

Eternity, Temporality, and the Grace of Redemption

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The relation between God, eternity, and time provides a significant locus of the mystery in which Christian doctrine terminates. The consideration of the matter and the meaning of time is preparatory to considering the incarnation, the entrance into time, of the Second Person of the Godhead whose coming was necessary for our redemption.

Isaac Watts, in his hymnic paraphrase of the ninetieth Psalm, saw time “like an ever-rolling stream” that “bears all its sons away.”¹ But in his reach for the meaning of what time is and does, he may have spoken more than he intended. For if time is, as he stated it, “ever-rolling,” when and where did time begin? When and where, if at all, will it end? Or is time eternal? The questions have puzzled philosophers and challenged the imaginations of essayists. Paul Helm, a contemporary philosopher and Reformed theologian, has observed in his challenging *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* that “The classical Christian theologians, Augustine of Hippo, say, or Aquinas or John Calvin, each took it for granted that God exists as a timeless eternal being. They accepted it as an axiom of Christian theology that God has no memory, and no conception of his own future, and that he does not change, although he eternally wills all changes, even becoming, when incarnate in the Son, subject to humiliation and degradation. The position at the present time among philosophers and theologians is a very different one.”²

We are not primarily interested at present in what Helm sees as alternative philosophic conceptions and arguments. One instance of what is involved will suffice. “Such a view [that God is in time] is characteristic of so-called ‘Process Theology’, which holds not only that God is in time but that it is essential to God that he changes, that his own character matures as he experiences the love, disappointment, and frustration of his creation.”³ Helm further observes: “certain biblical scholars hold that . . . while they are prepared to allow that certain expressions of Scripture are anthropomorphic – God does not have hands, or feet, or a nose, though Scripture says that he has all these – such figures of speech do not extend to divine activities. God only metaphorically has feet, but he literally remembers, or changes his mind, or grows weary.”⁴

It is of immediate interest that Helm has here referred both to God as he exists outside of time, God as a “timeless eternal being,” and God as he came into the world and was incarnate in the Person of his Son. In that coming into the world, Helm observes, God has made himself subject to humiliation and degradation. The significance of what is involved in those correlative conceptions exists on two levels. First, what is to be said of

¹ Isaac Watts, *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*, various editions.

² Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God without Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), xi.

³ Idem. See also Cornelius Van Til’s comment that “The most effective means ever invented by men to date by which to make themselves believe that they are not creatures of God and are not sinners against God is the modern process philosophy and theology,” in E.R. Geehan, ed., *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 394. Compare the “Open Theism” theology that claims, as does the earlier Socinianism, that God does not know, but must wait to discover, the future.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

the coming into the world in the likeness of sinful man, yet without sin, of the eternal Son of God and thereby making himself subject to time? If, as we shall observe, time is a created entity accordant with creaturely finite existence, we need to ask whether the incarnation of the Son of God involved and carried with it, in its subjection to time, an element of finitude. Our answer will be in the affirmative. Second, what is to be understood as the relation that exists between what, in eternity *outside of time*, God purposed and projected for his creation, and the experience and awareness of that *in time* by those whom he created in his image?

In a search for the meaning of time, Bavinck referred to “intrinsic time,”⁵ as distinct from “extrinsic time,” or time as a mere measuring device. He goes on to say that “time – intrinsic time – is a mode of existence of all created and finite beings.”⁶ And Cornelius Van Til echoes Bavinck when he concludes that “Time ... is a God-created mode of finite existence.”⁷ Our doctrinal sensibilities, therefore, echoing the fact that God became incarnate in his Son in time, force us to consider the relationship to temporality of the eternal God. God is the “eternal, uncaused, independent and necessary” God.⁸ But God has assumed to himself what is temporal, he is “in time,” in the human nature he assumed into union with the divine nature in his Son. That statement, as we shall see again in what follows, in no sense diminishes the deity of the Second Person of the Godhead who became Jesus Christ for our redemption. We hold to his full autotheotic nature. We hold clearly that in his incarnation Christ did not become a human person. He was, and he continued to be, a divine Person. In him, the human nature was not personalized. There was no communication of properties between the divine and the human natures of our Lord, and Christ’s deity is not made temporal by his humanity. But at issue at present is the finiteness and temporality of his human nature. That remarkable reality will be seen to have implications for the Christian’s walk in this life.

The essayists have paralleled the philosophic and theological enquiry. Sir Thomas Browne, a physician and author in Norwich, England, in the seventeenth century, is justly famous for his book of reflections, *Religio Medici*, in which he wrote about the mysteries of God, nature, and man.⁹ The sense of mystery carried over into Browne’s lesser-known *Hydriotaphia*, in which he wrote about the seemingly more mundane discovery of antiquarian urns in Norfolk. In that he observed that “Time which antiquates antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these minor monuments.”¹⁰ Time, mysterious time, Browne says, antiquates antiquities. It is, as Isaac Watts said, ever-rolling. That is the puzzle. Augustine also tried to unravel the meaning of time in the eleventh chapter of his *Confessions* on “Time and Eternity.” “It is not in time that you precede times,” Augustine states in his address to God. “Otherwise you would not precede all times. In the sublimity of an eternity which is always in the present, you are before all things past and transcend all things future ... ‘But you are the same and your

⁵ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, Trans. William Hendriksen, 1977), 155-156.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, for the den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1974), 66.

⁸ John Howe, “The Living Temple,” in *the Works of the Rev John Howe* (Ligonier, PA.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), vol. 1, 27.

⁹ See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, *Micropaedia*, vol. 2, 310.

¹⁰ Sir Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia*, various editions, Chapter 5, paragraph 1.

years do not fail' (Ps.101:28 [102:27]). Your 'years' neither go nor come...Your 'years' are 'one day' (Ps. 89:4 [90:4]; 2 Peter 3:8), and your 'day' is not any and every day but Today.... Your Today is eternity. So you begat one coeternal with you, to whom you said: 'Today I have begotten you'.... There was therefore no time when you had not made something, because you made time itself."¹¹

There, at least, we have a dictum, consistent with divine revelation, that provides a firm ground for our further enquiry. Simply, but boldly stated, God created time. But it is precisely at that point that questions arise, questions that are crucially relevant to our doctrinal enquiry. What does the rolling of time mean, we need to ask, for both our Christian doctrine and our Christian lives? The answer resides on two levels, as our observations to this point have already implied. First, what are we to say, if we wish to be consistent with the Scriptural revelation, that the entry into time implies for the Person of the Son of God incarnate? And second, what is to be said about the Christian believer's position and prospects in time?

We asked at the beginning whether time could be understood to be eternal. We answered in the negative. We did that because we saw that time was God-created. It had a beginning. At the beginning end of the temporal process, at its inception, it was entirely distinct from eternity. It came into being. But what is to be said of time now that it exists as a created entity? Will time come to an end? Our answer to that question, as it impacts on the meaning of Christian salvation, is that time, in the sense of Bavinck's "intrinsic time," will not come to an end. Time will unroll throughout the eternal age. The editor of John Newton's hymn spoke rightly and wisely when he said that "When we've been there ten thousand years,/ Bright shining as the sun,/ We've no less days to sing God's praise/ Than when we'd first begun."¹²

Two relevant comments might be inserted at this point. First, if, as has been said, time as we experience it is a mode of our finite existence, there is an accordance between time and finitude that cannot and will not be dissolved. Second, in the eternal existence in glory to which, by the grace of God, the Christian believer is destined, the believer will not transcend his finitude. His eternal life does not and cannot make him infinite. He cannot partake of his Creator's incommunicable attribute of infinity. In short, therefore, as existence in heaven will continue to be an existence in conditions of finitude, so time will continue as the mode of accommodation of that finitude. We do not know, of course, the form in which time in the eternal age will constitute that accommodation of finitude, in the same way as we do not know the capacities for spatial movement that we shall experience in eternity. But we know that our being and our knowing will continue to be sequential.

When we say that man will not escape his finitude, we are saying in other words that he will not escape his sequentiality. We shall not know in an instant all that is to be known. We shall learn. And sequential knowing, and indeed speaking, will necessarily involve a lapse of time. Bavinck's observation is to the point: "To eliminate time from our thinking is to eliminate our thinking and hence is impossible.... Existence in time is the necessary form of all that is finite and created."¹³ Time and space, that is, having been

¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 230

¹² John Newton, *Amazing Grace*, various hymnals, stanza added by John P. Rees.

¹³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2: God and Creation*, Trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 428.

created, will not be destroyed and dissolved. Eternity, then, we have cause to conclude, will contain a before and an after as to time, and a near and a far as to space. Not all that is in prospect has been revealed to us. But we do know, as to time, that because our Lord himself will be the light of eternity and there will be no need of the sun (Rev. 21:23), temporal existence will then not be, as it necessarily is now, diurnal. In saying that, we are recalling Bavinck's distinction between the extrinsic and the intrinsic senses of time. The former, the extrinsic, meaning by that time as a measuring device, "will one day cease."¹⁴ It will cease to be measured by the sun, or to be diurnal with its differences between day and night. But what we have said refers to time in its intrinsic sense. We are not saying that God in his eternal divine essence is subject to time in any sense. And we are not speaking of God the Son, *in his divine nature*, as subject to time. We are speaking only of two things: first, the temporal consciousness of man in his finitude; and second, the temporality of the *finite human nature* assumed by Christ, his human nature in its faculties of soul, its consciousness, affections, and actions. It can quite properly be said that in the eternal state we shall have put on incorruption. But it is necessary to observe that incorruptibility does not, and will not, dissolve temporality.

But that is not all that is to be said. Before we proceed, we must return to the incarnation of the Son of God. We have asked whether the submission to time by the Son of God connoted an aspect of finitude. We answer in the affirmative. That is so because when the Son of God came into the world to become Jesus Christ he took to himself "a true body and a reasonable soul;"¹⁵ and it is disclosed in the revelation that that true body and soul was created, finite, and subject to all the elements of suffering and temptation to which man is subject (Heb. 4:15-16). Remarkable as the doctrine is, our Lord now sits at the right hand of the Father in that same human nature, partaking of its finiteness and temporality. For that reason we have referred in our title to this paper to the perspectives of eternity and temporality as relevant to the grace of redemption.

Let us take up now the questions of the reality of the human nature in time assumed by the Second Person of the Godhead, and the relation between what God has decreed outside of time and the awareness of that by the Christian believer within time.

The Confessional statement

"God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, *in the fulness of time*, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth *in due time* actually apply Christ unto them."¹⁶

Here we have an introduction to the mystery of God's deliberative determination of redemption. We have said that God exists in a timeless eternity. His knowledge of himself and of reality external to his Godhead, his thoughts, deliberations, and intentions are not sequential. He knows all things in one eternal act of knowing. And yet, as the Confession has said, he decreed before the foundation of the world the justification of those he chose to redeem. That plan of redemption, we have adequate reason to conclude from the Scriptural data, proceeded from a deliberative council between the Persons of

¹⁴ Ibid., 162.

¹⁵ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 22.

¹⁶ Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), various editions, XI, 4. Italics added. See the similar statements in the Savoy Declaration of Faith (1658) and the Baptist Confession (1689).

the Godhead (Acts 2:23, 4:28; Eph. 1:4, 11).¹⁷ But if it is to be said of the eternal God that there is no succession of moments, no sequences of time, in his being or knowledge, how, then, can it be said that it was a deliberative process culminating in a divine covenant, which we refer to theologically as the covenant of redemption, that issued in our rescue from sin? Berkhof has observed judiciously on the point. “The word ‘counsel,’ which is one of the terms by which the decree is designated, suggests careful deliberation and consultation. It may contain a suggestion of an intercommunication between the three persons of the Godhead.”¹⁸

That intratrinitarian communication between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit led to a distribution of redemptive offices among the three Persons, each of whom is characterized by, and is to be known as possessing, distinguishable properties. In recognizing the distinctive redemptive offices of the Persons of the Godhead we are contemplating the trinity of God in its so-called economic and not its ontological aspect. It is apposite to say that there is no subordination of one Person to another in the ontological trinity, or as to the essence of the Godhead. The full essence of God resides fully in each of the Persons. In respects that do not call for fuller review at this time, we hold to the works of the Godhead *ad intra* as taking up the eternal generation of the Son and the spiration or setting forth of the Holy Spirit. But we hold also to the autotheotic nature of the Son and the Holy Spirit. As to God the Son, we say that as to his nature he is autotheotic, fully God in himself, but as to his Person he is of the Father. That is to say, he was eternally begotten of the Father, with the acknowledgment of the mystery at that point that we have seen Augustine to observe in his search for the meaning of time.

When we say that there was no subordination within the ontological trinity, but that a subordination existed within the economic trinity in the realization of the Persons’ respective redemptive offices, we can say the following without damage to that conclusion. God the Son, for example, was subordinate in the following threefold respect: first, as to mode of subsistence (his having been begotten of the Father); second, as the nineteenth-century Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, put it, in “the voluntary subordination of the Son in his humbling himself to be found in fashion as a man, and becoming obedient unto death, and therefore subject to the limitations and infirmities of our nature;” and third, in “the economical or official subjection of the theanthropos ... the subordination of the incarnate Son of God, in the work of redemption and as the head of the church.”¹⁹ But the veil of mystery implicit in the works of God internal to the Godhead has not been, and in the context of our finitude cannot be, withdrawn. We can only bow in worship and praise before the mystery of God’s being as he has revealed himself and stated his purposes in the Scriptures. But the seeming discordance between God’s timelessness and his deliberative decision to redeem is alleviated by the recognition that in it we have an anthropomorphism of the highest order. Indeed, it is to be said that all of God’s revelation is anthropomorphic. In his revelation God has accommodated himself to our humanity and, moreover, to our fallenness from which his redemption has rescued us.

Now the Confession states that *in due time* Christ died for the justification of his

¹⁷ See the fuller discussion in Douglas Vickers, *Christian Confession and the Crackling Thorn* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 75-76.

¹⁸ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 103-104.

¹⁹ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1974), 63.

people in accordance with God's decree. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). Two questions arise. First, why was the incarnation of the Son of God necessary for the accomplishment of the redemptive purposes that were in view? And second, what, more precisely, was involved in the sinless entry into time of the Second Person of the Godhead?

We do not rehearse at this time all that is to be said regarding the entry of sin into the world, the dereliction of our first parents from their obligations under the covenant of creation, and the entailment of the guilt of that sin to all of Adam's posterity by ordinary generation. We leave unsaid for the present the detailed doctrines of the imputation of Adam's sin and the transmission of his fallen nature. The focus of thought falls, rather, on the fact that Adam's fall involved the loss of his privilege of direct communion with God. That directness of communion had been enjoyed so long as Adam was qualified in his pristine holiness to discharge his mandated office of priesthood. He enjoyed that privilege when God, in the theophanic appearance of the Second Person of the Godhead, walked with him in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). But henceforth and by virtue of his fall, there could be no such direct communication. Now the intermediation of a priest was necessary. We know that following the patriarchal period of redemptive history the office of the priesthood was institutionalized in the Mosaic administration. But that institution itself, as did so much of the Mosaic system, pointed to the coming of a High Priest who would be in his Person the final efficient and effective mediator between God and man.

It was necessary, if a reconciliation between God and man was to be effected, and given the incapacities to which we were reduced by Adam's fall, that the mediator should be both God and man. Only in that way could the chasm between God and man be closed. A highly significant statement to that effect, that forged one of the building blocks of the more expanded Reformation theology, appeared in the *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became Man") of Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury in the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century.²⁰ It was necessary, that is, that a mediator who was both God and man should appear in time, become subject to the vicissitudes of time, yet without sin, and in his assumption of human nature be like those he came to reconcile to God (Heb. 2:9-10). But more was involved in the process and accomplishment of redemption.

Those for whom Christ gave his life of obedience and for whose salvation he died, those whom the Father had given to him for that purpose (John 17:6, 9), necessarily became his property. "Ye are not your own," the apostle stated to the Corinthians, "for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). It is of the essence of the entire conception and process of redemption that those who are redeemed have become the property of the Redeemer. It is at that point that the necessity of the coming into the world of the Second Person of the Godhead again becomes apparent. It was not possible that a man, a natural descendent of Adam, could discharge the office of redeemer. Not only did his own sin stand in the way. Not only would he be excluded from that office by reason of the necessity that would be laid upon him to atone for his own infinitely damnable sin, thereby disqualifying him from ability to do anything to discharge the guilt of the sin of

²⁰ See the discussion in Douglas Vickers, *Divine Redemption and the Refuge of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2005) 17-22.

others. But most notably, it was inconceivable that any one such man could qualify to assume the property of those who were to be redeemed. That, however, is what Christ accomplished. He purchased us from the estate of sin. We belong to him. He is our Lord Redeemer and we are his property. For that reason the incarnation of the Second Person of the Godhead was necessary.

The virgin birth of the Redeemer

Given the necessities we have just observed, it was necessary further that the Second Person of the Godhead should come into the world by being born of a virgin. What was impossible to human conceptions was dictated by God's eternal design. The virgin birth of our Lord had been prophesied long before (Is. 7:14, 9:6-7). We may take brief note of a number of issues that arise doctrinally at that point.

The mystery and the miracle of the incarnation press upon us. Two considerations are involved. In the first place, because it was the eternal Son of God who thus became man (though, as we have seen, by reason that his human nature was not personalized he was not a human person²¹), and that the child that was born was necessarily sinless, it was necessary that the entailment of sin that existed as a result of Adam's fall should be broken. Our Lord was born of a woman who was, again in the necessities of the case and contrary to certain doctrinal arguments to the contrary (as in Roman Catholic theology), in possession of the same fallen and sinful nature that proceeded from Adam to all his natural posterity. The entailment of that sin and sinful nature had, we have said, to be broken. How could that be done? The first thing to be said, the first respect in which the miracle of the incarnation appears, is that the Holy Spirit's work of grace in and on the mother of our Lord accomplished a cleansing from sin. It is true, and it is necessary to hold carefully, that the Holy Spirit at the incarnation did not simply create a human fetus for implantation in the womb of the virgin. Rather, the Spirit in fact impregnated the egg of the woman for the production, the unique creation, of the fetus-child. At that point, then, and in that respect, the second aspect of the twofold miracle of the incarnation appears.

We have observed the necessity that at the incarnation the entailment of sin had to be, and was, broken. If, as has been said, that breaking of the entailment of sin was accomplished by the cleansing operation of the Holy Spirit in the virgin, it might be asked whether the same breaking of the entailment of sin could have been accomplished in any other way. If, that is to say, the entailment was broken by the Spirit's operation on and in the mother, could it not have been done alternatively in both the mother and a human father? If that had been the case a sinless child could conceivably have been produced. But to say that, we would, of course, be engaging in pointless speculation. Suffice it to say that any such conception was excluded by two considerations that have been raised in our discussion to this point. First, any such pointless speculation overlooks entirely the necessity that the redeemer of God's elect should be both God and man. Only that could close the chasm between God and man. It is not necessary to repeat the argument. And second, it should be equally apparent, again for reasons that have been stated, that no human person could assume the property of those he might have set out to

²¹ The point is well taken by Berkhof, "The Logos assumed a human nature that was not personalized, that did not exist by itself," *Systematic Theology*, 322.

redeem.

We hold, then, to the revealed doctrine and fact of the incarnation of our Lord in the womb of the virgin Mary. The twofold mystery and miracle involved was, first, the breaking of the entailment of sin, and secondly, the Holy Spirit's impregnation of the virgin. But we stand in wonder and awe at the mystery and perfection of what God has decreed and done for our redemption. Surely, "great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16). Our conclusion is that no greater mystery presses on the human consciousness than this, that the eternal Son of God should take unto himself a human nature into union with his divine nature in the manner we have inspected, and that in doing so he should have made himself, for now and for all eternity, subject in his human nature to the process of time that he himself had created. He lives now in the same human nature that he assumed at his incarnation, though that was glorified at his ascension; he will come again in that nature (Acts 1:11); and we shall see God in him in that glorified nature through all eternity. The mystery we acknowledge and for which we thank our God is that in his human nature the Second Person of the Godhead voluntarily subjected himself to temporal sequences and realizations in order to be our redeemer.

We have spoken of the assumption by the Second Person of the Godhead of a finite, temporal human nature into union with his divine nature. It is apposite to point out that in the incarnation of Christ there was not, and there could not be, as Van Til has put it, a "commingling of the eternal and the temporal."²² The two natures came into union in Christ, as it was rightly understood by the Christological settlement at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. The first two stated characteristics mean that the divine and the human natures in our Lord were not in any sense intermingled; and the latter two characteristics assert the full reality of the union. It is the thrust of our present discussion to observe further that there is no commingling of the eternal and the temporal in our Lord's heavenly high priestly session. We shall return to the further significance of that fact.

It is relevant to observe also that just as there was no commingling of the eternal and the temporal at the incarnation, or no communication of properties between the divine and human natures, so there was no such commingling at the atonement that Christ offered for his people. Christ died, that is, in his human nature. And further, there is no commingling of the eternal and the temporal at the point of the sinner's regeneration, the point of transition from wrath to grace. For regeneration, as we shall observe it, is the sovereign, unsolicited act of God's grace, in which the individual person plays no part at all. God is sovereign in all parts of salvation, in justification, adoption, sanctification, and finally glorification. When that is said, it is not said or implied that the person who has been born again by the grace of God has no part to play in the progress of his or her sanctification. Indeed, we shall see that it is the Christian person's failure to pursue diligently the means of grace that accounts for the failure to realize blessings that Christ has purchased.

The consciousness of redeemed status

The paragraph of the Confession we have cited states that *in due time* the Holy Spirit

²² Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1963), 16-17.

actually applies Christ to those whom he redeemed. There is a due time for all of God's sovereign works in the accomplishment of his purposes. Redemption was accomplished when, as the Galatians text stated, the fullness of the times was come. Before us now, if we may summarize for purposes of clarity, are the two time lapses that lead to the Christian believer's awareness and realization of his or her salvation. The first has to do with the accomplishment of redemption and the second with its application.

First, God has worked with sovereignly designed pace throughout human history to prepare the world for the coming of his Son. That design encompassed the separation from all of the other nations of the world of a special people in whom and among whom God established a nation-church from which Christ, the promised Messiah, would come. The law was given as a schoolmaster to prepare for Christ (Gal. 3:24), and after Christ had come, "after that faith is come," or after the full plan of redemption had been revealed in the coming of the Redeemer, there was no longer any need for a schoolmaster (Gal. 3:25). Then God's special relation with his people Israel would be at an end.²³ Then the doors of the kingdom of God were thrown wide open to all the nations, the Gentiles were brought within the direct compass of saving grace (Gal. 3:14), and all the elect seed of Abraham were in due time to be brought to salvation (Gal. 3:29). The structure of the Mosaic administration, with its law code that hedged the nation in from the contamination of godlessness that surrounded them, and the message, the rebukes, and the promises of the prophets, are well known. But in the providential government of God, when human intellectual culture had reached its zenith in Greece and the ordered government of Rome had stabilized the nations, God, in the ripeness of time that then obtained, sent his Son.

We hold, then, to God's justification of sinners in actual historic time, grounded in the actual and temporal salvific work of his Son who came as Jesus Christ. We do not hold, that is to say, to a doctrine of eternal justification. God decreed our justification "from all eternity," as the Confession states. But God's declarative, forensic statement of justification does not occur, and the sinner's realization of it does not arise, until the justification that Christ purchased for his people is applied to them by the Holy Spirit's bringing them to faith and repentance.

It is beyond the scope of our present objective to address at length what we have just referred to as the doctrine of eternal justification. But in the light of what we are saying of the relation between eternity and temporality, a brief comment will be apposite. Arguments in support of the doctrine have been noted by a long line of Reformed theologians, and though some have held the doctrine in modified form it has generally been soundly controverted and has not become a part of the Reformed theological tradition. The notion of eternal justification, or the supposition that God did, in fact, declare his people justified from all eternity, fails to differentiate between the eternal decree of election that issued from the council of redemption on the one hand, and the effectuation in actual and created time of what that decree specified as its objectives. Some theologians spoke of an "active justification" or an *actus immanens* in God in eternity and a "passive justification" or an *actus transiens* in time and after faith.²⁴ The

²³ Compare the very insightful exposition of the point in John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1957).

²⁴ See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 518, and Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), vol. 3, 591.

very terminology and doctrine of justification became confused in the history of debate, and as Turretin observed, “Some maintain that it is an immanent act in God which was performed from eternity; others that it is transient, terminating in us and which takes place only in time and in this life. And there are some who hold that it is postponed to the last and decreitory day, in which all must stand before the solemn and public tribunal of Christ to hear the sentence of absolution or of condemnation from his lips.”²⁵ But Turretin comments, “The decree of justification is one thing; justification itself another.... The will or decree to justify certain persons is indeed eternal ... but the actual justification takes place in time.”²⁶ Bavinck, followed by Berkhof in more modern times, notes that the doctrine of eternal justification tended toward antinomianism, and “Fear of antinomianism ... kept Reformed theology from shifting the doctrine of justification back to that of the decrees.”²⁷ In modern times John Murray has referred to “eternal justification” as, quite simply, “a misuse of terms.”²⁸

Christ purchased for his people certain gifts, the gifts, for example, of faith and repentance, and it is the undertaken and guaranteed office of the Holy Spirit to convey those gifts to those for whom Christ died, to turn their steps to see Christ as their redeemer, to convey to them the blessings and benefits of Christ’s atonement, and to conduct them to glory. That being given, we have to observe, further, a distinction that is of serious moment for the Christian believer’s understanding of his or her redemptive status. That has to do with what we referred to as a second time lapse and refers to the distinction between what God has purposed for each of his elect people, on the one hand, and, on the other, their actual realization and awareness of what God has prepared for them and will in due time convey to them.

To clarify what is involved in that latter time dimension, we hold to the paradigmatic significance of what is referred to as the *ordo salutis*, or the order of application of redemption, notwithstanding some tendencies within contemporary Reformed ministries to depart from that doctrinal formation.²⁹ We understand that the successive elements of the application of redemption stand in a logical relation as well as, in certain of their aspects, a temporal order. But what we are concerned with at this point is the difference between the time of God’s accomplishing in his Son, or his actual accomplishment in time, all that was necessarily precedent to the believer’s benefit, on the one hand, and the believer’s experiential awareness of it. A tendency to diminish, if not reject, the traditional *ordo salutis* theology informs, it would appear, conclusions such as that of Gaffin that “Not justification by faith but union with the resurrected Christ by faith ... is the central motif of Paul’s applied soteriology.”³⁰ We in no sense diminish the importance in doctrine or in fact of the believer’s union with Christ. But we hold, in the manner of the Confessional statement that we have cited, to the distinctive stages, or

²⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, PA.: P&R Publishing, 1994), vol. 2, 682-83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 683.

²⁷ Bavinck, *op. cit.*, 3, 583 and Berkhof, *op. cit. idem.*

²⁸ John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 102.

²⁹ See John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* *passim*, for a classic statement of the *ordo salutis*.

³⁰ Richard B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 132. See also the same author’s “By Faith, Not By Sight”: *Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes, U.K.; Paternoster Press, 2006), 43 and *passim*.

aspects of connotation, of the actual application of redemption and the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in that. As to what is to be understood, to use Gaffin's language, as "the central motif of Paul's soteriology," we find it impossible to depart from the traditional Reformed understanding of the priority in time of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We do not find it theologically or doctrinally productive to hold with Gaffin that "Christ's resurrection is his own justification," and to speak of "the forensic, justifying significance of the resurrection."³¹ By that we mean that we cannot follow Gaffin in his doctrinal construction that speaks of the resurrection as "the redemption of Christ," and says that "Christ's exaltation ... is his justification. ... [T]he resurrection is ... Christ's justification or the point of entering into a state of being justified."³² Similarly "Christ's resurrection," Gaffin claims, "is his sanctification."³³ That line of doctrinal development sees the individual believer's justification, adoption, and sanctification as coming to effect and being what they are because at relevant levels the believer partakes of, or shares in, the redemption, justification, adoption, and sanctification that Christ achieved for himself, and by his doing so achieved for those who are joined in union to him.³⁴ It is in those respects that some Reformed theologians, who are working out the implications of Gaffin's conclusions, now see justification as something subtly different from the once-for-all forensic statement of God at the point of the sinner's coming in faith, repentance, and trust to Christ.³⁵

We have commented on the logical relation between the elements of the *ordo salutis*. The doctrine of God's justification of the repentant sinner is to be protected for its insistence on, as has been said, the once-for-all declarative forensic statement of God. It is that statement that permits it to be said that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). "Forensic" has to do with one's relation to the law, in this case the righteous law of God. One is just, that is, when his or her relation to the law of God is what it ought to be. By virtue of the substitutionary obedience of Christ, an obedience whose merits are imputed to, or placed to the account of, the sinner, the sinner now enjoys the blessing of the state of justification. By reason of Christ's substitution, the law has lost its condemnatory competence. But when it is thus said that the justification of the sinner has been effected, it does not mean and imply simply or only that a pardon for sin has been acquired. Justification, consequent on the sinner's repentance and faith, does, of course, imply pardon for sin. But it carries with it also and at the same time the grace of God's further forensic statement of adoption into the family

³¹ Richard Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 84-85.

³² Richard Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection*, 114, 121. Gaffin follows closely the work of Geerhardus Vos who speaks of "the justification of Christ," *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 151.

³³ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁴ In that respect Gaffin argues as follows: "[W]hat characterizes the redemption of Christ holds true for the redemption of the believer. As the justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification of the former take place by and at his resurrection, so the justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification of the latter take place in his having been raised with Christ, that is, in his having been united with Christ as resurrected. This means, then, that despite a surface appearance to the contrary, Paul does not view the justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification of the believer as separate, distinct acts but as different facets or aspects of the *one act* of incorporation with the resurrected Christ" *The Centrality of the Resurrection*, 130-31.

³⁵ The two books referred to by Richard Gaffin should be studied in their entirety in order to see the nuances of Gaffin's interpretation of his doctrinal statements.

of God. As the catechism puts it, “Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.”³⁶ It follows that it would be a misconstruction of biblical doctrine to drive a definitive temporal wedge between justification and adoption.

The same is to be said of sanctification as an aspect of the *ordo salutis*. The Catechism we have cited speaks judiciously of justification and adoption as “acts” of God’s free grace, but it speaks of sanctification as the “work” of God’s free grace. Sanctification is that work of God whereby “we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”³⁷ Justification is attributed to the sinner at a point in time. There is a sense also, of course, in which the sinner can be said to be definitively sanctified at the point of justification, meaning that he is set apart for God in a newness of life. In that sense John Murray’s distinction between “definitive sanctification” and “progressive sanctification” is doctrinally sustainable.³⁸ But sanctification in its progressive sense is a process of renewal whereby the individual is conformed progressively to the likeness of Christ. It is the task of the Holy Spirit, in the process of the application of the benefits of Christ’s atonement, to so work his ministry in the Christian life that the individual will achieve that “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”(Heb. 12:14).

But to refer again to the inseparability of the stages or elements of the *ordo salutis*, it is necessary to bear in mind the difference between what we might call intellectual distinctions and real distinctions. In the present instance we may draw an intellectual distinction between regeneration and justification in order to understand more fully God’s gracious work in the process of redemption. But we must be careful not to draw a real or rigidly temporal distinction where none may exist. In a real sense, we should not dogmatically separate regeneration and justification in time. For as Buchanan has observed, “no man is justified who is not renewed nor is any man renewed who is not also, and immediately, justified.”³⁹ There are, that is to say, no unregenerate believers, and no regenerate unbelievers. It has been rightly said that saving faith is regeneration pushing itself to consciousness. We may say in other words that sanctification *in its full meaning* does not wait on, or depend simply in a temporal sense on, the achievement of a state of justification. Justification, it has been said, is dependent on one’s faith and repentance, which are in turn the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). But the faith of which we speak is conveyed to the person in, and by virtue of, the Holy Spirit’s act of regeneration. And given that the faith which is effective in justification is thus born in regeneration, it is necessary to say that regeneration is prior to justification. But that is so in a logical and not necessarily a temporal sense.

But we are concerned at this point with the place and significance of sanctification in its full sense in the *ordo salutis*. Given the fact and meaning of regeneration, which involves the renewing of the faculties of the soul and the implantation within the soul of a new and holy principle of action, a new and holy disposition and character, sanctification, we must say, begins at regeneration. It is for that

³⁶ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Question 35.

³⁸ See John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification” and “Progressive Sanctification” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), vol. 2, 277, 294

³⁹ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, 400.

additional reason, then, that while we hold properly to a temporal priority within the *ordo salutis*, care must again be taken to hold in tension the logical and temporal relations between the elements of the Holy Spirit's application of redemption. But sanctification in *its progressive sense*, in the sense in which it is dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul that conforms the person to the image of holiness in Christ, is necessarily subsequent to justification.

The Christian life

What has now been said of the entrance into time of Christ as our redeemer, and of the realities of the believer's redeemed state that results, points to the question of the accrual to the believer of the benefits that Christ accomplished for him. A significant sense exists in which *the benefits and blessings that accrue to the Christian believer are not dependent on his or her experiential awareness or realization of them*. Consider the apostle's statement to the Corinthians that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). That no doubt contains layers of meaning. Given the context in which Paul made the statement, including the accusation that "the princes of this world" did not know whom they were crucifying (1 Cor. 2:8), he may well be stating that the revelation of the nature, the cause, and the meaning of the redemption that God set forth in Christ is of an order that the natural and unenlightened mind did not, and could not, know and understand. That, of course, is an unarguable truth of God's explanation of the human condition. Paul said as much in the verses that follow. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Some commentators have understood Paul to be pointing here to things that will become known and realized by the Christian only in the eternal age that is to come. Calvin, however, dissuades us from that interpretation in his conclusion that the apostle is not referring to "that spiritual blessedness which is laid up in heaven for believers." "I prefer," Calvin says, "to understand him [Paul] simply as referring to those gifts of God's grace that are daily conferred upon believers."⁴⁰

In considering, then, some aspects of the meaning and progress of the Christian life, it is necessary to recall the point at which we began. We have raised the question of what is to be said of the relationship to temporality of the eternal God. In our response we have seen that two doctrinal conclusions are at issue and are to be carefully held. First, God in his glorious and infinite essence, in his triune essential being, is eternal. But in the finite human nature in his Son, he has assumed to himself what is temporal. To make that statement, we have said, in no sense diminishes the divine Personhood of Christ. To the contrary, it is to understand more soundly who the Person of our redeemer is and what he has undertaken to do, and has done and continues to do, on our behalf. In making our statement we do not say that in his divine being Christ has partaken of temporality. But our task now is to consider what significance for the life of the Christian believer emanates from the aspects of the finite and the temporal in the human nature which characterizes the Person of our Lord in his heavenly session. More expansively, we are concerned with three aspects of progress in the Christian life; first, the benefits that

⁴⁰ John Calvin, Commentary at loc. cit.

accrue to the Christian and which may or may not be consciously realized to higher or lesser degrees; second, the responsibilities laid upon the Christian for the assimilation of those benefits; and third, as has now been said, the significance of the temporal awareness of the Son of God in his human nature. We begin with the last mentioned point.

To consider on the broadest canvas the relation between God and the world it would be necessary to reflect at some length on God's transcendence and his immanence. By the former we mean God's ontological separateness from all of the reality external to the Godhead that he spoke into existence. By his immanence we refer to his presence by his Spirit in the world, providentially determining and governing its processes and outcomes. If an unbalanced preoccupation with God's transcendence were held, the danger would exist of falling into the theological heresy of deism. Correspondingly, an over-emphasis on God's immanence contains the danger of the philosophic error of pantheism. But God is transcendent in that he is the ultimate authority over of the world's affairs and eventuations; and he is immanent in that he is our ultimate environment. In him we live and move and have our being.

We take full recognition of God's presence in the world and in the lives of his people by his Spirit's ordering their days and their ways. "Without me," our Lord has said, "ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). And it remains true that "God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions."⁴¹ But our immediate concern is not with the truth of those statements in and of themselves. We are interested in God's intervention and participation in the lives of Christian believers by reason of his heavenly incarnate existence in the Person of his Son. We may focus most directly on what is at issue by referring to the heavenly High Priestly office of Christ. That involves, we may say by way of summary, two things: first, intercession; and secondly, sympathy. Our Lord is engaged in a ministry of intercession with the Father on our behalf (Heb. 7:25). The fact and the terms of that intercession are well known to the practiced Christian. It is our intercessor's attitude of sympathy that now particularly engages us.⁴²

It is not only because of his divine omniscience, but because also of his perpetual existence in human nature that it is said that "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" and that we may "therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16). Our redeemer now sits on the right hand of the Father in the finite, temporal human nature, though now glorified but still not rendered infinite, that he assumed at his incarnation. In that, he observes and knows and understands our own temporality, temptations, rejoicings, and stress. God the Son, now rewarded with the glory that he had with the Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:5), observes in his divine omniscience all of the unfolding days of his people. But that observation and knowledge is informed also by a sympathetic involvement with his people, a participation with them in the time through which they pass, in all the events and vicissitudes of their lives.

That is so because as our Lord observes the events of our lives he knows the very

⁴¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 11.

⁴² Compare the very insightful discussion in John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), vol. 1, 48-51.

motions of soul within us by which those events and the thoughts and fears and imaginations associated with them are experienced and assimilated by us. He knows, and his knowledge impacts on his reactions and his deliverances, because he too is human. He has experienced in himself, yet without sin, the entire range of possible human experience and emotions. He knows us, not only because he made us and we came from his hands, but because he identified himself with us, totally and thoroughly, again yet without sin, when he was in this world. He knows all that can possibly occur and intervene in our daily lives. The mystery of his taking our human nature into union with his divine nature remains unfathomable. Yet we know, with an assurance and conviction from which we cannot escape, that his knowledge of us now is both divine and human. To say anything less would diminish our Lord's very Personhood. "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever."⁴³ We are arrested by the "for ever" in the Catechism's answer. Our Lord is able to, and he does, sympathize with us completely because he is man for ever. The widening implications need to burn their impress on our reluctant souls. We have such an High Priest, one who, in the ways we have observed all too briefly, "is not ashamed to call [us] brethren" (Heb. 2:11).

We have asked what are the blessings that God has "prepared for them that love him" (1. Cor. 2:9) but of which, by reason of our spiritual lethargy and dullness of soul, we are not necessarily fully aware. The answer, in short, is twofold. God has promised that we shall come at last to the inheritance he has prepared for us (Heb. 9:15), though the glory that awaits us is, of course, hidden from us in its full splendor and significance. It is true that the Christian is an eschatological person. He is one who thinks, that is, of the eternal destiny which, he is assured, God has prepared for those whom he has purchased in Christ. The "Golden Chain" of biblical data and promise entices his faithfulness. He knows that those whom God foreknew, who were the subjects of his predestinating decree, those he would in due time "conform to the image of his Son" because they would be "called, justified, and glorified" (Rom. 8:28-30). But perhaps the Christian soul is dulled by the subtleties of the pleasures of the world, and his alignment with the things of God is twisted by his busyness with too many distractions of this life; with things that may well be good in themselves, things indifferent perhaps, the adiaphora of life, but which crowd out by their absorbing tyranny the sense of the presence of God. Perhaps we would be better Christians if the anticipated reality of heaven more fully informed our thought.

But of immediate importance is the fact that now in the affairs of everyday God by his Spirit ministers, and waits to minister ever more fully, his graces to us. What are the blessings of which we may be too easily unaware? On the level that speaks to the essence of the meaning of the Christian walk and life, they are the blessings of knowing and communing with God. We have been reminded that Adam in his pristine holy state enjoyed that blessing in the highest degree. God walked with him in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen.3:8). And to bring the possibility down to our everyday, did not our Lord say, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me?" (Rev. 3:20). There our Lord is appealing for the admission to our lives of his sanctifying presence and influence. But

⁴³ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 21.

too often and too much, we don't hear him. Blessings that are ours in every sense because he purchased them for us go unrealized because we are reluctant to admit him to our lives. We have all experienced surprise and wonder as we have looked back over our life-journey and seen the way in which God by his grace and providence has worked out for us more than we had, or could have, imagined. We have had cause to thank him for his bountiful blessing far above what we could have contemplated. But now at this point we are speaking of something quite beyond that.

We are speaking at present, not only or simply of knowing after the fact the blessings that God has given to us. We are speaking of knowing God in Christ himself. Did he not say that if we confess our every sin and go out to meet him, "if we walk in the light as he is light, we have fellowship with one another"? (1 John 1:7). The prospect that John articulates in his text does not refer to the possibilities of fellowship between Christian brethren, possible and highly important and more fully explained in other places as they are. The fellowship of which the apostle speaks is the fellowship between God in Christ and the true believer. That is clear on the surface of the text, in which the apostle states that "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Therein lies the way of blessing, the way of discovering the blessings that Christ has purchased for us and has laid up for our participation and enjoyment.

When our Lord stated in his high priestly prayer to the Father that "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3), he had in view not a mere knowledge of certain doctrinal constructions about God and the relations between God and man. The word "know" in that context carries a much more profound meaning. We who are God's people have open to us the immeasurable blessing, not only of knowing more about God than do others who are still in the darkness of sin and estrangement from him. Wonderful as that in itself is, what our Lord is concerned with in his prayer is not that we should know about God, but that we should know him. It is available to us to know him in even closer and more spiritually productive ways than we have hitherto realized.

We referred, finally, to the responsibilities that lie on the Christian believer to assimilate the blessings that God has provided and laid up for him in Christ. The Scriptural text is expansive on the meaning and possibilities of the sanctifying presence in our lives of the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit whom Christ sent into the world to be our "Comforter" (John 16:7) and who, Christ said, "shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:14), waits our invitation to walk with us ever more closely. But we grieve him (Eph. 4:30) by our indolence.

We have it on the authority of God that "when he appears we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). That assurance turns on the promise that the Spirit of Christ will accomplish the task and commitment he assumed in the council of the Godhead before the foundation of the world; namely, that he would infallibly apply to those for whom Christ died all the benefits and blessings that Christ purchased for them and that he would conduct them to glory. But in the journey to that great day more fulfilling experiences of the company of Christ by his Spirit await us. We are convicted by the reflections of the disciples to whom Christ appeared on the road to Emmaus. "Did not our heart burn within us," they said, "while he talked with us by the way" (Luke 24:32). For ourselves in this seemingly ever-darkening day, what blessings we lose because we fail to cultivate his company as we walk on our way.

Conclusion

It is not necessary to repeat at any length the argument that has occupied us to this point. Five propositions will summarize what has been said.

- *First*, God exists in eternal splendor and glory in the fullness of the essence of his triune Godhead.
- *Second*, God has entered into time in the finitude and temporality of the human nature that he assumed into union with the divine nature in his Son.
- *Third*, the blessings that God has laid up for the Christian believer are not dependent on the believer's experiential awareness and consciousness of them, though it is the undertaken and guaranteed task and assignment of the Holy Spirit to communicate those blessings to those whom Christ redeemed.
- *Fourth*, Christ, in the discharge of his heavenly High Priestly office is able to, and he does, sympathize with his people in this world and life, in a unique and remarkable sense and degree because he too is human, "both God and man ... for ever."
- *Fifth*, the Christian believer is assured of blessings beyond imagination if, and as, he opens himself or herself to the fellowship of Christ by his Spirit.

May we each grasp for ourselves the high blessings that have been purchased for us at no less a cost than the coming into this world of the eternal Son of God to bear our sins.

Appendix:

John Murray, "The Sympathy of Christ" in *Works*, vol. 1, 48-51.

"[T]he two texts already referred to (Hebrews 2:17, 18; 4:14, 15) ... make it clear that this sympathy is derived from the experience of suffering, trial, and temptation which Christ endured during his humiliation. This exemplifies what appears all along the line of his high priestly functions; the heavenly exercise of this office is based upon the accomplishment of his earthly ministry in the days of his flesh. In this instance the particular aspect of the earthly ministry upon which the heavenly is based is that of the sufferings and temptations to which he was subjected while on earth. This requires us to take a much more expansive view of the earthly accomplishment which provides the basis for his heavenly priestly activity.... [H]is obedience, sufferings, and temptations covered the whole course of his humiliation. And *it is the experience derived from those sufferings and temptations that equips him with fellow-feeling or sympathy so that he is able to support and succour his own people in their suffering and temptations.* His earthly undertaking, therefore, was ... that he might be fully equipped with the fellow-feeling requisite to the discharge of his priestly ministry of succour. We need to appreciate the continuity and inter-dependence of our Lord's earthly and heavenly ministries.... [W]e are prone to emphasize the once-for-allness of his earthly accomplishment to such an extent that we fail to take account of the unity and continuity of the earthly and heavenly aspects of his high priestly function. This is but another way of recognizing *the reality of our Lord's human nature in heaven, and that it is in human nature that the Son of God in heaven exercises his heavenly priesthood.* Once we say human nature, we must remember that his human nature in heaven cannot be conceived of apart from the progressive developments which characterized that human nature on

earth and which condition the state of consciousness, feeling, and will of that human nature in heaven.... Any conception that robs our Lord of the reality and continuity of his human nature and experience is but a form of docetism which deprives the Saviour and our faith of what is indispensable to both.” (italics added).