preceding paragraph, when Paul speaks of knowing, he does not mean exclusively *knowing God*. In I Corinthians 13 we have repeated references to “knowing” without any specification as to the contents of the knowledge. The question in Corinth was not *what* do we know but *how*. This fact should be taken into account whenever Paul speaks of “knowledge” in this epistle. In this particu-

lar chapter, he compares “prophesying,” “speaking with tongues” and also “knowledge” with “love.”

Now no one will contend that the love of which I Corinthians 13 speaks is only a love for God: It is evident from the whole chapter that this love reaches out to all things, to God and to all that is in harmony with God. For that matter, no one *can* love only God; the first and second tables [65] of the law are ordained by one divine will, and are rejected or accepted by the human will as a unit. God is not to be thought of apart from His creatures—not in loving, nor in knowing.

Nor in seeing. “Seeing” in heaven will not be only a seeing of God, but a seeing of all that is in His dwelling and under the covert of His tent.

And this brings to mind the question: “Will men know each other there?”

Usually the question is put thus, frequently at funerals: “Shall we recognize each other over there? Earthly ties are broken; shall we see and know our loved ones again?”

### ***Knowing and recognizing.***

The above question is not commendable; it is not pious. For in putting the question thus we are too entirely occupied with self and the few with whom we have had close fellowship here upon earth. We neglect the broad scope of God’s drama of history, and limit ourselves to that very small scene in which we have played a very minor role.

God has never permitted us to consider ourselves apart from the broad scope of history; not a small portion of life but the *whole of history* has bearing upon eternity and upon heaven. Therefore we ought not to enquire concerning that little scene in

which we have played a part, but concerning the whole, concerning God's great world drama. And the question is: Shall we see that?

Now it is quite possible that we shall then not *recognize* each other, yet shall *know* each other. And when we consider the broad scope of history, it seems quite naive to limit the question of knowing to recognition of what we have seen on earth. But *knowing* the new humanity is something quite different. [66]

We ought not expect those few whom we knew upon earth to be in the foreground, as if they were the most important figures in heaven and all others were mere background. On the contrary, the one-ness of God's work in the world will claim our attention. Those with whom we were closely bound here upon earth will be *parts* of that whole, *each in his place*; they will appear as members of that great unified humanity which no man can number.

That this must be our approach is evident from the teaching of Scripture. We turn again to I Corinthians 18, and we sum up what is said there thus: the *content* of knowledge remains, but the *manner* of knowing changes. All that is "in part" will be done away, says Paul, to make place for that which is perfect, which has reached its objective.

### ***Knowledge in full.***

And how will this be? Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will *cease*. Ceasing does not imply that their *content* will be no more, but the text states that the *special gifts* here mentioned will no longer be in force. Knowledge itself will be intensified, as verse 12 plainly teaches. But knowledge as the *special gift of the Spirit* ceases.

From all of this we conclude that the

manner of knowing will be changed, will not be as it is in this era. We shall no longer walk our present pathways of knowledge.

And that is not surprising. Recall how even a slight injury to the brain may banish memory completely, how closely the brain is related to thought, and how intimate are body and spirit. Then we immediately grant that our present manner of knowing cannot be projected into heaven. "Knowing" will be something different there. [67]

Instead of the gradual process of knowledge as described by Paul, there will be a knowing *in full*, and a knowing at once. It will include *insight* and *comprehension*. Recall once more how Adam named the animals in Paradise according to their natures. It did not require years of study; he knew intuitively.

Such knowledge will then be ours, but far richer, and also different. Different because Adam lived in a "becoming" world and he himself was growing with that world. Growth will then be ended. Moreover, Adam stood at the beginning of history; we shall view the panorama of history from beginning to end, including the completed wonder of redemption and revelation.

We must conclude, therefore, that the comfort of "recognition" is far too meager. We look forward to amazing *insight* into all of God's works, including mankind. And though we have no conception of the manner of knowledge in heaven, so that we can say nothing with certainty, this we *may* say with certainty: it will be immeasurably deeper, richer, and purer than any knowledge attainable upon earth.

### ***The new avenues of knowledge.***

And what are the amazing possibilities of knowledge here upon earth? Television

is being developed rapidly, so that “seeing at a distance” will soon be as common as “hearing at a distance” now is. We already have a measure of clairvoyance in our human relationships; certain men appear to have exact knowledge of things happening at a distance, without the mediation of the senses. And while the so-called “occult” may be condemnable because of its misuse, the power itself lies in nature and as such is God-given. There are many factors which inhibit the use of the powers which are [68] in nature—factors of God’s will, but also of our own corrupted will. Who knows to what lengths we might bring “immediate” knowledge, such as the wonders of telepathy, if we were more sensitive, less hasty, less crude, if we were more wise in our diet and if our relationships were not so miserably disrupted? Many are quick to condemn all such activities as from the devil. But when the redeemed have been freed from all the impediments brought about by sin, the new humanity will surely find new and wonderful avenues of knowledge of which we can not even dream now. If even here people can read one another’s thoughts, why should not that be the general rule there? If even now some can know what is happening miles away, should even one small corner of the new earth be then hidden from our knowledge? If even here one individual can influence another by his mind, why should not such reaction of mind upon mind be “natural” there, the “waves” of thought undulating, as it were, from one mind to another?

Indeed, the fellowship will be such that each individual will be a legible epistle of Christ for every other individual. A song of praise from one heart will find immediate echo in all others. There will be unity of heart and mind, of living and striving. The

diastase has been removed—all diastase. The dwelling place of God is with men, and the dwelling place of man with man. The transfer of thought from one to another will be so intense that neither word nor touch of the hand will be needed to give expression to it. It will far exceed all that is possible here and now.

*Seeing the new earth.*

We have spoken once again about the new earth which we anticipate. And again the question of recognition arises. [69] But those who agree with what was written above will immediately feel that such a conception is again too narrow. For all things shall be *new*.

True, when Christ said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away,” He did not in the least imply annihilation. Scripture, particularly in the last Book, predicts a renewed *earth*; but not *another*. The existing order and scheme of the universe will change—both of heaven and of earth, because heaven is not outside the realm of things created.

That this change will be drastic is evident from II Peter 3:10ff, where we are told that the day of the Lord, the day of final judgment, will come with rushing speed and heaven will pass away. That is to say, it will pass from sight. In other words, the old order will be replaced by the new. Moreover, the elements will be dissolved; nothing will be able to resist the raging fire.

But dissolution does not mean annihilation. The elements themselves are not wiped out of existence, so that God must once again call things into being out of nothing as in Genesis. The form and fashion of things will change; the appearance of heaven and earth, and their relationship to each other, will be new and glorious.

Therefore, though our future dwelling place will be this earth, the new humanity will find it so changed that there can be no question of *recognition*.

Nor shall we attempt to describe what may or may not be upon the new earth. There have been many conjectures, for instance, in connection with the statement in Revelation that there will be no more sea. Such statements, however, are not intended to be interpreted geographically. This one merely symbolizes the removal of all things that separate, even as the sea separates. [70]

If our bodies will be totally different, it is only reasonable to expect the same of all creation. If all growth and “becoming” is ended, there is not one earthly image left to apply to the renewed earth. We shall not be able to describe the new earth until it appears.

For that matter, the all-inclusive blessing of God’s dwelling with man implies so great a change that we cannot conceive of recognition. When the diastase between God’s dwelling and man’s is removed, earth will share all the glory of that dwelling place of God. The honor and glory of all creation will be concentrated upon earth. The earth will be the center of the whole renewed structure—not because it is the geographic center, but because God has united Himself with us.

And yet, although we shall not *recognize* the old earth, we shall by insight know it to be the old one, the earth upon which the Son of God was crucified, where He broke the bands of death victoriously and brought immortality to light. He will enter in again, with His glorified ones, on that day of days.

## VI

# The Great Supper

To “see” God, and each other, and our dwelling place, will be automatic fellowship, insight, and comprehension, in love. And if we seek a doctrine which expresses this fellowship so as to include all its elements, we find it in those words of Scripture which tell us of “the supper of the marriage of the Lamb.”

### *The riddle of the marriage supper.*

These words from the Book of Revelation bring before us the christological element, concerning which we have thus far said little. We have spoken of seeing God, and each other, and our dwelling place. Now we face the question: What is Christ’s place in heaven?

Indirectly, the question has already been answered. For we have seen Christ as mediator in history, eschatologically striving toward a *goal*. The mediatorial work is redemptive, leading fallen man and the disrupted world back to a life in conformity with God. And when Christ will have conquered all, He will deliver all dominion to the Father.

For God gave unto Christ the dominion to that end, namely that He should deliver all to the Father. God did not abdicate, or relinquish His rights to the Son. But immediately upon the attainment of His goal, Christ relinquishes the kingdom to the Father. Not Christ, but the Father, is the

[73] end-purpose of all things. God does not give His honor to any creature, neither to any servant, not even to this “Servant.

But if that is true, why does Scripture speak of “the marriage of the Lamb”? Surely, the marriage of the Lamb is a feast of the union of Christ with the church. Is that not in conflict with the above thought, that Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father, that He steps aside in order that God shall be the end-purpose of all? The church is the new humanity, recreated of God, “of Him, through Him, and *unto Him*.” How then can the bride be adorned for Christ? How can she be called the bride of the Lamb? Whereas the servant should lead the bride to the bridegroom (John 3), does the Servant take the bride unto himself instead? Ought not the Christ rather rejoice as “the friend of the bridegroom”?

When Christ appears as friend of the bridegroom (John 3) it is clearly evident that the bride is for God. But when He is portrayed as bridegroom, then indeed we have a riddle.

And when we recall that in heaven the insight and understanding of the redeemed will be clear and sharp, the riddle becomes more absorbing. For they will know that history ends with the *abdication* of the Mediator Christ. How then can there be a “marriage of the Lamb”? Can the Lamb be the “husband”? Not He, but God the Lord

is that “husband.”

There is our problem.

***Basis for the solution of the riddle.***

The problem of the “marriage supper of the Lamb” is not too difficult, however. In the first place, we must remember that the Book of Revelation employs symbolical language, and symbolical language must be interpreted with care. On [74] the one hand, in a metaphor there is always *one* point of comparison, and we must beware of drawing others. On the other hand, the imagery of a vision always requires another figure to clarify it, lest we form a one-sided view. The figures of speech never demand logical interpretation, but commonly present utterly incompatible characteristics. We have seen, for instance, the *slain* Lamb *standing*. That alone warns us not to interpret the marriage of the Lamb as in conflict with or in contrast to that of God.

And further, if we read the chapter carefully, we find another “supper.” Verses 9 and 17 use the same Greek word, yet there is a great difference between the two suppers. The one is fellowship of grace; the other is execution of judgment. But we are primarily interested now in the fact that the bloody supper to which the birds of heaven are invited, to eat the flesh of those who have fallen in their bitter strife against God’s sovereignty, is called “supper of God.” In the representation of that supper there are no other guests besides the birds of prey; yet it is the supper of *God*, who wields justice and executes judgment.

Now even as there is immediate reference from the birds, the instrument of judgment, to God who uses them, from the supper guests to Him who prepared the table, so, too, the guests seated at the wedding supper of the Lamb must never be

thought of apart from Him who prepared that table of fellowship. The Lamb, at the highest place at the table, is not only the chief One there, but is also representative of the church. And thus the Lamb points to God, to Whom the Lamb is subject (as the very name implies).

***Analogy with our sacramental supper.***

In this connection we may well ask if the marriage of the Lamb is intended to remind us of the sacrament which Christ [75] instituted, similar in name. The word “supper” is frequently used in Scripture without reference to the sacrament. Nevertheless, there is one reason for linking the supper of Revelation 19:9 with “the supper of our Lord,” namely that Christ is spoken of as the Lamb, as the one slain for our sins. The feast of heavenly fellowship is thus directly bound up with Christ’s mediatorial death, with His sacrifice. As Lamb He stands before the throne of God; as Lamb He is seated at the table with His own. He is seated—indicative of triumphant celebration with the church; He stands—indicative of equally triumphant preparedness for service. Thus the marriage supper reminds us of the sacrament, as an eternal celebration of His sacrificial death.

This brings us to another thought: the Lord’s Supper is, among other things, a *memorial* institution. And though much in the history of God’s revelation will pass away, this will remain through eternity: that Christ institutes a memorial unto Himself at the place of worship. Such memorial to the name of God was already typified in the name given the Old Testament place of worship. And when the dwelling place of God will have come to be with men, all will be memorial, in perfection and completeness. That is to say, one event of the history



of salvation will not be commemorated in isolation from the others. The commemoration of the lamb implies the commemoration of the Lion, and commemoration of Golgotha includes that of the beginning and the end of history. Nor do we commemorate Him who was sent without including the Sender. The supper of the marriage of the Lamb is therefore, *eo ipso*, also the supper of the marriage of God. This is the more true because the supper of the marriage of the Lamb is *permanent*. It is not merely an introduction to the marriage state, but the [76] marriage feast and the wedded life merge into one. In Matthew 22 eternal bliss is portrayed as a marriage feast. And how could the Lamb and His church turn their backs upon God at the marriage feast? Nay; but Christ, as glorified head of the church, is also a part of the bride of God, part of the renewed humanity. He is the head of the bride. To the bride He is the one who has instituted the wedding feast upon His own flesh and blood, and thus earned the right to it. Therefore it is right that the bridal feast should be named for Him. But as second Adam, incorporated into the new humanity of which He is the head, He is a member of the bride whose husband is God. For the Word has become flesh, and remains flesh.

While there is, then, a certain relationship between this “supper” and our sacrament, we must carefully distinguish between the two. Commemoration in heaven will include confession, proclamation, praise and song. It is no longer a seeking of a “sign and seal,” for we shall behold the Lord *of* heaven and earth and eternally ascend toward Him who is Lord of all.

***The Great Supper in the midst of history.***

The supper of the marriage of the

Lamb, the feast of all the household of God, with Christ, before God, assures us that heaven does not turn its back upon *history*. The future glory of Christ will ever be seen as a result of His humiliation. Paul tells us, in Philippians 2, that Christ was exalted because of the humiliation to which he had subjected Himself, thus closely linking Christ’s life upon earth with His life in heaven. In calling the Great Supper “The Supper of the *Lamb*” heaven acknowledges the importance of history. The Lamb stands there as slain. That is to say, heaven never, throughout all eternity, abstracts Christ’s exaltation (His [77] standing) from His humiliation (His being slain). To the Lamb who wrought salvation for us by His blood will be given honor through all eternity. In that which is seen and said at the Great Supper, justice is done through all eternity to the fullness of God’s work in history.

In the Great Supper the meaning of history becomes clear. Faith gives way to sight—we shall see that which we have already gratefully *accepted by faith*. In that other supper, the judgment supper, the meaning of history also becomes clear, but there it is the rejection that is clarified. Hell will not institute a commemoration of Christ. It scorns and rejects such. Only the heavenly guests enjoy this fellowship of commemoration.

The historical reality of Christ’s death and resurrection, then, is held in remembrance eternally in heaven. History is thus shown to be wholly governed by the sovereignty of God. And we reject wholly the conception of Dante, who, in his poem, refers to the mythological river Lethe. Of this mythological river of the underworld the dead must drink in order to forget the past. In his ascent through the heavenly spheres to the sun, the poet stops beside

this river to rid himself of the oppressive memory of sin—by which he virtually meant that which is temporal, the relative, the historical. The poet would forget earth and all its aspects of time and space, for the higher the soul soars the more foolish and insignificant the earth and all things earthly become. And only after crossing the river is Dante privileged to meet that strange procession including a triumphal chariot escorted by the four-and-twenty elders and the four living creatures and the winged creatures, and surrounded by female figures who symbolize the church triumphant. And only after bathing once again in Lethe may Dante join the festal procession. [78]

Such mythical ideas are riddled with neoplatonism, which we discussed in chapter 1. When the doors of heaven open, all historical life upon earth loses its worth, they say. History no longer has meaning. But, contrary to this rejection of history, the Bible utters those beautiful words “the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Those who have been called to this supper have not been bathed in Lethe; on the contrary, they commemorate the *center of history*; they receive a perspective of history from its beginning to its end.

***The Great Supper and the fulfillment of fellowship.***

We have noted that the “Great Supper” is by no means named directly for the New Testament sacrament. The latter is an oft repeated sign and seal; the Great Supper is a continuous feast of perfect life in spirit and truth.

To the extent in which we see a fulfillment of the sacrament in the Great Supper, we see also the fulfillment of the “love feasts” which were held by the early

church. These “love feasts” are to be distinguished from the celebration of the sacrament, though the one frequently led to the other. But the Great Supper will be an eternal “love feast”—one unintermittent feast of joyous fellowship with God through the Lamb, and with each other. The last “Lord’s Supper” will usher in an eternal “love feast.”

At this table of fellowship all of God’s children will be present. Such a celebration there has never been upon earth. But all members of God’s covenant, also those who were prevented from partaking of the Lord’s Supper here, will be at the Great Supper table. Those now prevented because of mental illness or illness of soul will be there, healed by the great Shepherd of the sheep; those who are now too young will be there, fully matured, all worthy partakers. Children [79] will not be seen there. For a child is in the state of becoming, and in heaven there is no immaturity and no marriage or birth or growth. For that reason parents cannot expect to “recognize” their own children there, though they will *know* them and sit at table with them.

Moreover, the ministration of the Word and of the Sacraments will fall away. For as to the Sacraments, which are holy and visible signs and seals instituted by God for our better understanding and greater assurance, they will no longer be needed. They imply that our faith is still weak, and in heaven nothing is weak and nothing needs strengthening. Neither is there need of a sign or seal, for all promises will have been fulfilled and we shall see “face to face.”

Neither will there be need of revelation by means of the Scripture. God’s name will be proclaimed in everything and everywhere.

“And I saw no temple there.” That word implies that not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament types will end, not only the altar but also the pulpit is abolished. Each individual will there be a minister of the Word, each will be confessor and penitent, each distributor of the ingredients of the love feast. The last also will be first; but at their head, leading them in offering all to the God of eternal good will, is the Lamb.

Truly, the half has not been told us of this new communion table, this fulfilled and eternal fellowship of the church of God.

*The Great Supper and the “pluriformity” of the church.*

In the marriage supper God’s power to unify overcomes all hindrances. The Lamb, at the head of the table, is the Christ, the Son of man. He does not reveal one type of humanity, [80] but in Him all that is truly human is unified. The Lamb, therefore, is guarantee of unity in the diversity of uniformity in pluriformity.

Every individual and every life has its peculiarity, its “differentness.” Now when, at the Great Supper, the unity is perfect, these differences are not done away. Quite the contrary—each person’s individuality will come to full expression and not one will find his own special pathway of life insignificant. In other words, there will be great diversity in unity. “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”

Where diversity is suppressed we cannot rightly speak of unity. But when many diverse elements are brought together in perfect harmony and peace, there is unity. Neither does the diversity become “individualistic.” Individualism does not celebrate communion; but where communion is cele-

brated there is unity and diversity; the very recognition of the diversity is the token of unity.

There are several Scriptural references, particularly in the Book of Revelation, from which this diversity may be inferred. For example, Revelation 14:3. There we are told of a “new song” in heaven, which the hundred-and-forty-and-four-thousand will sing and which no others can learn. It has been thought by some that these hundred-and-forty-and-four-thousand are the whole congregation of the redeemed, the multitude which no man can count. Taken by itself, the number might be thus interpreted, for it is a symbolical number and indicates great fullness—144= 12x12; 1000 is the product of 10x10x10; 12 signifies the union of the divine (three) and the earthly (four); and 10 or 1000 represents completeness.

But the hundred-and-forty-and-four-thousand are only a part of the multitude of redeemed, a group upon whom a special seal was placed to indicate their unique position [81] among the elect. They were sealed against destruction when they were exposed to peculiar suffering upon earth, suffering for the sake of Christ, suffering of a special nature and especially severe. And even as job was doubly rewarded, they are given the special reward of a special glory; they are distinguished from the multitude “which no man can number” by a song which none other can sing. God having led them in special ways upon earth now gives them a special song of praise to sing amid the great communion of saints.

Another example might be cited from Revelation 21:14, where we read that the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are written on twelve foundation stones of the walls of the new Jerusalem. All who go in or out of the city (this is of

course symbolism) can read those names. Thus the apostles are placed in a particular position of honor; their names, and none other, are there for all to see.

Other passages might be quoted, but this is sufficient to prove our point that the Great Supper in heaven is a supper of communion because each of the great Shepherd's sheep knows himself a peculiar member of the flock. Each one's cup has been filled with living water, each according to its own measure, but each will joyfully say that his cup has run over. In the house of the Father are many mansions; but it is nevertheless one house.

But the heavenly recognition of diversity will not be according to human standards or according to our warped insight into each other, however certain we may be that we are right. All will depend upon this one question: what has been a man's significance before God and what his service for Him? Each will then have his own place, and will realize the rightness of it. [82]

The Great Supper will be great in oneness as well as in diversity. It will be the revelation of the truth that unto him that hath shall be given and he shall have abundantly. There, at last, history will be classified as it should be.

### *The Great Supper and the "new wine."*

In heaven all things are new—also the ingredients of the supper. There is "new wine."

But we must not think of those ingredients as bread and wine such as we now have. The simple statement that "meat and the belly" will have been done away is sufficient evidence of that.

What then did Christ mean when He said to His disciples, after instituting the Lord's Supper, "I shall not drink henceforth

of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it *new* with you in my Father's kingdom?"

We need not go to any length explaining the impossibility of wine such as we know it. Such wine is out of the question after the aforementioned radical changes have taken place. Wine as we know it is a product of natural laws, inseparable from climatology and meteorology, which are part of the present world. If we think these away, how can we speak of wine in heaven similar to that of today?

Some will object that, though *new*, it is nevertheless called wine. But we have noted that the word "new" implies, in each case, radical change, and that the nouns "heaven," "earth," "covenant" and so on, are retained with the profound implication that the new has evolved *from the old*. We expect a new heaven and a new earth, but not till the old has passed away. Surely then the "old wine" will also pass away and give place to the "new." [83]

In prophetic perspective Christ saw that day when they would drink the new wine, celebrating the Great Supper as a fulfillment of the fellowship of the old wine. Seated there in fellowship with His disciples, and having just instituted the New Testament of blood, He strains toward that fellowship in heaven, when the shed blood, symbolized by the wine, will have harvested its last fruit upon the final intercession of Christ.

In the promise of "new wine" we find a prophecy of new fellowship with Christ, new enjoyment, and new appropriation of His work—with eternal gratitude—and thus enriched communion with God Himself.

Christ does not promise merely a repetition of the fellowship of the Communion

Supper. Then the words “to drink wine again with you” would have been sufficient. He emphasizes the change—the wine itself shall be new. Our wine of communion is symbol of the shed blood, a memorial to be repeated *till He come*.

But the new wine will be poured by a Christ no longer in diastase. The wine of today is fitting for a faith that is constantly in need of strengthening; the new wine is given and received in full fellowship, “face to face.” The new wine will be served at a table of eternal remembrance of the shed blood—but also in celebration of the cessation of all blood flow—that of Christ as well as that of His own, that of death but also that *of life itself*.

For the new wine is closely related to the institution of the covenant. God’s first covenant looked forward to the “moment of time” *when* all flow of life blood would end, when the “living soul” would have entered his rest. But the first Adam failed; he spilled the wine of the Covenant of Works. The second Adam, the “life-giving spirit,” takes the cup of [84] the wine of the Covenant of Grace in His own shed blood as a sign of that eternal cessation of all flow of blood. Thus the new wine becomes truly a festal drink. The new wine and the water of life are in effect the same, expressed in different symbols.

The old wine belongs to the work of redemption completed in principle but still looking toward its full fruition; the new wine belongs to a wholly accomplished and consummated work. The old wine is poured at a supper of remembrance in faith; the new at a supper of seeing face to face. The old wine belongs to this dispensation; it is a sign of the diastase, both in space and in time, and lies between the sign and its fulfillment; it is for those rich in principle

though still poor in comparison with the wealth that awaits them. The new is the wine for those who will have inherited full riches.

Nor need we ask if this wine will be only for the twelve present at the institution of the Lord’s Supper. For Christ addressed His disciples as builders of the church, and gave them this cup of remembrance to pass on to the thousands who would believe. The new wine will be new also in this respect, that it will be placed before not merely a small group of believers but before the united church, by Him who with this new wine institutes commemoration to God the Father through all eternity.

#### ***The Great Supper and the covenant.***

When He whom we confess to be our Highpriest shall pour the “new wine” at the table of eternal fellowship, it will be in celebration of the fulfillment of the entire covenant concept. For without covenant there could be no true fellowship; throughout the Bible, fellowship is based upon covenant. [85]

Some speak of the several phases of the covenant as so many separate covenants, or they speak of the covenant as binding only during certain periods, as if it were more or less intermittent; they seem to imply that there can be relationship between God and man without covenant of any kind.

Scripture does not picture it thus. God makes a covenant with man as with His son; because of this covenant He later makes a covenant with the earth, the rain and sunshine and harvest, and—with Himself. He even places men in covenant relationship toward each other, so that covenant in its broadest sense is basic to all fellowship. And it originates in the fundamental covenant statute between God as

Father and man as His son. It is in this relationship that the unity of the universe is established and assured. Therefore, too, all things are determined by covenant statute—the evaluation of sin, for instance, and its punishment. For punishment is an avenging of the covenant, even as sin is a breaking of the covenant.

***The Great Supper, covenant, and eternal punishment.***

As we see it, the covenant gives us the only basis for a discussion of eternal punishment. The question has recurred again and again: How can there be blessedness side by side with wretchedness? How can the guests at the Great Supper rejoice in full communion while aware of the great excommunication? How can they see “the smoke of the torment” of the lost “ascend forever and ever,” and be happy?

The Bible teaches the unvarnished truth that hell is, and is eternal. We shall not go into this question fully, but simply accept this teaching of Scripture and note what men have said about it. [86]

Reasoning humanistically and anthropocentrically, men have tried to comfort themselves with assurance of final reconciliation. They find it too “painful” and too “horrible” to think that part of mankind should feast while the rest is plunged into outer darkness. The torment of hell must surely neutralize the bliss of heaven. And how about those who know that tender earthly bonds must be broken? Can there possibly be perfect happiness for those who know a loved one is lost? The very thought is contrary to human hopes and desires and feelings.

Seeking to escape the unwanted truth, men have flagrantly denied Scripture. Some hesitate to contradict Scripture, but believe

that the misery of the lost will end; there will be final annihilation. Others teach the restoration of all things, and believe that men will suffer for a time because of their sins but will eventually be reconciled unto God and received into His loving arms.

While the latter idea virtually avoids the question of possibility of happiness beside an open hell, the former does not solve the problem at all. Surely it is no less painful to believe that the Great Supper is celebrated above the huge grave of the annihilated. The fact of annihilation would remain an eternal memory, and the question concerning happiness in the absence of loved ones goes unsatisfied. It makes little difference if they have been annihilated or merely excluded as righteous punishment for their wilful sin.

The difficulty into which such thoughts bring us can be escaped only by *radical conversion* of this thinking. We must break with this tendency to reason things out, and let ourselves be guided by Scripture; and we must stop imposing our present psychological insight upon the feelings of the redeemed. [87]

Such a conversion takes place when we recognize the majesty of the covenant idea and realize its *universality*. If, from the very beginning, the terms of the covenant declared vengeance upon the covenant breaker, then hell is not evidence of the failure of the covenant but is its vindication. Without such vindication of the broken covenant we should have miscarriage of the covenant. To put it bluntly, if God failed to punish covenant breakers, He himself would be covenant breaker.

To be sure, this involves deep problems—God’s sovereignty, election, rejection. But when, in heaven, the end is related to the beginning and the beginning

to the end, the twofold nature of the covenant will be clearly evident; there was, at the beginning, the possibility of life or death. “The day ye (living) eat thereof, ye shall surely die.” From the beginning God preached both life and death to man. And at the end both blessing and wrath are brought to consummation.

And as to the psychological objections—if it seems unwarrantable that the saved be happy while others are in torment, then it was equally unwarrantable for man in Paradise to allow himself to be stimulated to the service of God by promise of reward or punishment. Psychologizing does not help us. We are called upon to believe the Word of God.

The solution of the problem is to be found in the *sovereign will* of God, as revealed in His Word. The Word tells us that from the very beginning God’s covenant with man had this twofold nature, was a two-edged sword. It was a covenant between two parties, placing the responsibility upon man. But on the other hand in its conception it was one-sided—and thus we face the profound reality of the sovereign will of God. [88]

Consequently our psychologizing becomes ridiculous. It becomes entangled in its own perplexity. For instance, one might say that he cannot see how a man can be happy at a feast when his brother of former days is forever excluded. But another may with equal right ask, “Will not Paul’s closing exclamation of Romans 9 to 11 ring through heaven eternally?” Paul has dealt with the question of his former brethren whom he sees rejected of God and for whom he would wish himself accursed. He who would psychologize would prolong Paul’s desire into heaven. But Paul cries out in conclusion, and will continue to exult

through eternity, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” He will no longer wish himself accursed. Neither will Moses again ask God to blot out his name from the book. For all will there be reconciled to the will of God and will learn to glory also in His sovereignty. Neither will hell be banned from their thoughts, for they will ever glory in the fact that Jesus Christ descended into hell, suffered the pangs of hell, and thus acknowledged God’s covenant wrath to be holy and righteous.

Let us never forget that all mankind was included in the covenant from the beginning; that this is fundamentally the determining factor in all their relationships; and that the final ground of the covenant is the will of the Creator. It pleased God to so create man that he should be in covenant relationship to God—a relationship which implies *responsibility*, and which includes punishment for the covenant breaker. He was chosen from among all creatures to this responsibility.

There is a profound difference between faith and sentiment. We may not approach the problem with egocentric, anthropological psychologizing, but we must approach it in [89] faith, accepting the written Word. Then we shall admit that we have no authority to say what love is. Then we shall no longer conceive of flesh-and-blood bonds in heaven stronger than the bonds of the Word and the Spirit. Then our knowledge will not be of our own construction, but it will be a knowledge by faith.

The redeemed at the Great Supper will recognize as belonging with, them only those who belong to God. The content of the song of the singers beside the crystal sea *mingled with fire* will ever be the covenant. At the Great Supper, when eyes will see

clearly, the oneness of law and gospel will be acknowledged for ever.

*The Great Supper and the covenant of works.*

We have remarked above that we can not logically distinguish between Covenant of Works, Covenant with Nature, and Covenant of Grace as if these were three covenants. We shall nevertheless use this familiar and convenient terminology in our discussion, and attempt to show that the Great Supper of the marriage of the Lamb signifies the consummation of the Covenant of Works, the fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace and the sabbath of the Covenant with Nature.

These three thoughts are virtually found side by side in the second verse of the last chapter of Revelation. We shall begin with the first—the Great Supper is the consummation of the Covenant of Works.

In Revelation 22:2 we read of the new city, Jerusalem, symbol of the Lord's church and the new humanity. It is an organized city, as the broad street suggests, and dominant in the midst of the city is a river, the river of life; moreover there are also trees, so that we have the suggestion, of a garden. The Greek word for "tree" of life allows a plural translation [90] and the tree of life is pictured as on both sides of the river. Thus we are reminded of Genesis. The prophecy of the last Bible book harks back to the first book, where we also read of a garden and a river. But the new is far richer. It is the fulfillment of the Covenant of Works.

"Covenant of Works" is the name given to the initial relationship between God and man. This relationship was a covenant simply because service of God is possible only in the form of a covenant. The term "Covenant of Works" was applied in

retrospect, in contrast with "Covenant of Grace," and the very Covenant of Grace adds depth and meaning to the concept of the Covenant of Works. It is evident, then, that the Covenant of Works must not be looked upon as merely temporary; it is rather the original, fundamental, and therefore irrevocable covenant.

In the Covenant of Works God linked the promised blessedness with the work of obedience. Man was called to obedience; therein he would find his freedom and blessedness. Not that he could earn it; all of man's strength and ability was given of God, and man can never return unto God the equivalent of all that God has given him. Man's obedience could never be the *reason* for his attaining blessedness; it is only the channel. For though the covenant, as we have before noted, involves two parties, it is one-sided in that God originated it and has absolute control of it. He has related our works toward Him with His work toward us.

Now if man in Paradise had kept the covenant, the garden would have unfolded to fullest beauty for him. The first human pair would also have multiplied to the full number of humanity ordained to life. And a city would have evolved with patriarchal heads, with governors and subjects. The [91] "city" would have blossomed forth even as the garden, to be a city without force or tyranny or barred gates.

But sin disrupted all. The development of the garden was arrested; man was banned from it; and government of force had to take the place of peaceful patriarchal rule.

God, however, carrying through His side of the covenant, provided One to fulfill the demand of obedience and to bear the punishment for the broken covenant. The



way which God thus opened for Adam and his sons is fittingly called the Covenant of Grace; it is now only by grace that man can be restored to fellowship with God. But there is no *new* covenant. The second Adam took upon himself the Covenant of Works, and no man comes into God's fellowship except through the fulfilling of that original relationship, which we call the Covenant of Works, by the second Adam.

And now we have before us the glory of that fulfilled Covenant of Works, in the eschatological perspective of "garden" and "city." The river of the garden is broad. It flows from the throne of God and thus all who drink of it are linked with that throne. There is access to it from all sides, for the street and the river and the trees form one picture. And "tree of life" is the name given to all the trees of the garden of which all may take freely.

As to the city, where there were but two people there is now a multitude that cannot be numbered, and the relationships are again patriarchal and peaceful, without force or tyranny or barred city gates. The people are a complete number. Not one of God's children is missing.

In this garden and city of the future the Covenant of Works attains to its rest, its sabbath, its *omega*. That which God set before man in the beginning has there been fulfilled by grace.

### ***The Great Supper and the covenant of Grace.***

In the second place we would speak of the Great Supper as fulfillment of the Covenant of *Grace*.

This is not a second covenant. God does not duplicate. Moreover, a covenant is by nature "once and for all." In fact, the Covenant of Grace as continuation of the Covenant of Works is evidence of that. For

when the guilty party to the broken covenant stood condemned, God revealed a mystery which had until then been kept hidden, declaring that He himself would stand for its continuity, that He would lay the required love and obedience, and also the punishment, to the account of His beloved Son. From then on the first Adam and his descendants had no longer to *work* with God toward their ultimate blessedness, but to *believe* in the second Adam. Thus the covenant became a covenant of grace.

And the covenant remained universal, as originally intended. That is, directed not to one race or one tribe or one nation, but to *humanity*, to all of Adam's descendants.

But, as Paul observes when God reveals to him the "tree" of Abraham (Romans 9-11), a tree must be trimmed of its dead branches. Only those are counted children of Abraham who have the faith of Abraham. They are the *living* branches. So, too, membership in Adam's tree is not merely a matter of flesh and blood and soul. To Adam *as covenant child* only those are reckoned who accept the Second Adam and thereby fulfill the primal function of the first Adam—obedience to the Word of God.

The universality of the covenant requires that not one race or people be left out. Yet during Old Testament times there was one nation singled out of the many as the "chosen people." Such separation was but an *ad interim*. We may look upon the covenant as then *en marche* toward fulfillment, [93] towards the time when all nations, from the uttermost parts of the earth, would belong to the covenant.

So also we read in Revelation 22:2 that the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. And we see therein the beautiful fulfillment of the Covenant of

Grace. Throughout the centuries the healing power of the tree of life has been active, bringing the heathen to repentance and sanctifying their lives. The universality was evident even before Abraham; it was never wholly lacking during the time between Abraham and Christ; it strode toward fulfillment at Pentecost; and it reaches its glorious fulness in the new Jerusalem.

Thus this same verse of the last chapter of the Bible proves that the threads of the Covenant of Works, as they fell from the hand of Adam, were taken up by the second Adam in the Covenant of Grace. And the fullness of that Covenant of Grace will be enjoyed eternally in the sabbath of the Jerusalem that is still above but will one day descend to be with men.

There will be very great peace. And he who comes to the river may drink thereof freely. For before he was permitted to come to the crystal clear river he was washed in the crystal sea (chapter 4:6)—the sea which reminds us of the “sea” in the court of the temple of old. So will all be cleansed as *priests*, also the heathen who have come from afar. It is the fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace.

#### ***The Great Supper and the covenant with nature.***

We have discussed the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. Now we must give brief attention to the so-called “Covenant with Nature.” This is the generally accepted terminology for the promise of God given after the [94] flood, namely that the earth should not again be destroyed by water, and the further promise of regular succession of seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.

This covenant must, however, not be

understood as on a par with the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, as if it were another “chapter” in the doctrine of the covenant. This covenant with nature includes the animals. Moreover, it does not so much concern nature as *history*. Rather, it is first of all concerned with history, and *therefore* with nature.

God’s promise, then, assures *normal alternations* in nature. The normality determines the regular progress of history; there will be no repetition of the flood; the next catastrophe will be that of the end. But there will be alternations—spring and summer, fall and winter; growth and decay, waxing and waning.

And this covenant with nature has become a phase of the Covenant of Grace. Nature is subordinated to God’s great work of gathering His people. The covenant with nature sets the stage upon which the drama of history is enacted. The alternations, convulsive, corruptive and catastrophic before the flood, are now normalized in order that the plan of Christ’s coming may be carried out. And finally, after the catastrophe of the last day, the covenant with nature will also reach its objective, its sabbath rest.

For we read that spring, summer, autumn and winter will cease. The very terms will lose their meaning. The tree of life, supplying the ingredients for the eternal supper, will bear its fruit from month to month. The sun will ever shine—though it will not be the sun we know. In short the covenant with nature will have come to rest. [95]

For the covenant with nature was intended to be valid “while the earth remaineth.” Until the end of time, God will uphold the balance of cold and heat, of light and darkness, so that the one cannot triumph over the other. The earth is bound

within the circle of waxing and waning, until in the new Jerusalem the waxing and waning, the growing and fading, the “not yet” of spring and the “no longer” of winter will cease.

We may interpret Revelation 22:2 in its broadest sense. When the tree of life gives its fruit “from month to month,” Scripture means that all living things will enjoy such regularity. Promise and fulfillment will have become one. Indeed, the very words “promise” and fulfillment” will fall away. There is no longer a possibility of promise when fulfillment is rich and full. Thus the glory of the fulfilled covenant with nature is one of the foundation stones upon which heaven rests. All that which was created blossoms full in the sun of God’s righteousness. There is no more change. Hallelujah.

***The Great Supper and the Pact of Peace.***

All that is *of* God returns *unto* God. So also all that concerns the covenant. Originated by Him and upheld by Him, it must also revert to Him. And we cannot close our discussion of the Great Supper and the covenant until we have discussed that first and ultimate decree of God’s will, His covenant with *Himself*.

Reformed theology has long ago recognized this covenant between God and God, has spoken of it as the “Council of Peace” or “Pact of Peace,” and has understood thereby the covenant between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, made before time began, in which each bound Himself to the others in eternal truth to do what must be done for the salvation of [96] the world, for the preparation of the bride of the triune God, and for the great culminating restoration unto God of all things.

Even though the world had not fallen, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

would have bound themselves in covenant to maintain creation in its covenant relationship to God. For every decree of the triune God is essentially a covenant decision.

In this doctrine reformed theology reaches its deepest depth. Therein lies the fundamental basis upon which God’s relationship to man is built.

And therein lies also the guarantee of heaven. For we recall that, as we have before noted, the covenant between God and man is two-sided, yet it is one-sided in origin; for the sovereign God alone instituted and planned it. And the highest pleasure of fulfillment will be the rejoicing of God with God, of Father, Son and Holy Spirit with each other, in the fulfillment of the truth of each toward the others from eternity.

Thus we gain a deeper perspective of the doctrine of the trinity, and also of heaven’s eternal rejoicing.

Most surely we cannot reach greater depths in our analysis of salvation. We can but stammer of our own smallness and lack of understanding.

Yet Scripture does wish to bring this deep truth to our attention.

For who are they that sit at the table of the Great Supper? They are those prepared by *the Spirit* to be members of the bride of Christ. He equipped them with wonderful gifts; He “brooded” over them to bring forth all that was beautiful and purely human; He regenerated them and gifted them with [97] heavenly gifts and cleansed them. And He finally delivers them to the Christ.

Again we ask, who are they that sit at the table of the Great Supper? They are those whom the Son bought and brought in. He took them from the hand of His Father. He bought them with His own pre-

cious blood—for Himself, but especially for the Father. He bought for them the white garments which the Spirit wove for them, and He clothed them therewith that they might be well-pleasing to the Father. He has known them and has born their sorrows. He has been glorified in them and has seen His desire upon them. He shepherded them in love; and His scepter was over them all their days, unto the end of the world, even as long as it was given Him to reign. And now He, in turn, gives them to the Father, that the kingdom may be the Father's.

Once again, who are they that sit at the table of the Great Supper? They are those known of the *Father*. They were His; He gave them into the hands of Son and Spirit. He created them, and creating the first Adam He already “saw” the Second; while laying the foundations of the first creation, He already had in mind the glory of recreation. And so He finally takes His own from the hand of Son and Spirit—His own, whom Son and Spirit have perfected and made well-pleasing unto Him. Through all eternity He cannot look upon one of them without having fellowship with the Son and the Spirit, whose handiwork they are. And He rejoices in Himself because He has created them to His own glory.

Thus all returns unto God in peace. The *two-sided* covenant finds its fulfillment, its clarification and its glory in the one-sided covenant of God with God. And man enters into the sabbath rest of God. God does not enter into our sabbath, for our sabbath is not the ultimate goal. But man's [98] sabbath strains toward the sabbath of God at the Great Supper; the fulfillment of the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace, and the Covenant with nature proclaims forever God's Pact of Peace with God.

And thus we arrive at the title of our last chapter . . .

## VII

### Fulfilled Sabbath Rest

#### *Fulfillment of the sign and seal.*

The sabbath is eschatological. From its very beginning it was a symbol of the rest that “remains” for the people of God. This was said in New Testament time (Hebrews 4:9), proving that also the New Testament sabbath points toward that which is to come. For though the Lord of the sabbath has laid another foundation for the New Testament Sabbath, and has re-clothed it, it is still an eschatological sign to struggling, suffering humanity.

Under the old covenant, the sabbath pointed forward to Him who *was to come* and bring rest; thus the rest followed toil, and the sabbath was the seventh day, the closing day. The weary laborer was given a day of rest lest he die.

Under the new covenant a remarkable change took place, based upon the mediator who, in principle, *has brought rest*, who *has risen* from the dead, who henceforth reigns and lives to all eternity. Therefore the sabbath of the New Testament falls upon the first day of the week. It is a change in principle. Under the old economy the laborer struggled toward the day of rest; under the new economy he begins with rest; he no longer needs to seek rest lest he die; he is richly endowed, an anointed partaker of God’s feast, performing works of gratitude. [101]

But neither has the sabbath of the New

Testament reached its fulness. The toil is still difficult, and the gratitude often weak, and the battle not yet wholly won. Thus the sabbath remains an eschatological sign.

And only in the New Jerusalem is that sign at last fulfilled. There the battle is won, the tears are wiped away. Intermittent labor and rest ceases forever. An eternity of uninterrupted joyous glorifying of God begins—the purest of toil.

Moreover, the sabbath is also a seal. It guarantees and assures us of the faithfulness of God. And as such, also, it finds its fulfillment in the heavenly sabbath.

This is evident from the Christological element in the institution of the sabbath. For the resurrection from the dead is the believer’s guarantee. But this guarantee-sign also needs fulfillment. The glorified Christ is physically still *in diastase*. Nor has He entered into complete rest; He struggles daily in prayer, and the final victory must yet be won. And the church, celebrating its sabbath, still sees in that sabbath a sign and guarantee of that which is to come, still lives by faith and not by sight.

When the fulfillment is ushered in, the sign will fall away. After the last day Christ will be revealed, with his glorified human body, and He will bring His own to God, to deliver them up to Him. This brings about His own rest, and marks the end of all struggle in history. And whereas the actual

task of the sabbath was to lead men and their works upward to God, Christ's delivery of all to the Father is its final fulfillment. The upward climbing is forever done, and the upward leading. God and His work are at rest, forever.

At the close of the preceding chapter we concluded that the guarantee of our sabbath rest lies in the fact that our Sabbath is linked with *God's*. Not that they are one; but God's [102] will-to-rest guarantees our rest. He must attain to His eternal self-satisfaction in His work, and therefore the sabbath is a guarantee and sign to man of eternal rest.

When this unintermittent rest will have been attained, the guarantee-sign will fall away. The preaching of the Word at intervals will cease, for we shall dwell eternally with the Word. The sacrament is fulfilled and also falls away. The sign and seal of the temporal sabbath will give place to eternal sabbath fulfillment.

***“Katapause” conquered by “sabbatismos.”***

When the eternal sabbath takes the place of the temporal sabbath of guarantee and sign, the Sabbath-of-interval is conquered by the Sabbath-without-interval.

Scripture makes this differentiation in sabbaths in the fourth chapter of Hebrews, where we read of the evolution of the sabbath. There a differentiation is made between the Old Testament sabbath of Joshua and the Sabbath prepared by the Joshua (Jesus) of the New Testament. The distinction is not one of antithesis but one of lesser versus greater; that is, of progression. The first Joshua brought the Sabbath-of-interval, the “katapause.” The great Joshua of the New Testament will bring the unbroken sabbath. The first is much; the latter more. The “katapause” is a tempo-

rary relief, a welcome surcease for man in the midst of his weary struggle and toil, a breathing spell. But he must return to the struggle.

But God is not a God of intervals. He remembers us in our Sabbath “pauses” and blesses them. He has given to weary men the intervals of rest and relief. But the “katapause” is ever a sign pointing ahead to the “sabbatismos,” the eternal rest of the Father which man will share. [103]

***Progression in the meaning of the word.***

To Israel on the way to Canaan, the sabbath was a symbol of the promised land toward which they were traveling. To Israel *in* Canaan (see Psalm 95) it meant a life according to the law of God and, closely associated therewith, rest from enemies. In the latter there was already more suggestion of eternal rest and the sharing of God's rest. But it is still negative. Rest *from one's enemies* is not yet rest *with one's friends*.

The first Joshua got no farther than the “katapausis.” With the second Joshua the “sabbatismos” dawned. These must not however, be viewed as opposed or antithetical, any more than image and reality or object and shadow are opposites. In fact, God uses the word “kata-pause” in reference to Himself when He speaks of resting from His work (Hebrews 4:4, 10). But when He speaks of His good pleasure *in* His work, it is His “sabbatismos.”

That the sabbath should be intermittent in this life was necessary as part of the rhythm of history. But such alternations could not be the ultimate plan of God. For men must sing the “thrice-holy” *without pause* (Revelation 4:8). In the very Pact of Peace God planned history with its fluctuations and instituted the sabbath as intermittent, *even had the world not fallen into sin.*

He planned progression in history, toward the eternal sabbath of which the intermittent day of rest was a sign. And throughout the ages each successive sabbath was an ever stronger guarantee-sign of the eternal sabbath.

When eventually this guarantee-sign is fulfilled, intervals will cease. There will no longer be intermittent toil and rest, but the two will be identical. [104]

*The memory of sin.*

Dante, in his great poem, pictures the shadow of earth falling upon the heavenly spheres, thereby symbolizing the after-effect of earth upon heaven. We shall not now enter into a discussion of the implications of Dante's symbolism, but comment merely upon the after-effect of earth, and particularly of sin, upon the bliss of heaven.

Scripture forearms us against any such conception by the statement: "God shall wipe all tears from their eyes." This does not at all mean that there will be no recollection of sin—better said, that there will be no knowledge of sin. We cannot exclude the knowledge of sin from our picture of salvation. But over against that knowledge of sin we shall have the knowledge of and the full insight into the marvelous grace of God.

Moreover, awareness of sin is not a result of sin. It is not a consequence of sin but counteraction against sin. Awareness of sin is awakened either by grace or by the accomplished righteousness of hell. Therefore the knowledge of sin in heaven will be *insight* rather than *recollection*. By grace we shall have a knowledge of *comprehension* and see sin as we have never before seen it. No "after-effect" of sin can therefore mar, even in the least, the blessedness of heaven.

For we shall have entered into God's

sabbath, and tearful eyes have no place there. Nothing less than *fullness* of joy is possible there. For God has covenanted with Himself that the new humanity, known by Him from eternity, will come before Him in glory and in perfect bliss.

Man's "katapausis" is overcome by God's "sabbatismos," but the two are not, we have noted, antithetical. For in heaven, too, there is a "katapausis," a rest from trouble and sorrow and sin and remorse. But not as an after-effect of [105] earth, or as a reaction, but as fruit of the "sabbatismos." *Because* God has fulfilled in them the wonders of His grace in full measure, therefore they now know how they were once despoiled by sin and hardened over against His grace.

That very knowledge is also a gift of God's grace to them. If Dante were right, if there could be a recollection or recognition or remembrance that cast a shadow in heaven, the "sabbatismos" of God would be imperfect. Sin does not *remain*; but it comes to mind with richer, deeper, fuller meaning. Over against the former knowledge of sin and remorse, there will be heavenly rest, fruit of the "sabbatismos."

The unintermittent praise of God will triumph, unhindered.

*The question of historical-cultural development.*

It was not without reason that we emphasized in previous paragraphs that we shall enter into God's sabbath rather than He into ours. From this point of view, we believe, the question of the fruit of "common grace" should be discussed. That is, has culture and civilization any meaning for heaven and eternal life? For this question, too, must be summed up under that other: Is the sabbath in the last analysis for

our pleasure and rest or for *God's*?

In the first instance the sabbath would be primarily a question of what we *may* do. There is still so much to enjoy in this weary and oppressed world.

In the second instance the sabbath becomes a question of what we *must* do, what is *required* of us. God has a covenant claim upon us as co-workers, that we should bring forth out of His creation that which lies therein. That is our official calling to culture, and that is directly of service to God's [106] *sabbatismos*. For in the unfolding of the fullness of creation God attains to His rest, His sabbath.

In the first instance the world is primarily seen as an object of God's curse, and the sabbath as *katapause* is an intermittent refreshment in a condemned world. But in the second instance we see the earth not primarily as accursed but as an instrument for God's glory. Its development and unfolding (civilization and culture) is then preparatory to God's sabbath, and the perfecting of its development is that sabbath. Our task is to hew a path by which that sabbath of God will come. We are not merely to "enjoy" that which is left of beauty and pleasantness in this world.

The sequence of events must be explained by their beginning, if we would see whither they tend. If we proceed, from the Covenant of Grace as starting point, we go astray; but when we see the Covenant of Works as basic to all covenant relationship, we are on the right track. The question of what has been left us is important, but is only one side of the problem.

The egocentric view says, "We have much left to us." The lazy servant says, "The punishment was not as severe as it might have been." But such is said only *after* the fall.

The theocentric view says, "We have not yet fulfilled our tremendous task as we should have." The obedient son strives to obey. That was also the attitude *before* the fall.

Christ once and again speaks to the Pharisees of things as they were "*in the beginning*." That is binding. He emphasized that they *had not yet attained*. Men hunger—they have not yet eaten enough. Men thirst—they have not yet drunk enough. Men mourn—but not yet to the right end. Men have not yet inherited the earth. [107]

#### *History presses toward its consummation.*

What has all this to do with our evaluation of culture and civilization and our participation in them? Very much. First of all, the question of culture and civilization becomes eschatological. Indeed, it is inconceivable that culture should not be called upon to serve the eternal sabbath of God. Personally, the question becomes this: What is my task as a servant of God? It is not a question of: How can I get my little share?

In the narrower sense the culture problem becomes one of "common grace." "We have deserved the curse, but God has in mercy left us much that is good and pleasant—the beauty of nature, a symphony of Beethoven . . ." Those who speak thus forget that in Paradise of old, commandments as well as promises were *dated*. *From the beginning*, the tasks assigned man pressed him onward toward his future, toward that "point of time" which we have mentioned again and again. And man still strives toward that "not yet" The clock is still running. Our "orders" are still dated. Like Adam and Eve, we are to work with the materials at hand in order to attain to the cosmic sabbath.



For enjoyment, even as before the fall, ought not to be in the “things” but in the *good use* of the things, in what we can accomplish with them. Paradise lost and regained, and the period between, presents a task to be performed. It is a God-given task.

Some speak of culture as of something which all men have in common. There is, by God’s grace, a common ground for enjoyment and for work, a sort of neutral ground, which the world and the church share. But that is error. There can be no “territory” of common activity, though the world is our common workshop. That is clear when we think of culture [108] and civilization in terms of a God-given task. Then there is on the one hand obedience, and on the other hand transgression.

While it is true that God is long-suffering, tolerating sin and the sinner for a time, we must not forget that in so doing He has this specific purpose: that the new humanity may come to its full development. (Like the farmer who “tolerates” weeds only with an eye to the maturing of his grain.) Humanly speaking, God thrust a whole history between the threat of death (when man fell into sin) and the fulfillment of that threat—a history with not only the possibility of repentance but also the stimulation to repentance—thus maintaining the cultural mandate of Paradise. Recall what has been said of the “covenant with nature” as a phase of the Covenant of Grace which in turn was a continuation of the Covenant of Works.

#### *The honor and glory of the nations.*

In Revelation 21:24 we read, “The kings of the earth do bring glory and honor into it”—that is into the New Jerusalem. There are men of high degree and power

and wealth, even kings and princes, whom the Lord uses for the building of His church and the coming of His kingdom. This does not mean, cannot mean, that something of culture and civilization will be carried over into eternity. What place could our treasures of earthly culture have in the New Jerusalem, when we shall have been radically changed and the earth will have undergone the final catastrophe?

The idea of gradual change-over was excluded even from the beginning, for even then a “change in a moment” was anticipated, a catastrophic change. There can be nothing [109] transported from the evening of this world into the morning of eternity.

But the dawning of the morning of eternity may be compared to the mornings of creation of Genesis 1. Even as each new creation morning saw new wonders superimposed upon that which had been created before, wonders convulsive-eruptive, so also will be the morning of re-creation. God will not carry the old into the new, but will superimpose something new upon the old. That which has been on the previous night may in the morning be radically changed, put aside, made serviceable to the new. In Genesis 1 that which had been created was preparatory for that which the new morning brought. The old was not carried into the new, but the new into the old. Will it not also be so when the great “evening” of the “day of the Lord” passes by and eternal day dawns? “Behold, I make all things new!”

Nor should we mourn as loss the passing of the culture of this world. Was it loss when the apparently chaotic conditions of the beginning were transformed into cosmic order? Neither will it be loss when, in the last day, all the glory of this beautiful world vanishes. On the contrary, it will be

as wonderful a gain as that with which each new creation morning praised God.

When God created man He, as it were, said to him: You, man, have never experienced that which the birds and fishes have experienced, the wonder of a new creation morning. You are My son, and I have given you a mind and a heart, that you might believe Me; I am giving you a work to do, and when My time comes I shall show you, too, a wonder of new creation—and it will be the last. All that was made in six days will pass by suddenly, and there will be a new dawn richer and more glorious than any that preceded. You [110] will not take with you into that day anything from the evening before, for there *My* tent will overshadow you and all its furnishings will be Mine.

Then man had no thought of carrying anything of the old into the new. Such a thought did not come into his heart as long as he was without sin, for his heart was yet immune to such fantasy which fails to recognize the force of the changes which God brings about.

***The historical process of civilization and culture.***

We do not deny that all things have their meaning and serve their purpose—but it is a purpose of *preparation*, even as each creation day of Genesis was preparatory for the catastrophic change of the morning to follow. And in our insistence that the “new” earth is actually the old, the “new” man the same as the man of today, we have acknowledged that the present is preparatory for the new world which is to come. But just how and in what form the things of today will be used as groundwork for our future dwelling of fellowship we do not know; and we should not speculate.

As to the historical process of civilization and culture, that will also pass away. A process is always “passing.” But as a process, and in so far as it is impelled by faith and obedience, and corrected by the sin-withholding power of God, it is by no means valueless. Its value lies in its very passing; thereunto it has been predestined. It is instrumental, willingly or unwillingly, in preparing the children of God for their “fulfillment.” It provides the stimulant which instigates the believer to work; it enables him, motivates him, broadens his view. It provides ever new material with which to work. It is indeed included in the fullness of God’s work in which He will eternally rejoice. [111]

And when the fullness of humanity has been brought in, when the last child is born and the last child of God reborn, history will attain its reward. History must bring about the last temptation and the last triumph for the children of God. To this end the world with its tensions, with its Anti-Christ and its two-edged sword, has been necessary—to bring God’s work to its climax. The value of history lies not in any of its finished products, or even in the last calendar day, but in the fact that its ups and downs provide the strain and stress which gradually leads to the arena of the last battle between Christ and Anti-Christ.

Shall we say then that the glory of the whole world is for the sake of the church? Yes, we may say so. But that is not our *last* word. For there was glory in nature on the farthest islands and in the depths of the sea long before the breath of the church wafted over the earth; civilizations rose and fell, passing by the church. Our last word, therefore, must be that from before the very foundation of the world all glory and beauty was intended for God’s sabbath, and

for His pleasure. And when the whole panorama which He foresaw will have passed before His face, shall we not honor history *in its passing*? For its passing is the pathway along which God attains to that perfected reality which He saw before the creation of one cubic centimeter.

All history is direct sabbath preparation. All is God's work. Therefore all things sing the praise of God even now—but it is a praise of preparation, preparation for the eternal sabbath. He permits us to share in His completed work, and God's pleasure in His own sabbath is our guarantee of cosmic peace. Believing this I can say, in the midst of the great congregation; All is yours, and all is ours, but we are Christ's and Christ is God's.

### *Cosmic peace.*

In preceding paragraphs we have discussed the sabbath as guarantee and sign of cultural-historical peace. Civilization and history are at the service of Christ. When the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into the church, it is in fulfillment of the promise that all of civilization, with its ups and downs, is directed toward the service of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Culture and civilization are matters of the earth. It was upon earth and with reference to earth that God said to man, "Multiply and replenish." And though man's fancy may be enticed by the possibility of contact with other planets, thus far he can boast of no influence upon any of the heavenly bodies. Yet we are already "in the last days"; "the end of the age is upon us," according to Scripture. We are living in the millennium, and when this has reached its maturing all will rapidly run to a close.

Nowhere does Scripture give us a hint of possible influence of our culture upon

other heavenly bodies. We were told to subdue the earth—no more. The Apocalypse speaks of catastrophic influences of other spheres upon the earth at the end of time, but not *vice versa*.

Therefore we have limited our previous discussion to the world, the field of labor of the two Adams, and have found the sabbath a guarantee token of cultural-historical peace.

But the word "world" may also be interpreted to include all of the cosmos. And what will happen to the other heavenly bodies at the end time we do not know. To be sure the Bible speaks of the moon turning to blood, and of the stars falling in mathematical succession. But that is visionary. Nevertheless the relation between earth and other heavenly [113] bodies is such that one cannot be brought to a standstill without effect upon the others.

This only do we know, that God in the beginning established the heavenly bodies in a relationship of peace one with another. And that peace, having been disrupted by sin, must also be restored. Now when the eternal sabbath will be ushered in, peace will also envelop the sun, moon and stars. There will be pan-cosmic peace.

### *The Sabbath a guarantee of cosmic peace.*

From the beginning the sabbath was also guarantee of this cosmic peace. The sabbath was given to earth after the universe was established in harmony and pronounced very good. In Deuteronomy 5 we read of a cultural-historical ground for the sabbath. But in Exodus 20 *cosmic peace* is given as the divine motive for the sabbath commandment, and it is grounded upon God Himself.

In Deuteronomy 5 Israel is exhorted to

observe the sabbath in remembrance of their servitude in Egypt and their exodus. The motive there is cultural-historical. At the time of their departure the treasures of Egypt were urged upon them; thus the “glory and honor” of king Pharaoh was brought into the congregation of God, the “culture” of Egypt became of service to the church, to the messianic people, to the city of peace. And Israel is reminded of this each sabbath day.

Alongside of this—not over against it—we have the superscription of the law given in Exodus 20. Again we are reminded of the exodus from Egypt, and the cultural-historical motive of Deuteronomy 5 is confirmed. But in Exodus 20 there is also reference to *cosmic peace*. “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them [114] is, and He rested on the seventh day; *therefore* the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.” Heaven and earth—the entire cosmos—was included in that original bond of peace and made of service to Jahwe in His sabbath joy. And cosmic peace must also be a prerequisite for heaven’s joy, when God’s dwelling place will be with men.

Christ gave himself also for cosmic peace. He has earned also that joy.

*Cosmic peace is forensic.*

We may call cosmic peace “forensic,” in distinction from “ethical.” The justification of man is an ethical deed, renewing man, purifying his evil nature and thus reconciling him with the law. It is forensic also, for man was *declared* righteous before the tribunal of God when He chose His own in Christ and pronounced them free. Forensic righteousness is founded upon Christ’s work and is in accordance with God’s good pleasure.

Now the righteousness of God is manifested not only in the gospel message which comforts some poor soul with assurance of pardon; it is also manifested in the curbing of the heavenly bodies in their glowing and cooling, their wandering and clashing. The covenant with nature penetrates into the farthest corners of the universe.

To Christ *all things* are given—first in the eternal good pleasure of the Pact of Peace, and later in His exaltation. Not only renewed humanity, but all creation is His. Paul witnesses to the inseparableness of the cosmological and soteriological aspects of Christ’s redemption. It is God’s good pleasure to “sum up all things in Him” who, in accordance with the forensic justice of the Pact of Peace was made sin for us, that all His own might be justified. [115]

Through Christ, God restores all things, even “things in heaven,” to their original state, a state of peace. All creation now suffers under the curse of sin; that alone is evidence of the inclusion of the cosmos in the forensic relationship. But the *sign of the cross* has been set on high amid the stars. The cross of Christ has indeed been lifted high.

We reserved this discussion of forensic peace till the end of the chapter and of the book intentionally, lest we should exclude cosmic peace from the decree of justification and limit justification to man and his historic life upon earth. Or, avoiding this error, we might have fallen into the opposite one, conceiving of cosmic peace as merely a *result* of the forensic justification of man. And in that case we might have imagined that God cleansed the world and paved the streets with gold and embellished the New Jerusalem with precious stones *for man’s sake*.

But that is not the situation.

If so, man would be upon a sort of pedestal and all the rest of the cosmos would look up to him. And he, as it were, would bring the universe back to God, as if he were a viceroy of God.

But God does not recognize such a viceroy. Man is reconciled unto God *along with all of creation*. What else could we expect, since he too is a creature? Creation does not sigh to him or direct its pleas to him. God does not give that honor to any creature. Christ's soteriological significance is *directly* cosmic, and man is inseparably part of the cosmos. From the very beginning God has looked upon him as part of the cosmos and dealt with him as such. For that reason not only man but the universe to its farthest corners shared the curse of sin. And so also will all share in the peace imparted by Christ.

As to where in the universe God's dwelling place will be when He comes to dwell with man, and where therefore the center of the universe will be, that is not a geographic question nor to be determined by quality or quantity or any such standard. We know that God chose the earth from among all the spheres as "operation basis" for his forensic justification, He, the sovereign God, the one law-giver, has spoken—first to Himself (in the Pact of Peace) and subsequently to man (in the Covenant of Grace). All is subject to His word.

### *Universal sabbath.*

Thus the sabbath will one day be wholly fulfilled—in all its meaning as guarantee of eternal rest. Even the name, Lord's Day, will fall away; for the Christ is Lord by virtue of God's forensic declaration, and the cosmos that was bidden to honor Him is God's; it is a treasure which the steward now governs but which he must return to

the master. At the beginning of the Book of Revelation Christ holds the seven stars in His right hand—symbol of cultural-historical peace. But at the end of that last Bible book He gives all actual stars into the Father's hand, having reconciled them. Cosmic peace.

Therefore let the sabbath bells ring out! Let them ring till they are silenced by the very fulfillment *of* their message. Let them ring for the sun which will not be needed in the city forensically called to wondrous light. The city lies in the midst of the cosmos, its gates wide open to all creation. Its length and breadth and height are equal—the cube is the emblem of great peace. The sun standing still also speaks of rest. All rest and all work are identical; desire [117] and fulfillment are one. All emblems fall away; every pen ceases its service.

Nor can we go on. We can cast all crowns at the Lord's feet. The seven "stars" do so—and all the stars. The precious stones gleam, inscribed as they are by His hand with the names of those bought with a great price.

How He rejoiced when He inscribed those names! Judge? Father! All the many names of God shall be equally precious. We shall sing, unceasingly—*Te Deum Laudamus!*