

CHRIST AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

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History submits to God.

The Old Testament, beginning from the first chapter of Genesis, is a movement of creation and growth which starts from God to settle within man. God continues to direct and govern it with keen intent according to a definite aim. Consequently the movement of history in each single individual or across the life of a generation or that of a nation is subjected completely and in exactitude to His will and foreknowledge. For God is “King of the ages” (1 Tim. 1:17); and everything goes on “by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23); while all things are controlled perfectly, for God “has determined (for all nations) the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” (Acts 17:26)

The transformation of time into salvation and eternity.

And even though the motion of time appears to be apart and disengaged from man: the sun rising and setting whether he wills it or not, the seasons rotate completely independent of him, yet in fact, this motion with all its grandeur and force is subjected by God unto man that he may make of it his own history: a living spiritual history stretching across the ages, and ultimately overriding time itself to merge into eternal life with God—where there will be neither sun nor moon, winter nor summer (Rev. 21:23). Christ Himself declared this end, “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away” (Mark 13:31). So time, in its material rotation is dead and will pass away with its heaven and its earth; but in its connection with humanity, it is a living unceasing history of salvation; the history of God’s word which returns not empty. It is a movement beginning from God and ending in Him, and with it the redeemed man: “Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you.” (Jer. 1:5).

And if man moves in accordance with this will of God, i.e. in accordance with knowing God and glorifying Him, he will rise above the movement of time and will subjugate it in fact to God’s will; he will transform the hours, days and years into a history of salvation: a divine time, an eternal life in the Kingdom of God, “behold now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2); “my voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord.” (Ps. 5:3) As for the man who defies

God's will and ignores His knowledge and His glorification, he will fall under the movement of time and will become a dead part of the dead time, and will inevitably fall under the physical rotation of days. But in spite of this, he will become a servant of God under absolute compulsion unwittingly and unwillingly and therefore he will not rejoice in doing God's will.

Time serves God's Revelation.

The Old Testament in its entirety is a living history which speaks very plainly and clearly. It relates to us the story of God's continuous condescension and His connection with man to raise him above the movement of dead time, and that by the interception of His word forming of the rotation of the years a sacred living history: the history of God with man, or rather the history of man with God.

In other words all of the Old Testament is, at one and the same time, the history of God's work in man and the work of man in accordance with God's word or against it. Of the two, God was revealed most clearly with all His attributes. It would thus seem that the movement of time has resulted, by God's continuous interception in the Old Testament in the Revelation of God's Being unto man and in man through the submission unto His word and even through disobeying it. For man's disobedience became a new element for declaring God's might in subduing evil. When we read the Holy Scriptures, we find them, in appearance, mere historic events. But if we probe their origin and their aim, we discover that they all point to the Revelation of the Living God.

Here, we confront the question: what is the value of God's Revelation to man? Well, in fact here lies all the mystery of the Old and the New Testaments, and the very essence of man's value and the whole of history in its final context: "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee (from within the fact of time) the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent". (John 17:3)

The Knowledge of God is the means of transferring man from time into eternity.

God is Truth, Life and Eternal Light. So the knowledge of the Truth is indeed sharing with Him; and the knowledge of Life is life and the knowledge of Light is inevitable illumination. Man, by losing the knowledge of God, loses Truth in its essence; loses Eternal Life and loses the Light. Consequently he will merely feel the motion of time overwhelming and overpowering him until he falls dead under it. Hence the knowledge of God rescues man from falling under the inexorability of time ending in death. Whereas the knowledge of God is His unceasing Revelation unto man's mind and heart: Revelation as a knowledge of comprehension and love and existence within the source of existence and an assurance of eternal life soaring over the movement of time and death.

But the fulfilment of God's Revelation unto man necessitated the entry of all generations into the experience of God throughout the ages, that man may ultimately comprehend God as lustrous Truth and Life Eternal. To attain this aim, man had to pass two stages with God, each as different from the other as can be. The first is the Old Testament, a stage wherein God's Revelation was indirect through the spoken word. The second is the New Testament declaring God's direct Revelation through the Incarnate Word. The difference between the two is summed up by St. Paul in his words, "God who . . . spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son . . .". (Heb. 1:1)

The Old Testament is under the power of time and the New Testament is beyond the power of time.

The Apostle's words are clear for God spoke by the prophets at sundry times (in the past), and through events (in diverse manners). As for the New Testament, it is in verity that God revealed Himself directly (in His Son) outside the bounds of history (spoke to us personally). It is thus evident that God's Revelation in the Two Testaments was on two contrasting planes complementing one another: 1. A Historic plane through the movement of time, events and the succession of generations. 2. A direct factual plane outriding time through the Incarnation—namely the appearance of God on earth in a human body.

But the historic method used by God for His self-revelation in the Old Testament was on three levels:

A. *The Royal Level:* This was by giving fixed promises to be fulfilled in time for the people as a nation living among others. These promises came to pass through judges, rulers and kings whom God moved and whose works He directed.

B. *The Sacerdotal Level:* This was by giving commandments, laws and religious ceremonies and rites, all of which necessitated the consecration of servants and the anointing of priests to teach the people and bring them near unto God.

C. *The Prophetic Level:* This was by granting prophecies and spiritual instructions connected with the future of the people concerning their continuous relation with God and their mission to the nations of the earth; these were disclosed to prophets speaking by the Spirit of God.

Yet the great wonder is that each of these three levels appears, with deep research in all the Holy Scriptures, to form one complete clear plan recorded in a reasonable logic heading towards one aim. For the judges, the rulers and the kings who followed one another over two thousand years in Israel, with their divergent morals and religious standards are all under One Divine Authority—as though they were in fact appointed by God to fulfill the One

Aim of God whether by their success or their failure. Similarly the priests and the levites, with the diversity of their degrees, works and characters were all united by One Duty across the ages. This duty they performed for the people; it was accepted by God whether they fulfilled it in faithfulness and contentment or under rebuke and wrath because of their rebellion. The same is true about the different prophecies proceeding from responsible or irresponsible men throughout the Old Testament; for the Holy Scriptures witness that all these prophecies came through the Holy Spirit and were fulfilled in their due time despite the personality of their proclaimers and whether the people accepted or disregarded them.

The unity of the historic movement represented in the king, the priest and the prophet.

The bigger wonder, however, is that these three levels centered on the king, the priest and the prophet which were the foundation of God's educative method for revealing Himself unto Israel were closely correlated in a supreme unity with one aim, though moving in time.

For the kingdom in Israel—namely the manner of ruling and the way by which the king lived—was the means for ensuring the worship and the temple ceremonies, the continuation of the priesthood, the daily offerings, and the setting up of priests and their fulfilling of their duties. All this was closely connected with what the prophets declared concerning the veracity and security of the aim towards which Israel was moving as a nation.

Here, the unity of Israel appears in the form of an organization: an organized royalty, an organized priesthood and an organized prophecy. But in its essence it is an organic living unity. For the king, the priest and the prophet do not represent three organizations, rather are they three organs in the body of a living nation moved by God and directed by Him towards a specific aim and a supreme ideal which is very important for all the world.

God's revelation in the king, the priest and the prophet.

The Divine Counsel behind this living body—namely a people ruled by a king anointed by God, served by a priest appointed by God, and inspired by a prophet led by the Holy Spirit—centers around God's desire to reveal Himself to the world through this living body moving across the ages and throughout the generations. For God used to be revealed in the king through his royalty as the Great Organizer and the Saviour of the people. He used to be revealed in the priests as the High Priest. He used to be revealed in the prophet and through his words as the Comforter and Teacher of the people.

Mediation of the king, the priest and the prophet between the people and God, a preparation for the appearance of the Messiah.

Still there is before us an astounding mystery which completes all this. The people of Israel were not considered as a body apart from Him, but were regarded by him as His first born for being the first nation to serve God according to a set Law. But such service was not fulfilled in the persons of their kings, their priests or their prophets, rather was it fulfilled in the person of the Messiah representing them before God in His divine capacity as the Son of God who is at the same time a Servant of God as an Israelite in Whom is no guile, for he is “of Abraham’s seed” and “the son of David” in the flesh.

Thus, the Messiah was regarded from the beginning as the *Eternal King* after Whose type rose David and the other kings anointed by God; in Him royalty will reach its summit, and the kingship of Israel will settle ultimately on His shoulders and to whose kingdom will be no end (Luke 1:33; see also Daniel 7:14-15). He will also be the *Priest* after Whose type was each priest raised to serve before God as a mediator for the people, and in Whom all priesthood will be consummated so that He may be the One Mediator between God and man. Likewise he is the *Prophet* in Whose name each prophet prophesied and to Him each prophet pointed by the Spirit declaring His Advent in the fullness of time. In Him will end all prophecy, all knowledge and all science of the world.

The Messiah is the ultimate aim of the kingdom of Israel, its priests and its prophets.

The New Testament has pointed to the perfect mystic relation between Israel as a nation and the Messiah, i.e. Christ, in such a way so as to attribute to Him all that was attributed to Israel with great precision. For instance, in referring to the Lord, Jesus Christ on His return from Egypt with the words “Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt. 2:15) it used the very same words recorded at the exodus, as though Israel was moving symbolically within the range of the coming Christ, His life and His characteristics. Moreover the prophecies stretch to the extent of being able to address the Messiah in the person of Jacob, who is called Israel; for we find such expressions as “my servant Jacob” and “my servant Israel” (Is. 41:8;44:21) in a manner applicable to the Messiah and to the people of Israel together without any disharmony. And this is the astounding mystery hidden behind calling Christ the Son and the Servant at one and the same time and of designating Him as the King, the Priest and the Prophet. He is an Israelite in Whom is no guile, ye rather is He the Veritable Israel. He is indeed the Son of God “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men”. (Phil. 2:6-7)

Here, we can plainly see the vital interrelation between the person of the Messiah and that of Israel; hence each word which proceeded from God, each mission and each movement unto Israel in connection with its kings, its priests and its prophets, relied in its depths on the personality of the Messiah and pointed to Him as the ultimate aim in His capacity as the Eternal King, the Only Priest and the One Prophet speaking in His own name and on Whom the whole existence of Israel rests.

Consequently, all the history of Israel with all the events of its kings, all the rituals of its priests and all the sayings of its prophets is itself the history of the Messiah and His Revelation, given symbolically in the form of a nation chosen with care and love to represent God amidst the nations of the earth and to declare His person and His mercy to them. Even the tragedies of Israel, its captivities, its continuous sufferings and its chastisements throughout its history cannot be discounted from God's positive actions by which He stretched forward with Israel to come nearer and nearer to the other nations of the earth, so that finally Israel was joined—despite itself—to the rest of the nations in the person of the Messiah who completed this joining and reconciled them in Himself through the Cross and thus ended the historic mission of Israel. The mission of the historic Messiah ended to give way for the mission of the Christ of nations, the Christ of Eternal Life.

Therefore, this close organic unity between the personality of Israel and that of Christ explains to us how all the historic events, the laws and the rituals together with all the teachings and the prophecies of the Old Testament—though they pertain to the people of Israel—cannot be explained nor understood except in the Person of Christ who is the ultimate aim of Israel and its beginning at one and the same time. For Christ, as St. Paul said, is the end of the law given by Moses and the kingship established by David and the prophecies spoken by the prophets. He is the very aim of Israel and of all men “by Whom they all consist”. (Col. 1:17)

All the history of the Old Testament with its people, kings, priests and prophets symbolizes Christ.

Consequently, the Old Testament prepared the way for Christ and pictured Him in time across the history on the level of symbols. For the historic events continued—in their depths—to point to Him with exactitude on the level of the prophecies until they ended in Him. Moreover, all the religious rites and ceremonies aimed at bringing the human spirit nearer to the mystery of Christ, the Real Lamb, until they became dyed by His Blood flowing from the Cross visibly and clearly. Also the prophecies continued to unfold the material wrappings which enveloped the truth of the kingdom of the coming Messiah: the kingdom of grace, truth, spirit and life until it became clearly visible, “. . . that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our

hands have handled, of the Word of Life . . . for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy . . .” (1 John 1:1 and Rev. 19:10). This means that Christ was and still is the center of the Bible, yea and the center of all of man’s redemptive history. One of the most illuminating passages which transfer the picture of the Messiah from His limited position in Israel to a center of salvation, glory and regality over all the world is the vision of Daniel, “I saw in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13-14).

The Wise men of the Jews apperceived this truth.

This truth was one of the most outstanding teachings of the inspired rabbis in the era preceding the Advent; as proved by their saying, “Not only did all the prophets proclaim the coming of the Messiah, but the whole world was created for Him.” The same truth is the foundation of all the New Testament; Christ Himself emphasizes it, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27) On this very basis the faith in Christ was imprinted on the mind of the early Church, “For by him were all things created . . . And he is before all things and by him all things consist.” (Col. 1:16-17).

When the Apostles began to lay the foundations on which the Gospel was to be built in the New Testament, they turned their gaze to the Scriptures (or the Books of the Old Testament) for their inspiration and they applied what was recorded in them to the sufferings of Christ, His death and His resurrection, “. . . I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, . . . for I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures . . . so we preach, and so ye believed.” (1 Cor. 15:1-11) It is also plainly evident from “The Acts” that the Apostles saw in Christ’s coming, His death and His resurrection the fulfillment of the aim of all the prophets and the consummation of all the Scriptures, “Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice . . . that is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel . . . Ye men of Israel . . . Jesus of Nazareth . . . being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him . . . being a prophet . . . He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ . . .” (Acts 2:14, 16, 22-31). “And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as

did also your rulers. But those things which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled . . .” (Acts 3:17-25).

St. Paul followed the same theological school, “Men of Israel and ye that fear God, give audience . . . For they that dwell at Jerusalem and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him . . . And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree . . . And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled . . .” (Acts 13:16-40; see also acts 17:2-3).

And to clarify to the reader both the importance and the pre-eminence of this method in founding the theology of the New Testament and the establishment of the evangelization, it suffices to bring out the solemn declaration of St. Peter in his second epistle. For this Apostle emphasizes in his declaration that the reliance on the Holy Scriptures in witnessing to the works of Christ, His suffering, His death and His resurrection surpasses his own personal experience. Listen to him saying, “And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” (2 Pet. 1:18-19).

St. Paul follows this same patristic traditional method, considering that the reliance on the Holy Scriptures and applying the prophecies to the theology of the New Testament are the first-class foundations. As for the personal experience, even though it be a face to face confrontation, it takes the second place (see 2 Cor. 12:1-11).

This declaration from the two Apostles should sharpen our attention that we perceive the great importance given by the Apostles and the Disciples to the Old Testament, and the extent of their reliance on it in their evangelization. Yet though they underrated their personal experience, it is considered by us as parallel to the Scriptures, and an essential witness to the theological edifice of the New Testament.

This same method of relying on the Holy Scriptures in witnessing to the death of Christ and His resurrection, is still used by the Church up to the present. For we always say, whenever we recite the Creed “. . . He rose from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures . . .”.

(Translated by Iris Habib el Masri)