

## “Christ in Us: the Hope of Glory: Christology and Spiritual Formation”

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Recent discussions regarding spiritual formation have focused on the past work of Christ as the ground of our spiritual identity and power. Other contributions have focused on the present work of Christ and the Holy Spirit as sources of strength and direction. The present paper adds to these foundations the reality of our future in heaven as a source of motivation and specific direction both for Christian living and ministry.

In the past many exhortations to “live life differently because of our future in heaven” have been made by preachers and writers based on general information, such as, we will be holy so be holy now. This paper will examine the foundation for newer more specific direction, which was begun by Barth, expanded in the Realized Eschatology movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Cullmann, Grounds, Gruenler, Ladd, Moltmann), and specific theological truths of scripture concerning our position in Christ and our future in heaven. What does our future in Christ suggest for our walk now, which will help equip the present 2 billion Christians to reach the 10 billion non-Christians in the next 50 years? (cf. Auerbach, Dieter, Eldredge, Foster, Grenz, Hoekema, Lawrenz, McGrath, McQuilkin, Rolheiser, Walvoord, Willard).

All humans share in the quest for spirituality, truth, meaning. Many people settle for what their culture or society offers them, that is, the status quo of religiosity. A few seek for a different or deeper interpretation of life.

Some seek for more social, or more personal, forms of understanding human purpose. These real life quests for meaning sometimes surpass the more philosophical or speculative quests. The speculative quests often have more intellectual vigor; but often result in less actual conversion or growth. In the West, Modernism was interested in grounding all thought in a sure, or certain, foundation. Many focused on rationalism; some on idealism, some on existential personal encounters with truth. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw process (Whitehead, Hartshorne); personalism (Brown, Bowen), phenomenism (Husserl, Heidegger), neo-Thomism (Gilson, Maritain, de Chardin) and epiphenomenism (Ayer, Russell). Other philosophies gave up the search for truth and simply sought coherent meaning, e.g. analytic philosophy and pragmatism. By 1979 Rorty, and others, gave up the search for meaning and simply sought interesting dialog about important questions. This is in keeping with the post-modern spirit which rejects any truth or meaning other than personal ascriptions.

For those who already have contact with true spiritual reality, that is, a life of faith and grace through Jesus Christ, the life quest is to walk deeper with Christ and to experience more of God in daily life. It is not that God is hidden, at least most of the time. It is that we need to find ways to see Him in life, to touch Him in prayer or contemplation, to experience Him in our spirit or through life experiences (e.g., books by Foster, 1978ff). Willard (1999, chapter 2) has made the point that most of us simply need to understand what the presence of God is like and how to observe what is already around us. But the heart is rarely satisfied for long with the

observation of the hand of God in nature or the providential actions in our behalf. Hearts year for fellowship.

Beyond our personal external experience are the social facts that we may well experience more of God in social settings, such as worship services or group retreats, and the reality that we may minister effectively in the lives of others to help them grow closer to Christ, and in the process see our own growth stimulated. Christianity finds its highest expression in this life when believers, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, minister directly to the spirits of other people, via conviction, evangelism, communicating truth, worshipping together. There have been a number of efforts to quantify the steps of spiritual growth. The Engle scale (1977) proposed twelve steps or levels in coming into a relationship with Christ. Most growth hierarchies (Fowler 1981) approach only the psychological aspects of faith, that is, the steps in developing a deeper psychological faith. These do not ask or examine the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us grow. Other authors (Eims, 1970; Clinton, 1987) list from four to eight levels of spiritual growth for those who are already Christians. Paul uses two levels (milk, meat) and John uses three (children, men, fathers). I see no simple answer to how many levels or steps of spiritual growth one can use. More to the point is the nature of the process of growth. The development of values, leading to spiritual formation, was begun by Krathwold (1961) and Kohlberg (1981). Kohlberg postulated the idea of a seventh stage of moral development in which one reaches a “unitive” stage of growth (Power 1986). The research in this tradition of moral development continues today (Jovonen, J. &

Wentzel, K. 1996). Again, no consensus is apparent.

One of the ways spirituality is developed is through human interaction. Russian educators (especially Vygotsky 1985) have worked more than anyone on the stages of the process of social development of humans (Williams 1989). In the U. S. most recent research has been on small group interactions as part of a personal discipleship process (Dieter 1987; Richards 1987; Clinton 1994; George 1997).

Now we come to the question, “What is the effect of our hope and future in Christ on life and ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” Here I focus on the biblical materials.

-Past: Our Benefits from Christ’s Atonement

Created nature Gen. 1:28-29; 2:13-18; Rom. 1:

Fallen nature

Penalty of sin

Original sin

Responsible knowledge

Election

Free from the penalty of sin Col 3:3

Restored relationship possible

-Present: Our Position in Christ: objective salvation (positional, relational)

Prevenient grace Jn 1, 8; Rom 2; I Pet. 3

Calling Heb. 6

Repentance and Faith

Free from the power of sin

Justification

Regeneration

Adoption

Union

Raised with Christ Col 3:1

New Law, No condemnation Rom 7: 1-7; 8:1

-Present: Our Daily Life in Christ's Presence: subjective salvation

(sanctification, imparted, experiential, responsible participation) Micah 6:8

Eph. 4:15 5:26 II Pet 3:18 Live in light of who we are becoming.

Faith works by love Gal 5:6 I Thess 1:3 I Tim 1:5

Free from the immediate power of sin/ overcoming sin/nature/flesh

First fruit of the Spirit I Cor. 12: 13; Gal 5:16-17 Eph 5:18

Confession and cleansing

Disciplines

Grow in grace by faith in Christ (Gal 2:20 Eph 3:17, 4:15), dependence on the word, walk in the Spirit

Holiness Lev. 11:44 II Cor. 7:1 Lk 1:75 Eph. 5:25-27 Heb 12:14

Sanctification Jn 17:17 I Thess 5:23 Heb 13:12 Rom 6: 12, 14, 22 Rom 15:16 II Thess 2:13 Tit 3:5 I Pet 1:2

Righteousness Matt 5:19 Jn 15:10, 12 Rom. 8:3-4 I Cor 1:30

Lordship, surrender, present Rom. 6: 13, 19; 12:1

Old man, new man Rom 6: 4-6 Eph 4:22, 24 Col 3:9, 10

Stages of Growth I Jn. 2

-Future: Our life changes based on our future in Christ

Sharing in the divine nature II Pet. 1:4

Transformation Rom 12:2 II Cor 3:18; 5:17

Perfection Mt 5:48 2 Cor. 7:1 Eph. 4:13 Col 1:28; 2:10 I Jn 2:5 4:17

Perfected in Love Jn. 17:23 Phil 3:12 Col. 3:14 Heb. 10:14 1 Jn. 4:12,  
17-18

God-like Rom 8:29 I Cor 15:49 Eph 3:19 I Jn 3:2

All riches Eph. 2:4-7

Judge angels 1 Cor. 6:3

United with all believers of all ages Heb. 12:1 Rev. 21:3, 7

This fourth emphasis on personal life change based on our future reality has been the focus of spirituality for the Eastern Orthodox and Church of the East traditions. It has had a more minor role in Western and African spirituality. The highest form, in intellectual terms is, called theosis. Theosis, becoming one with God, implies that a human can somehow become one with the God of the universe, thereby incorporating and transcending reality, a kind of reverse incarnation. This is based, in part, on II Peter 1: 4 - that you might become partakers of the divine nature. Some people teach that this has been our human destiny, joint heirs with Christ has been God's plan all along (Barnhouse 1965, Clinton 1987, Nouwen 1992, Pinnock 1996, Curtis. & Eldredge 1997, Mascetti 1998, Lawrenz 2000, Larsen 2001). Implied in this process of theosis is both a conception of reality and an investment of meaning in that conception far beyond what philosophers who are not also theologians have ever brought under study. Other writers believe that theosis in II Peter is the same as our fellowship with God

described in Matt. 5, Romans, the Gospel of John, and I John (Reicke 1964, Rahner 1968, Moltmann 1977, Richards 1987, Smith 1995, Dupre 1998). In general, the first five items in the list above titled Future may be seen as synonyms.

Conclusion:

Live in present with expectation of future participation in God: anticipation and hope in the midst of pain, degradation, angst, and spiritual warfare because we know that our future and the world's future is assured of victory. Directly address hearts, spirits, (angels, demons) and spiritual issues because we know of the reality of the spiritual world via Christ and the resurrection.

Seek total personal transformation as an ongoing process (and death to self) because that is our promised future.

Every personal encounter is a divine appointment for kingdom action because God has left us here in the interim with a specific purpose.

Every day nature and life tell us about God and our relationship with Him and we can look at all life from the perspective of the resurrection and the future glory with Christ.

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