

The Person of Christ

Rev. Takeshi Nidaira
Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (Japan)

I. The Christian confession on the person of Christ

The Christian Church has a well-summarized statement on the Person of Christ. It is the second article of the Apostles' Creed. With this article and many other faithful statements derived from the Bible, we confess the truths about the Person of Christ over against heresies. As you know, the second article says: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his (God's) only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead." And Luther clearly and beautifully explains the meaning of the second article: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord" (David P. Kuske, *Luther's Small Catechism, Revised Version, NPH*, p. 151).

The Apostles' Creed was not written or assembled by the apostles as it had been said in the Medieval Ages. Professor Kuske says: "The Apostles' Creed developed in the early Christian church because people felt a need to have a brief summary of what they believed and taught as Christians. The wording of the Apostles' Creed developed gradually, but it soon was used wherever the Christian church had spread. Christians used it to tell others what they believed and also to confess their faith with one another when they met for worship" (*Luther's Small Catechism, Revised Version, NPH*, p. 131). The truth that the apostles did not write the Apostles' Creed, however, does not make the Creed worthless. For what the Apostles' Creed says is in accordance with what the apostles believed, confessed and taught; In other words, it is biblical.

Immediately before ascending into heaven, Jesus said to the apostles, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This promise and prophecy was fulfilled ten days after Jesus' Ascension, that is, on the day of Pentecost. All of the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (2:4). Some of the people who were at the temple in Jerusalem and heard the apostles speaking in languages "native to the different places represented" (*Concordia Self-Study Bible*, p. 1657), made fun of them, saying: "They have had too much wine" (2:13). Then Peter told the people that he and the other apostles were not drunk, and he boldly preached the message about Jesus Christ. Peter properly divided the Law and the Gospel and through his message the Holy Spirit worked. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:41)." By inspiration Luke recorded not only that fact but also what the Christians in the first half of the first century believed, confessed, taught, and practiced. Luke says in Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

By the way, what does the phrase "the apostles' teaching" in Acts 2:42 mean? Is it a teaching that originated from the apostles? Absolutely not! Because, according to the Great Commission of the Lord, they taught the believers in their days to obey everything that Jesus had commanded (Matt 28:20), and Jesus says that only those who hold on to his teaching are really his disciples (John 8:31). After the apostles were convinced of Jesus' resurrection, especially after Pentecost, they were faithful to the Lord even to death and boldly confessed their belief in Jesus. When the Sanhedrin threatened Peter and John and "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus," these two apostles replied, "We cannot help speaking what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18,20). It is said that St. Peter wrote 2 Peter between A.D. 65 and 68 (*Concordia Self-Study Bible*, p. 1916). In 2 Peter 1:12-15, Peter implies that the day when he will die a martyr to Jesus is near (cf. John 21:18). At end of his life, Peter reminded the Christians in those days that the power and coming of Jesus Christ that he had told to them were not cleverly invented stories and that he was an eyewitness of Jesus' transfiguration (2 Pe 1:16-18). Then, Peter encouraged them to hold on to Jesus' teaching, saying: "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to

pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (1:19).

St. John, too, continued to hold on to Jesus’ teaching and was a good witness of Jesus. He writes in John 20:31: “These (his entire Gospel) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” In his later years John was exiled to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea for his activities as a Christian missionary and there he wrote Revelation “in the mid-90s of the first century after Christ” (The People’s Bible on Revelation, Wayne Mueller, NPH, p. 2). In the last chapter of Revelation, John warned everyone who would hear the words of the prophecy of the book against changing even one word, saying: “If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book”(Rev 22:18,19).

Peter and John’s faithful attitude toward Jesus’ teaching, that is, God’s Word is not something new that we can find only in the faith of the apostles. Moses, one of the famous leaders of God’s people in the Old Testament times, also warned the people about God’s law: “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you” (Deuteronomy 4:2). When God called Ezekiel as his prophet to the rebellious Israelites, he said to the prophet: “You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen” (Ezekiel 2:7). God said to Jeremiah: “Say whatever I command you” (Jeremiah 1:7). We could speak about many more examples of faithful prophets who taught and encouraged God’s people to hold on to God’s Word.

However, let us return to the subject of what St. John writes in Revelation 22:18-19. Pastor Wayne Mueller has a good comment on those passages. He writes: “John’s warning, of course, applies to how we handle all Scripture”(The People’s Bible on Revelation, NPH, p. 228). All the member churches of the CELC agree with him because, according to the Bible, whoever adds to it or subtracts from it is a false prophet. Of course, this rule also holds true in handling God’s Word concerning the Person of Christ.

We should note that St. John, as the last apostle, taught again how to handle God’s Word. This rule was surely handed down from the last apostle to our church fathers. Let me quote from the Triglotta.

The Christian writers of the first three centuries, furthermore, furnish ample proof for the following facts: that from the very beginning of the Christian Church the candidates for Baptism everywhere were required to make a confession of their faith; that from the beginning there was existing in all the Christian congregations a formulated confession, which they called the rule of faith, the rule of truth, etc.; that this rule was identical with the confession required of the candidates for Baptism; that it was declared to be of apostolic origin; that the summaries and explanations of this rule of truth, given by these writers, tally with the contents and, in part, also with the phraseology of the Apostles’ Creed; that the scattered Christian congregations, then still autonomous, regarded the adoption of the rule of faith as the only necessary condition of Christian unity and fellowship.

The Triglotta continues:

The manner in which Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin, Aristides, and other early Christian writers present the Christian truth frequently reminds us of the Apostles’ Creed and suggests its existence. Thus Justin Martyr, who died 165, says in his first Apology, which was written about 140: “Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who also was born for this purpose and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, that we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third. Eternal praise to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

And the Triglotta says:

Irenaeus, who died 189, was the pupil of Polycarp the Martyr; and what he learned from him, Polycarp had received from the Apostle John. Polycarp, says Irenaeus, “taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true.” According to Irenaeus, then, the “rule of truth” received and confessed by every Christian at his baptism was transmitted by the apostles (Triglotta, CPH, 1921, p. 10,11).

The Triglotta has many more details of the history of the Apostles' Creed. However, from the above facts it is clear that the teaching of Jesus' two natures—true God and true man—was correctly handed down from Jesus to the apostles, and from the apostles to the church fathers. That's why the Triglotta concludes that the foundation of the Apostles' Creed was laid by Christ Himself when he gave them the Great Commission.

II. Jesus Christ's two natures

(a) The true deity of Christ

When we speak of the two natures of Jesus, we would do well to note that he, who is the only true God with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity, took on a human body. It is not that a man became a God. All those who accept the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God (The CELC Constitution, Article II, Section 1) are confident from the testimony of God the Father that Jesus is true God. Jesus came to this world to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8). At the very beginning of his public ministry, Jesus told John the Baptizer to baptize him. It was proper for them to do that to fulfill all righteousness (Matt 3:15). As Jesus stepped out of the water, the Father declared: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Before Jesus went to Jerusalem to accomplish the final task as the Savior, he went up a mountain with Peter, James, and John. There these three disciples were given a glimpse of Jesus' glorious appearance as God and they heard the voice of the Father, saying: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him (Matt 17:5; 1 Peter 1:17)." By this, the Father proclaimed that Jesus is his Son.

Jesus' own testimony also makes us confident that he is true God. In John 8:58 Jesus says to the Jews: "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am." The words "I am" spoken by Jesus are not merely a pronoun and a linking verb. When God appeared to Moses at Horeb, he said to his servant: "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). God is completely independent and exists in and of himself. God is a personal being. God is not bound by time at all. Professor Ernst Wendland has a good and an interesting comment on Exodus 3:14.

Those who are familiar with the Hebrew language will see something else of great significance in God's "I AM." The letters of the Hebrew stem for the word "I am" are the same letters used in the Hebrew word which we translate as "LORD" (The People's Bible on Exodus, NPH, Ernst H. Wendland, p. 25).

That is to say, Jesus in John 8:58 applied the phrase "I AM" in Exodus 3:14 to himself and he solemnly claimed the eternity of his being and his oneness with the Father. Besides that, Jesus in John 10:30 says: "I and my Father are one." Here I want to quote from Concordia Self Study Bible.

One. The Greek is neuter—"one thing," not "one person." The two are one in essence or nature, but they are not identical persons. This great truth is what warrants Jesus' "I am" declaration (CSSB, footnote, p. 1627).

We have other testimony too. As the leader of the Jewish court Caiaphas, the high priest, asked Jesus if he was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus replied: "Yes, it is as you say" (Matt 26:64). We should note that in each case the Jews understood what Jesus wanted to say but they didn't believe it. Rather, they thought that Jesus had blasphemed God. That's why they tried to stone him (John 8:59; 10:31) and finally crucified him.

The authority of forgiving sin also gives proof of Jesus' divinity. While Jesus was staying in Capernaum, a paralytic man was brought to him. Jesus didn't say to the paralytic, "I shall heal your sickness." But Jesus said to the man: "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). Having heard that, some teachers of the law thought to themselves: "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (2:7) Because Jesus is the all-knowing God, he knew what they were thinking in their hearts. Then Jesus said to the paralytic: "Get up, take your mat and go home" (2:11) in order to show them that he had the authority to forgive sins. The man got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all (2:12). We agree that God alone can forgive sins, but we don't want to copy the unbelief of these teachers of law. We believe that Jesus is true God. In fact, Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead (Matt 25:31).

We know that Jesus did many miracles. At a wedding that took place in Cana, Jesus changed water to wine (John 2:1-11). Jesus healed a dying child in Capernaum (4:46-54). Jesus fed the five thousand people (6:1-14). Jesus healed a man born blind at Siloam (9:1-7). He also healed many more. Jesus did these miracles to reveal his glory as the Son of God (3:11; 10:25). On the night Jesus was betrayed, Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus replied: "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (John 14:11). Needless to say, his own resurrection from the dead is one of these miracles.

Before ending this section regarding the true deity of Christ, I would like to show some other testimony from the Old and New Testaments. Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6 are famous passages for referring to Jesus' divine nature. In Isaiah 7:14 the prophet calls the baby who is the promised Savior and who will be born of the Virgin Mary, "Immanuel." According Matthew 1:23, the word "Immanuel" means "God with us." And in 9:6 he calls the baby, "Mighty God, Everlasting Father."

St. John begins his Gospel with the solemn phrase that reminds us of the account of Creation in the first chapter of Genesis. He writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made" (1:1-3a). John continues: "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him" (1:10). Even if we don't know Greek, it is obvious from the context that John is referring to Jesus. John ascribes divine names, divine attributes and divine works to Jesus.

(b) The true humanity of Christ

The first promise about the Savior is recorded in Genesis 3:15. It says: "And I will put enmity between you (Satan) and the woman (Eve), and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." We know from this gospel that the Savior is called her (Eve's) offspring. Namely, the Savior is a true human being who will be born of a woman. This promise also tells us about the Savior's passion and his victory over Satan. Yet, from Genesis 3:15 alone, we don't know anything else about who the Savior is. God, however, gradually makes this promise clear and specific through the prophets.

Let's say that we are looking at God's saving plan through a single lens reflex camera. While we are bringing Genesis 3:15 into focus, distant scenes are out of focus and vague. Therefore, next let us bring Gen 12:1-3 into focus. It says: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. . . . I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." These passages tell us that God chose Abraham (Abram) as the ancestor of the Savior; that God gave him three promises. God promised that he would give a country to Abraham and his descendants; that he would make Abraham's descendants many; that the Savior would be born from Abraham's descendants (cf. Gen 22:18; Gal 3:16). Abraham became a father of many nations (Gen 25:1-4; 13-18), however, the Savior would be born as promised in Canaan from the Israelites, Abraham's descendants.

Next, we bring Jeremiah 23:5,6 into focus. God here declares: "The days are coming when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness." A righteous Branch is one of the titles of the Savior. Out of the twelve tribes of Israel, the tribe of Judah was chosen as the tribe from which the Savior would be born. And out of the many houses of the tribe of Judah, God chose David's line as the line from which the Savior would be born (cf. Gen 49:10; Is 11:1-5). The Savior would be born as a descendant of King David in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Finally, we bring the familiar passages—Luke 2:11,12—into focus. "Today in the town of David (Bethlehem) a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." His parents named this baby, Jesus. This personal name means "One who will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). Because of the above and the other prophecies about the Savior, his genealogy was important especially to the Jews. That's why Matthew recorded Jesus' genealogy at the very beginning of his Gospel. As promised, the Savior, Jesus was born of a woman who was the descendant of Abraham and David. Jesus' legal father, Joseph, too was from the same line.

The New Testament has many more details about Jesus' humanity. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21). Jesus grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). Jesus felt hungry (Luke 4:2). Jesus ate and drank (Luke 7:34,36). Jesus slept (Mark 4:38). Jesus had a will (Luke 22:42). Jesus had emotions (John 11:33). Jesus wept (John 11:35). When Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, he said: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matt 26:38). Jesus died on the cross (John 19:30) and was buried (19:42). Thus, the Bible ascribes a human nature to Jesus. Jesus has the same body that we have, consisting of flesh and blood and bones (Luke 24:39; John 19:33-34).

One big difference between Jesus and all human beings is that he had no sin, since he had been conceived by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit. "The Christian Church has from the beginning believed and confessed that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary" (Christian Dogmatics, Volume II, CPH, Francis Pieper, p. 72). Another big difference is that he did not have to die.

For that reason, we reject all the unbiblical teachings that the virgin birth of Jesus was not a true story; that Jesus was only seemingly a human being, but not so in reality; that Jesus only had a body; that Jesus only had a human soul; that Jesus didn't have a human will and emotions, etc.

III. The Personal Union of the two Natures in Christ

I met a Canadian businessman by chance. I don't know his name. I don't know where he lives. Yet, I will never forget that I met him, because he is the first "Christian" who said to me: "I am a Christian but I don't believe Jesus' virgin birth." If a typical Japanese had said that, I would not have been surprised, because many Japanese think they are Buddhists and they don't believe in Jesus. Is our faith and the above man's faith the same? I would say, "No!" As long as one tries to understand Jesus' virgin birth according to reason, he will never be able to be convinced of the truth that "God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law" (Gal 4:4); that the divine and human natures were personally united with one another when God the Son was conceived in Mary's womb and became man.

The personal union of the two natures in Christ is a deep and great mystery (1 Tim 3:16). The Formula of Concord also says: "Next to the article of the Holy Trinity this (the personal union or communication of the natures in the person of Christ) is the greatest mystery in heaven and on earth" (Triglotta, Th. Dec., Art. VIII, 33, p. 1027). The Formula of Concord has many more details on this matter, but allow me to quote from Koehler. Koehler briefly explains the union the two natures in Christ as follows.

The two natures are not so mixed and mingled as to make a new composition; neither has one changed into the other, losing its own identity; but, like body and soul, they remain distinct. Nor do they exist beside each other, like two boards glued together, without having any communion with, and interrelation to, each other; but again, like body and soul, the divine nature so permeates and penetrates the human nature, and the human nature is so permeated and penetrated by the divine nature, that both natures make one person. "As the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one in Christ" (Athanasian Creed). (A Summary of Christian Doctrine, CPH, Edward W. Koehler, p. 88).

St. John describes this personal union with easily understood words. He writes: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). St. Paul writes: "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" (Col 1:19). "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form (2:9)." Because of this inseparable but distinct personal union, both are correct as John says, "He (Jesus) is the true God" (1 John 5:20), and Paul calls Jesus, "the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5; Rom 9:5).

IV. The Communion of Attributes

We believe, confess, and teach another important thing concerning the Person of Christ. It is the communion of the attributes of the natures of Jesus. After amplifying the personal union, the Formula of Concord says:

From this basis of the personal union, as it has been stated and explained above, that is, from the manner in which the divine and the human nature in the person of Christ are united with one another,

namely, that they have not only the names in common, but have also indeed and truth communion or equalizing of the same in their essences, flows also the doctrine concerning the true communion of the properties of the natures (Triglotta, Th., Dec., Art. VIII, 31, p.1025).

I think that this matter is the most difficult doctrine concerning the Person of Christ. I also think that it is the best way to explain this matter that we “receive and repeat the explanations which the ancient orthodox Church has given here of the good foundation of Holy Scripture” (Triglotta, Th. Dec., Art. VIII, 61, p.1035). For that reason, I quote from the Formula of Concord.

- (a) Since in Christ two distinct natures exist and remain unchanged and unconfused in their natural essence and properties, and yet of both natures there is only one person, hence, that which is, indeed, an attribute of only one nature is ascribed not to that nature alone, as separate, but to the entire person, which is at the same time God and man (whether it is called God or man). But, in this mode of speaking, it does not follow that what is ascribed to the person is at the same time a property of both nature, but it is distinctively explained what nature it is according to which anything is ascribed to the person. Thus the Son of God was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and hath suffered for us in, or according to, the flesh, 1 Pet. 3,18; 4,1. (Triglotta, Th. Dec., Art. VIII, 36-37, p. 1027).
- (b) As to the execution of the office of Christ, the person does not act and work in, with, through, or according to only one nature, but in, according to, with, and through both natures, or, as the Council of Chalcedon expresses it, one nature operates in communion with the other what is a property of each. Therefore Christ is our Mediator, Redeemer, King, High Priest, Head, Shepherd, etc., not according to one nature only, whether it be the divine or the human, but according to both natures (Triglotta, Th. Dec., Art. VIII, 46, p. 1031).
- (c) However, it is still a much different thing when the question is whether the natures in the personal union in Christ have nothing else or nothing more than only their natural, essential properties; for that they have and retain these has been mentioned above. . . . But that this opinion [that nothing should be ascribed to the human nature of Christ which is beyond its natural properties] is false and incorrect is so clear from God’s Word that even their associates rebuke and reject this error. For the Holy Scripture, and the ancient Fathers from the Scriptures testify forcefully that human nature in Christ, when it was glorified and exalted to the right hand of the majesty and power of God, after the form of a servant and humiliation had been laid aside, did receive, apart from, and over and above its natural, essential, permanent properties, also special, high, great, supernatural, inscrutable, ineffable, heavenly prerogatives and excellences in majesty, glory, power, and might above everything that can be named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come (Eph 1:21) (Triglotta, Th. Dec., Art. VIII, 48-51, p. 1031).

V. The reason why Jesus had to be God and Man

- (a) The reason why Jesus had to be man:

Hebrews 2:14-17 helps us to understand why Jesus took on a human body and came to this world. “Since the children have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

All people are sinful by nature and sin every day in their thoughts, words, or actions. Sin pays off with eternal death in hell. But no one can save himself from eternal death. Everyone needs the Savior. That’s why God promised Adam and Eve to send a Savior. That’s why Jesus came to this world. Jesus took on a human body in order to obey God’s law in full as the substitute of all people (Gal 4:4,5); in order to take all the sins of all people (2 Co 5:19-21); in order to die and pay the ransom for the sins of all people (Heb 10:5-10; 1 John 2:2); in order to be forsaken by God for all people (Matt 27:46).

- (2) The reason why Jesus had to be God:

According to Psalm 49:7, no man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him. The story of the young rich man reminds us of this (Matt 19:16-24). If there were a perfect saint, he would indeed be saved, but he would have no superfluous merit, which he could pass on to some one else (A Summary of Christian Doctrine, CPH, Koehler, p.94). It is also obvious that no mere human can destroy Satan who holds the power of death. Satan was successful in tempting even Adam and Eve, who were holy and had a perfect knowledge about God. We are sinful by nature and don't have a perfect knowledge about God. How can we overcome all his cunning temptations? It is God alone that can defeat Satan's temptations. Because Jesus was the holy one and the Son of God (Luke 1:35), he didn't have original sin. Jesus didn't commit any sin by his thoughts, words or deeds. The Bible says: "We have one (Jesus) who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb 4:15). 2 Co 5:21 says that Jesus had no sin. Another thing that only God can do is to rise from the dead. Jesus had to be God in order to rise. Jesus had to be God in order to prove by his resurrection that he accomplished his task as the Savior of the world.

VI. Conclusion

Before closing this essay, let us recall Jesus' question in Matthew 16:13-17. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; other say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophet." Then, Jesus asked them, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" As their representative, Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus accepted this confession and said to Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but my father in heaven. On this rock (not on Peter, but on the confession he made) I will build my church, and the gate of Hades will not overcome it."

The Christian Church that even Satan cannot overcome is built on the "solid rock"—that is to say, on the One who is the Son of Man and who is at the same time the Son of the living God. Let me ask you two more questions before closing this essay. Who do the people in our day say Jesus Christ is? We may hear many strange answers. But what about you? Who do you say Jesus is? Of course, you and I follow what the Bible says. I believe, confess, and teach that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. I know you agree. I rejoice that by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit God has given us this common faith and confession, which is proclaimed to the world by our joint-fellowship, our activities, and our confession. May our God continue to bless our confession to his glory and the good of all people.

Bibliography

- Kuske, D. P., Luther's Small Catechism, Revised Version, Milwaukee: NPH.
- Fehlauer, A. F., Catechism Lessons, Pupil's Book, Milwaukee: WELS Board for Parish Education, 1981.
- Koehler, E. W. A., Luther's Small Catechism, Indiana: CTSP.
- Wendland, E. H., The People's Bible, Exodus, Milwaukee: NPH
- Braun, J. A., The People's Bible, Isaiah 40-66, Milwaukee: NPH
- Balge, R. D., The People's Bible, Acts, Milwaukee: NPH
- Panning, A. J., The People's Bible, Romans, Milwaukee: NPH
- Mueller, W. D., The People's Bible, Revelation, Milwaukee: NPH
- Koehler, E. W. A., A Summary of Christian Doctrine, St. Louis: CPH
- Mueller, John T., Christian Dogmatics, St. Louis: CPH, 1955.
- Pieper, Francis, Christian Dogmatics, Volume II, St. Louis: CPH, 1951.
- Balge, R. D., Sermon Study on the Gospel, (ILCW), Series A, Milwaukee: NPH
- Balge, R. D., Sermon Study on the Epistles, (ILCW), Series B, Milwaukee: NPH
- Balge, R. D., Sermon Study on the Epistles, (ILCW), Series C, Milwaukee: NPH
- Franzmann, W. H., Bible History Commentary, New Testament, Volume II, Milwaukee: WELS Board for Parish Education, 1981.
- Luther, Martin, Commentary on Romans. Translator, J. Theodore Mueller, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1992.
- Jeske, J. C., Christology And Justification: A Vital Link, Presented to the Convention of the Western Wisconsin District of the WELS, 1998.

Becker, S. W., God Manifest In Flesh: The Mystery of the Personal Union.
Concordia Self-Study Bible, St. Louis: CPH
Concordia Triglotta, St. Louis: CPH

The Two States of Christ

Rev. Jonas Schroeter
Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (Germany)

Introduction

Compare the child in the manger that the Gospel of Luke puts before our eyes with the risen Lord who on the evening of the first day of the week walks through a locked door to comfort his disciples with the greeting, "Peace be with you." Compare the man dying on the cross with the picture the Holy Spirit showed to Stephen when he looked up before his death and saw Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. We find an immense difference between the mode of existence of Christ during his earthly days until his death and the mode of existence of our risen Savior. The humble preacher and teacher Jesus from Nazareth on the one hand, and the exalted Lord of all on the other, show us the two states of Christ.

Besides the facts in the Gospel record we find this doctrine most clearly in Phil 2:5-10: Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

From this passage the terms are taken that are in use to describe the two states of Christ. Following the Greek expression *ejkevnwsen eJautovn*—"he emptied Himself," the Latin word *exinanitio* came into use, as well as the term *exaltatio*.

Before we discuss the facts that the Bible shows us about the states of exinanition and exaltation, we will first ask whom Scripture shows us as the subject of exinanition and exaltation. Phillipians 2 gives us Jesus Christ. This name is not used of the eternal *logos asarkos* but of the *logos ensarkos*. It is the Word that already became flesh who now emptied himself and was later exalted. To be precise we also need to define that it was the person of the Son of God according to his human nature. The man Jesus passed through exinanition to exaltation. This can not be stated of the divine nature since the eternal God does not and can not change (Psalm 102:27).

Since incarnation and exinanition start at the same point, we are tempted to equate both. But if we understand exinanition as equal to incarnation, this would necessarily lead to the conclusion that incarnation ended when the exaltation began. But Scripture tells us that the human nature also was exalted. For this reason we need to make the distinction between incarnation and exinanition. They both began at the same point, but incarnation continues beyond the grave forever. The state of exinanition ended on Easter morning.

In the state of exinanition the *logos ensarkos* refrained from living on an equal level with God and appeared in the form of a servant. In the state of exaltation He received the name above every name.

The State of Exinanition

General facts

During this period Christ voluntarily gave up the full use and revelation of the divine power and glory that was given to his human nature. He emptied himself and took on the form of a servant. This is not to be confused with giving up the divine attributes themselves. Even in the state of exinanition Christ possessed all of his divine power, knowledge and glory, and there are incidents when He actually used them even in His earthly days, for instance to perform miracles.

No one could have forced him to come to this world in the form of a servant. He humbled himself voluntarily only as he followed God's will to show love to sinners. He came in order to achieve salvation for mankind.

The History of Exinanition

The state of exinanition covers the period of Christ's earthly days from his conception until his burial. The Bible does not give us an exact number of steps or stages. We are free to distinguish any number as long as we keep in mind that all of these stages of exinanition are not steps of increasing humiliation.

Ever since the early church formulated the apostolic creed, five or six steps are customary. Let's discuss six stages of the history of exinanition and see which way our Lord went in supreme obedience in order to redeem us.

The conception of Christ

In looking at the conception of Jesus Christ we speak about the very beginning of exinanition. That's not because exinanition is the same as incarnation. But the very moment when Christ's human nature became united with the divine nature the human nature of Christ took on the "form of a servant."

Scientists in our day are working hard to research the mysteries involved in the normal process of human conception. But the conception of Christ through the direct work of the Holy Spirit will always remain a transcendent mystery and as such an article of faith. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). This is all we can know about the conception of Christ. By way of this miracle God became man, or to put it in other words: Godhood and manhood were united. This child will not have a human father.

When God created Adam, he made him an adult person. When God became man, he went so far in his humiliation as to develop from embryo through all stages of childhood. In this way he became fully our brother.

The birth of Christ

According to the report in Luke 2 the birth of Jesus took place in the common manner of all human births. There is not anything unusual or miraculous about the birth itself. Only the poverty and lowliness of the circumstances put the birth of our Savior in some extraordinary light.

The unusual aspect of this birth follows from the miraculous conception. Isaiah foretold that a virgin would be with child and give birth to a son (7:14). Mary learned to understand this miracle when the angel reminded her: Nothing is impossible with God. We maintain against all human understanding that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin.

Scripture only states that Mary remained a virgin until the birth of Christ. After the first centuries of Christianity, when the ideals of monastic asceticism began to take root, the question was debated whether Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Christ. In following this line of thought some even taught that Christ was born *clauso utero Virginis*. While there is no doubt that God could bring about even this miracle, this assertion has no basis in Scripture. Also the teaching that Mary remained a virgin forever does not have proof in Scripture, even though it is not possible to determine from Scripture whether Mary had children after the birth of Jesus.

The earthly life of Christ

When mentioning the different phases of the exinanition, the apostolic creed bypasses all of the earthly life of Christ after his birth until the *passio magna*. It is still worthwhile pointing out some more of the events that filled the days of his flesh. According to Gal 4: 4 Jesus was born and put under the Law. This can first be seen when the child was circumcised according to the law at the eighth day. All who list circumcision as a separate stage of exinanition have to be careful not to give the impression that Jesus was not under the law during the first seven days of his earthly life. In his conception and birth he put himself under the fourth commandment. But with his circumcision it was first shown publicly that the Son of God was subject to the Law. In Mt 12:8 Jesus states clearly that he is not naturally subject to the law. Rather he is the Lord also of the Sabbath. Jesus Christ placed himself voluntarily under the Law in a vicarious manner in our place.

In the next years of his life his education further shows how Jesus abandoned his divine omniscience. In Luke 2:52 it is reported that the child grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. The education and training of Jesus did not differ from that which parents give to their children generally. He submitted to his parents and teachers and learned from the education they gave to him. His human nature developed in the way common to all human children. According to the customs of his time he learned the trade of a carpenter like his foster-father.

Even after he entered into his public ministry where he showed many proofs of his divine nature, he still continued to share the common necessities of human life. He was in need of food and sleep. He underwent temptations and felt strong emotions like grief and sorrow. Jesus also submitted himself to the authority of worldly government by instructing his disciples to pay taxes (Mt 17:24ff).

The sufferings of Jesus Christ

In order to describe the suffering of our Lord pastors probably think of the words they use to bring the torments of crucifixion to their congregations in Lenten sermons. But we should not restrict the suffering of Christ to the last week of his earthly life. Christ suffered not only during the last two days of his earthly life. Many other experiences during his life also added to his suffering and could be listed under the stage of suffering. Jesus experienced human temptations and strong emotions. However he never had a sinful thought in his heart. Scripture especially tells us that his loving soul suffered from the rejection of the Gospel by his own people (e.g. Mt 23:37). In dogmatic textbooks sometimes the distinction is made between the *passio inchoata* as the sufferings he endured during his daily life and the *passio magna* which refers to the agonies endured in Gethsemane and especially at the cross. Already in anticipation of this suffering the soul of Jesus was filled with real dread (Luke 12:50). We can hardly imagine the tortures of his body when he was flogged and finally nailed to the cross. But completely beyond our comprehension is the suffering of his soul. The sins of the whole world were laid on him. He carried them to the cross. He had to bear the chastisement of all sin of all mankind. He passed through the very torments of hell which made him cry: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He experienced what it means if God turns away his grace and punishes with the full force of his anger.

The death of Jesus Christ

The Gospels report that Pilate was asked by the leaders of the Jews to remove the bodies from the cross since it was the day of preparation (John 19:31). The formal obedience to the law of the Jews led to a trustworthy report by independent witnesses about the death of Jesus Christ. Experienced Roman soldiers made sure he indeed died. This fact is important for the credibility of the resurrection and with it for our salvation. If Jesus had not died completely, he also would not have been raised from death. But we know for sure his soul was separated from the body.

We need to observe one important difference between the death of Jesus Christ and ordinary human death. Psalm 16 foretells and the Apostle Peter underscores it: You will not let your Holy One see decay. Even though Jesus died God did not allow the body to start decomposition. In one more point Christ's death was totally different from any other human death. Even in death the union of the human nature in body and soul with the *logos* was not severed.

The burial of Jesus Christ

The burial seems to be only a logical and human consequence of the death of our Savior that does not have much importance for our dogmatic interest. But we need to take into account that the divine power that was given to his human nature could have freed him from the cross and could have saved him the experience of burial. But he chose to refrain from using this divine power even in these decisive moments of his earthly days. In this way his burial also is a true stage of his exinanition and is mentioned in the apostolic creed. Furthermore the burial serves us as another witness for the certainty of his death.

The state of Exaltation

General facts

As soon as the purpose of exinanition was accomplished, Christ was placed in the state of exaltation as described in Phil 2:9,10: Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. If we ask what Christ left behind, we find the *morfh*; *douvlou*—the form of a servant. In asking what he gained, we are pointed to the assumption of the unrestricted, continuous, perpetual use of the *morfh*; *geou'*—the form of God. After his resurrection Christ did not hide his divine glory any more but made full use of it. We have to note that exaltation pertains to the use of the divine glory and not to its possession,

since Christ was in possession of divine glory also during the state of exinanition but only refrained from making use of it. On a time line the state of exaltation began with the vivification, and continues forever.

History of Exaltation

The descent into hell

The Apostles' Creed lists one stage in its enumeration that we don't find in the Gospels. Two passages are commonly quoted as the source for this teaching: 1 Peter 3:18,19, Christ was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison and Col 2:15. After Christ had returned to bodily life in the tomb through divine power, in his glorified body he went where no human can go—to hell. He made his way into the prison of the damned in order to “preach” to them. Scripture reveals very little about his descent into hell and there is no revelation on what and how he preached. Only if we look into Col 2:15 do we find a hint as to what his preaching may have included: And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

What Christ “preached” could not have been a preaching of Law and Gospel in the way he commanded preaching to us. He went to hell in order to show to the devil and to the damned that he indeed had won the battle and he presented himself as the one who has the victory. At the same time he confirmed the condemnation for all in hell. It well may be that this preaching was not a verbal proclamation but rather a show and display of his victory.

Our confessions mention this stage of the exaltation of Christ only with the short article IX in the Formula of Concord. There the purpose of the descent into hell is described in view of the believers: For it is sufficient that we know that Christ descended into hell, destroyed hell for all believers, and delivered them from the power of death and of the devil, from eternal condemnation and the jaws of hell. The Confessions go on to warn against attempting too detailed an explanation: But how this occurred we should [not curiously investigate, but] reserve until the other world, where not only this point, but also still others will be revealed, which we here simply believe, and cannot comprehend with our blind reason. It is interesting to notice that the earliest versions of the Apostles' Creed don't mention the descent into hell.

Common errors in the teaching of the descent into hell are the ideas that it was part of the humiliation and that it took place during crucifixion or right at the moment of his death. Another way of misinterpreting Scripture's teaching on this point would be the attempt to make a distinction between hell and the “prison” referred to in 1 Peter 3:19. It has been claimed that “prison” does not describe the place where the devil and the damned are but a place for all dead where they await judgment day. Christ's preaching in such a place is easily misunderstood as if those passed away are given one more chance to repent and believe.

Resurrection

When the tomb was still sealed and the angel had not yet removed the stone, early on the third day the dead body of Christ was quickened and brought back to life. The miracle that is completely unbelievable to human reason happened. What power caused this miracle to happen? At Pentecost the Apostle Peter preached: But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Acts 2:24). Here and in many other passages God the Father is mentioned as the power who raised Christ from death. But Jesus also speaks of himself as one who has the power to bring his life back. In John 2:19 we read: Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” Also in John 10:17f we are informed that the Son is active in the resurrection. “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. . . . I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.” In the light of these passages we can maintain that both the Father and the Son are causing the resurrection.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples later that day, they quite understandably doubted at first that they really saw him and that he was indeed among the living. Jesus had to show them his body: After he said this, he showed them his hands and side (John 20:20). It was still the same body they had brought to the tomb. But still this was a glorious body (Phil 3:21) that was no longer restricted by space and time and no longer

needed food and sleep. His body after resurrection could no longer die (Romans 6:9). His human body already took on that glorified form which even our bodies will take on when he raises us at the last day.

The Lord had already foretold the time of resurrection. He would rise from the dead on the third day. This refers to the Jewish custom of counting the days. The first day was the day of his crucifixion and burial. The day of resurrection then was counted as the third day. We don't know the exact hour in which Christ rose from the tomb, but this event took place before the angel removed the stone and the sun rose.

The New Testament gives many witnesses who saw the risen Savior and proves that his resurrection is certain. All who heard the message doubted at first. But then the disciples went out to see the empty tomb and Jesus appeared to them. For a period of 40 days he occasionally spent time with them in order to comfort them and to give instructions concerning the kingdom of God. In these weeks many more became eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:6).

The resurrection of Christ gives great comfort to sinners. Jesus could not remain in the grave. This is proof for us that he is God. He had foretold that he would rise again from death as part of his messianic mission. Now resurrection proves that his word is truth and he indeed is the Messiah and that his mission is indeed accomplished. With the resurrection God publicly declared the justification of all mankind.

The errors concerning the resurrection can be grouped into two groups. There is the rationalistic contention that there are no miracles and for this reason there can be no resurrection—not even of Christ. They deny the possibility, necessity, and reality of the resurrection and so reject the fundamental teaching of Christianity, as Paul says in 1 Cor 15:14.

The other errors concerning the resurrection deny or misinterpret single features. The Calvinists teach that Christ's human nature did not effectively participate in its own resurrection nor was the glorified body of Christ immediately independent of time and space.

Ascension

Forty days after Easter the Gospels report one last incident in the earthly life of Christ. After some final instructions to the disciples, Jesus went up to the clouds and a cloud hid him. In this way Jesus disappeared from the eyes of his disciples. For the moment of his resurrection Jesus did not have any eyewitnesses. Here at his ascension the disciples and perhaps many others saw how he was taken up to heaven. Jesus intended to show them that he was no longer going to appear to them in the way he did in the last weeks. They were to wait for his final coming on Judgment Day and not for an occasional reappearance.

Where did he go? The Gospels answer: He was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19). While the visible skies are not meant here, there are possible explanations of what is meant by "heaven." Jesus told one of the criminals at the cross: I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. Also Paul is looking forward to come to the place where Christ is (Phil 1:23). Christ went to the place of the saints, to the *coelum beatorum*. But scripture tells us also that he went to a place that is far different from all other places: He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe (Ephesians 4:10). The place of his sitting at the right hand of God is also called *coelum maiestaticum*. We also learn from this passage that Jesus was not fixed to a certain place, like a retirement or state of rest in glory. He also fills the whole universe. And from there he is working and active, as we will see in discussing the next stage of his exaltation.

Sitting at the Right Hand of God

It was promised in the Old Testament and declared in the New Testament in numerous passages that Jesus Christ after his ascension would be seated at the right hand of God. While reading such passages we first think of the throne of a king where God the Father is seated and at the right hand his first and most influential adviser. But we have to take into account that the Holy Scripture here speaks in anthropomorphic language. This is also true for similar passages where it is said that God lives in heaven or that he looks down upon his children. God is spirit and a spirit does not have flesh and bones. So we can not picture God's right hand as an organ, like a human hand. Also, the place at the right hand of God is not a spatial position. We need to understand this metaphor and look for the point of comparison. 1 Peter 3:22 can help us: . . . who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in

submission to him. The right hand of God refers to a position of inexpressible authority, power, glory and heavenly majesty. Quenstedt sums it up: Christ's sitting at the right hand of God is the highest degree of exaltation, or an act by which he himself after his ascension into heaven, when he was placed according to his human nature on the throne of divine majesty, dwells in the fullness of honor, glory and majesty and fully exercises his infinite power and through it rules in a most present and powerful way over all things in heaven and on earth for the glory of his own name and for the comfort and salvation of his afflicted church.

Who was it who was seated at the right hand of God? In his sermon at Pentecost the apostle Peter tells us, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). And in Phil 2:9 we read that God gave him a name above all names. So he was not in this position before and he did not have the name before. These expressions can only speak about the human nature of Christ which alone could be raised to a higher state of perfection. According to the divine nature Christ reigned together with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity. Quenstedt points us to a subtle distinction: To sit at the right hand of God the Father is not entirely the same as to reign with the Father. For until now Christ has reigned with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity. Nevertheless, he did not sit at the right hand of God from then, for his sitting began first from the time of this exaltation.

Scripture reveals to us a comforting truth about what Christ does while sitting at the right hand of God: And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Eph 1:22f). Jesus uses his rule at the right hand of God in order to turn everything into good for his people and for his body, which is his church.

With the sitting at the right hand of God (*sessio*) we have left the realm of space and also of time where we described most of the stages of Christ's exaltation and exaltation. The sitting at the right hand will last forever.

Return to Judgment

The *sessio* is the final stage of exaltation. But in the apostolic creed we confess one more point: . . . from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead. Christ's human nature will not receive any additional glory on this day. All his glory now is his and he reveals it to his church already in his word. At the last day his glory and power will be visible, not only to those who believe in him but to all mankind and also to those who rejected him. At judgment day Christ for the last time will be active as our Savior when he puts all who believed in him at his right hand side and invites them: Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world (Matthew 25:34).

We are looking forward to this day, when we will see him and when we will also receive a glorified body. Now the deep mysteries of the states of exaltation and exaltation are hidden from our eyes and we try to understand with our limited minds what he reveals in his word. It will be on this day that we will be able to fully understand and see him as he is. Until then we want to teach and confess and preach all the comforting truth to lost souls in order that they might be saved.

Literature

Schaller, John; *Biblical Christology*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee WI, 1919

Hoenecke, Adolf, *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*, Vol III *Die eigentliche Dogmatik—Soteriologie*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee WI, 1912

Concordia Triglotta, *Die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis Mo., 1921

Quotes of Quenstedt quoted from "Middler Dogmatics Aids, A listing of passages and translations of Latin and German quotations in Prof. Meyer's Dogmatics notes"

The Work of Christ as Prophet

Rev . Mutebele Chijoka
Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Zambia)

Introduction

When the Chairman's Advisory Council of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Zambia Conference (LCCA-ZC) asked me nearly two years ago to present an essay on "The Work of Jesus Christ as Prophet" at the Fourth Triennial Convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), the first thing that came to my mind was the question Jesus Christ asked his disciples in the region of Caesarea Philippi, namely, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Mt 16:13). The disciples had enough information from people concerning Jesus Christ because on one occasion Jesus had sent them to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 10). Without hesitation they responded, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and still others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Mt 16:13,14). We note from this passage that the concept of what a prophet is had taken root in people's minds by the time Jesus was here on earth.

In this paper, which is the first of the three papers that will discuss the work of Jesus Christ in his threefold office as Prophet, Priest, and King, we shall consider the work of Jesus Christ as Prophet. First we must understand the definition of prophet. After that we will consider Jesus as Prophet according to this outline:

1. In the Old Testament
2. In the State of Humiliation (Exinination)
3. In the State of Exaltation

Common Definitions of a Prophet

Merrill Unger, in Unger's Bible Dictionary, page 890, gives his definition for prophet as "A prophet is one who is divinely inspired to communicate God's will to his people and to disclose the future to them."

Edward W. A. Koehler, in A Summary of Christian Doctrine, page 107, says "A prophet of God is one who speaks for God, making known and interpreting the word and will of God to man.

In Abiding Word, Volume 2, page 128, we read, "The function of a prophet therefore, might be described simply: God spoke to the prophet and the prophet reported to the people."

A Prophet According to African Culture

In African Traditional Religion in the Biblical Perspective, page 88, Dr. Richard J. Gehman, who did research among some African tribes, defines what a prophet is to an African: "A prophet is one who predicts the future. He warns of the impending danger such as drought, heavy rains, locusts, plagues and ensuing epidemic. The prophets are associated with ancestral spirits. They communicate with ancestors who inform them what shall take place and what remedies may be taken to prevent disaster or to protect against danger. . . . The primary means by which a prophet receives his revelations is by a dream. But he might also be possessed by the ancestors."

The Bible's Definition of a Prophet

The definitions of a prophet, as found in books and in culture, may be of interest as we study the thoughts of men. Finally, though, our definition must come from the Bible, as it is Scripture that defines the term.

According to God's inspired Word, a prophet of God is one called by God. This call is not an invitation. It is an appointment from God himself. The Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5).

Scripture also tells us that the function of a prophet of God is to proclaim or preach the message of God to people. A prophet of God also foretells the future. "The Lord said, 'You (Moses) shall speak to him (Aaron) and put words in his mouth, I (God) will help both of you speak and I will teach you what to do. He will

“speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him” (Ex 4:15,16). The Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah, “You must go to everyone I send you and say whatever I command you . . . Now, I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer 1:7,9). And when God called the prophet Ezekiel we read, “Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them” (Eze 3:4).

So far, we have seen that a prophet of God is not like the other prophets who claim to receive their revelations from ancestral spirits. The prophet of God does not speak his own words or thoughts. Rather, he speaks what God, who called and appointed him, commands and directs him to say.

1. Prophet in the Old Testament

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word (Jn 1:1), performed his prophetic work of proclaiming God’s message in the Old Testament through the holy prophets. The Apostle Peter, one of the twelve, testifies, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently with greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings and the glories that would follow” (1 Pe 1:10,11).

Edward W. A. Koehler, in his book, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, on page 108 tells us how Jesus Christ performed his prophetic work in the Old Testament: “Hence, even before his incarnation it was Christ, the Son of God, who made known to Moses and the prophets the word and will of God by sending His Spirit into their hearts.”

True, what the prophets taught, proclaimed and foretold in the Old Testament, it was Christ who took part in creating all things (Jn 1:3), who then spoke to the serpent and Eve in the garden of Eden (Ge 3:15), performing his work of a prophet.

Christ Declared a Prophet

As noted earlier, the idea of a prophet was not something new in the Old Testament times. Moses, who lived about 1,500 years before Jesus Christ, told the Israelites about the Savior to come: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him . . . I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him” (Dt 18:15,18).

The Old Testament has many prophecies which tell us about the prophetic work of the Anointed One. The Prophet Isaiah, who lived about 760 years before Christ, prophesied, “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice” (Isa 42:1-3).

In another place Isaiah wrote of the Christ: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn” (Isa 61:1,2).

And again Isaiah wrote, “See I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you because of the Lord your God, the Holy one of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor” (Is. 55:4,5).

The Prophet Zechariah, who was also a priest, prophesied about Jesus, “Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord” (Zec 6:12).

2. In the State of Humiliation (Exinination)

In the days of his flesh, Jesus Christ, as a prophet, taught and preached the message of God personally. However, he chose twelve disciples and taught them for a period of three years in order that they would teach others when he left the earth. In all our four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we see Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, doing his work as a prophet, that is, teaching and preaching God’s Word. Some passages clearly reveal this:

“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’” (Mt 4:17).

“Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said, ‘The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mk 1:14,15).

Jesus message was simply for people to acknowledge their sins and believe the good news which is centered in the promised Saviour of the world. A good explanation of this is found in Harold E. Wicke’s “The People’s Bible, Mark,” page 22: “The way to the king, as Christ points out, is to repent and believe the good news. Repent means to have a change of heart as far as sin is concerned and in this connection points to good news concerning the one in whom they would find forgiveness of sins. Jesus called on his hearers to turn away from the service of sin, to be sorry they had fallen away from God, and by faith to trust in him who alone offers forgiveness.”

This is what Jesus, as a prophet, wanted his people to know and do as he went about teaching and preaching in Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and to the regions beyond. He was doing the work of a prophet.

People Recognized Jesus as a Prophet

The power of the Word in Jesus’ preaching led people to recognize him as a prophet, as we see in a number of passages.

The Samaritan woman could not keep the information to herself. “Sir,” she said, “I can see that you are a prophet” (Jn. 4:19).

“Those who were at the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, after hearing his message, said ‘Surely this man is the Prophet’” (Jn 7:40).

When Jesus raised a widow’s son at the town of Nain, we are told that “They (the people) were filled with awe and praised God. ‘A great prophet has appeared among us’ they said. ‘God has come to help his people’” (Lk 7:16).

Christ Proclaimed Himself to be a Prophet

In his first sermon at his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus Christ told the people who were in the synagogue that he was the prophet about whom Isaiah wrote. In Luke we read, “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the Prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor’” (Lk 4:16-19, compare with Isa 61:1,2).

Jesus told the unbelieving Jews, “I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (Jn 12:49,50).

And when Christ was honoring his heavenly Father for the work he was sent for, he prayed, “I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you and they believed that you sent me. I have given them your word. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known” (Jn 17:8,14,26).

Christ Preached the Law

Christ as a prophet preached the law for two reasons: First, he wanted to make people conscious of their sins, and secondly, he wanted the law to guide them in their Christian living. (We recognize that the law also has a third use, namely, to curb people from coarse outbreaks of sin.)

As an example of Jesus’ use of the law to make people conscious of their sins, we read from Luke, “On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘What is written in the law?’ he replied. ‘How do you read it?’ He answered: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘You answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live’” (Lk 10:25-28, compare with Dt 6:5, Lev 19:18).

To show people the way they should live in accordance with the law, Jesus told them, "Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48, compare with Lev 19:2).

Christ's preaching of the law was clear to the people; he was not like the priests, scribes, and Pharisees who burdened the people's consciences by their preaching of the law, and who gave them no hope. Besides the law, which convicts, Jesus preached the gospel, which saves.

Christ Preached the Gospel

The primary prophetic work of Jesus in the days of his flesh was always the preaching of the gospel, the good news of salvation for all mankind. This is shown in the following passages:

"The law was given through Moses, grace and truth come through Jesus Christ" (Jn 1:17).

Jesus Christ told the disciples of John the Baptist who came to Jesus to find out whether he was the one to come: "Go back and report to John what you have seen . . . and the good news is preached to the poor" (Lk 7:22). Jesus told the people of the town of Capernaum, which was his headquarters: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also because that is why I was sent" (Lk 4:43).

Christ's preaching of the gospel was to bestow his salvation upon sinners, to turn their sinful hearts to God. Christ's gospel message could be summarized in a well known passage of the Bible, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Christ, Prophet of the World

Christ's prophetic work in the days of his flesh (his exinanition) was conducted with the impression that Jesus was only designated for the nation of Israel. When the Canaanite woman, who had a daughter suffering terribly from demon possession, asked Jesus to heal her daughter, Jesus answered, "I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel" (Mt 15:24).

When Jesus sent out his twelve disciples to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, he gave them stern instructions, saying, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel" (Mt 10:5,6).

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "For I tell you that Christ has become the servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs" (Ro 15:8).

However, Christ showed that he not only came for the Israelites but for all the people who were under God's wrath because of their sins. We see this when he stretched his hand to heal the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28), when he held a conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn 4:1-26), and when he healed a servant of the Roman centurion (Lk 7:1-10).

In regard to Christ as Prophet for the World, the Old Testament prophets foretold that the prophetic work of the Anointed One would not be limited to one nation, the nation of Israel, but would be for all nations. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Isa 60:3). August Pieper, in "Isaiah II," page 575, comments well on Isaiah 60:3: "He will extend his call to Gentiles whom he does not know, and Gentiles who do not know him will come running to him. He'll convert many Gentiles to Zion."

Another striking passage showing Christ's redemption of the world is found again in Isaiah: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6).

Again, reading from "Isaiah II, pages 360,361, August Pieper comments on this passage: "There are two points about this mystery that must be noted. The Gentiles are not an independent class of citizens in the kingdom of God, alongside the Jews, but a class such as has been incorporated into that citizenship which belongs to Israel by promise. In God's spiritual kingdom Israel is also God's firstborn, possessing all the rights of the firstborn. The Church of the Gentiles dare not forget that. The second point is that there is now

no distinction between Jew and Greek, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free, for they all have the one Lord who is generous to all who call upon him. Christ is our all and in us all (Col 3:11, Ro 10:12). The Gentiles who believe are naturalized citizens in God's kingdom, the believing Jews are natives."

The Prophet Haggai also prophesied that the Savior will be for the Jews and Gentiles: "I will shake all nations and the desired of all nations will come" (Hag 2:7).

Surely Jesus is the Savior for all people. Jesus said, "I have other sheep that are not of this pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16).

Truly, Christ was first sent only to the nation of Israel, then for the rest of all people regardless of race, language, nationality, culture or status in society. The Apostle Paul wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jews, then for the Gentiles" (Ro 1:16).

3. In the State of Exaltation

Nearly two thousand years have passed since Jesus Christ ascended into heaven. However, he still continues with his work as a prophet, that is, teaching and preaching the good news to all people here on earth. He does this through his Church. The writers of the four Gospels tell us how Jesus Christ entrusted the mission of teaching and preaching his word of salvation to the Church. Before ascending into heaven, he said to the eleven disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:18-20a). To those same disciples he said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:15,16).

Jesus spoke of the Church continuing his prophetic work, when he said, "'Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive any his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven'" (Jn 20:21-23).

In the same way Jesus said, "This is what is written, 'The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' You are my witnesses of these things" (Lk 24:46-48).

David J. Valleskey, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, comments well on the mission of the Church in his book, "We Believe—Therefore We Speak" pages 128,129,132 and 133:

"They (the disciples) were to make people Jesus' disciples by employing the means of grace (baptism in particular), through which the Holy Spirit creates faith. And they were to help people grow as disciples as, through the Word, they taught them to obey, to guard, and to hold fast to everything that Jesus had commanded, that is, all of his Word. 'Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you' included the believer's life of sanctification that follows upon his or her becoming a believer through baptism . . . Be heralds of the gospel. The assumption is that to do this disciples will be going to those who have not yet heard and believed it . . . The church would be going to all people everywhere who have not yet come to repentance and received the forgiveness of sins, to tell them the good news that in Christ their sins have been forgiven. Those who receive their message in faith can be assured that heaven's doors are open wide to them. Those who reject it must be told that the doors of heaven are closed as long as they refuse to repent and believe the gospel."

John (Johannes) Schaller, from 1908-1919 the president of the Theological Seminary of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, USA, (later to be called Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, at Mequon, Wisconsin), in his book entitled "Biblical Christology," pages 140,141, wrote about Jesus Christ's prophetic work today through his Church:

"Whenever and wherever preached, the gospel is his word and he is the prophet, as he spoke aforetime by the mouths of his prophets (Lk 1:70, 1 Pt 1:10-11, Heb 1:1), so he has now charged his

church with the mission to proclaim his gospel, in his name, in his power and with the assurance of his invisible, bodily presence unto the end of days (Mt 28:18-20). In pursuance of this plan, he not only appointed his apostles to be his inspired witnesses and authoritative teachers of his Truth for all generations to come (Mk 16:15; Jn 20:21, Ac 1:8), but he also continues to bless his church with gifts of persons qualified by their endowment to carry on the work (Eph 4:8-12, 1 Co 12:28, Mt. 9:37f). In a peculiar and unique sense, the word of the apostles is the word of Christ himself (Isa 52:6; Lk 10:16; Jn 13:20). But the same is true of the preaching of all servants of the church as far as they take their message from the recorded word of Christ.”

In Conclusion

It is important for every Christian to recognize Jesus as Prophet. But why? It’s because Jesus did more for us than suffer and die on the cross and rise from the grave. As our Prophet, he gave us the message of his sacrifice on the cross, the word of salvation. If he had not acted as a prophet to share that message from God, how could any of us have faith? How could any of us receive eternal life if Jesus had not given us that word of salvation?

How wonderful it is that Jesus, a true man, walked on this earth to deliver to us the precious message of our eternal life! As we read in Holy Scripture, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Ro 10:15, compare with Isa 52:7). Paul was writing about more than the feet of the Apostles, the Evangelists and today’s pastors, teachers, lay messengers, etc. He meant the feet of Jesus as well, yes, Jesus, our Prophet.

May this message of Jesus as Prophet be yet another part of God’s Word that strengthens and sustains us in our faith.

Bibliography

- Gehman, Richard J., African Traditional Religion in the Biblical Perspective. Kijabe, Kenya: Kijabe Printing Press, 1989. Paperback.
- Koehler, Edward W. A., A Summary of Christian Doctrine: A Popular Presentation of the Teachings of the Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952. Paperback.
- Laetsch, Theodore, editor, The Abiding Word, Volume Two. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947.
- Pieper, August, Erwin E. Kowalke, translator, Isaiah II; An Exposition of Isaiah 40-66. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1979.
- Schaller, John, Biblical Christology: A Study in Lutheran Dogmatics. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1981.
- Unger, Merrill F., Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Third Edition. Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1966.
- Valleskey, David J., We Believe—Therefore We Speak: The Theology and Practice of Evangelism. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.
- Wicke, Harold E., The People’s Bible, Mark. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988.

The Work of Christ as Priest

Rev. Segundo Gutierrez,
Evangelical Lutheran Church (Peru), essayist

Rev. Timothy Erickson,
Evangelical Lutheran Church (Peru), translator

Very esteemed brethren in the faith of Jesus Christ. It is because of the mercy of God that we are meeting this day to share these papers that have been assigned to each one of us. It is a real honor and privilege to be able to be with all of you, my brethren, in such a conference and to participate as a presenter for the first time. I hope that this humble work will serve to strengthen our faith.

May God pour out his blessings in these days!

The Offices of Christ

Everything that Christ did as the God-man in His state of humiliation, and what He still does as such in His state of exaltation, belongs to His divine office or work. Christ executed perfectly and still executes to perfection everything that is necessary for our salvation. Because of this, the mediating work of Christ includes everything that He did and still does to provide mankind with salvation.

From the moment of the incarnation, conception, birth, circumcision, obedience, etc. of Christ our Lord, everything tends to the same end, the salvation of the sinful world. "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). See 1 John 3:8. So, Christ came into the world to save sinners (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 1:15, John 4:9-10).

And as Savior of the sinner He had to accomplish three works: First, He had to teach men the way to salvation (Luke 4:18; John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1; Matthew 17:5). Second, He had to reconcile the world with God (2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Matthew 20:28; Romans 5:1; 1 John 2:2). Third, He had to govern His church as Her head (Luke 1:33; Ephesians 1:20-23; John 18:33-37). Finally, all of these things that Christ performed as true God-man (Prophet, Priest, and King) were necessary for our salvation. Although Christ carried out his three offices simultaneously and conjunctly, it is necessary to speak about each one of them individually in order to have greater clarity.

Sacerdotal Office

A high priest was a minister especially assigned for worship and to execute sacrifices and rites in the name of the community. He was the highest religious dignitary, representing the nation before the Lord. Therefore, a high priest was one who represented men before God and had the task of presenting offerings and sacrifices for the sin of the people. With the goal of fulfilling these duties, a priest needed not only to pay attention to the fulfilling of precise ritual details, but also to have interior feelings with his sacred work.

In the same way, a high priest had certain essential duties: First, the service of the Lord in the sanctuary. Second, the teaching of the law to the people. Third, the consultations with Jehovah on behalf of the people (Exodus 28:30; Ezra 2:63; Numbers 16:40; 18:5; Jeremiah 18:8; Micah 7:11). He was also subjected to certain norms. For example, it was prohibited to him to be married to a dishonorable or repudiated woman. He had to be married to an Israelite who was a virgin, or a widow of proven genealogy. There were laws that determined what the conduct of the high priest ought to be. In the exercise of his functions the high priest wore sacred vestments whose use was prohibited outside of the temple.

The most important function of the high priest was to make atonement for the sins of the people once a year. Carrying the blood of atonement, protected by the cloud of perfume around him, he walked through the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place and took his place before the mercy seat (atonement cover) on the ark. He made atonement for himself, for his house, and for all the people (Leviticus 16:11-19). Afterwards he came out and confessed all of the sins of Israel over the head of the male goat, and the animal was conducted into the desert, bearing the sins of the people far away from the

presence of Jehovah (Leviticus 16:20-22). In all of this, Aaron acted as a type of Christ. So then, the earthly priests had the highest privilege of passing through the veil once a year to enter the Most Holy Place, in a material sanctuary.

The qualities of a priest were to be able to sympathize with those he represented and to have been divinely designated for this task (to have been called by God). This means that no man can of his own accord establish himself as high priest, nor can he maintain this office validly by the gift of some earthly authority. Aaron was designated for the priesthood after the proclamation of the pact on Sinai and the order to construct the tabernacle (Exodus 27:21; 28:1ff). In the beginning Aaron had only been the prophetic spokesman for Moses (Exodus 4:14-16; 7:1). In his time Moses was the only one who was admitted to the presence of God, be it on the mountain or in the tabernacle of testimony (Exodus 19:3, 19; 20:21; 24:12-18; 33:7-11; etc.). But once the tabernacle was raised and ready for the sacrifices, it became necessary to have a permanent priesthood. At that time Aaron was consecrated together with his sons, purified, anointed and dressed in the priestly garments (Leviticus 8).

Aaron and his successors, who represented the nation of Israel in the presence of God, were Israelites who knew the conditions under which the people lived. The work of high priest was the presentation to God of the offerings and sacrifices for sin. This was presented annually on the Day of Atonement. This was the occasion on which the high priest must fulfill the sacrificial functions. Because of this, with the goal of accomplishing these duties with dignity, a priest not only must pay attention to the precise fulfillment of various ritual details, but he must also have internal feelings in agreement with his sacred work. The high priest had to be patient and of good character, which in reality did not happen in any of those earthly high priests. Even if his acts had been perfect, yet the character of the man made him irremediably inadequate for the priesthood. No priest in Israel was disposed to “deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray” (Hebrews 5:2).

Because of this, a high priest could not make an adequate atonement for sins when he himself was full of feelings of indignation against those who were guilty. Even Aaron himself was not in a condition to intercede as a priest before God for the people. So, it was necessary for the high priest to present a sacrifice for his own sin and then for the people. Only after Aaron had presented a calf as an offering for sin, to atone for himself and for his family, could he proceed with the expiatory ritual in favor of the people. So, Aaron, as well as his successors, were sinful men and were obligated to make atonement first for their own sins. In the same way, they could only offer sacrifices of animals, incapable of erasing sins; and they were mortal men and their priesthood was constantly interrupted (Hebrews 7:23).

But Christ our Lord, since he was holy, eternal, innocent, without blemish, had no need to make a preliminary sacrifice for himself. He endured the common weaknesses and temptations of men, but did not yield to them. So, as it was necessary that the animals were physically clean, so also the life that Christ presented to God on the cross was a life free of contamination. As the servant of the Lord “he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:9). The holiness of our Lord, His active obedience to God, is essential for the efficacy of His sacrifice.

Qualities of Christ for the Priesthood

The same two qualifications for any high priest are present in Christ: First, His divine call. Second, His ability to sympathize with His people. Christ, the Son of God, did not assume the dignity of the high priesthood on His own initiative, but was called by God, who acclaimed Him His Son in Psalm 2:7. “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” Also, He acclaimed Him as permanent High Priest (Hebrews 7:24).

Christ as High Priest of His people is faithful and merciful, because He was made like His brethren in all aspects and was exposed to all the tests and temptations that they have had to endure. These temptations and tests fell upon Him, the Word says, “during the days of Jesus’ life on earth” (Hebrews 5:7). This is an expression that emphasizes the condition of human weakness that He shared during his earthly life.

For example: Mark tells us that on the last night of His life Jesus began to feel very afflicted and anguished. Three times He expressed to his disciples who were accompanying Him the sentiment of the words, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” He told them, “Stay here and keep watch.” Then He

went in a little farther, fell to the ground and asked God His Father to make it possible that this moment of pain not arrive. In His prayer He said, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:33-36).

So, the High Priest (Christ) was tested in the same human way, but he did not commit any sin. Rather, He offered for us the only perfect and effective sacrifice, in such a way that His priesthood is sufficient to perfectly save us (Hebrews 4:14; 5:6; 7:21; 8:6; 9:11-14; 10:11-14). In the same way He did not look for a way to avoid temptations and tests through supernatural means. At no point can the objection be sustained that His Father helped Him to endure these temptations and tests because He was the Son of God, or that they were easier for Him than for us.

Christ recognized the will of His Father and fulfilled it to perfection. Therein lies His obedience. “In spite of being the Son,” no exception from the law was conceded to him. From the beginning Christ marched on the way of obedience to God (see Isaiah 50:5). For this reason, even the sufferings of Christ were the necessary price of His obedience and this qualified Him to be the Savior and High Priest of His people. Christ has brought eternal salvation with His perfect obedience. “Israel will be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation” (Isaiah 45:17).

The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place

The Holy Place formed a rectangle 20 cubits long by 10 wide (Exodus 26:16, 18, 22-24). The priests entered this place every day (Hebrews 9:6). The Most Holy Place beyond the curtain had a cubic form, 10 cubits on each side. The priest entered there only once a year (Hebrews 9:7). So, in the tabernacle and the temple the Holy Place was in continuous use. Day by day, morning and afternoon, the designated priests entered it to light the lamps (Exodus 27:29ff), and at the same time to burn incense on the altar (Exodus 30:7ff). Again week after week the designated priests entered in the Holy Place to put fresh bread on the table for the bread of propitiation (Leviticus 24:8ff). In conclusion, those were offices that took place in the first part of the tabernacle/temple and any member of the priesthood could execute them.

In contrast, no one except the high priest was permitted to enter the “second part” of the tabernacle, the Most Holy Place, and even in that he was only permitted to enter once a year, on the day of atonement, and the conditions for entering were very strictly prescribed (see Leviticus 16). For example: the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place only on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tisri) in each year; with garments of white linen reserved for special sacrificial occasions.

He entered twice in the Most Holy Place. On the first occasion he took the blood of the calf that had been sacrificed as an offering for his sin and that of his household and he sprinkled it on the front of the mercy seat (atonement cover) and before the mercy seat, which was covered the whole time by the cloud that rose from the incense being burned on the golden altar. Later, when the male goat had been killed as an offering for the sins of the people, he brought that blood into the Most Holy Place and splattered it on and before the mercy seat.

Later, having completed this part of the ritual of atonement, he left the sanctuary and confessed the “national” sins over the head of the second male goat designated by lot; then it was sent into the desert in the place of the people.

Aaron and his successors entered the earthly Most Holy Place on the day of atonement by virtue of the sacrifices of animals (blood of male goats . . . of calves). Christ, however, has entered the heavenly sanctuary by virtue of His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12). He took His own blood into the heavenly sanctuary. The Aaronic high priests had to present themselves repeatedly before God, because the redemption that their ministry procured was no more than a sign and had a temporary character; but Christ entered there once for all time. All of the offerings (blood of animals) that were presented on the day of atonement or at any time, possessed a ceremonial cleanness, an external efficacy. They served to effect an external purification, but the blood of Christ, His sacrifice, did not effect only a mere cleansing, but a clean conscience before God.

Imperfection of the Old Priesthood

No priest of the lineage of Aaron could have been described as “a priest forever,” for the simple reason that each one of them died at his appropriate time. But the High Priest of Christians is immortal, having died once for all and having risen from death. The declaration, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek,” announced the abrogation of the former law that instituted the Aaronic order. It was inevitable that the former law be abrogated sooner or later because, in spite of the ritual sacrifices and the priestly ministry, it did not procure any real peace of conscience, nor immediate access to God. The perfect life of our Lord Jesus Christ made it possible for him to be the letterperfect fulfillment of “You are a priest forever.” To be sure, the Aaronic priests were called according to a hereditary principle, but none of them could enjoy the priestly dignity perpetually.

Aaron served his people as high priest during the pilgrimage in the desert; but there arrived the day in which Aaron and his son Eleazar were taken by Moses to the top of Mount Hor. There, Moses took the vestments off of Aaron and placed them on Eleazar, and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain, and Moses and Eleazar descended. Later, after the establishment in the land of Canaan, Eleazar died (Joshua 24:33) and was succeeded by his son, Phinehas and so the history continues. Generation after generation, the priests died, and their office passed to another.

There were many priests, but death impeded them from continuing to serve. However Jesus, our Lord, is eternal and doesn't die, his priestly office does not pass to another. He is the only one who is irreplaceable, perfect for all time, the only holy and perfect one. Because of this, all of those who have Christ as their High Priest and Mediator before God, have in Him a Savior whose redeeming power is perpetually available to all. He lives for all time, eternally committed to bless and protect those who have been delivered to Him. So, the way by which it is possible to approach God is through Christ. It is a way that is always open because, in the presence of God, He represents His people as “priest forever.”

Superiority of the New Priesthood

Whatever the reasons, the new priest is better because the new priest is Christ. He withstood difficult temptations on earth. He learned by suffering how difficult the way of obedience could be. He interceded for his disciples so that their faith would not fail when the time of testing came. He offered His life to God as an offering for sin in favor of the people. Because of this, Jesus is the unchangeable High Priest who helps all of those who come to God through Him. He is precisely the High Priest that we needed: “Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26).

Jesus has the unique qualification of having experienced the complete force of temptation without having succumbed to it even once. He is holy, free from all guilt and contamination. He came to earth “in the likeness of flesh.” He lived among sinners, received sinners, ate with sinners, was known as a friend of sinners. However, He was separate from sinners and now is exalted above all the heavens to share the throne of God.

A high priesthood carried out at any earthly altar is inferior to the heavenly High Priest who depends on a perfect sacrifice offered once for all time for the exercise of his office. Since its beginning, the earthly sanctuary was designed to be only a “figure” and “shadow” of the heavenly reality. On the other hand, the tabernacle did have the intention of serving as a place of dwelling for God among His people on the earth. The high priests of the lineage of Aaron ministered in an earthly sanctuary, but Jesus exercises His High Priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, of which the earthly was only a model or a pattern.

Because of this, the ministry of Jesus is very superior to any earthly ministry. If the old “testament” or covenant had been perfect, it would not have been necessary to replace it with the new. And the new must be better because it would not have made sense to replace the old testament with another that wasn't better. The new testament implies the abolition of the old sacrificial order due to a perfect and unrepeatable sacrifice.

One Sacrifice Forever

Before presenting an offering for sin in favor of his people, Aaron and his successors had to present first an offering for themselves. But Jesus did not need to present a daily sacrifice nor even an annual sacrifice for

the sin of the people. He presented one permanent and valid sacrifice in favor of his people when he offered his own life as an offering so perfect and effective that it needs no repetition.

Even less did He have the need to present a sacrifice for Himself. He is holy, innocent, without blemish (Hebrews 7:26). He is personally free from all guilt and the tyranny of sin, and for this reason He is the one most capable of being the effective High Priest. "He . . . provided purification for sins" (Hebrews 1:3). And He was called precisely "that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17), since it is the function of all high priests "to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Hebrews 5:1).

The sacrifice that our Lord Jesus Christ offered was that He offered himself "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He spoke of the new testament in His blood which was poured out for many (the Lord's Supper) (Mark 14:24). This clearly indicated that our Lord was presenting Himself to God as a sacrifice for others. And when His hour had come and He was extended on the cross, instead of having His heart full of bitter resentment against His executioners; He offered His life to God as a sacrifice for His people.

How effective and acceptable this sacrifice was before God! Under the old law the high priest was surrounded by weaknesses and because of them he had to offer sacrifices for sins, as much for himself as for the people. However, Jesus our High Priest is not subject to these earthly conditions. He is the one whom God addressed as His Son, whose high priesthood is absolutely effective and eternally adequate to fulfill the necessity of His people. Christ was capable of doing what man could not do because of his sinful nature. God sent His own Son in a condition similar to that of sinful man, and as a sacrifice for sin.

Christ has fulfilled once for all time what generations of levitical sacrifices had never accomplished: "One sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:12). Probably many or the majority of those who were first converted to Christianity had been accustomed to some form of adoration in which the sacrifices of animals played a part. The fact that His new form of adoration had no place for such sacrifices was in itself a recognition that they had been pronounced obsolete forever by the death of Christ. So, truly the sacrifice of Christ had purified His people from the moral contamination of sin and had assured them of the permanent maintenance of a correct relation with God, "because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:14).

The sacrifice of Christ has made His holy people "perfect" for all time. Because of this, three spectacular effects have been attributed to this sacrifice of Christ: Through Christ the conscience of His people has been cleansed of guilt; through Him they have been made capable of approaching God as acceptable worshippers; and through Him they have experienced the fulfillment of all that had been promised in the olden days and have been brought into a perfect relationship with God.

It also meant that their past sins and iniquities had been eternally erased from God's files, for He promises, "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17). In that sacrificial law of the old testament there was an "annual reminder of sins," while in the new pact there is no more memory of them.

Perfect Sacrifice

Christ as High Priest of His people has not entered into any material sanctuary, but into the presence of God in heaven to present Himself before God on our behalf (Hebrews 9:24). One who is personally holy, innocent and without blemish (Hebrews 7:26) is in His home and is acceptable in the presence of God. But now He appears in the presence of God not only on His own behalf but also in favor of sinners. If we want to present ourselves before God, we must be clean of sin because God is holy. To appear before God by ourselves is impossible; since only through the representation of Christ our High Priest do we remain clean and able to present ourselves before the presence of God (Hebrews 9:24).

When Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary, He did it once for all time and His entrance into the presence of God in favor of His people was by virtue of His own blood. This makes a contrast with the entrance of the high priest of Israel into the material Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. The high priest of Israel, having entered to present the sacrificial blood ("blood that is not his own"), had to leave again immediately only to enter and repeat the same ceremony the following year, and the year following that, and so on indefinitely.

But the sacrifice of Christ, being a real sacrifice and not a sign, is perpetually effective, and, because of that, does not need repetition (Hebrews 9:25). If the sacrifice of Christ had been in need of repetition, then he would have had to endure suffering and death an infinite number of times through the years of world history. The Word says: “Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:25-26). So the purpose of the coming of Christ was to make sacrifice for our sins.

We read in 1 John 3:5. “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins.” “He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Hebrews 9:12-15).

Christ died once by divine design, and His death was followed by salvation for all of His people. This is so because in His death he bore “the sins of many,” offering His life to God as an atonement for them. Or as Isaiah writes, “. . . because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). So, the presentation of the life of our Lord to God was a sacrifice so perfect that any repetition is not possible nor necessary. He was offered “once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

Likewise, the Aaronic priests never sat down in the sanctuary. They remained on their feet during the whole development of their sacred duties, and these were never complete because their sacrifices always had to be repeated continually every year. But whether the repetition was every year or daily, the main point is that repetition was necessary. None of those sacrifices could remove sin or purify the conscience with a permanent effect. The completion of a sacrifice only meant that another similar must be offered in due time, and so on indefinitely. It was to show this that the priests did not sit down in the presence of God when a sacrifice had been presented to Him.

But the perfection of the sacrifice that Christ made of Himself is shown in that when He had presented it to God, he sat down. No other sacrificial service can be required of the priest who appeared in the fullness of time to lay aside sin and to sanctify His people once and for all. A seated priest is the guarantee of a finished work and of an accepted sacrifice. The heavenly High Priest certainly has a continuous ministry to intercede for His people at the right hand of His Father.

Intercession of Christ

The heavenly High Priest certainly has a continuous and permanent ministry to intercede in favor of His people. And His intercession rests on the base of the presented and accepted sacrifice once and for all and not on a constant or repeated offering of His sacrifice. Christ is really the only mediator between God and men, because He possesses divinity and humanity perfectly in the same person. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). So, men are able to approach God with all security because they have a priest who intercedes for them.

Therefore, if we have Jesus as our High Priest, who has made propitiation for the sin of His people and has suffered their weaknesses and provides mercy and grace to help them in the time of need and intercedes always in favor of His people at the right hand of God the Father, then “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:33,34).

It is important to speak about the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ because in some periods of time it has been grotesquely misrepresented in popular Christian thinking. It must not be thought that Christ is

interceding for us as an orant always standing before His Father with his arms extended and blabbering with strong cries and tears for our cause. In no way. Christ is our High Priest who asks what He desires of His Father who always hears and grants His requests. It is certain that the life itself of our Lord in heaven is His prayer. His self-sacrifice completed once is infinitely acceptable and effective. His contact with the Father is immediate and uninterrupted. His priestly ministry in favor of His people never ends, so the salvation of which He assures us is absolute.

Christ our High Priest has been seated at the right hand of the Father as a sign that His sacrificial work is completed. But even more, the value of His sacrifice and the dignity of His person are evident by the fact that He has been seated not merely in the presence of God, but at the right hand of God. From the shame of the cross, He has been exalted to the place of heavenly glory. Because of that, His people are able to appropriate His priestly help, assured that in Him they have access to the grace of God and His power. God the Father says to you: "Sinner, you thought that because of your sins and weaknesses I could not save your soul, but behold that My Son is here at my side, and I look at Him and work with you because of My contentment with Him." So the glorified Christ intercedes as the God-man in favor of His people and provides the believer with the absolute security of his salvation.

Access to God Through the Sacrifice of Christ

In view of all that Christ has accomplished for us, we confidently approach God in prayer. We maintain our Christian confession and hope; we help each other by gathering together regularly for mutual support, because the day for which we are waiting will soon be manifested. The "freedom" that the believers have in Christ to enter the heavenly sanctuary through Him is contrasted with the restrictions that existed in the earthly sanctuary. In this all the people could not make use of its privilege, but only the high priest as their representative, and even he could not do so when he chose, but only at determined times and under certain conditions.

But those who have been purified, consecrated and made perfect by the sacrifice of Christ, have received a free right of access to the holy presence of God. The sacrifice of Christ our Lord has restored the relationship between God and man. And now in Him we have that invitation to approach "confidently the throne of grace." So believers have free entrance to the heavenly place. That is, we have the right of access to the heavenly throne by means of the sacrifice of Christ in favor of His people.

Jesus, our High Priest, who entered once and for all in the Most Holy Place by His own blood (Hebrews 9:12), has procured for His people an equal right to enter by the same blood that He spilled as a sacrifice in favor of His people. Now the way by which one enters the presence of God is a new way that had not existed before He opened it and entered there. So it is a new and living way. In effect Christ Himself as Sacrifice and Priest for His people is the way to God. The Lord says in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." It is a way that crosses the veil into the Most Holy Place. It is because of the sacrifice of Christ that the way of access to God has been opened. From one point of view, the veil kept man apart from God; but through the death of Christ the veil was torn and the new way was consecrated through Christ, by which man is able to approach God.

So, brethren, if Christ our Lord is our High Priest who intercedes for us besides, then we have the privilege of approaching Him with all confidence. Then those who venture to enter the heavenly sanctuary by the blood of Jesus are purified and made able to be in the divine presence by that same blood. So then, since we have a great High Priest who is merciful and faithful, let us approach with a sincere heart and remain firm, retaining to the end our confidence that we have been made participants of Christ, and let us remain firm without doubting in the hope of the faith that we profess. Remember and do not forget that we have a merciful High Priest who intercedes for us, His children, and that only through Him are we able to receive all the strength we need to maintain our confession and resist the temptations of the devil. Christ our Savior has been made more sublime than the heavens. For these reasons, Christ is a great High Priest who intercedes for us.

I hope that this little essay has been pleasing to all of you and serves in some way to increase our knowledge and strengthen our faith. I repeat my thanks to all of you for giving me the opportunity to share together the Word of God during these days. May God bless you and enlighten you in your tasks. Amen.

The Work of Christ as King

Rev. Stefan Sjoqvist, Lutheran Confessional Church, Sweden

“So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, ‘You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.’ But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king’ (1 Sa 8:4-7).¹

During the Old Testament era until the time of the prophet Samuel, the Chosen People of God were led by God’s own spokesmen, the prophets. It is not until the lifetime of Samuel that Israel became a kingdom.

We encounter a king and a priest of the Lord in the mysterious character of Melchizedek in the story of Abraham (Ge 14:18, Heb 7; see also Heb 5:6,10; 6:20), but he is not tied to the people of Israel as their king. His dynasty and priesthood are hidden in mystery, and the epistle to the Hebrews describes this person as a shadow of Christ.

When the people of Israel demand a king of their own from Samuel the prophet, God tells him that this in reality is a departure from the Lord as their true King. Samuel quotes them as saying, “You said: ‘We want a king to rule over us’—even though the Lord your God was your king” (1 Sa 12:12).²

Israel praised the Lord after the Exodus out of Egypt:

“Yahweh will be king for ever and ever” (Exod.15:18, NJB).³

Despite His remarks about the election of an earthly king over His people, the Lord blessed the kingship of Israel. It is God himself who enthroned the king of Israel, but he restricted the blessings of the monarchy to adherence and faithfulness to His commands:

“Be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away” (1 Sa 12:24,25).

From eternity God was the King of the Chosen People. Although Israel’s earthly king came into being because the people were straying away from their Lord as their true King, God had an earthly king in His plans in order to save, not only the covenant people, but the whole world. Already about 800 years before Saul became the first Jewish king, the patriarch Jacob prophesied concerning Judah: “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes” (Ge 49:10,11).

Before any king existed in Israel, when Samuel still was a little boy, his mother Hannah prophesied concerning Messiah: “He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed” (1 Sa 2:10).⁴

God confirmed that the king of Israel was his own by anointing (1 Sa 10:1). The Lord’s King, who was to come with salvation for Israel and the world, was to be called “the anointed.” In Hebrew that is Messiah and in Greek Christ.

God told David: “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sa 7:12,13).

Likewise we read in Micah 5:2-4: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.”

And Jer 23:5,6: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.’”

In this way God summarizes and perfects salvation history. God who is the king of His people from eternity will be reinstated as their King. This will be accomplished through a King who is their own according to flesh and yet their true divine King, God and man incarnate.

We have seen that in the theocracy of OT Israel the Triune God was king long before His people established the external kingship. We have also seen that God the Son fulfilled the promise of a perfect King through his incarnation and saving work.

Before we analyze how Christ’s kingship is structured, let us state that there is a distinction between his rule of power and his Kingdom. Schaller notes: “It must be observed that *basileia* is never used as a designation of the group of created persons or things affected by the dominion.”⁵

Thus the power of Christ or God is not identical or synonymous with the extent of His Kingdom. The fact that God is King, governing the whole earth and the universe, does not mean that all the inhabitants of the earth are members of His Kingdom. Even an earthly king might exercise power beyond the borders of his own kingdom and its people. In the same way God is the king of the universe, but only those who are counted as his flock are subjects in His Kingdom.

It is important to distinguish between Christ’s Kingdom of Power, His Kingdom of Grace, and His Kingdom of Glory.”⁶ It is also important to notice the areas where one could see a unity between the kingdoms and points of connections.

Christ’s Kingdom of Power denotes the concept of Christ as the ruler of heaven and earth; His Kingdom of Grace denotes His rule over the Church, and His Kingdom of Glory means that He rules with unveiled majesty and glory in heaven.

In his Kingdom of Power Christ rules with omnipotence. In His Kingdom of Grace He rules through the Gospel in Word and sacrament.⁷ Even though it is important to make distinctions between the different ways the divine King rules, it is also important to stress the unity of kingship. Pieper says: “Christ rules in the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of Glory with the same omnipotence with which He rules the Church and Heaven.”⁸

Even though the grace which changes our hearts through the gospel of Christ is not an irresistible grace,⁹ but a grace that can be resisted (Matt. 23:37), it is the same omnipotent power which created the universe. This fact is a comfort to afflicted children of God when they are reminded that the same power which raises the sun will gather the elected to the Kingdom of Christ.

“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

Christ’s Kingdom of Power

Before his incarnation the Son of God is the almighty King who created the universe.

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Col. 1:16).

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:3).

Christ inherits this omnipotence as the true eternal God and exercises it together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. His power does not only include those who are His own children. Nor does it merely include the impersonal powers of nature, all that moves on earth, in the air and in the sea (Ps 8:7,8). It includes also the enemies of His Church (Ps 110:2), yes even hell (Php 2:10).

When Scripture tells us that omnipotence is given to Christ, it always is speaking about Him after His incarnation. Christ as true man is almighty due to hypostatic union; the personal union with the logos". "He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Da 7:14). Christ says: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mt 28:18).

The exaltation of human nature on the throne of divine power fulfils the promise of God to his people. Although God admonishes Samuel because of the people's dethroning Him as the King of people, He uses their failure to install the eternal Son on the throne of David. The Son of God could only inherit the throne legally by incarnation in human flesh through the birth line of Judah, Jesse and David.

The omnipotence of Christ is not restricted through the incarnation nor increased through His glorification. As true God He is always the Almighty and Omnipresent One. Since the incarnation He is a God-man with omnipotent power.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever" (Isa 9:6,7).

"Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working'" (Jn 5:17).

Thus the humiliation of Christ through incarnation does not empty His omnipotence. The humiliation means He freely refrains from the constant use of His divine attributes. "Christ Jesus . . . being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Php 2:6,7).

Without Christ permitting it, His own enemies could not touch Him. It is the omnipotent King Himself who gives His own executors the power to act. To Pilate He says: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (Jn 19:11).

Popular theology describes God as a powerless god leaving the world to its own destiny while he watches in compassion, but at a distance. Biblical theology holds to the biblical teaching that Christ has been "seated . . . far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph 1:21-23).

"You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas" (Ps 8:7,8 cf. 1 Co 15:27).

Pieper: "He rules all things moving on earth, in the air, and in the sea (Ps 8:7,8). He rules over his enemies (Ps 110:2). Scripture exempts no territory in the universe from the dominion of Christ; the officium Christi regium extends over all relations and situations in the universe."¹⁰

Men who are enslaved by reason and unbelief experience this doctrine as an obstacle and offence. They attempt with the "theodice problem" as their weapon to discard the Christian view of the almighty ruling King Christ, Christus Pantocrator.

God's own children have by the gospel caught a glimpse of God's love in the face of Christ, the revealed God.¹¹ Although they are those who do not search the hidden councils of God,¹² they find great comfort in knowing that the God who loves them also works for their best with His almighty power (Ro 8:28).

Even though Christ is the hidden power behind divine providence, one must stress one important difference between His Kingdom of Power in time and His Kingdom of Glory in eternity. In His Kingdom of power He allows the existence of evil. In the Kingdom of Glory the last enemy has been defeated, and the presence of the Triune God illuminates the whole world. God "'put everything under his feet.' In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him" (Heb 2:8).

In heaven God no longer uses evil and pain as tools for chastening His people. In heaven “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 22:3-5).

Christ makes use also of the Kingdom of Power to gather and preserve the Church in this world.¹³ When Christ sends His followers to make “disciples of all nations,” He reminds them of His Kingdom of Power: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore . . .” (Mt 28:18,19).

The almighty power of Christ will accompany His followers while they accomplish the mission He has given them. “The purpose (finis ultimus) of Christ’s dominion is the glory of God, inasmuch as he controls all happenings in such manner as to realize the ultimate purpose of God.”¹⁴

Even the evil that afflicts, hurts and threatens God’s own children works “together for good” (Ro 8:28). God’s goal for His children is that they shall grow in sanctification. The suffering which comes to them serves to their chastening (Heb 12:5-14).

Christ’s Kingdom of Grace

When Christ and His apostles proclaim the Kingdom, they are not speaking of His omnipotent rule over the visible and invisible universe.

Pilate had the common view of a kingship limited with geographical borders, external power and militant servants fighting with temporal weapons. “Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.’ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth’” (Jn 18:36,37).

Scripture says: “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Ro 14:17).

Christ’s Kingdom is not something in the future. It is present everywhere faith receives the complete atonement of Christ. “He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13,14).

Christ’s Kingdom was present during His earthly ministry everywhere He himself was present physically. Christ could say to the Pharisees: “The kingdom of God is among you” (Lk 17:21, NJB) because he was present among them, before their very eyes. When Christ casts out demons, His own enemies must conclude that the Kingdom had come, surely not in their hearts, but very visible in His own person (Mt 12:24-28). Hence the apostolic message to the people of Israel is: “The kingdom is at hand” (Mk 1:15, Lk 10:11, RSV). The gospel of Jesus Christ (Ac 5:42, 11:20, Ro 1:4,15:19, 2 Co 2:12, 10:14, 1 Th 3:2, 2 Th 1:8), the gospel of the grace of God (Ac 20:24), of His Son (Ro 1:3,9) is therefore synonymous with the gospel of the Kingdom which Christ Himself proclaimed (Mt 4:23, 9:35, 4:43, Lk 8:1) and sent His apostles to proclaim (Mt 24:14, Lk 9:2, Ac 8:12, 19:8, 28:31).

To believe in the gospel of Christ, that He carried our sins on the cross, that He was punished for them, that we are clothed in His righteousness, means to have entered the Kingdom of Christ (Mt 21:31, Mk 10:15, Lk 16:16, Col 1:23, 1 Th 2:12).

Unless one is born again one cannot enter or inherit the Kingdom of God (Jn 3:5, 1 Co 6:4). Those who are united with Christ through the Word (1 Pe 1:23) and baptism (Jn 3:5) enter the Kingdom of God.

The only weapon, means or tool of the Kingdom of Christ is the gospel in Word and sacraments.¹⁵ “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom” (Mt 13:37,38).

This is also why Christ explains to Pilate the nature of His Kingdom: “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:37).

The Kingdom of Grace is established through faith in the testimony of truth. This is the work of grace in the believing heart. Because the Kingdom comes through faith, it is invisible in essence (2 Ti 2:19).¹⁶

Because the Kingdom of Grace consists in faith in Christ and faith is kindled and nurtured in the hearts of men through the gospel (Ro 1:16,17, Eph 2:8,9, Jn 8:31, 15:1-7, Col 1:21-23), it is impossible to establish or nurture the Kingdom of Grace through the preaching of the law. Law and gospel are opposites and wherever law is allowed to rule in the domain of conscience, the Kingdom of Christ will perish (Ro 3:20, 4:13-16, 10:4, Gal 2:16-21, 3:11-14, 21-25, 5:4, Php 3:8,9). Although the Kingdom of God is characterized by “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17), these fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25) do not flow from the preaching of the law, which only causes death (2 Co 3:6). The fruits of the Spirit flow from the preaching of the gospel—the proclamation of free grace won by the vicarious atonement of our crucified Savior (Jn 15:5, 1 Jn 4:19).

Because of the preceding we can conclude that the Kingdom of Grace is never established by force or sustained by force, political actions or moralism. The King of the Kingdom of Grace is our crucified and risen Savior whose scepter is the gospel in Word and sacrament. We can also conclude that since the Kingdom of Grace is a rule of grace in the hearts of the believers, it is impossible to identify it with a specific church organization or the sum total of church organizations. It can neither be located by the episcopacy or tradition. The Kingdom of Christ is active and ruling wherever Christ rules as King in the hearts of the believers, through faith and by the means of grace. The Kingdom of Grace rules wherever a contrite heart trusts in the vicarious atonement of Christ.

Luther explains the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “The Kingdom comes . . . when the heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit so that by his grace we may believe his holy Word and live a godly life, both in time and hereafter forever.”

Membership in the Kingdom of Grace is therefore not synonymous with membership in a denomination, nor is it won by obedience to the law nor through the intellectual understanding of doctrine (Mk 10:14,15). It consists in trusting Christ as our crucified Savior—a faith sown into our hearts by the seed, the gospel in Word and Sacraments.

The Kingdom of Grace will last until the end of this world (Mt 28:19, 20). It has the promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Mt 16:18).

When Christ returns, the Kingdom of Grace will end. The existence in the Kingdom of Glory does not consist in believing but seeing. Schaller: “The Kingdom of Grace, with the possibility of salvation for mankind, will come to an end on the last day, which faith is turned into glorious vision.”¹⁷

Christ’s Kingdom of Glory

When we talk about three Kingdoms of Christ, it is important to remember that these definitions are created to make it easier for human reason to understand and to clarify certain necessary distinctions. In reality, there is one Kingdom and one kingship expressing itself in different ways to man, namely in the temporal world, in the realm of salvation, and in the state of eternal heavenly bliss.

Christ’s Kingdom of Glory is a great comfort to the children of God during suffering and tribulation. The Church has no right to demand a better destiny than her King. “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?” (Mt 10:25, KJV).

But the Church is also reminded that as her King has been exalted and glorified, she also will be glorified and enjoy indescribable bliss. Paul says: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom” (1 Ti 4:18).

The Kingdom of Grace is enjoyed through faith. It takes hold of God’s promise, the assurance of salvation through Christ. The Kingdom of Glory is when Christ turns our believing into seeing. In that moment no veil will cover our eyes. “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face” (1 Co 13:12).

“Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). Let us remind each other that when Christ arrives the Church Militant will be turned into the Church Triumphant, the Kingdom of Grace will be a Kingdom of Glory. “Those he justified, he also glorified” (Ro 8:30).

Amen.