

CREATION AND RECONCILIATION

1. Introduction: Purpose of Study

In this study we will be looking to see the nature and purpose of creation, keeping in mind that creation is moving towards its given goal, since God is purposive. We mean that the creation of creation by God is not an end in itself. In this sense the ‘why’ of creation is more important than the ‘how’ of creation. Nevertheless the ‘how’ or the modes of creation also determine the end, as they are themselves, in some sense determined by the end.

The coupling of reconciliation with creation is not arbitrary. It is axiomatic that the creation which comes from God's hand must be an essential unity. Anything else is unthinkable. For God and His creation to prove perfect, this creation, at the telos, the end–goal of time, must also be at one. Its essential unity must not only be proven, but it must be shown that at no point is that creation ever essentially changed) no matter what incursions have been made upon it by evil.

Again, it must be shown that creation is not dualistic, that is of two forces which spring, as they are, from the original creation, since that will presuppose a dualism within the Creator. On the other hand, if we posit a monism as in pantheism, then it will mean that good and evil are, in the ultimate of the one piece, in which case true moral distinctions ultimately disappear. Further to this we must see that the creation is created in moral freedom, that is it is given choice of will and its ultimate unity and freedom must be seen and accomplished in the light of true moral choice.

From this it can be seen that the ultimate unity of all things, whilst it cannot be summed up under the term ‘reconciliation’ as such, is nevertheless linked with the thought and accomplishment of reconciliation. Briefly we posit that man as the apex of creation is in such a position that his ultimate state determines to a significant degree the state of the whole creation. In some sense the outcome of creation is contingent upon the destiny of man. Hence when he is awry in his universe, the universe is not only awry to him, but is in fact in some sense deficient in that its true Creature–Head, man, is not functioning correctly and so is depriving the creation of its fullest functional operation and expression. When man, fallen, is reconciled to God, and to his fellow–man, and to creation, then that man also is against the disparate forces within creation. The ultimate victory of God is that He unifies all things. That is the true outcome of reconciliation. Only when the essential unity of creation is seen in this its true character, and its true harmony, will the essential nature of creation, and its prepurposed goal be fully seen.

To this we may add that once this is fully seen so God also is fully seen, that is insofar as man and the whole creation can comprehend the Creator. It takes a creature to understand the Creator, but then only as a creature can, and may need to.

2. The Nature and Fact of Creation

(i) God the Creator

It is interesting, within the Book of Job to see that the arguments of Job and his theological friends is of such nature that they take sides, Job justifying himself, and the others, in some form or another, judging him. They can only see suffering come upon him if he is evil. Suffering, then, is God's judgement. Job refuses to believe this, declaring himself righteous. It is doubtful whether he is doing this from a spirit either of self-justification or self-righteousness. It is apparent that neither group can solve the problem of suffering. As spectators we can see that the argument arises because God has asked Satan a question concerning Job; 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?'

Satan, in denying that Job is such a person, is also inferring that within creation none such exists, and therefore that God's creation is defective. Satan may well be viewing the argument from a perfectionist point of view, and in fact Satan fades from the picture as the book proceeds. Job and his comforters undoubtedly tackle their subject from varying dimensions, but neither moves in the one dimension which would make things clear to them the dimension of creation. We are not saying the fact of creation will solve their problems, but we are saying that had they seen God as Creator, they would then know what creation is, and the problem would have been tackled differently. Hence in Chapter 38 God begins a dialogue with Job by reminding him of the sheer fact of creation and His own Creatorhood. Job is put into a dimension – a vantage point – which he has not previously had. His creaturehood suddenly blossoms into full being, and he understands. Notice that no intellectual or moral solution is given to him. It is enough that he see God in the perspective of creation, and creation in the perspective of God. Hence when we say in the first Article of the Creed, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty', we immediately add, 'Maker of heaven and earth', and this is the right order. Not only do we believe in Him as Father, but we cannot separate His Fatherhood from His Creatorhood. In this perspective we see God.

(a) Why God Creates

The adoration of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in the Revelation is because God is Creator. The fact that He created is enough. The fact that God willed creation is wonderfully praiseworthy. Doubtless creation is grateful for its given being. Creation seems to relish its life and existence. That is, it must be grateful to God. We can say then that there is a 'grace' of creation. The creation does not merit it. God creates because He wills to do so, and we may not fully understand that will.

Secondly we can say that God creates because He is Creator. We do not mean He is the object of His creative force, but that He is the subject of it. However, to use human terms, the kind of Creator that He is determines the 'why' of His creation. Without doubt the fact that He has created

reveals His nature, certainly as Creator. When the seraphim says, ‘The whole earth is filled with His glory’ it is saying that His creation can experience His glory and that that glory is manifested. If we take another (permissible) translation of the same verse ‘The earth is the fulness of His glory’, then it means creation displays His glory. Other Scriptures of course bear this out, so that God creates in order to display His glory.

This is not intelligible to us until we further explore the doctrine of the creation of all things, and especially the creation of man. Then we see that the knowledge of the glory of God is essential for the full contingent being of man and all things. Whilst this is an argument within a circle, it is, nevertheless, valid.

The set, or pre-purposed goals of creation also indicate the ‘why’ of creation. Very briefly put, these goals are the ultimate glorification of all things. This includes the unifying, filling, completing aspects of redemption and restitution which we will later study in particular. God will have accomplished His purpose and will by what He does, so that we can conclude the true ‘why’ of creation is simply the will of God. Nevertheless that will is spelled out to us in prophecy, in the fulfilling of that prophecy, in the processes of time, and at the end of time. Knowing the will of God we come to know God, especially as we are aligned with that will.

Since God wills us to know Him we can conclude that the ultimate ‘why’ of creation is ‘to know God and enjoy Him forever’. This will be when ‘the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea’. It will mean that God wills for His creation to know Him, and have fellowship with Him so that in itself it is free, i.e. ‘the glorious liberty of the children of God’.

The many subsections and implications of this ultimate will be the subject of our study, but here we conclude that because God is Creator He creates. It is His will to do so, and He does so consistently with His nature. The kind of Creation that He creates reveals the kind of Creator He is, that is, the truth of the Creator. It is marvellous that man may know this.

(b) How God Creates

In Genesis chapters 1 and 2 there are two accounts of creation. Some see them as two different accounts of the one event. Others see them as complementary accounts of the one event. Whatever the argument may be, something of the modes of creation appear before us. Nevertheless, before we examine these we are reminded that the things of creation came into being by a fiat of God. He spoke and it came to pass. Psalm 33:6 and 9 says, ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made for he spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth’. Psalm 148:5–6: ‘For he commanded and they were created. And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed’. Hence in Hebrew 11:3 we read, ‘By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear’. Later we will see that the spoken word of God in some way relates to the Eternal Word who is also called the Son (cf. John 1:1–3, Hebrews 1:2–3). However the principle of the creative word is in Isaiah 55:10–11, especially v.11 – ‘So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it’.

The actual modes of creation are discussed in Genesis, chapters one and two. Other portions of Scripture speak of the effects of this act of creation. Yet other passages, as we shall see, speak of the nature of creation. The primary thing we must see is that creation was formed through a series of creative actions of God. At the completion of each creative period God sees that what He has done is 'good'. Finally in the last and completing period He sees that everything is 'very good'. It is like something being formed in sections, progressively and processively, and then all things coming together so that the final work makes it a complete and functional whole. The significance of this is that the whole creation is a working harmonious whole, a unity, and is essentially operative. It is to be doubted that 'good' here simply means 'morally good', although, of course, it does not mean less than that. It is better to see 'good' as meaning 'functionally good', i.e. a working, viable entity. The order in which things are created is as follows:

The first day, light. The second day, the firmament. The third day, the seas, land, and vegetation. The fourth day, the luminaries. The fifth day, the birds. The sixth day, animals and man. The order, of course, is intended to have its significance.

(c) What God creates

I Peter 4:19 speaks of a 'faithful Creator'. This must mean primarily that He who commits Himself to create will do well and that His creation will not fail. He will be faithful to His creative fiat. He will create and sustain His world and bring it to its (His) desired end. Hence the nature of creation is very important.

Two things must firstly be seen:

- (i) This creation is a functional, operative, and purposive entity, whole and harmonious, and
- (ii) It is not a set form which of itself keeps retaining its fixed order, and reproducing it.

In order to understand these points let us see that the creation proceeds from God, and whilst each element of it has discreteness of its own, i.e. a separate and complete being within itself, yet for that essential being it is continually contingent upon God. What, then do we mean by this?

Discrete Being. 'Each according to its kind' (Gen. 1) must mean that there are certain fixed orders. Psalm 148:5–6 and Jer. 31:3536 suggest a regular order of being. Proverbs 16:4 says, 'The Lord has made everything for its (own) purpose'. We assume that everything has its own identity. We assume it has function. Nothing else will make sense. Hence nothing of the creation is part of God. It has its own being as a created thing as God has His Being as uncreated and eternal. There may be affinity, but not identity. In this sense all that God creates is free. If it were part of God Himself (pantheism) then it would not be free. This gives moral sense and worth, then, to all creation. We might observe that some forms of mysticism seek to be part of God, or to be absorbed back into Him.

Contingent Being. Whilst each element is discrete, yet at the same time it is contingent for true being. To say, 'In Him we live and move and have our being' means that each created element is not true to its own created nature unless it is wholly contingent upon the Creator. It is not part of the Creator. It is part of creation. However, for its essential being it is contingent upon the Creator. Thus creaturely being is what constitutes true identity.

This is further seen to be true when we understand that creation is not something which exists in its own rights, and which continues by its own efforts, even procreative efforts.

Continuing Creation. In Isaiah 44:24 God says, ‘I am the LORD who make all things, who alone stretch out the heavens, who spread out the earth – who is with me?’ This implies that creation is not a series of originally created things each now simply reproducing its own kind, and that creation is given this power apart from the continuing operation of God, as though He had initially put into operation a chain of cause and effects and then had withdrawn Himself from continuing personal creative action. Rather, God is present continually, creating endlessly. What He creates is not new in the sense that it is different, but is new in the sense that it is fresh. Another way of looking at this is to say that God upholds or sustains the universe. This is true, but the continual creation of things and creatures must be seen in this light. This is really what we mean by contingency. God, if He wishes may destroy, and He will, when there is necessity.

(d) Some Elements of Creation

The functional nature of creation is, as we have seen, ‘very good’, i.e. functionally good. Eccles. 3:11 says ‘You have made everything beautiful (appropriate) in its own time; and you have put eternity (the world) into man's heart so that by searching he cannot find out the end from the beginning’. I Tim. 4:4 says, ‘Everything created by God is good and to be enjoyed’, as against the demonic accusation that much that God has created, e.g. foods and marriage, are not good (see I Tim. 4:1–4). In I Tim. 6:17 Paul says, ‘He has given us all things richly to enjoy’. Acts 14:15 infers that the nature of creation is for the well-being of man. Proverbs 16:4 (quoted) shows that everything is created for its own purpose. When Psalm 33:5 says, ‘The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord’, and I Cor. 10:26 says, ‘The earth is the Lord's and everything in it’, then these statements presuppose good function, and good purpose. Later we will see from Romans 8:18–25 that the creation, when released from its present bondage to futility and corruption, will resume its full functions, and we gather from this that such are excellent as also they are perfect. Psalm 104 is a good example of the functional pattern of creation.

The structural nature of creation is summed up in Col. 1:15–17. In this Paul speaks of the creation of ‘all things’ – a phrase which is most important in the N.T. The ‘all things’ are constituted in an hierarchical order. There are celestial creatures which exercise various forms and provinces of government. They are – at least in this current era – above human and other terrestrial beings. Also their order is functional. The unseen (celestial) powers and the seen (terrestrial) powers are all part of the one functional, purposeful order. Man is set to do the will of God as outlined in Genesis 1:28ff. Celestial powers are variously indicated as serving God, and as also serving nations and God's people. Much of the functional order is not disclosed, but the indications are that it is all ‘very good’. Within the seen world man holds the position of being servant of God and yet Lord of the creation. Of course we understand that God, as Creator is above all these orders, and that they are contingent upon Him.

The moral and physical nature of creation. We saw in Hebrews 11:3 that only faith can understand the true nature of creation. It sees it to be born out of the fiat of God, and so understands that its nature can only be good, no matter what appearances may seem to be to the contrary. Many times, especially in the prophets, the physical well-being of creation is related to moral goodness or conversely its deterioration to immoral rebellion. In Isaiah 32:9–20 there is

a dissertation on Israel and her land when she is evil, and the resultant new creation when she comes into obedience. Passages such as Isaiah 11, 65:17–25, 66:22–23, Romans 8:18–25 and Revelation 21:1–22:5 also indicate that the final beautiful nature of the renewed creation will be contingent upon its moral renewal. This is why it is said, ‘All thy works praise thee’, for they spring from Him who is perfect. Incidentally, we can see that judgments like that of the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are indications that the disturbance of the normal order of creation is the reminder that God is present to His creation and when its normal harmony is interrupted then man suffers deeply. The Noahic covenantal promise was that God would not disturb the rhythm of the seasons, and that man could depend upon His grace in not invoking (this kind of) judgement.

(ii) God and His Relationship to His Creation

(a) Trinitarian Creation

What we have not seen, to date, is the Trinitarian nature of creation. By this we mean that ‘the Father (almighty, maker of heaven and earth)’ initiates creation. A Bible hermeneutic (principle of interpretation) which we must take into consideration is that the whole of the Scriptures reveals the nature of God in a complete way. All we need to know is revealed there, but it is revealed in the entire Scripture. Hence even though in the few references to the nature of creation and creation, in the O.T., little or nothing is said concerning the Father creating, yet other passages show that the Creator–being of God is very much at one with His Father–being. The Sermon on the Mount is the classic reference passage including the Lord's Prayer, and its constant references to God as the Father who cares and provides. Man's creatureliness is mentioned in the same breath as his sonship and familyhood.

In the Old Testament the following passages relate to God as Father and Creator:– Isaiah 63:16, 64:8, Malachi 2:10 (cf. 1:6), Deut. 32:6, Deut. 14: 1, Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1, Jer. 2:26–27, 3:4, 19, 22. It has to be admitted that almost all of these references refer to God and Israel. He has created them as His people, so that their sonship refers not so much to the origination of creation, as to the origination of Israel as a people. Nevertheless, in the light of certain N.T. statements the work of creation in the O.T. must be seen to be the initiative of the Father. In Acts 17:24–28 Paul quotes a pagan poet as saying, ‘We are His (God's) offspring.’ He then indicates that idols would then be as fathers or ‘the Father’, probably with the thought of Jer. 2:26–27 in mind. This, then, throws back fresh light on to the creation–event, and we can conclude that what Israel experiences as a nation is what the man of faith would experience anyway. If, by faith, to be sons of Abraham is to be sons of God, then men of faith have always been sons in that sense (cf. Gal. 3:7–9, 26, 29, John 8:39–42, Gal. 4:29, 31).

The participation of the Word, or the Eternal Son in creation is a theme of the N.T. This is seen in passages such as John 1:1–3, Col. 1:15–17, I Cor. 8:5–6 (cf. Hebrews 2:9–10) and Hebrews 1:1–3. A passage in the O.T. which seems to relate to John 1:1–3 is Proverbs 8:22–31. However, not only does the Son create, but he is the one who sustains and upholds creation ‘by his powerful word’. In this sense the Son is always continuously present to creation.

The work of the Spirit is shown under such passages as Gen. 1:2–3, Psalm 104:29–30, Job 26:13, cf. Isaiah 32:15ff. In the N.T. he is called

‘the Spirit of life’ (Romans 8:2–3, II Cor. 3:6, Rom. 8:9–11) and this probably derives from Ezekiel 37:1–15 with Gen. 2:7 in mind. He is the creative Spirit by whom all life comes into being and is sustained in that being. The Spirit also, as are the Father and the Son, is present continually to creation.

We can conclude therefore that the work of the three Persons of the Trinity is a simultaneous work as they, Initiator, Mediator and Agent are one in their bringing of creation into being. This knowledge gives us a deep understanding of the nature of creation. Since all are One in this Creation, therefore creation must constitute an essential unity.

(b) The Care of Creation

Normally we would place this work under the heading of ‘providence’, that is saying that God provides for His creation. This, of course, is true. Psalm 104, the Sermon on the Mount and other similar passages show that God cares for His creation and continually sustains it. However, as we shall see, it is the nature of their functional operations which primarily concerns Him. He does not only ‘give life and breath to everything’ but aids the ‘all things’ as they work within His purposive will. Hence He is giving power to fulfil purpose.

Also under providence is included His creative faithfulness (I Pet. 4: 19) which means He protects His creation from opposition. We have not yet raised the question of the coming and nature of evil, but God protects what He has created from its devastation. Jer. 31:36 (cf. Psalm 89:36–37) shows that God will protect the order of His universe. The moral order is presupposed by His own nature. In passages like Psalm 78:25–26, 65:9–13, Isaiah 40:26, 44:24, 45:12 we see that He maintains the order of creation, but also orders it and uses it for His providential and moral purposes.

Finally we see that His care includes redemption and the final restitution of all things. Because His universe is moral, He must care for it when immoral powers try to change or destroy it. Hence Isaiah 63:16 not only speaks of Him as creative Father, but calls Him ‘Redeemer from Eternity’, meaning that He has ever been Redeemer by nature, even before creation began. This is a very important insight.

(iii) God, Creation, and Man

Man the Image of God

We now come to the doctrine of creation as it relates to man. We see that God creates man in His own image. See Gen. 1:26ff., 2:7f., 9:6, Psalm 8, I Cor. 11:7, cf. Eccles. 7:29, 3:11. By ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ we do not mean a static or ossified representation of God, but say, ‘The image means that everything that God is, man is like that, but anything that God is man is none of that’. We mean that man is man, and God is God, and that whilst there is affinity between the two, there is no identity. The closest we have to man becoming somewhat as God, is in II Peter 1:4 where the redeemed are said to be ‘Partakers of the divine nature’. This is the only time such a statement has been made, and to be a partaker or a sharer is to have fellowship with God, and so derive the benefits and fruits of that nature, such as in I John 1:3, John 17:20–26, I Cor. 1:9, II Cor. 13:14.

Man then is intended to be a dynamic reflection of the God who acts, and is ever present to His creation. Doubtless the mandate of operations which God gives to him within the creation, such as is seen in Gen. 1:28ff., 9:7 (cf. Psalm 8:5–8) is the way in which he is intended to reflect God. His obedience to the natural or functional laws of the universe will also reflect God (cf. Rom. 3:21).

Man the Contingent

Man is from dust. This is seen in Gen. 2:7 (cf. Gen. 3:19, 23, Job 4: 19, 33:6, Psalm 103:14, Ecclesiastes 3:20, 12:7, etc. However this dust is not to be despised. It is part of God's creation. God does a second work of creation, taking this dust, shaping it up into man, and then breathing into this form the 'breath of life'. Man is not merely dust: he is what God makes him by shaping that dust and enlivening it. God has given him personal being by the breath of His mouth. However, from one point of view man is flesh (Gen. 6:3, II Chron. 32:8, Psalm 145:21, Isaiah 31:3, etc.) which means that of himself he is not immortal. His ultimate immortality is that which God gives him.

Man has no moral strength of himself. Romans 7:14ff. gives us a picture of man of himself. He is unable to accomplish moral good, or desist from moral evil. Doubtless this is a picture of man who has experienced fallenness, but man is never man of himself, but only in contingency upon God.

It is often said that man is troubled by his finiteness. This may be true of man who desires to be as God, but it is not true of man who wishes only to be like God. To be creaturely and dependent is a very rich thing. Man may glory in his comparative weakness. It is not actual weakness, for creatureliness is man's true being. Hence it is both desirable and delightful. Death as fallen man knows it is not part of the true (created) human scene.

Man the Head of His Creation

God has placed man as the head of his world. We saw that fact in the mandate given to him to be fruitful, multiply, fill up the world, subdue it and have dominion over it. This was not merely an opportunity presented but a responsibility given. Without doubt man is to work with God and for God. This constitutes an essential, if not the essential part of his humanity. God is creative: man is procreative. God is purposive: man shares in that purpose.

We can understand from man's fall that place which he had prior to the fall. For example, we know that the full restoration of the universe is contingent upon man's restoration. Man of himself can and will restore nothing. But his place in the universe is significant. We propose to show what were his activities or offices. First of all he is a creature of the Creator, and is not man unless a creature, and he must do that work of a creature which is consonant with his calling. Secondly he is the subject of the King, since God is 'King over all the earth'. As a subject he is being cared for by the King, but must also do the will of the King. Thirdly he is a son or child of God, God being Father. Being a child of God he is cared for by the Heavenly Father, but as the (unique) Son of God was, and is subject to the Father, so must he be, and thus do the Father's will. Only as creature–subject–son may man fulfil his role as lord over his universe. He is free to make his choices; indeed he must do so, but he is never so free as when he chooses to do the will of God in his capacity as creature–subject–son.

Then he is able to rule. Then he is able to be fully man.

Man and the Subjection of Creation

Although we have not yet dealt with the fall of man as he rebelled against God, nevertheless we must look at what has happened because of that fall, as it is linked with man's relationship to his universe. As we saw Romans 8:18–25 speaks of the creation as groaning under a bondage. This bondage has two elements

- (a) The creation is subject to corruption, and
- (b) It is subject to emptiness (vanity, futility, inane operations, nonfulfilment).

We assume then that corruption is no essential part of true creation, and that creation has a task to fulfil, otherwise speaking of its 'futility' of operations would be without sense. In Genesis 3 we have mention of the earth being cursed for man's sake and that it will have to go against its true nature to produce weeds and briars in the proportion it does. Also Cain is told that for his sake it will yield even less than for Adam. There is a mystery here that we cannot fully fathom. What we can see is that when man is fully rehabilitated then the creation will be renewed. This means that the creation is dependent upon the renewal of man for its own renewal so that functionally man has a leadership of creation which is very significant.

We may conclude then from our studies of man that he is very high in the order of creation. There are indications in Daniel ch. 7, and in other passages within the New Testament that ultimately man will be over angels. Man glorified then will be advanced from, and in some ways different from, man created, man fallen, and, even, man redeemed. Glorification, too, is what God had planned before He even created the world (cf. I Cor. 2:6ff.).

(iv) Conclusion as to God, Creation, and Man

(a) Creation Reveles God

We have seen something of the nature of creation as it comes from God. We emphasise that the creation is not God, although it certainly discloses the nature of God. Doubtless this is one of its functions. Psalm 19 speaks of this revelatory 'sound' (voice) going out to the ends of the earth. a fact quoted by Paul in Romans 10:18 where he appears to refer to the proclamation of the Gospel. In Romans 1:18–20 Paul claims that men are reprehensible because creation gives out the revelation of God. He does not even seem to consider that the present state of creation is a significant impediment to man knowing God – if he will! Let us observe, in passing, that the nature of creation is what reveals God, not simply the fact of creation. A reading of the Psalms shows that the very nature of the universe declares the nature of God. However, what is meant is that what God is, is seen in the things that are made. His beneficence is seen in the rhythm of the seasons, and filling the heart with food and gladness'. Also He is the God who gives to all men 'life and breath and everything', so much so that a pagan poet can say of Him, 'In Him we live and move and have our being.' (Acts 14:15, 17:25, 28). Paul is saying that the nature of God can be known by seeing the way the things operate, the things which God has made. At the very least man may know God. We shall see shortly that man does not desire to know God.

(b) Creation and Purpose

We have already indicated that creation without purpose is unthinkable from the Biblical point of view. The immediate purpose for creation even with fallen man, is to populate it, making family life amongst mankind, and also to subdue the elements which exist within creation, these coming under the lordship of man. Now we can examine the salvific or ultimate purposes for creation at greater length. Normally we should discuss these in the light of the fall of man, but since they are stated in relationship to creation they are also relevant at this point.

Rightly speaking these purposes can be considered under

- (a) Redemptional purposes and
- (b) Restitutional and Glorification purposes, the latter two ultimately being two sections of the one work.

In regard to redemptional purposes we have those Scriptures in the Old Testament which refer to the New Covenant, the forgiveness of Israel, and the coming of the Kingdom. In the N.T. we have references to the personal salvation of man. Hence II Tim. 1:9 says 'God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our own works but in virtue of his own purpose which he gave us in Christ Jesus from eternity.' The passage of Ephes. 1:4–7 speaks of God's purpose from before the foundation of the world, and says this is so that we may be 'to the praise of the glory of His grace'. In regard to ultimate glorification of man we have passages such as I Cor. 2:6ff., Ephes. 1:12–14, Rom. 8:28–29. As we have seen in Romans 8:18–25 there is to be the ultimate 'restitution of all things' (Acts 3:21). This has its O.T. equivalents in passages such as Isaiah 11, 65 and 66 when all created things will be reconciled to one another. The ultimate glorification or eternalising of creation is indicated, and thus that God is 'faithful Creator'.

In this respect Colossians 1:20 speaks of a reconciliation of 'all things' which includes things celestial and things terrestrial amongst which there has been disharmony by reason of the disaffection of some of these things with God. Hence 'every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2:9–11).

If at this point we can see that ultimate redemption and glorification is not a new step which is disclosed only in the N.T. but is 'the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from eternity' (Acts 3:21) then we can see creation as morally purposive. Ephesians 3:7–11 plainly says that the ultimate working out of God's will relates to the plan of God, i.e. of Him 'who created all things'. In other words, God's purposes for His universe are not determined by the failures and exigencies of things within His creation) but are the outworking of His plan which He determined before even embarking on the work of creation.

With this in mind, we may now proceed to see the action which brought about disharmony within Creation, and which sought to alter the essential unity of that Creation.

3. The Attack Upon The Unity of Creation – Satanic and Human

(i) Satanic Elements Effect Rebellion¹

We have said that if there is a dualism within creation, then this must mean a dualism within God. Whilst creation is not God, it proceeds from God, and so reveals what He is. It has affinity with God, but not identity, yet its true affinity depends upon its contingency and an uncontingent creation is a contradiction in terms, and a hopeless affair.

Whilst the Scripture does not give us an account or explanation of the origin of evil, it nevertheless gives us an account of the intrusion of evil into the affairs of the creation. To speak of 'the origin' of evil is perhaps impossible. It has been pointed out that evil is not a viable entity within itself in terms of creational being. It is an attack upon that which has been originated. However this may be, passages such as Revelation chapter 12, Isaiah 14:12–14, Ezekiel 28, Luke 10:17–19, 11:14–21 indicate the nature of Satan's rebellion. The refusal of Satan to be creaturely, under his Maker, and his ambition to become head of the angelic powers and even usurp the powers of God is what has made him subvert one-third of those angelic powers and seek to attack the nature and operations of Creation. This is an immediate attack upon the operations of the 'Faithful Creator'. In II Thess. 2:3–4 it is shown that he seeks to be worshipped in the temple of God as very God himself.

The nature of Satanic operations are revealed in many places in Scripture. Little is spoken of him in the O.T., but from what is revealed in the N.T. it is best to view him as having always opposed every element of the will and purpose of God. This would then mean that he had sought to defeat the purposes of God within creation from the beginning of his rebellion. Job 38 describes the creation by God, and says, 'The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy', meaning that at that point where the terrestrial creation had begun, all celestial elements were in accord. Whilst a point of time is impossible to be denoted, yet early in creation Satan must have rebelled. Hence the Genesis story of temptation.

(ii) The Rebellion of Man Against God

(a) The Act of Rebellion

Paul's note about woman being beguiled into transgression but man deliberately transgressing (I Tim. 2:12–14) shows that man's rebellion against God was deliberate. We will have to see the enormity of this act in order to understand that it is in no way excusable, and that it is not within the power or ability of man to wrong this right, even if he were predisposed to do so, and we are clearly told that he was not predisposed to do so.

¹ This subject of Satan's rebellion and evil is vast and beyond the scope of this paper. Readers are referred to two extended treatments. One is 'The Dominion of Darkness and the Victory of God' (G. Bingham, N.C.P.I. Publication, 1977) and Living Faith No. 5 'The Nature of Authority and Obedience'. These studies also include the nature of the rebellion of man against the Creator.

We must not understand this rebellion as mere disaffection with God. It has no valid basis for 'They hated me without a cause' (John 15:24–25, cf. Psalm 35:19, 69:4) is the principle behind man's rejection of God. This rejection is described in Romans 1:19–23. It must be seen that man could read creation and know God, and did know God yet he deliberately rejected God. In other words he refused the message of creation which was and is continually before him. There could be no pleading of ignorance. In refusing God man refused creation. We see that if creation also communicated the purposive nature of God, then man rejected God's purposes for creation. Of course he rejected God's purposes when he rejected God, but we are saying that he knowingly rejected God's purposes.²

(b) The Nature of the Act of Rebellion

It can scarcely be intended that man was tempted, by the serpent (cf. Genesis 3:1–6, cf. Revelation 12:9) to be like God, since Genesis 1:26 tells us he was already like God. Indeed passages such as Genesis 9:6 and I Cor. 11:7 insist that in some way he is still like God. The temptation must have been with some difference, and 'as God' rather than 'like God' seems nearer the mark. It may not mean 'God' so that Adam thought he would become God, but to be 'as God' is surely to reject the elements of contingency which attach to 'creature, son, and servant', and be autonomous entities independent (i.e. uncontingent) of God. Hence the rejection of God means a rejection of the authentic theology, cosmology and anthropology which is innate in true creation. Man now has to build a new rationalisation of God, creation and man, and since these innately cannot change he must 'exchange the truth of God for a lie' which is why he 'worships the creature (creation) rather than the Creator'. Part of his false rationalisation is that the creation is wonderful, but requires no Creator, as such'

Man does not forsake his role as lord of creation, but in no sense will he accept that he is the underlord, i.e. under God.

(c) The Effects of Rebellion

Romans 1:18–32 may not immediately be said to be Adam's rebellion. It is, however, the expression of that rebellion. Jewish readers would have ascribed this to the Gentiles, but in Romans chapter two Paul effectively shows that Jews, too, are in the same sorry state of sinning. The effects then of the rebellion are those shown in Romans 1:21–32. Rejection of God

² Can it be said that the purposes of God are expressed by creation? It may be argued that the teleological nature of creation is a Christian concept and derived from the Judaic-Christian Scriptures. It may be possible to show from creation that all things are moving towards a certain goal. It is a strange quirk of theology that some see in Romans 1:20 simply certain attributes of God shown in and by the things of creation. Why not all the attributes of God and all His nature? Does the verse confine it to less than all? For example, are 'His eternal nature, namely His power (dunamis) and deity (theites, divinity, Godhead)' not all His nature? If so do they not include His Fatherhood, Redeemerhood, Kingship, as well as Creatorhood? Has not God always been that? Is it possible to reveal some of His attributes and offices and not all, and still claim that He is known? Are 'power' and 'Godhead' limited elements of God? Scarcely! We should then conclude that man's rebellion was (and is) against the whole of the nature of God. This alone makes sense of the enormity of his rebellion against all that God is, and has proposed to do, even salvation and glorification.

demanded the structuring of the idolatrous system, and this resulted in sexual immorality which in turn led to sexual deviations and perversions, which then led to a reprobate mind, and so to the break up of all natural creational relationships, and so to all kinds of cruelty, vice, and the like.

The effects however, are not without the personal intervention of God. He gives men up, successively, to the fruits of their sins. He personally abandons them to their evil. This is His wrath working out. He is wrathful with man. Whilst Matt. 5:43–48 leads us to believe He never ceases to love that which He created, it must be seen, nevertheless, that God reveals His wrath upon all sin, which is itself a deliberate repression of its holy counterpart, e.g. purity is suppressed by (the act of) impurity.

Subjectively man is now in a dreadful state. However much he may rationalise this outwardly, or intellectually, he is inwardly the object of dire perversity. He may rationalise, with his mind, the new forms of God, man and creation, but they are not essentially what he rationalises them to be. These rationalisations form the seemingly brilliant religions and philosophies of mankind. Atheistic rationalisations are no less brilliant. Yet from God's point of view they are foolish. Man, as a rebellious existent within his creation, is opposing its unity, seeking to change it in its functional nature, and constantly trying to make it fit his rationalisations, which of course it cannot do. Hence man's immense problems. Hence his existential despair, his bitterness, his cynicism, or his superficial or careless approach to life and the universe. He plays many variations on the same monotonous theme. In doing this he increases his inner despair and anguish. Because he must, by nature of the case fracture relationships or relate inadequately to 'all things' therefore he is ever pursuing a course which will satisfy him. Ecclesiastes is an excellent treatise on man seeking to find his fulfilment in his uses of various elements within the universe. He can find none. Should he achieve worldly success it will vanish from him in a moment of death and assuredly a fool will inherit the labours of the successful man. So, in fact there is no success. The same writer says the alternative is to 'fear God and keep His commandments'. He says this is 'the whole of man', and not simply the whole duty of man, although it is also that. He means that obedience to God is what constitutes true (dynamic) humanity.

When it comes to expressing the dreadful anguish of man we find the task impossible. Only a revelation of the Cross will show the depths of human depravity and moral anguish, because all sin has been gathered there. Being borne by the Sufferer it is exposed in its enormity by the dimensions and character of his suffering.

(d) Some Descriptions of the Effects of Rebellion

Unattractive as it is we need to see the effects of rebellion, otherwise the vast dimensions of grace in reconciling man will not be seen and admired. Hence we try to see what sin has done to man.

In Romans 5:6–21 Paul tells us the effects of sin:

- (i) Man becomes totally morally helpless (asthenic). He can do nothing in the moral realm.
- (ii) He becomes ungodly. He may have 'gods' and 'lords' but he is ungodly. His religion is false.
- (iii) He becomes a sinner, i.e. one who opposes God and His laws.
- (iv) He becomes the enemy of God, and is the object of His wrath.

(v) Sin has entered his world, and with it death. He is now the slave and victim of sin and death and the dreadful fears which attend their depredations on man.

In Romans 3:9–18 Paul says all men are under the power of sin. He says that because of this no one knows God, no one seeks after Him. No one does good, nor is anyone righteous. All are evil, bitter, in the ways of ruin and misery, and know no peace. They are murderous. They have no fear of God. If we compare this with Romans 1:18ff. we see it is simply a practical description which parallels the things described in that passage. If we read Mark 7:20–23 we see that man has become a fountain of pollution and evil. This should be compared with the nature of the image of God in man. God is the ‘fountain of living waters’, and contingent man has from his heart a fountain flowing which is ‘the springs (issues) of life’ (Jer. 2:13, cf. Proverbs 4:23). However this pure stream has become a ‘muddied spring, a polluted fountain’ (Prov. 25:26). This compares with Jeremiah 17:9 where ‘the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (corrupt).’

Man as we have seen is an active enemy of God. Romans 5:10, 1:30, cf. 3:18, and Col. 1:21 show this, and show that the evil deeds of man are both the cause and motivation of that evil. In all of this enmity, Satan and his evil powers are active in promoting slavish fear of God, and so deeper hostility towards God. Hebrews 2:14–15 with Ephesians 2:1–3 show how cleverly Satan manipulates mankind. All are under his sway (I John 5:19, cf. John 8: 44, with I John 3:11–12). Man is now the slave of evil powers (Ephes. 2:13) and is caught into bondage by the fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15). His consequent (and constant) bitterness in blaming God for his unsatisfying world (‘this existence is absurd’) is hatred rationalisation of its own evil and failure.

Man, then, is in this terrifying state. Everything is completely loaded against his ever turning to God, repenting and confessing, and so humbling himself. It is virtually impossible. Not only has he no power to do so because of his rebellion and weakness, but because also he has no right to do so. He is doomed, damned, condemned because of his actions. See Romans 1:32.

Man is alienated from God. No better description is there than Isaiah 59:2, ‘Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God’. If there is going to be reconciliation then only God can act – if He wills.

4. The Reconciliation of God³

(i) Introductory Note

It is clear that it is disparate elements which are, or need to be reconciled. If there are differences between God and man, between universe and man, between man and man, and between the elements which constitute the personality of each person, then reconciliation, so far as creation is concerned, would be a vast work. For this reason we need to define what reconciliation really is,

³ Readers should supplement this treatment of reconciliation by using Living Faith No. 15 ‘The Christian Doctrine of the Atonement’. We do not wish to repeat all its elements in this present study. A superb treatment of reconciliation is James Denney’s ‘*The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*’ (James Clarke London).

and to see whether it can be effected, and if so, how.

One of the problems we will face in examining reconciliation is that if we take the subject solely to be contained within the technical value of the word 'reconciliation', or within the scope of the word as a subject, then we will miss the whole of the movement of reconciliation which is also at the same time salvation–history. In other words, reconciliation is not one thing and the atonement another, but each is part of the other and both are, in the ultimate, the one.

(ii) The Nature of Reconciliation

The term reconciliation has the practical meanings of doing away with an enmity, the bringing together of those persons who were formerly hostile, the bridging over or amelioration of a quarrel, and in some cases the harmonising of elements which were previously incompatible and disparate. It even has the idea of the purging of impure elements, as say from a temple which has been polluted and needs reconsecration. Reconciliation is the act by which these formerly hostile elements are made one, i.e. unified.

The Scriptures which refer directly to reconciliation, are, as such contained almost totally within the N.T. They are Romans 5:10ff., II Cor. 5:18 ff., Ephes. 2:11ff., Col. 1:19f. In I Cor. 7:11 there is a reference to reconciliation between husband and wife. In Matthew 5:9 we read 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God'. This of course means that their Father (God) is the true Peace–maker and they are imitating Him. The term here is not, technically, reconciling, but then 'making peace' is the term used alongside 'reconciling' in Ephesians 2:15 and 16, so that the outcome of making peace is reconciliation, and in Romans 5:1 to be justified and so to have peace with God is really to be reconciled to God.

The outcome of reconciliation which we shall see below is the bringing together of all hostile elements, man as against God, and disharmonised elements of the universe to their natural functional level.

(iii) The Background of Reconciliation

Reconciliation must be seen against the background of the nature of God. In no place is it suggested that God has to be reconciled to man. He is wrathful, no doubt, yet in His wrath He loves, or better still, in His love He reveals wrath. Man needs to be reconciled to God, and man is the enemy of God, but God's being is such that He goes out to effect reconciliation, to remove the impediment which prevents man subjectively from wanting to come to Him, and objectively that impediment which would never allow man to come to Him, namely his sin, since the sinner must die for his sins.

The background against which we must understand reconciliation is the hatred man has for God, his fellow–man and the universe. In Romans 5:10 it is stated that 'while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son'. This means that our attitude of enmity did not change. This attitude is very serious. It is the deliberate opposite of the demand to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. In Col. 1:21 it is said, 'You who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds (or, 'by evil deeds') he has now reconciled...' Here the enmity is deep–seated in the mind. It is exacerbated by the guilt of sins which continually enlarge the hatred.

In John 15:18–24 Jesus makes the revelation of the deep hatred of the world against the disciples. He warns them that they are hated because they have allied themselves with him and the Father. He says, 'They have hated both me and my Father'. Doubtless we would think the revelation of the Father would excite men. To the contrary, they hate him more because he has revealed what they did not wish to retain in their knowledge God as Father. Hence, says Jesus, they fulfil what is written in their law, i.e. 'They hated me without a cause'. Man has no valid cause whatever to hate God.

This begins to show us the terrible nature of hatred and man's evil. In the case of the hatred of Cain for Abel was the fact that Abel had been accepted by God, but Cain had not been accepted. Abel's works were righteous, Cain's not. This is the frightening clue to man's hatreds.

This is seen in Ephesians 2:11f. Here the age-old hatred of Gentile for Jew is seen. Why? The Jews are exclusive. They keep out the Gentiles from the place of true (accepted, ordained) sacrifice. The Jews are exclusive, for God accepts them but not the Gentiles. In this, also, is the Gentiles direct hatred for God. This is even why they are for the most part Gentiles. Their hostility to God is shown in the gods they espouse. Furthermore, since gods and demons relate, the hostile forces of evil have their power in inciting men's hatred for God.

(iv) The Personal Enmity of Man for God

The purpose behind a study such as this is to show how we, as humans, have hated God and therefore to realise the dimensions of love and grace which are needed and operative to cover our dreadful sin and reconcile us to God, first objectively, and then subjectively.

How deep is our hatred for God? We have to say as deep and high as our guilt which is as deep and high as God's holiness and His love. It is this love and holiness which we have rejected. It is that we hate. We hate it all. We are 'enemies in our minds'. Our enmity is active. That is why we try to repress righteousness by actual deeds of unrighteousness. We cannot be called enemies simply because we are not on the right side. We are on the wrong side, and are active in it. 'He that is not for me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth'. Again we are not passively enemies. Our guilt goads us into hatred. Our guilt then multiplies and further exacerbates us. We could murder man; we could murder God. If it is simply a thought in our hearts, it is in God's sight murder, as though it were done.

The anguish of enmity must be considered. Man is created for love, and to love. He does despite to himself by not loving. He does despite to himself by hating. We come back, again, to that awful existential anguish, loneliness, meaninglessness which we saw in Romans 1:20ff. The twisting of our relationship with God twists our relationships with others, with ourselves, with things, with our universe. It is this perverse and loathsome creature who dares to criticise and demean the High and Holy One, to become enraged against Him and inflamed. Because we were made for love we do frightening damage to ourselves, and can by no means reverse the process or come back to our true humanity. How, then, is reconciliation effected?

(v) The Act of Reconciliation

‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.’ If we are going to understand this statement, then we must see ‘Christ in all the Scriptures’. We must see that the process was planned before the foundation of the world, and gradually effected in the time of history. The crystallised act of the Cross has the whole of history behind it. The immaturity of man, caused by his sin must be considered. He is gradually taught. The time of Israel is to create the structure of thinking which will enable an understanding of reconciliation. The fact of sacrifice and propitiation, roughly understood in pagan sacrifice, must be understood in terms of the God who is love, and yet reveals His wrath, but not such wrath as do the capricious gods, or the raging demons. For this reason the nature of sin can only be understood by revelation. Likewise wrath must be a revelation, and love the over-arching revelation.

‘God was in Christ’ must mean that the act of the Cross is initiated by the Father. John's Gospel shows us the obedience of the Son and his doing only that which the Father showed him. Of course God was not on the Cross, not, anyway as Father. But by virtue of Him, the Son goes to the Cross. On the Cross he dissolves the enmity, and takes away the hostility. How does he do this?

He does it in a number of ways. So far as the Gentiles are concerned he fulfils the Mosaic law. All its demands are met, and in this sense there is no more the Mosaic law. Christ is the end of the law for everyone who has faith. That way of law is abolished. The moral law was not, nor ever shall be, abolished. The sins against it are also borne and their guilt destroyed. It was within the case of Mosaic law. When the ritual and sacrificial laws of Israel are fulfilled Israel in that sense has no exclusive claim to sacrifice. It is one sacrifice for sin for all time, and for all men – ‘not for our sins only, but the sins of the whole world’. Hence the veil is split, the way to the holiest is opened, and all may come by this new and living way. The cause for hatred of the Jews is abolished.

But this is not all. On the Cross he bears the guilts of all mankind, of both Jew and Gentile. He fulfils the demands of all true law for all time (cf. Romans 3:21–26). All sins, seemingly, formerly passed over, are now seen to be upon that Cross, and all are borne to extinction. ‘He bore our sins in his body on the tree.’ Not only the punishment of the sins, but the sins themselves. Objectively he destroyed the impediment between man and God – guilt. Subjectively he removed the impediment, and laid the grounds for new love – ‘We love because he first loved us.’

We can expand this. Man knows he has hated. That past hatred has, in fact, been destroyed. ‘He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.’ The whole chain of sin and guilt and hatred has all been borne to exhaustion and non-being. It has been erased. Christ has played it out to nothingness. Man has no past to haunt him, nor old hates to revisit him. He loves, he adores God.

Even this is not all. Man's conscience holds him on its painful hook. It roasts him over guilt's fire. Conscience is ruthless. Deep down, below the surface conditioning of man, conscience spells out the grim truth of law – ‘The soul that sins it shall die.’ It insists on ‘I (God) will by no means acquit the guilty.’ The wrath of God is not only revealed, now, but it is to come in full and final impact. In fact this has happened on the

Cross. 'Herein is love, not that we loved him, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' 'God hath set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood....' The wrath has been poured out. The judicial penalty has been expended. There is no cause for enmity. God has not hated but loved. Man may now see Him as love. This is what he must do.

The inner operation of the Cross is mostly withheld from us, perhaps for very good reasons. We have said that we see the impediment to reconciliation – the sin of man – at the Cross. Only here is a true revelation of sin. The terrible cry wrung from Jesus – 'My God My God Why did you forsake me?' is not the cry of ignorance, but the cry which communicates the pain of rejection, the cry that is endemic to all rebellion and its fruits. 'God made him to be sin for us', hence God made him to take the existential loneliness, awryness, and painful dislocation that man knows. He made him to take it all and then destroy it in that holy reconciling love.

It is helpful to note that Jesus' quote, 'They hated me without a cause', is found in Psalm 69 (verse 4). This is a messianic psalm, a psalm of the Cross. Its text speaks of 'More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without a cause'. It goes on to show the anguish and shame of rejection. Time and again the subject of hatred cries out for deliverance from his hating enemies. This is what is meant by 'destroying the enmity' or 'finishing the hostility'. This is the reconciling act of the Cross.

(vi) The Effects of Reconciliation

These effects are many, both direct and indirect. However, we will not see them in their all-embracing nature unless we see them under the whole atonement, and not just from the specialised theological use of the word 'reconciliation', which has primarily to do with man's enmity with God, and the work effecting its removal. Then we will see the personal results which come to a man, the results which come in regard to the people of God, and finally the cosmic results of atonement and its reconciliation.

The Personal Effects of Reconciliation

Man is at peace with God: this is the basic effect. Man can resume being a creature of the Creator, a son of the Father, a subject of the King. He is in harmony with his Maker. He recognises that God is not only essentially Father–Creator–King, but that He is also essentially Redeemer, the God of grace. God is not so bound by a tyrannical order of moral creation that He cannot exercise His grace and love and make man as one with Him 'a partaker in the divine nature'.

Reconciliation is primarily an act which God enacts. Hence its objectivity allows the responding subjectivity of man to be on solid and authentic grounds. Hence man is at peace, not by what he does or feels, but by what God has done for him. Man's crisis of faith in the reconciling work of Christ leads to a process of comprehension and experience of the God of love. His old rationalisations of God, man, and creation have now become new and true. Hence his internal tyranny of sin and, as we have observed, existential despair and hopelessness, have been replaced by incredible peace. Being reconciled he is at peace with God. Being reconciled he is at peace with himself.

He is also at peace with his fellow–man. Forgiven of his sins he forgives. Cleansed from his pollution he espouses practical holiness. Reconciled he desires to proclaim reconciliation; 'Be ye reconciled to God'.

These are the personal effects of reconciliation, but their implications and wide-reaching secondary effects cover the whole gamut of Christian living and obedience.

The Effects of Reconciliation With the People of God

God has created man. Man has rebelled. God has reconciled him. Reconciliation is no mere moral expediency to meet the contingency of rebellion. It was planned before time came into being. It was ever God's intention. He ever planned to reveal Himself as Redeemer and the God of grace. He had planned man's freedom, and that freedom was to be real. It included the power to disobey. Creation is only understood in the light of redemption, for very little of creation is known if it is not interpreted by salvation history. Creation is ever moving towards its glorious predestined end.

Part of that marvellous end is the people of God. Man as we have seen was split down the centre by enmity. We saw this principle in the story of Cain and Abel. We saw its wider representation in the cleavage between Israel and the other nations – Jew and Gentile. Now in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. Out of the two humanities of Jew and Gentile an entirely new and other humanity has been minted, and this in the crucible of the Cross. Now there is the family of God, the new, true, Israel.

Nor is this all. This is the new habitation of God. We are being built together as a holy temple. It is to be, as it is becoming, an habitation of God, through the Spirit. This is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Ezekiel 37:27–28. It is seen in the beautiful passage of Revelation 21:

That there is a people of God (cf. Exodus 19:5–6, I Peter 2:9–10) is stunning. Each reconciled person is part of the family of God, the new history of redemption issuing from the Cross. His true personal being is only complete and experimental in the context of the family, the church, the true reconciling agent of God to the world.

The Cosmic Effects of Reconciliation

Paul states but does not explain the reconciliation in cosmic terms. He says, 'For in him the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.' (Col. 1:19–20). If we look at the context of this statement, we see that the 'all things' to which he refers in v. 16 are 'all things...in heaven and earth, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authority – all things were created through him and for him.' This is also the 'all things' of Ephesians 1:9–10 where the plan 'for the fulness of time' is described. It is 'to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.' Both passages make it clear that the whole cosmos of creation is involved.

At face value it seems that 'all things' as created will ultimately be reconciled, and it would seem that fallen and evil angels and forces, even including Satan are reconciled, which of course would be impossible. Repentance by the evil powers is nowhere anticipated. If we were to take a specialist use of 'reconciliation' to mean the purging of a temple, then that would be true. However that is probably not the focal meaning of reconciliation in this particular case. If it has the meaning of 'all dissident elements purged so that true harmony exists' then that would be an understandable explanation. Let us then look at two things, (a) The state

reconciliation, harmony and peace, and (b) The method by which this is effected, i.e. the blood of his cross, the death of Christ.

We are given many beautiful passages in Scripture, already quoted, which show us the ultimate harmony that will be. In Isaiah 11:6ff. the wolf dwells with the lamb, the leopard lies down with the kid, the child and the snake play with each other, and ‘they shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,’ says God. This is repeated in Isaiah 65:25. God creates a new heaven and a new earth. In Ezekiel 37:27 God says of His people, ‘My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.’ Both of these beautiful concepts are gathered together in Revelation 21:1–5. In this passage death has passed away. A new cosmos is irradiating before the eyes of all creatures, and they are part of it. It is ‘the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth only righteousness.’ Nothing that defiles or is an abomination shall enter into it. Nothing shall destroy its harmony.

How does this happen? Do angels as well as men, and do all angels and all men accede to the Cross? Whilst it is an attractive idea we are not led to believe it will be. In the latter chapters of the Revelation all evil forces are actually destroyed. We do not say annihilated, for that is not indicated. Destruction⁴ in the N.T. is crippling, paralysing, or putting out of employment and action of a person or power. If then God destroys evil it can never trouble the ultimate harmony or undo it. Is this in fact what happens?

In Phil. 2:9–11 Paul says that ultimately every knee shall bow to Christ as Lord. In I Cor. 15:24–28 he speaks of the ultimate subjection of every enemy to Christ. This is also indicated in Hebrews 10:12–13. The predictions of Christ of the end-time were that there would be cataclysmic upheavals, and dreadful assaults by the powers of darkness, especially upon the people of God, and the creation of God. Revelation 12 indicates that Satan knows his time is at hand; he is about to be defeated and destroyed. The latter chapters depict the defeat and punishment of evil. Only then does true peace come. Only then the new heavens and the new earth appear.

In all passages concerning reconciliation the terms ‘by his death’, ‘by the death of His Son’, ‘by the blood of his cross’ are used. This means that the victory of the Cross is the defeat of evil powers, and the cause of their ultimate doom. Passages such as Col. 2:14–15, Hebrews 2:14–15, amongst many others show that Satan's final doom was sealed at Calvary. When man's guilt was destroyed sin's power was broken, and the hold that the flesh and evil powers had over man was cancelled. Man is now free to relate to God and his fellow-man, as also the creation.⁵

This leads us to an important truth: God, ultimately, is not defeated in His creation. He reconciles all things. Revelation 5:1ff. shows that he does it by ‘the-Lamb-as-it-had-been-slain.’ He alone unfolds history, breaking its seals, and completing its purposes.

⁴ See Romans 6:6, Hebrews 2:14 and similar passages. Such destruction does not allow evil to exercise itself. Annihilation raises as many, if not more problems than it seems to solve. There is the question of whether the Creator destroys anything He creates. Proverbs poses a deep question: ‘The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble (evil).’

⁵ Cf. Living Faith No. 1 – ‘The Nature and Meaning of Love’.

5. Conclusion: Creation and Reconciliation

We have hinted that God's faithfulness as true Creator is not really vindicated unless at the end and in the new age all is harmony and peace. This is true. Of course we must understand that peace is complete unity. It is not mere static peace, but in fact dynamic unity, or to put it clearly, absolute love.

We have had the principles shown clearly concerning this ultimate peace and harmony. Romans 8:18–25 speaks of the creation being liberated from its bondage to corruption, and its release into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This accords with the passages of the O.T. concerning the ultimate fulfilment of all things, when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. This is the 'uniting of all things', 'the filling up of all things', and 'the reconciling of all things' by Christ. In Col. 2:2 Paul speaks of the power which knits men together in love. In Col. 3:14 he speaks of the bond of love which 'unites all things together in harmony'. This unification is in Christ: this filling comes from Christ, this reconciling is by the blood of the Cross, and the harmonising is by the love of God⁶, as demonstrated and actuated in the Cross.

What must be seen is that creation as it initially came into view was never, of itself, the ultimate intention of God. The fall must not be seen as a dismal failure, nor must the Cross be seen simply as its rectification. Greater issues are at stake, such as the freedom of the created being, so that his being in the image of God is a real thing. The voluntary reunion of man with God and his glad acceptance of his contingency is the marvel of the Cross, and the thoughtful love of God. Since the goal of creation is the glorification of man and all things, it is equally the revelation of God as He is – in His glory – and it is the vindication of His faithful Creatorhood, Fatherhood, Kingship and Redeemerhood.

For this reason, creation should not be seen apart from reconciliation, nor reconciliation apart from creation. Anyone who views history atomistically or considers it in its fragments has missed the full view of the grace and intention of God. One who has come to know the peace which passes all understanding and knows Him to be 'the God of all peace' will understand the true nature of God, and live in the wonder and security of it. He will be the one, above all others, who will cry fervently, urgently, 'Be ye reconciled to God'

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⁶ Cf. Living Faith No. 1 – 'The Nature and Meaning of Love'.