

# THE ALMIGHTY -- THE ETERNAL

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"Whom no man hath seen nor can see"

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## 1. The Beginning of Time

"I only am God; I existed before Time itself." (Isa. 43:13. Ferrar Fenton translation).

The eternity of God is beyond human comprehension. We are finite creatures; our minds can only conceive objects existing within space and events taking place within a span of time marked by a beginning and an ending. We can accept the idea of endless life by visualizing the continuance of the present into future time without interruption or change for ever; it is not possible to project our minds back into past time and comprehend the idea of a no-beginning. Somewhere back in the distant recesses, our finite thoughts tell us, there must have been a start. But although this is certainly true so far as created things visible and invisible are concerned, God tells us it is not true as respects himself. God has always existed, truly eternal. With him there is no beginning.

Until God began to create, there was no such thing as space and there was no such thing as time. Space is the medium in which objects exist and time that in which events take place. Space can be defined as the distance between any two objects; until God created objects there was no space. Similarly time can be defined as the duration between any two events; until God caused events to happen there was no such thing as time. The ancient Greeks evidently saw something of this, for Plato writes "Time and the heavens came into being at the same instant, in order that, if they were ever to dissolve, they might be dissolved together. Such was the mind and thought of God in the creation of time." The work of Einstein, in our own day, and of others who have followed him, difficult of comprehension by ordinary people as it is, goes to show that Plato was thinking on right lines. Time and space had a beginning. God, who exists eternally before that beginning, is the Creator of Space and Time. That is exactly what He tells us himself. "I am God. Yea, before the day was I am he. . ." or as Fenton translates it "I only am God. I existed before time itself." In Isa.

57:15 He declares himself "the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity"; perhaps that expression is the only really satisfactory definition of the existence of God before creation. The writer of the 90th Psalm attempted to convey his own understanding in his own words "Even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psa. 90:2) but that is a relatively feeble restatement of the conception given to man through the agency of Moses; "say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." (Exodus 3:14). So many attempts have been made to express that word, I AM, into comprehensible English. The One being, the Ever-living, Eternal, the Self-existing; each conveys part of the meaning but none express it accurately. There is no word in the English language to describe a state of existence which is infinite in duration and scope, independent of all else, omnipresent and omnipotent. Isaiah has to come to our rescue in simple words of one or two syllables. "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isa. 44:6). "I am he, before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me: I, I, the Lord; and beside me there is no savior" (Isa. 43:10-11). "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me." (Isa. 46:9). This expression "I am" or "I am he" recurs again and again to designate the one eternal God who is from infinity to infinity, from the time of no-beginning to that of no-ending, whose power is limitless and all-embracing. The New Testament catches up the theme and repeats it to Christian believers in this present Age "I am Alpha and Omega" (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, as though we were to say A and Z) "the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). Present, past and future, God is always there.

So, before the beginning, God was alone. Before man trod the face of the earth, before this planet and all the starry Universe had come into existence. Before the angels were created or the world in which they move. Back in the emptiness and the darkness of infinity, there was God, planning for the future, devising the details of that creation which He purposed within himself to bring into being.

The beginning of all things is marked by the distinction between God manifest in his Word for the progress of creative activity and God the Eternal, the Omnipotent. "In the beginning was the Word" says John at the opening of his Gospel "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This same way in the beginning with God" (John 1:1). The English term "Word" is used to translate the Greek "Logos" which has a two-fold sense, that of speaking and that of thinking or reasoning. Hence it involves the conceptions of thinking, reasoning, meditating, calculating, planning - the mental faculties generally. That something more is involved than the operation of the Divine mind reaching out and pervading all things becomes obvious when later on John tells us that this same Word "became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of an only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The Word has an objective existence in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, come to earth to manifest his Father in the sight of men in a manner heretofore thought impossible, for men knew that the Eternal is fundamentally uncomprehended by human senses, "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see" (2 Tim. 6:16). John explained the wonder. "No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared" (revealed or manifested) "him" (John 1:18). We can regard the "beginning" at which the Word was "with God" as that point of time, in very truth the beginning of all things, when God made provision for the manifesting and the revealing of himself to the creation which He was about to

commence, when the Word became an active agent whereby the designs of the Eternal were to be put into effect. That active agent is the "only begotten Son".

There must be something very real in this relationship of Father and Son, even though we realize that we are dealing here with a Divine mystery of which the earthly figure is but a feeble illustration. We are told, in what is perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). In a memorable passage St. Paul referred to God as "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all. . ." (Rom. 8:32). These cannot be figures of speech. The matter dealt with is too serious to be defined in other than concrete terms. The Eternal really did give One who had been with him from the beginning of creation, yea, and since his ascension on high is with him still and eternally. The "Word of God" really did walk the earth among men, yielded his spirit into the hands of the Father when upon the Cross, rose again in the power of an endless life, and is with the Father, lord over all created things. We have to hold and believe all that in harmony with what we know of the oneness and eternity of God.

The Book of Proverbs helps here. This is the book which enshrines a great deal of what is called the "Wisdom" literature of Israel. In Old Testament days, an equivalent term to the "Word of God" was the expression "the Wisdom of God". Divine Wisdom was held to be the agent of all God's work in creation, and "Wisdom" was personified in the same manner as the "Word" in New Testament days and in John's Gospel. Nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs are devoted to the words of the "Wisdom of God", transmitting his counsel to men upon earth. Embedded in these nine chapters there is what amounts almost to an autobiography of the Word of God, a personal explanation or definition of his relationship both to the Father and to the world in which men live. It is as if God knew how difficult it would be for men to understand how the Word, the Son, could be one with the Father yet distinct inasmuch as his relation to man is concerned. So Wisdom, the Word, speaks, saying (in Prov. 8:22) "the Lord possessed (acquired) me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up (anointed) from everlasting, before the earth was. ." The word translated "possessed" is qanah which means to get, to buy, to purchase, to obtain, and it carries the definite meaning of becoming the possessor of something not previously possessed. Now this is said to have become true at the "beginning" of God's "way"-A word meaning a road or trodden path leading to a definite goal-and this at once brings us into the realm of history, of events, occurring within time. God himself had no beginning; the "beginning of his way" must refer to the point at which He began to put into operation his creative power to cause events to happen in the sequence He had already ordained. The investment of his Wisdom, his Word, with attributes of personality, as implied in this chapter, was evidently prior to any work of creation, for "Wisdom" goes on to say "When there were no depths, I was brought forth ... before the mountains, before the hills, was I brought forth, while as yet he had not made the earth ... When he prepared the heavens, I was there, when he set a compass upon the face of the depth ... then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" (Prov. 8:24-30). All this language should be understood as describing the investiture of the Word with personality without doing any violence to that Divine Oneness which Jesus always claimed continually subsisted between himself and his Father, a unity which was in Jesus' mind when He said "I and my Father are one". Furthermore, this association of personality with the Word marks the dividing point between the eternity in which God dwelt without creation and the time span during which his creative power brings into existence the creation comprehended in time and space as we understand those terms. Proverbs 8 describes an exercise of the Divine Will resulting in the concentration of God's mind

and plan in respect to all creation in One who could thenceforth stand up and say with full authority "The Lord acquired me at the commencement of his developing purpose before any of his most ancient works; I was anointed to this from eternity". That is more of a paraphrase than a scholarly translation but it conveys the meaning of the passage in modern English idiom related to what is known of the nature of God. Theologians have wrestled with this basic truth of the Christian faith in the effort to make the mystery intelligible but this treatise is neither qualified to pronounce upon their arguments nor satisfied that they really succeed in what they set out to do. Nothing can match for clarity and simplicity the plain Biblical definition "the only begotten Son of God". And the clearest and most satisfactory manner in which we can view God in his manifestation toward us is to visualize One who became the embodiment of the Divine Word back there when God was about to commence creation, was thenceforth the Father's companion and agent for the execution of his work, as a beloved Son, in the fullness of time was found in fashion as a man for the suffering of death, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, Lord of all creation.

It is significant that the Son is said to be in the image of the Father. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of All creation" says St. Paul in Col. 1:15. "The brightness (effulgence) of his glory, the express image of his person" is the way Hebrews 1:3 puts it. It was only when the Word was invested with attributes of personality that He could be spoken of as the image of God. Not an image by creation as was Adam, who also was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) but an image by reason of sonship -- the only begotten Son of God.

So the Father entered into communion with the Son as with a companion, but to guard against thinking of the Son in the manner we think of created beings, who also derive life from God, the Son claims for himself those prerogatives which elsewhere in the Scriptures are attributes of God. "Before Abraham was, I am" He said to the people (John 8:50) and they, remembering that God is declared to be the "I am" took up stones to stone him "because that thou, being man, makest thyself God". "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" He told them (John 8:24). The claim to be the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and last, attributed to the Father both in Isaiah and Revelation, is also accredited to the Son in Rev. 1:11, 2:8, 22:13. There can be no doubt about this. "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive" (Rev. 2:8), God the Father does not die, cannot die; but the Son did die, and the mighty power of the Father was exercised to raise him out of death and set him at his own right hand (Eph. 1:19-20). So that when we have explored all that can be explored and said all that can be said we can apprehend no more than is conveyed in the simple Scriptural statement that God the Eternal comprehended his Word, his Purpose, his Power in the only begotten Son, who henceforth became the Father's right hand in all creative work, the manifestation and revelation of the Father to all created beings. The institution of that condition of things was the first event ever to happen and therefore the beginning of time.

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## 2. Author of Creation

Responsible scientists no longer deny that the Universe had a beginning. There was a time, fantastically remote from the present, when all creation - this earth, our Sun, all the starry splendor of the heavens -- did not exist. It just was not there. There were no living creatures, for there was no life. There was no light, for there was nothing to give light. No heat, no sound, no movement; nothing. There was no means by which to measure out space, by which to span out time. Length and breadth, past and future, are words which would have had no meaning if there were any words, and there not; time was only an eternal "now" and space was only an infinite "here".

There was a moment, say scientists, when matter, material, the stuff of which things are made, began to come into existence. From what cause, by what power, they do not know, and no scientific instrument can reveal. But they can and do observe the results of that coming of matter into existence and they peer intently into the recesses of distant space in order to gain clues that will afford them a clearer understanding of this profound mystery. Of course the experts differ, as experts always do, and it is still a matter of hot debate in the appropriate academic circles whether all the material now in the universe first appeared in the form of a colossal solid lump which exploded and sent its contents careering through space to condense into stars, suns and planets, or was the continuous appearance of atoms created out of nothing, a process which continues everlastingly, coalescing together to form great gaseous clouds which ultimately become the stars we see and know. But there are two facts upon which all the scientists do agree. They know that there was a start to the Universe; their instruments cannot tell them by what power or what means it was started.

Science in its exploration of the past has to stop at this point, where the first stars were born, where in God's mighty crucible the first atoms were forged out of nothingness. Science has to stop at the boundary marked by the beginning of material things; only faith and spiritual discernment can step across the line and find, behind the coming into existence of all we can see and hear and handle, God the Creator, existing from eternity, putting into active operation his great purpose.

We do not know whether what is usually called the angelic world came into existence prior to the visible universe or simultaneously with it. We do not know the true nature of the celestial world or of celestial beings, only that it is a real world, with real citizens living nearer to the presence of God than do we upon earth, capable of intelligent loyalty, service and activity in the things of God, and ceaselessly engaged in the occupations and duties for which God has created them. Because the Bible tells us of angels who sinned, and are reserved to judgment, of evil principalities and powers in the heavens, we have to accept the fact that the citizens of that world are capable, like man, of obedience or disobedience, loyalty or disloyalty, to God, and that there are those in that world who now are in a state of rebellion against God. Neither can we pronounce with any certainty upon the relation of that world to our physical universe in terms of space and time. The five human senses, and every type of detecting instrument which the wit of man has devised, are incapable of sensing or detecting anything to do with that world. But because God is the Source of all life and the Author of all creation, in whatever sphere of being that life and that creation is manifested, we can be assured that a time there must have been when the celestial world, with whatever forms of life it holds, came into existence by the creative decree of God, just so surely as did our own material order of things. There are a few allusions in Scripture to that fact. Of the Son it is said that "by him

were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible. . ." (Col. 1:16). That the creation of what is to us the invisible world, the angelic, antedated the formation of the earth at least is indicated in Job 38:7 where the sons of God, i.e., the angels, are depicted as "shouting for joy" when God brought this planet into being. But our earth is a comparative newcomer on the scene; the starry heavens existed, substantially as we see them now, long before the Earth was formed. Sometime in that remote past, perhaps at the very beginning of things, the celestial world came into existence, and for the first time living, intelligent beings stood before God and gave praise to him for the blessing of conscious life.

Knowing so little of that celestial creation, unable as we are to visualize the conditions of life in that world, in thinking and speaking of the work of God in creation we can do little more than consider the material universe of which we and our earth constitute a small-an infinitesimally small-part. When we talk of God as Creator, although we are fully aware that the angelic world is part of his creation also, it is of man and the visible universe that we must speak.

Away back there in the dim recesses of past time, so many long ages ago that the mind could not possibly take in the significance of the number of the years, a stupendous event took place. God created the first atom!

Now an atom is a very tiny thing. Most people know nowadays that all earthly materials and substances are composed of atoms, clinging together tightly to make up the mass of the material. These atoms are almost inconceivably minute. It would take more than a million of them, placed side by side in a straight line, to equal the thickness of a human hair. The tiniest grain of dust, only just visible to the human eye, can contain more than ten millions of atoms. Yet this earth and all that is on it, and all the stars of the sky, consist entirely of atoms, inconceivable numbers of atoms congregated together. God made them all, made them out of nothing, by the exercise of his own Will, the power of his Holy Spirit. There are only about one hundred different kinds of atoms, but out of the tremendous number of combinations possible with those hundred kinds the whole wide variety of earthly things has been constituted, -- land and sea, rocks and minerals, trees and grasses, animals and fish, man himself, all constructed from atoms. God made them all and ordered the fashion atom combines with atom to produce all the different substances we know, and so made possible the bodies we possess and the environments in which we live, and move, and have our being. And away in the vast stretches of empty space, at fantastic distances from this earth, there are mighty star clusters, galaxies as they are called, each containing millions upon millions of giant stars each one of which is bigger by far than our own sun, -- which, as stars go, is only a midget,- and every star in every one of those countless galaxies is itself made up of atoms almost without number. Scientists are well accustomed to talking on the radio and otherwise about atoms, their nature and behavior, but they cannot say where they come from or by what power they are created. Neither their researches nor their instruments can tell them that.

The Bible does do so. In some of those inspired moments when holy men of old were moved by the Holy Spirit to utter words the meaning of which they themselves could only dimly understand, or even not understand at all, there were occasional allusions intended to have significance for us in these latter days, and which, closely examined, do have meaning. Speaking of his almighty power and wisdom, God says through the prophet Isaiah "My hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned (Heb. stretched out) the heavens; when I call unto them they

stand up together." (Isa. 48:13). Let the implication of those trenchant words sink in! Here is the creative power of God calling into existence the material substance of which this earth and all the heavenly bodies are composed, preparing the space in which they are to continue their existence and by one word ("when I call unto them") setting the entire assembly in orderly array as we see it glistening above our heads every night. Says Wisdom, the Logos, the only begotten Son "When he prepared (established) the heavens I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the depth ... then I was by him as a sure workman (or architect"; this is the meaning of the Hebrew;) Prov. 8:27-31. This momentous passage depicts the speaker as the active agent of God in the work of creation as distinct from the creative force or power whom we call God the Creator and God the Father of all.

Where human intellect fails, the Holy Spirit fills the gap. Speaking under the Spirit's guidance, the prophet Isaiah was able to describe what the wisest of men cannot describe. "Lift up your eyes on high" he says in Isa. 40:26 "and behold who hath created these, (the stars) that bringeth out their host by number. He calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth." Here is a marvelous picture; God the Creator "bringing out their host by number" as He creates the atoms, forms them into stars, and sets them to work. "Not one faileth". Never, in ail this mighty process, is there a mistake or slip; all goes precisely according to plan. "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite." (Psa. 147:4-5). No one of less than infinite understanding could originate and execute so tremendous a work. No one of less than infinite intellect could so number and give names to the myriads of stars that exist.

It is time now to ask the question "Why did God do all this?" For what reason has the Most High brought into existence this vast creation, so evidently intended to be the abode of continuous life -- for the marvelous adaptability of our own planet to the myriads of different forms of life it supports shows unmistakably the Divine intention to multiply life in all its manifestations. The Revelator gives the answer. "Thou hast created all things and for thy Pleasure they are and were created". (Rev. 4:11). The wordy does not signify pleasure strictly in the modern sense of the word, but rather the idea of purpose or intention. The glowing words of Revelation 21:3 in which God is depicted at the last as making his dwelling with men seem at least to hint that in some wonderful manner which our altogether inadequate comprehension of God forbids our fully understanding, God comes inside his own creation of space and time in much the same way as a man builds a house for himself and then goes inside and lives in it. Some such idea may possibly be intended by the words of Isa. 40:22.

"He ... sitteth upon the circle of the earth, stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." Psalm 104:2 has much the same idea. God enshrouds himself in light as a garment, stretches out the heavens for a veil and lays the supporting beams of his dwelling-place in the celestial waters, the recesses of far space. God would dwell with man, but he remains invisible to man, "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see." (1 Tim 6:16). Inconceivably remote, and yet infinitely near. The same Divine Mind that ranges through the vast recesses of space, filling it with great stars, is able to take note of the smallest detail affecting the welfare of his humblest living creature. a sparrow, said Jesus, cannot fall to the ground without the knowledge of the Father (Luke 12:6). The God of the atom, of the mighty stars, is also the God of the sparrows and is as fully aware of the one as the

other. Even the hairs of our heads are numbered, Jesus went on to say. After all, if God can keep track of the untold millions of stars, and knows all their names, then heads and sparrows must be easy to him, for there are far less of them to account for. So that as we look out upon the vast universe which our God has made we need not be appalled or afraid of its vastness and our own littleness. Out there, in the light behind the darkness, is our Creator and our Father, intensely conscious of us, our lives' experiences and problems, our loves and fears, our strength and weakness, our successes and failures, and He is most certainly and surely working out his great purpose for those on whom He has bestowed the inestimable gift of conscious, intelligent life.

But how can men, who even as nations are less than the fine dust of the balance before him, how can men with their limited powers of perception come to know the God who inhabits eternity; how attain that communion and fellowship with him which He himself has said is his desire and intention? If no man can look upon his face and live (Exodus 33:20), if He dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, if He is One whom no man hath seen nor can see, how may we ever come to know him? The answer is in five simple words in John's Gospel. "The Word was made flesh". The Word of God, the Logos, already the active agent of the Father in the work of creation, already in Old Testament days the means of communication between the Father and all men, now becomes more intimately connected with mankind that He might reveal God to them in even clearer guise. The Word came to earth, and dwelt visibly amongst men, having taken upon himself the nature of man (Heb. 3:16). And in him men saw the Father.

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### 3. The Word made Flesh

"God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Those words, spoken to the Pharisee Nicodemus and recorded in John 3:16, have become what is probably the most familiar verse of the Bible. But they enshrine a profound mystery none the less. Who is the only-begotten Son and in what relation does He stand to the Father?

First of all it must be accepted that this giving of God's Son was a very real transaction and no figure of speech. The basic truth of the Christian faith, one plainly and unequivocally attested by Jesus himself, is that the Son of God came down from heaven and took upon himself human nature in order that He might die for the sin of man and thereafter release man from the condemnation under which he lay. The words of St. Paul admit of no other construction "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to death for us all. . ." (Rom. 8:32). This was a real giving and a real death, and the measure of the Father's love for mankind is comprehended in the reality and the severity of that parting and that loss. Unless there was a real giving and a real sacrifice, to use a human word, on the part of the Father in this matter, then John 3:16 has no meaning. Our Lord attested the truth of his death and resurrection by Rev. 1:18 "I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." ore. "

The identity of the only-begotten Son with the Word of God, who was with the Father from the beginning, is plain from John 1:14 "And the Word was made flesh, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." The Word made flesh possessed title to two names, the Son of God, relative to his Divine origin, and the Son of Man, relative to his human nature through Mary from David. In another place He called himself David's son and David's Lord, an apparent paradox which proved an insoluble enigma to the Pharisees and Scribes who were presented with the problem of its solution.

It is necessary to guard against a too literal application of the human analogy here. Jesus did not become the only begotten Son by reason of his humanity. He was the Son of God, supreme over all Divine creation, from the very beginning. Monogenes is a word indicating the principal son or heir, hence the association with the idea of firstborn or only son, and it is the idea of primacy which has to be borne in mind. Isaac is called the only begotten son (monogenes) of Abraham in Heb. 11:27 although he was not the only or even the eldest son of the patriarch-but was the heir. Scripturally God has many in The angels are called sons of God. Adam in his perfection was called the son of God. Reconciled Christian believers are called sons of God. In fact it would seem that the title is properly applicable to every one who is in a state of sinless perfection or by means of the justification by faith which comes from acceptance of Christ has been accepted of God as such. But the sonship of the Word is something different and on a higher plane. Angels and humans are sons of God by creation, because God has given them life. The Word is the Son of God because He is of the Father, and stands in a relationship to the Father which is neither shared by angel or man nor can be understood by man. He is the firstborn Son of God, one with the Father in thought and action, executive agent of the Father in all that is done, the sole manifestation of the Father to his human creatures. With that definition we have to be content.

"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. ..." (Rom. 8:3) is one of the Scriptural allusions to the manner in which the Word "became flesh". This one passes over the fact that He was born a babe at Bethlehem and stresses instead the departure of the Word from his heavenly glory with the Father, and his sojourn on earth as man. That manhood was real; certain heresies in the Early Church pictured the Word as inhabiting the human body of the man Jesus of Nazareth and leaving that body to its fate as it expired on the Cross. The New Testament is positive to the point of dogmatism against any such understanding. The One who came from above became man, even although in doing so He by no means renounced his Divine Sonship, his relationship to God the Father. Whoever does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, says the beloved disciple John (1 John 4:2-3) is not of God. The writer to the Hebrews goes a little deeper when in his second chapter he declares that He took hold not of the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham; because men are sharers together in flesh and blood, he also shared in the same. That he definitely means a true sharing of human nature is made plain in the same chapter where, after quoting David in the Psalms describing man as "created a little lower than the angels" and nevertheless "crowned with the glory and honor" of human nature, he says that Jesus was likewise made "A little lower than the angels" and similarly crowned with glory and honor. He goes on to explain that this was in order that He could be made subject to the suffering of death, "that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, goes deepest of all. "Christ Jesus" he says "although in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (this is the R.S.V. rendering; the A.V. "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," has been long since recognized a poorly defective translation) "but emptied himself.... being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). One common theme runs through all these allusions; it was necessary that the Son of God become man and die as man in order that Adam's race of men could be redeemed. Whether we understand the philosophy of the Atonement or not, whether the necessity of Christ's death on the Cross for man's salvation is apparent to us or not, we must accept the plain, uncompromising statement that "since by MAN came death, by MAN also came the resurrection of the dead." (1 Cor. 15:21). The death of Christ on the Cross was no metaphor, no pantomime action having no reality behind it. It was no crucifixion of a mortal man whose body had been temporarily inhabited by a Divine Spirit which vacated it again at the moment of death. This death was reality, as real as the death of any man of Adam's race who in his own turn and time has returned to his dust, his spirit going back [o God who gave it. (Eccl:12:7). Christ's death as man constituted the antilutron, the corresponding or equivalent price paid for the redemption of slaves in the Roman world ("the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom -- anti-lutron -- for all" (1 Tim. 2:6) by which He fulfilled his promise to give his flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). It was after He had thus been "delivered up to death for us all" (Rom. 8:32) that the Father put forth his "mighty power" and "raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand" (Eph. 1:19-20), not now as man-for his humanity had been given "for the life of the world"-but restored to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5) and with the addition of that supreme exaltation described in Phil. 2:9-10 "Wherefore God has also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.... and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord. . ."

These are the facts. We do not understand, we cannot hope to understand, just how it was that the Word of God, the Father's agent in all creation, resplendent in the glory of his heavenly station, "emptied himself" and became the child of Mary, growing over the term of some thirty years to the

full estate of man. We do not understand how Jesus of Nazareth lived his life within the limits of human manhood and yet maintained that link with his Father which enabled him to say, as He did to the Jews "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30), to remain aware of the circumstances of what for want of a better term we must call his "pre-human existence", and to manifest powers which belong, not to man, but to God. Neither do we understand the nature of the happening, three days after the lifeless body had been laid in Joseph's tomb, when He rose from the dead "in the power of an endless life" (Heb. 7:16) and "appeared in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:29). We may not understand, but there are enough positive Scripture declarations to enable us to grasp the elemental truth; the Word, the Son of God, came from the Father into the world and was made flesh; He gave that flesh for the life of the world and died upon the Cross; he went out of the world and returned to the Father, and now is Lord over all things in heaven and earth.

This is where those texts which speak of the Son as bearing the image of the Father have their place. It is a truth not always readily appreciated by Christians that upon his ascension into Heaven our Lord left the body of flesh behind for ever. In mediaeval times the incongruity of a human body existing to all eternity in the spiritual courts of the celestial world was not realized; even today the implications of such a belief are not always faced and considered. He was raised from the dead, not to a renewal of the human nature and body which He had given for the life of the world, but to the glory of the celestial state of being which had been his before He came to earth, and with added glory consequent upon his triumph over the forces of evil. Nothing less is demanded by his own words "and now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). St. Paul in 1 Cor. 15 explains that there is a fundamental difference between earthly (terrestrial) and spiritual (celestial) bodies, and lays down as a maxim that the terrestrial body -- flesh and blood -- cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. It is necessary therefore to think of our Lord in his exaltation as being in the image and likeness of his Father in the celestial sense and not in the terrestrial. Several texts assist in this understanding. The writer to the Hebrews refers to him as "being the brightness (effulgence) of his (God's) glory, and the express image (exact impress, says one translator) of his person" (Heb. 1:3) and that this refers to a time prior to his coming to earth is supported by a very similar expression applied to the Wisdom of God synonymous with the Word of God - in the Apocrypha ". . . the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty ... the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the glory of God, and the image of his goodness." (Wisdom 7:25-26). Writing to the Colossians, St. Paul said "He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation" (not "every creature" as in A.V.; Col. 1:15). And it is this Christ, who is the image of God and shares his glory, who comes in that glory at his Second Advent. He does not return in the form of man, for He is no longer man; He returns in his other-world glory, the glory of the Divine nature, a glory which cannot be discerned or apprehended by the natural sight, for the sense organs of men are incapable of perceiving that which belongs to the celestial world. a reasoned view of the principal hope of the Church on earth, the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ to establish his Kingdom, reign over the nations, and judge the world, has to take that into account.

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## 4. Above all heavens

The one who ascended is the same who once descended to the world of man, and now is returned from whence He came. That is a very bald statement of what is perhaps the most profound mystery of the work of Christ. His life on earth as Man is tolerably easy to visualize, the manner of his death and subsequent appearance to the disciples. That He came from God, having laid aside the celestial glory He possessed with God, and for a short time accepted the limitations of human nature, is a belief which can be accepted even if there be only a partial understanding of what the words imply. But what is the truth behind the statement in Ephesians 4:10, a statement which summarizes all that the Scriptures have to say regarding Christ's post resurrection glory, to the effect that He "ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things"? The relatively frequent mention, in the New Testament, of his ascension and of his participation in the "fullness" which is otherwise ascribed to the Father makes clear that these are no casual words: they are indicative of a fundamental truth.

The elementary statement that Christ since his ascension is seated at the right hand of God is a figure of speech which provides a convenient visual image to the mind but does no more than sketch a very broad outline of the basic truth involved. No instructed Christian nowadays believes that God exists in the form of a venerable aged king seated upon a great throne set somewhere in the midst of the stellar heavens, with the Lord Christ eternally passive upon a somewhat lesser throne beside him. It may be a closer approach to the reality to picture him as a radiantly glorious being "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto," but even so we cannot with our human minds hope to formulate a picture which comes anywhere near the truth. The nature of the Divine Creator remains for us an impenetrable mystery. And to some extent the Person of Christ must share that mystery. We should no longer think of him in the form of the Man who was crucified, rather as the "Lord that Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Pet. 3:18 N.E.B. and R.S.V.) partaker of the Divine glory.

"Far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." (Eph. 4:10). This is a more profound and comprehensive truth than the simple and matter-of-fact statement in 1 Pet. 3:22 "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" but both texts refer to the same thing. The words of Peter are capable of interpretation in terms of space and time and open up to view a picture of Christ sharing the glory of the Father in heaven, the while He is waiting for the "due time" in human history when He is to return to earth again, and that is about the easiest manner in which human beings can grasp the great truth. St. Paul goes deeper; whether by inspiration of the Spirit, or by an inward knowledge of a nature not possessed by any other of the intellectuals of his day, and gained perhaps by reason of the "visions and revelations" which had been his experience, he was able to declare that Christ ascended not into a place inside the heavens, but outside all heavens. He goes outside the creation his own hands constructed in the beginning and that links him in a very definite manner with the omnipresence of God the Father. That is a state of being men find hard to conceive; the space and time characteristics of our environment constitute for us the only conceivable attributes of existence. Perhaps the nearest approach we can make to an understanding of St. Paul's words in this text is to reflect that just as the Word existed "with God" before anything of our material creation was brought into being and was therefore of necessity "outside" the bounds of that creation, just as the same Word came "inside" this creation in order to be made flesh for the suffering of death, so at his ascension He went outside the creation again, "far above all heavens", to be re-united with the

Father and enjoy once more the glory He had with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5). At that moment when the ascending Lord, watched by the little group of disciples on Olivet, entered into the cloud which received him out of their sight, He must of necessity have discarded the material trappings by means of which He had been able to talk and deal as man with men, and entered immediately into that condition of union with the Father in his control and government of all creation which Paul here defines as "far above all heavens, filling all things" and elsewhere in 1 Tim. 6:16 "Dwelling in the light no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see." It is from that condition He comes back into our material creation and our world at the time of "his appearing and his kingdom."

The entrance of the Son "far above all heavens" in order to "fill all things" provokes the question whether the Son did at any past time "fill all things" or was this, on the contrary, an aspect of that additional exaltation which according to Phil. 2:9 was conferred upon the Son at his ascension. The expression "fill all things" is based upon the idea of pervading or diffusing through all creation that which makes it complete. The Greek word *pleroma* which is at the root of "fill" and "fullness" in a number of related texts in the New Testament indicates the filling of a vessel or a space so that it is completely occupied. It would seem as if, basically, creation itself is not complete until the ascended Christ has been re-united with the Father and partaken of that "fullness" or all pervading power which in Col. 2:9 is expressed as an attribute of God. "For in him" (that is, Christ) "dwelleth all the fullness of the Deity bodily" ("Godhead" in this verse is a mediaeval term for Deity and a rather clumsy one) "It pleased the Father" says St. Paul again in Col. 1:9 "that in him" (in Christ) "should all fullness dwell." At the very least this declaration in Col. 2:9 means that all which makes the Father what He is, the Almighty, the Eternal, is manifest also in the Son in his embodiment of the Father toward all created beings. "I am in the Father, and the Father in me" said Jesus (John 14:10-11). It might well be therefore that the Son by whom all things were made, and without whom was not anything made that was made; the Son, who is the Father's right hand agent in all the works of creation, could not and does not finish that creative work, filling it up to completion, until He has visited earth, suffered and died, risen again, and by those things conquered and made an end of evil and sin. In such case the "filling all things" is still going on, for not until the Second Advent of Christ has finished its work of eliminating sin and sinners from all creation can it be truly said that the fullness of Christ has "filled all things". Perhaps, then, creation is not yet finished, man is still in the formative stage, and God has yet to look upon the work of the seventh creative day and pronounce it, as Genesis says He did pronounce the work of six creative days, but not, at that time, the seventh, "very good".

This is where Phil. 2:9 is apposite. "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This quite evidently implies an addition to the glory which Jesus enjoyed with the Father "before the world was"; the heavenly chorus in Rev. 4:12 "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing" indicate that. The difficulty is in conceiving the nature of that greater Name or higher exaltation which can justly be said to be the possession of the Son now which was not his before. There is an element of advance, of development, here which might not accord at first thought with the customary view of the Son, the Word of God, as already supreme over all created things at the beginning.

Does the answer lie in the realm of his conquest of sin? Explain it how we will, there is much in the philosophy of the permission of evil and its relation to the Divine purpose which is still mysterious, and there are questions posed which are still unanswered. That Divine creation, celestial and terrestrial, was sinless at the start, and that sin is a later intrusion, is fundamental to a correct understanding of the Scriptures and the nature of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That sin and evil will, one day in, history, be eliminated and all creation continue into eternity in full harmony with the ways and laws of God, is demanded alike by the vision of the prophets, the teachings of the Apostles, and our own common sense. It is inconceivable that God, who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13) could allow this marring of his own handiwork to all eternity. And that the earthly life and death of the Lord Christ was, in a manner we do not fully understand despite all our theological definitions, a necessary prelude to the overcoming and eliminating of sin from both the earthly and the heavenly worlds is also a fundamental of Scripture teaching. "... having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself ... whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. " (Col. 1:20). It might well be, therefore, that the greater glory and the higher exaltation devolving upon our Lord at his return to the heavenly courts was the glory and exaltation of sin challenged on its own ground, the power of sin overcome and conquered, the fate of evil definitely sealed, and what might yet be demonstrated to be the final phase in the progress at least of earthly creation triumphantly achieved. St. Paul did describe the nations as at one time "having, no hope, and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:12) but at the ascension of Christ that grim prospect was turned into the triumphant certainty of a glorious eternity for "whosoever will". In a very real sense, therefore, the ascension of Christ to the presence of the Father set the seal upon the work of creation and made certain in the eyes of all beholders the attainment of God's purpose in that creation. Reason enough, surely, high exaltation and a Name above every name.

Even so, there is a headship of the Father upon which the station of the Son does not infringe. St. Paul, in his famous "resurrection chapter" -- 1 Cor. 15 -- referring to the consummation when Christ shall have destroyed all sin and evil and shall have reconciled to God all who can be reached with the saving power of the Gospel, declares that "when all things are put under him (the Son) it is manifest that he (the Father) is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued under him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor. 15:27-28). There can be no dispute that the subordination of the Son to the Father is indicated in this verse: great as is his exaltation and unique as is his Name the oneness and unity of the Father and the Son still permits the difference in degree that is implied by this statement. The Father is still the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose own majesty as the Great First Cause He will by no means share with another. There seems little doubt that at the end of the Messianic Age, which all prophetic Scriptures unites in looking upon as the full end of the course of sin upon the earth, the Lord Christ relinquishes the commission which brings him to earth for the whole period of his First and Second Advents, presents the reunited human race to the Father to whom they have been reconciled, and turns as it were to manifest his Father and execute his Father's will in whatever other sphere of Divine activity is then due in the Divine purpose to be opened up.

Perhaps Eph. 2:7 contains just a hint of those future activities. "In the ages to come" writes St. Paul of the times which lie beyond the glorification of the Church with Christ, God will "show the

exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus". "Show" is a word meaning to demonstrate, manifest, give evidence. "Kindness", likewise is moral goodness, integrity, from a root word meaning virtuous. "Exceeding riches" is better read to-day as transcendent wealth. In ages yet to come God is going to demonstrate and give evidence of the transcendent wealth of his own grace and favor, of his own moral goodness and integrity in the evident exercise of that same goodness and integrity toward the Church of Christ which He has taken out from amongst mankind. But to whom is the demonstration directed? By that time all mankind will themselves already have become subjects of that same goodness and integrity and have received of the surpassing wealth of his favor. They will already have received of the ministrations of Christ and the Church during the long period of the Messianic Age then ended. The conclusion -is almost irresistible that St. Paul had in mind other races of intelligent beings yet unborn, creations which the Most High has not yet brought into existence, the subjects of purposes which for aught we know may well constitute part of the original plan of God but the execution of which must needs be deferred until the dark history of sin and death has run its course and closed in a triumphant demonstration, for the benefit of all who should know life in future time, of the beneficent qualities of righteousness and the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It is hardly likely that, even on the material plane, the creative activity of God is going to be satisfied with the glory and the potentialities of life on one world out of all the immensity of this vast universe. Hardly likely that life as we know it is the only kind of life possible within the power and the purpose of God. Much more likely that in a fashion we cannot be expected to understand at this stage of our experience the fact and the record of sin and death on this planet in human history will be the means of so enlightening future created beings that none such will ever embark upon the same disastrous course;. all will be persuaded of the rightness of God's ways. And if this be so, what is more logical than to expect the Church, joined in eternal association with Christ her Lord, to become the means throughout all ages of demonstrating, and being a demonstration of, the goodness and integrity of God and the transcendent riches of his grace?

This then is our God; wise beyond all understanding, loving beyond all comprehension. In his power, infinite; in his justice, terrible toward all sin but infinitely patient toward the sinner. In the far distances of past ages He commenced to fill his creation with life; the work has as yet hardly commenced, for the basic principles upon which alone life can eternally endure have as yet only imperfectly been comprehended by those first few who have experienced life. One day in the future that comprehension will be complete, and the purpose of God will take a great step forward as life begins to fill every recess of this vast universe.

"To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him? It is he that sitteth over the sphere of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. Lift up Your eyes on high. and behold who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might. for that he is strong in power."