

## Chapter 7

---

# Exaltation

---

**B**ecause of the exaltation of Jesus after his resurrection appearances, the experience of the church with him has always been in the present tense. While the church affirms the apostolic faith of the witnesses who knew Jesus when he walked the earth, the Christian faith does not remain in the past concerning his identity and actions. As a result of his exaltation to the right hand of God, the Christian faith moves from the past to a present faith in who Jesus is and what he does. The debate between John MacArthur and Charles Ryrie over the nature of the gospel has hung on whether the exaltation of Christ represents a part of the gospel. MacArthur stresses faith in who Christ is whereas Ryrie stresses faith in what Christ did.<sup>1</sup>

Other religions affirm an ascension of people from the physical realm of earth to the spiritual realm of heaven. One of the holiest shrines of Islam is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, site of the ancient temple of Israel. From that rock the faithful of Islam believe that the prophet Mohammed ascended into heaven, mounted on his horse. The prophet Elijah of Israel was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). In these cases, and in the cases of the classic mythologies and tribal religions, the ones who ascend to heaven do so as a reward to themselves. But while the ascension of Jesus to heaven contains the element of reward for obedience, it goes beyond mere reward for him. His exaltation to the right hand of God comprises an essential element of the means of salvation to others. Furthermore, in the other stories of ascension, the characters do not die; their ascension provided a way to escape death. With Jesus, however, death comprised the necessary means to exaltation. Christianity does not deny death. Rather, it affirms a reality greater than death.

## BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Christ's exaltation to the right hand of the Father has a variety of implications that the New Testament addresses. These implications stem from his role after that exaltation. The Gospels allude to Christ's exaltation as something in the future, yet related to what he began in his earthly ministry. The rest of the New Testament views that earthly ministry of Jesus from the perspective of the present reality of his sitting at the right hand of Majesty.

### **The Gospels**

The exaltation of Christ in the Gospels cannot be separated from the messianic expectations of the people of Israel, who were looking for a great king and deliverer. The Evangelists portray Jesus as a pivotal figure who redirects the understanding of his followers from the historically captive concept of the coming kingdom as a possession of Israel to a cosmically extended assertion of the reign of God. The Gospels begin with fulfillment of the promise to Israel with the birth of the King (Matt. 2:1–12; Luke 1:32–33), and they end with the establishment of that King's reign over all creation (Matt. 28:18). Throughout his ministry, Jesus demonstrates the reality of the kingdom of God, opens the door to life in the kingdom, and begins the campaign to extend the kingdom through his servants.

*The kingdom.* Alternatively referred to as “the kingdom of God” (Luke) and “the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew), the kingdom Jesus announced went far beyond the dream of territorial independence and self-determination cherished by the people of Israel. John had preached the nearness of the kingdom for which Israel longed (Matt. 3:1–2), but when Jesus preached the nearness of the kingdom it was accompanied by healings and exorcisms (Matt. 4:17, 23; 9:35; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:36; 5:17; 8:1–3). He demonstrated that the reign of God pertained to every realm of experience, physical and spiritual. In his presence, the kingdom of God had already come, for God's full authority was expressed by the authority Jesus exercised over such things as demons (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20) and diseases. Furthermore, Jesus exercised the authority of God in teaching (Luke 4:32) and in forgiving sin (Matt. 9:2–8; Mark 2:3–12; Luke 5:24; 7:49).

The powerful demonstrations of his authority inevitably caused his critics to ask by what authority he did the things he did. Did it come from God or Satan (Matt. 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8; cf. Matt. 12:22–32; Mark 3:23–27; Luke 11:17–22)? Publicly, Jesus suggested the source of his authority by what he said about his own identity:

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

“The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand  
until I put your enemies  
under your feet.” ’

David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?” (Mark 12:35–37; cf. Matt. 22:41–46, Luke 20:41–44)

This quotation from Psalm 110:1 became for the early church the most frequently cited Scripture to describe the present majesty, power, and authority of Christ. Yet when Jesus raised the issue, it puzzled his hearers (cf. Acts 2:33–35; 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Heb. 1:3–4, 13; 10:13; 1 Peter 3:22; Rev. 4–5). That is, with their highly developed tradition of what the appearance of the kingdom must be like, the faithful Jews of first-century Palestine could not understand its coming in Jesus. That tradition was culturally related to the historical experience of Israel under the idealized King David. For Jesus to speak of the kingdom as being present within or in the midst of his audience made no sense to them (Matt. 24:37–39; Luke 17:20–21). Thus, Jesus used parables to describe the meaning of the kingdom.

To his disciples, however, and gradually to the wider audience, Jesus made clear that what Israel had hoped for would not come with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where the crowd hoped he would claim the throne of David and drive out the Romans. Instead, the expected reign of Jesus would begin when he returned to the Father. John’s Gospel frequently cites private conversations in which Jesus spoke of returning to the Father from whence he had

come (John 6:62; 7:33–36; 8:21; 16:5). Writing some years after the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, John observed that “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God” (13:3). In this vein, he recorded a portion of the prayer Jesus prayed before the guards came to arrest him: “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (17:5). The other Gospel writers agree that Jesus publicly announced his impending exaltation at his trial before the Sanhedrin where he declared, “In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64; cf. Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). John adds that when Jesus appeared before Pilate he declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

*Entering the kingdom.* Jesus clearly made the point that not everyone would be a part of the kingdom. While God had authority over all things, the kingdom and the benefits of being a part of it did not belong to everyone. Loyalty meant everything. Jesus lamented that the rich have a difficult time entering the kingdom (Matt. 19:24; Mark 10:23; Luke 18:24). Divided loyalties create a tremendous barrier to being willing to enter the kingdom. Diversions distract people from entering even though they may have intended to (Matt. 8:19–22; Luke 9:57–62).

Jesus represented himself as the door or gate to the kingdom (John 10:7–10; cf. Matt. 7:21–23; Luke 13:22–30). By virtue of his exaltation, Jesus became the intermediary who opened the way of access between finite humanity and the holy God. He would go where no one could go, but he would open the way for others to follow (John 12:26; 14:2–6). Entrance into the kingdom, therefore, depended upon how one related to the exalted Lord. In one sobering passage, Jesus declared that some people would give lip service to him as Lord and do the sort of deeds in his name that he indicated should characterize the kingdom, yet he would turn them away with the judgment, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:21–23). This passage comes shortly after his warnings about those who do good things but have wrong motives. The superficial approach to religion that fails to grasp Jesus Christ, for whatever motive, has failed to grasp the present experience of the kingdom and access to God.

Jesus said that he was the good shepherd. When the good shepherd calls, his sheep follow and they receive life. Furthermore, he declared, “no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28). Hearing and responding appropriately has an ancient warrant as the expression of faith in Scripture. Those who heard the words of Moses and placed blood on their door frames were saved from the curse that overcame Egypt (Ex. 11:1–12:30). People who had faith in God responded appropriately. Jesus said that people who respond appropriately to his words will live (Matt. 7:24–27; Luke 6:46–49; John 5:24; 8:51). He explained why this was so to his disciples at the Last Supper, when he said, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them . . . loves me [and] . . . will be loved by my Father” (John 14:21). Jesus described behavior as something that emerges from a relationship founded on love.

Entry into the kingdom means entry into a particular relationship with the One who is the kingdom. Jesus explained that “I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:20). Those who enjoy intimate relationships with the Father through the Son have life. To the eleven remaining disciples, Jesus explained that the benefits of the kingdom come through one’s experience with the exalted One who has lived through heaven and earth: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit” (15:5). The benefits of salvation come through, from, and in the One exalted to the right hand of God.

*Prayer.* Those who have this kind of intimate relationship with the exalted Christ also have access through him to God in prayer. At first, the words of Jesus sound like a grand license to have one’s wildest dreams fulfilled: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (John 15:7). Again he said, “My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (16:23), and “In that day you will ask in my name” (16:26). Rather than granting license to gratify every desire, however, Jesus invites his followers to abandon their prayers and enter into him. He invites his followers to let his words saturate them in such a way that they actually pray in his name rather than in their own name. “Knowing” Christ means everything for enjoying the benefits of the kingdom. He promised them that “in me you may

have peace” (16:33). His final prayer for believers was that “in him” they might experience unity, love, and joy (17:13–26).

As the door to the kingdom, Jesus provides the means for believers to experience it in the present, before they die. The benefits of salvation are experienced “in him,” which necessarily suggests a mystic relationship.

*Extension of the kingdom.* Having demonstrated his own authority over sickness, disease, and oppressive spiritual forces, Jesus then gave his disciples that authority to perform the same ministry in his name (Matt. 10:1; Mark 3:14; Luke 9:1–2). When he sent his disciples out on their mission, he charged them to preach a simple message: “The kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt. 10:7). He instructed them to perform the same healings and exorcisms that had accompanied his declaration of the same message. And when they returned from the mission, they marveled: “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (Luke 10:17).

Jesus extended the kingdom through those who served him. He taught his followers that they would do even greater things than he had done in his ministry, “because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). He entrusted his followers with authority to act in his absence and to extend his work (Luke 10:19). He left them with the “keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:19) and charged them to make disciples of all nations, based on his resurrected status: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18–19). The followers of Jesus, and all those who came to have faith in him, received a commission to act as servants or stewards of Jesus, their master, in his absence. The exaltation would create a new basis for relationship with him, who expected his followers to live as though he might return at any moment (Matt. 24:43–51; 25:1–13; Mark 13:33–37; Luke 12:35–48), yet who promised that even in his absence he would always be with them (Matt. 28:20).

Because of the uniqueness of the relationship between Jesus and his followers that he promised would transcend time, space, and physical separation, Jesus warned his disciples that they would find themselves facing persecution and death “on account of me” (Matt. 13:9–37; cf. Matt. 24:9–14; Luke 21:12–18). This expectation contrasts vividly with his warning that at his arrest the disciples would flee. After the exaltation, Jesus could offer to the disciples a quality

of relationship that would put all other issues of life in perspective. Inclusion in the kingdom would not only affect how the followers of Jesus approached death, it would also affect how they approached life. The kingdom of God would become apparent in how the servants behaved toward one another and toward others in the absence of their Master (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27).

*Observations.* All of the Gospels deal with the theme of the exaltation of Christ. The Synoptic Gospels, oriented toward Jewish Christians, use the vocabulary of the historical tradition surrounding the kingdom of David. The Gospel of John, however, written for a Hellenistic audience unfamiliar with the traditions of Israel, strikes the same chords but stresses the relationship possible with God as a result of the exaltation.

### **General Apostolic Writings**

While the Gospels have the benefit of hindsight in describing the good news of Jesus, they present the exaltation as an expectation. The rest of the New Testament, however, presents the exaltation as a present reality and experience of the church. The vocabulary of the apostles takes a shift from the Gospels. They say little about the kingdom in their letters, but they stress in various ways the nature of the present relationship between believers and their exalted Lord. Paul in particular shares the vocabulary of John's Gospel and the significance of being "in" Christ. The exaltation of Christ had tremendous implications for life and death to his early followers.

As Jesus had suggested, his followers did face death on account of him, Stephen being the first. This martyr also supplied the church with its first witness of the exaltation, for as he appeared before the Sanhedrin he declared, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). An experience with the exalted Christ resulted in the conversion of Paul (9:3–6). The church also experienced a continuation of healings and exorcisms when done "in the name" of Jesus Christ (3:6, 16; 4:10, 30; 9:34; 16:18). The apostles appealed to the exaltation in at least 280 passages in their writings, excluding the Gospels and Revelation.<sup>2</sup> Several major themes appear in the writings: the present power and authority of Christ, access to God through Christ, faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ, relationship with Christ, the mediator of the benefits of salvation, Christ as a helper, revelation, the church, service for Christ, and Christian behavior.

*Authority of Christ.* In his Pentecostal sermon, Peter declared that the claim for which Jesus had been put to death had now occurred: Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God and is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36). The knowledge that a benevolent being exercised authority over every other force in creation provided a compelling reason to give thoughtful consideration to the gospel. His followers claimed that he had power and authority over life, death, angels, demons, the present, the future, all spiritual forces that people of the first century understood to surround them and affect them, as well as the whole created, physical order (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:20–23; Phil. 2:9–11; 3:21; Col. 1:15–18; 2:10; Heb. 2:7–9; 1 Peter 3:22; Rev. 1:5; 6:1–17; 8:6–9:20).

By virtue of his relationship to the Father, Christ has the power to bring everything in submission to himself. The ambiguity over the identity of Christ that perplexed people in the Gospels before his death does not appear in the other apostolic writings, written in the experience of the exaltation. Paul, who had held the coats of those who stoned Stephen for bearing witness to the exaltation, boldly testified of “Christ, who is God over all” (Rom. 9:5). In Revelation, Christ the sacrificial Lamb shares the throne as well as the praise, honor, glory, and power of God (Rev. 4–5; cf. Heb. 1:3–4). All the forces of earth might oppose Christ, “but the Lamb will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and Kings of kings” (Rev. 17:14). The early church, even in severe persecution, experienced the power and authority of Christ enough to believe that he would defeat his enemies (1 Cor. 15:24–28; Heb. 10:13). Christ has the power to save because he sits at the center of the throne of God (Rev. 7:17).

*Access to God.* Through his exaltation to the right hand of the Father, Jesus provided immediate access to God for his followers (Rom. 4:23–5:1; Eph. 2:8; 3:12; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:14–16). This aspect of the gospel provided poignant meaning for those who thought of God as distant and unapproachable, as the Platonic view of God maintained. After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, marking an end of the religious rituals established by Moses with its priests and sacrifices, this element of the gospel also

provided poignant meaning for those Jews who heard that they could have access to God through the priesthood of Christ.

Hebrews elaborates on how Christ continues eternally as a priest on behalf of those who have faith in him (Heb. 5:1–10; 6:20). Jesus Christ is a priest who meets human need, for he possesses the holiness and purity that everyone else lacks. Having given himself as a sacrifice to God in our place, he is now seated at the right hand of God to open access to God through him (7:26–28; 8:1–2; 9:11–28; 10:12–18). Those who have come to Jesus may now worship and praise God through him (12:24; 13:15).

The apostolic writings are ripe with the conviction that the followers of Jesus could enter into the presence of God and worship him through their mystic relationship with Jesus Christ, who had returned to the glory of the Father. They gave thanks to God “through” Jesus and “in” his name (Rom. 1:8; 7:25; Eph. 5:19; Col. 1:3; 3:17). They offered their prayers, blessings, and praises to God through Jesus (Rom. 16:25–27; 1 Peter 2:5; 4:11; Jude 25). Jesus made priests, soothsayers, necromancers, astrologists, oracles, and the like obsolete. Rather than relying on the occult or the cult to make contact with the powers and dominions of the universe, Christians can come into the presence of the Creator God through Jesus Christ our Lord, his Son, who lives eternally with him (Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1).

*Relationship with Christ.* The necessity for relationship with Christ in order for the exaltation to affect someone positively cannot be stressed enough. Some exorcists tried to invoke the name of Jesus to perform the same sort of wonders the apostles performed, but they lacked the proper relationship with Jesus Christ to be endowed with his power. They sought to use Jesus rather than to be used by Jesus (Acts 19:13–16). The fact that Jesus died, rose again, and was exalted did not in any way diminish for the early Christians their conviction that they could have a present relationship with him because those baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ (Gal. 3:27). God, in fact, has called people into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ the Lord (1 Cor. 1:9). Fellowship with him opens the door to fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:3).

Knowing the Lord Jesus Christ puts everything else in life in perspective. Paul traded preferment, prestige, prominence, and

power for a life of privation after he came face to face with the exalted Christ on the Damascus road. Everything that had mattered most seemed unimportant “compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:7–8). Thus, knowing Jesus Christ becomes the means of escaping the corruption of the world (2 Peter 2:20).

*Benefits of salvation.* The early church learned that the benefits of salvation came *through* and *in the name* of the Lord Jesus Christ as a present reality. Among the benefits that come through him are:

salvation from wrath	Rom. 5:9
reconciliation	Rom. 5:10
eternal life	Rom. 5:21
victory	Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:57
cleansing, sanctification, justification	1 Cor. 6:11
life and all else	1 Cor. 8:6
confidence	2 Cor. 3:4
strength	Phil. 4:13
grace and peace	2 Peter 1:2
forgiveness of sins	1 John 2:12
repentance	Acts 5:31

While the benefits of salvation come *through* the relationship with Christ, the experience of salvation occurs *in* the relationship with Christ. Salvation is not a commodity that early Christians accumulated and kept safely stashed. They experienced salvation in their relationship with Jesus Christ. He has eternal life, and those who live in him share his life (Rom. 6:23; 1 John 5:11–12). Christians experience grace to the extent that they are mindful of their relationship *in* Christ (1 Cor. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2:1). Likewise, joy comes as a byproduct of the relationship believers find in Christ (Phil. 3:1; 4:4, 10). The experience of faith, love, and hope come in relationship with Christ (1 Thess. 1:3). Victory, freedom, and equality become real experiences in Christ (1 Cor. 11:11; 2 Cor. 2:14; Gal. 2:4; 3:28).

The exalted Christ is the one in whom the benefits of salvation are found as an added feature of knowing him (2 Tim. 2:10). God has blessed the followers of Christ with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Standing at a distance from Christ by neglecting the relationship, however, deprives a person of the benefits that could be theirs. Such spiritual experiences as grace and peace meant a great deal to the early church that endured hardship and suffering, but those believers found a constant source of grace and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; 6:18; Eph. 1:2; 6:23; Phil. 1:2; 4:23; 2 Thess. 1:2; 3:18; 1 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4, Philem. 3, 25; 1 Peter 5:14; 2 John 3). While “peace” had from antiquity served as a greeting and benediction in the ancient Near East, the church affirmed that it came only from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*The Lord as helper.* In his vision of the exalted Lord, the martyred Stephen received the grace and the peace necessary to die (Acts 7:55–56). The Lord is a helper in desperate circumstances, even when he does not make the circumstances go away. Rather, he uses the circumstances to draw the believer closer to himself. While the early Christians sought deliverance from trouble, they found that Christ provides strength to endure troubles (Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Thess. 3:12–13; 2 Thess. 2:16–17; 3:3; 2 Tim. 4:17). They also found that Christ rescues people from the trials and attacks that might keep them from him (2 Tim. 1:12; 3:11; 4:18; 2 Peter 2:9). Because of his life in the flesh, the exalted Christ knows what it feels like to endure trials, and he is able to help (Heb. 2:17–18; 4:14–16).

*Corporate relationship to Christ.* As the exalted Lord, Christ draws his followers together into relationship with him and with one another. Metaphysically, he is the head of the body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12–31; Eph. 3:6; 4:4–16; 5:22–24, 29–30; Col. 1:18), the foundation of the building (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:4), and a king-priest over a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). These different metaphors describe the corporate relationship of the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ as his church. Christians have a corporate relationship with and responsibility for each other by virtue of their relationship to the exalted Lord, the quality of which depends on the faithfulness of that relationship

with Christ. The metaphors of body, building, and priesthood speak of the high value of unity that Christ expects of his followers. This quality was so important to those who first knew Christ that Paul declared that those who are divisive are not serving the Lord (Rom. 16:17–18; cf. 15:5).

The quality of community life in Christ depends on a constant awareness of his authority in the midst of the church. In the salutation of the apostolic letters to his churches, Paul reminded the faithful saints that the definitive reason for being a group rested in their experience of being “in” the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). As such, they were to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). When the apostles appealed to the churches in the matter of their relationship and unity, they appealed “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:10). While the churches were expected to exercise discipline over the behavior of members of the body, they were charged to do so in the spirit of carrying “each other’s burdens” (1 Cor. 5:4–5; Gal. 6:2). Through his church, Christ offers a place of acceptance and belonging, free of favoritism or distinction, where everyone can have a place (Gal. 3:26–28; Eph. 6:6–9; Philem. 16; James 2:1). The extent to which a church corresponds to this expressed will of Christ depends on the extent to which the members recognize the present authority of Christ in their midst.

The apostles had a profound understanding that holy behavior or godly living did not come from the observation of rules or regulations. Rather, they constantly pointed to the living Lord and urged Christians to imitate Jesus Christ, who is exalted (Phil. 2:1–11). They encouraged believers to live life in a way that would please him, conscious that their life was hidden in Christ (Rom. 14:5–9; 1 Cor. 4:17; 6:13–17; 7:32–35; 2 Cor. 10:5; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 1:20–26; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:21; 1 Peter 3:16; 2 Peter 1:8). Christian behavior should be governed by the reality that Christ has been exalted:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. . . . And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. . . . (Col. 3:1, 17)

*Extending the church.* God chose to make known what Christ has accomplished through the church. Paul called this plan the “mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God” (Eph. 3:7–11). To lead in the oversight and extension of the church, Christ appointed leaders (Eph. 4:11; cf. Rom. 12:6–8). Paul and Peter both taught that Christians should recognize those in authority under the Lordship of Christ (1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Peter 2:13). The authority of the New Testament letters rests on the recognition by the early church that Christ had in fact designated apostles whom he sent to help accomplish his mission through the churches. Thus, the letters regularly begin with an acknowledgment that the authority for the letter rests in the commission of Christ. They wrote as apostles of Christ Jesus (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1–2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:6; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1), who regarded themselves and other Christians as his servants or ministers and who carried out his instructions (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 4:1; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 1:1, 7; Col. 4:7, 12; 1 Tim. 1:12–14; 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:24; James 1:1; Jude 1; Rev. 1:1).

The apostles gave the church instructions they received through visions, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and by angels (Acts 9:10–16; 10:1–16; 11:27–30; 12:6–10; 13:1–3; 16:6–10; 21:10–11; 22:17–21; 23:11; 26:12–19; 2 Cor. 12:1–7). These instructions came with the authority of the Lord Jesus by way of revelation (1 Thess. 4:2; Rev. 1:1). In the absence of a clear instruction from the Lord, however, the apostles offered their own opinion after stating that it did not have the authority of the Lord’s command (1 Cor. 7:25). They also taught that the Lord would give insight and understanding with respect to his will for individual Christians (Eph. 1:17; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:7). The Lord confirmed the message and authority of the apostles by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders (Acts 2:43; 3:1–10; 5:12–16; 6:8; 8:4–8; 9:17–18, 32–43; 13:9–12; 14:3, 8–10; 16:16–18; 19:11–12; 20:7–12; 28:1–10).

*Faithfulness and suffering.* The martyrs of the early church did not die for an idea or a philosophy. They died because the exalted Christ is Lord and more real to them than any suffering might be. Their faith rested not in the past but in the present, for they entrusted their lives to Christ. The gospel for them consisted in more than mere words about what Jesus had done to save them; the gospel

introduced them to Jesus, who lives as Lord. That being the case, they stood firm for the person they knew rather than a religious ideal they espoused.

Esoteric theology had no staying power in the early church, and the apostles warned Christians against the sort of speculative theology that would lead people to “lose connection with the Head” (Col. 2:16–23). By standing firm in the Lord (cf. Eph. 6:12–14), people can face the troubles and hardships of life, for the exalted Christ is more than a religious affirmation. He gives peace, strength, and grace to those who remain in him. Faith for the early Christians was not “about” Jesus; it was “in” Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15; Philem. 5; 1 Peter 1:8–10; 1 John 2:24, 28).

## Conclusions

The exaltation of Christ places the suffering and frustrations of humans in much larger perspective. In his life in the flesh, Jesus Christ experienced the dark side of life, but he persevered for the joy that lay before him in the exaltation (Heb. 12:2; cf. Phil. 2:6–11). By his supreme authority and power over all things visible and invisible, he can protect those within his kingdom from all the things that superstition and religion hurl at people to keep them in the bondage of fear. By his life, he makes it possible for people to experience the benefits of salvation even in the midst of turmoil. He creates a community of love and support through which he expresses himself by those sensitive to his presence. He brings people into the very presence of God even when they thought God was too distant, holy, and austere ever to know. He makes the kingdom of heaven more real than the kingdom of this world. He provides insight and understanding for living while providing strength to carry on in the difficult times of life. In Christ the early Christians found a Lord worth dying for.

## HISTORICAL/THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

From the death of Jesus for declaring before the Sanhedrin that he would be exalted to the right hand of God to the death of Stephen while testifying of his vision of the exalted Jesus, the early church identified martyrdom with faithfulness to the living Lord Jesus.

Christians could face the death of martyrdom because they believed Christ reigned as King more than they feared torture and death. Martyrdom made possible a special relationship with Christ that included visions from him, grace to endure torture, peace, and immediate presence with him at death.

### **Martyrdom**

Though local cases of martyrdom occurred in the first century, official persecution began under Trajan in 111 when he sent Pliny to Bithynia to establish order. The emperor's abolition of all clubs or societies, which he perceived as hotbeds of political foment, directly threatened the meeting of Christians, who did not enjoy official recognition as a legal religion. To prove they were not seditious, Christians were expected to offer incense to the emperor's idol and curse Christ. Symean, bishop of Jerusalem, and Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, died in this persecution.<sup>3</sup>

As an encouragement in times of persecution, the church began preserving accounts of the deaths of those who died for their devotion to Christ. *The Martyrdom of Ignatius* preserves the early attitude of the church that those who belong to "Christ the King of heaven" have nothing to fear from people or spirits.<sup>4</sup> Those who suffered as martyrs would come before the face of Christ and inherit their place in heaven by virtue of their confession of Christ unto death.<sup>5</sup> After the beasts devoured Ignatius in the public arena of Rome, his followers gathered what bones of him remained and carried them to Antioch, where his martyrdom was commemorated every year on December 20. Distraught over the death of Ignatius and fearful for themselves, the church at Antioch prayed for some assurance from the Lord. In response to their prayers, several members of the Antioch community reported visions of Ignatius in the presence of the Lord, praying for the church.<sup>6</sup> Thus, at an early date, Christians believed that the martyrs stood in a special relationship to Christ and that they continued to be concerned for those left behind.

Local persecutions erupted throughout the second century. Among the more notable martyrs, Polycarp died by fire about 155. In *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* the understanding appears that all martyrdoms occur by the will of God.<sup>7</sup> In this account of the death of Polycarp and his companions, the martyrs did not cry out under

severe lashing, showing that “the most noble martyrs of Christ in that hour under torture were absent from the flesh, or rather, that the Lord was at hand and was conversing with them.”<sup>8</sup> The exalted Christ embraced the martyrs in their suffering, and they exchanged an hour’s torture for eternal life.<sup>9</sup>

Visions played a major role in the martyrdom of the early Christians. Three days before his arrest, Polycarp reported a vision in which his pillow was burning up. He interpreted this experience to mean that he was being called upon to die by fire.<sup>10</sup> Also connected with the martyrdom of Polycarp was a voice from heaven overheard by other Christians as the moment of death approached, which said, “Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.”<sup>11</sup> These revelations from the exalted Christ formed the context of Polycarp’s response to the proconsul when called upon to take the oath to Caesar as Lord and to curse Christ:

I have served him eighty-six years and in no way has he dealt unjustly with me; so how can I blaspheme my king who saved me?<sup>12</sup>

The church held the martyrs in special honor “because of their incomparable loyalty to their own King and Teacher.”<sup>13</sup> The church collected the bones of Polycarp after his burning and celebrated his martyrdom each year at the repository of his bones as a means of strengthening those who would be martyred in the future.<sup>14</sup>

Justin Martyr died in Rome under Marcus Aurelius in 163 after Crescens the Cynic denounced him. Apparently professional jealousy played a part in the charges since Justin had defeated Crescens in public debate about the Christian faith.<sup>15</sup> In his testimony before the prefect, Justin affirmed both his faith in the Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose appearance the prophets had foretold, and the certain expectation that those who die for faith in him will ascend to heaven and be saved at his universal judgment seat.<sup>16</sup>

A number of Christians died in Lyons and Vienne in 177 during the festival of the three Gauls as an offering to Rome and the emperors. A dozen Christians were beheaded in Carthage in 180 during the reign of Commodus. The governor of Cappadocia instituted a fierce persecution during the same period after his wife became a Christian. As the number of martyrs increased, the practice spread of

commemorating the faithfulness of those who died for Christ on the anniversary of their death. These ceremonies and the growing body of literature describing the martyrdoms brought a heightened sense of the importance of faithfulness to Christ the Lord.

The third century began ferociously for the church, with provincial persecutions in Egypt and North Africa during the reign of Septimus Severus in 202. Origen's father was a victim of this persecution in Alexandria while Perpetua and her friends died in Carthage. *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* describes the visions these martyrs received to prepare them for their ordeal.<sup>17</sup> This account also describes how the martyrs escaped the pain of their martyrdom because of their presence with Christ.<sup>18</sup>

In the face of growing persecutions, Tertullian wrote two treatises designed to encourage Christians not to flee martyrdom. He commended the ascetic life because it prepares the body for the hardship of suffering.<sup>19</sup> Rather than fear death, Christians should face death by martyrdom as the means to divine reward and heavenly glory.<sup>20</sup> Tertullian taught that persecutions were not merely allowed by God, but were actually the will and purpose of God:

For what is the issue of persecution, what other result comes of it, but the approving and rejecting of faith, in regard to which the Lord will certainly sift His people? Persecution, by means of which one is declared either approved or rejected, is just the judgment of the Lord.<sup>21</sup>

Through persecution Christ proves those who belong to him. Rather than experiencing fear of renouncing Christ when brought before the authorities, Christians should face martyrdom boldly, knowing that they would receive power to render a faithful witness.<sup>22</sup> Christ, therefore, rejects those who refuse to suffer persecution for his name's sake, for refusal of persecution is refusal to believe or follow the Lord.<sup>23</sup> Willingness to share the sufferings of Christ comes from faith in the Lord himself, "who will stand by us to aid us in suffering as well as to be our mouth when we are put to the question."<sup>24</sup>

Local persecutions continued under Maximianus (235–238) and Philip the Arabian (244–249), but the great universal persecution began in 250 at the command of the Emperor Decius. Bishop Fabian of Rome and Alexander of Jerusalem were martyred, but

some bishops like Cyprian of Carthage went into hiding. Origen was imprisoned but later released. Another group, represented by Bishop Eudaemon of Smyrna, renounced Christ. This persecution was renewed under Gallus and Valerian. Sixtus II of Rome and Cyprian died in 258 along with many others who remained faithful to their confession of Christ. This persecution ended under the reign of Gallienus, who granted Christianity official status as *religio licita* in 261.<sup>25</sup>

Following the Decian Persecution, Gregory Thaumaturgus stressed the faithfulness of the martyrs in his evangelization of the pagans. The remains of the martyrs were brought to the services in their honor and the commemorations took on a festival atmosphere. According to Gregory of Nyssa, the former Gregory permitted them to enjoy themselves at the commemoration of the holy martyrs, to take their ease, and to amuse themselves, since life would become more serious and earnest naturally in process of time, as the Christian faith came to assume more control of it.<sup>26</sup>

The Decian persecution raised an enormous disciplinary problem for the church concerning those who had not kept the faith under persecution. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, before his own martyrdom followed a policy of letting the severity of the penance fit the nature of the lapse. Fortunatus held that no discipline at all should be exercised. Novatian, a presbyter of Rome, on the other hand, took the position that no one who failed under persecution could be readmitted to fellowship. The dispute resulted in the election of two rival bishops to succeed Cyprian: Fortunatus and Maximus, a follower of Novatian.<sup>27</sup>

Persecution returned in 298 when Galerius purged his armies of all Christian officers. He then pressured Emperor Diocletian to renew the persecution of the church, though local officials had broad discretion in how to punish those who violated the prohibition of Christian worship. This persecution produced another controversy similar to the Novatian one regarding the status of bishops or lesser clergy who had handed over sacred books to the authorities. The controversy erupted in 312 when Felix of Aptunga, a bishop who had handed over books, consecrated Caecilian as bishop of Carthage. The strict disciplinarians consecrated Majorinus in opposition and upon his death, Donatus to succeed him. The Donatists

argued that since Felix had lapsed during persecution, none of the sacraments he administered had validity. Thus, the consecration of Caecilian had no validity. The consensus view of the church held that the sacraments had validity in and of themselves, but the Donatists persisted in rejecting the validity of sacraments administered by those clergy who had failed to bear faithful witness to Christ under persecution.<sup>28</sup>

Martyrdom and discipline represent two different kinds of issues implied by the status of Christ as exalted Lord. As king he deserves total loyalty, and as priest he enables total loyalty. As head of the body, however, he upholds the church and disciplines it. With the end of persecution and the official recognition that came with the reign of Constantine, martyrdom for Christ became a fading memory, but the problems of the administration of the body of Christ became a major preoccupation as the division between an Eastern Church and a Western Church became more apparent.

What did survive as a legacy of the persecutions was a veneration of special holy people who were regarded as holding special status with Christ. The tombs or places of martyrdom held special significance as places of grace, especially on the saint's holy day of martyrdom. Thus, the original intent of encouraging the church to endure suffering ended. What had shown the nearness of the exalted Lord now created an impression of the distance of the Lord, which the martyrs could mediate.

The willingness to face martyrdom because of love for Christ did not end, however, in the fourth century. Christians throughout the centuries from Japan and China to Russia and Germany to South Africa and Brazil have accepted martyrdom for Christ. This willingness emerges from what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the quest "for Jesus Christ himself," and it is driven by the concern for "what Jesus Christ himself wants of us."<sup>29</sup> Bonhoeffer's thoughts on martyrdom reflect the thesis of this book: that at different times and places, different elements of the gospel have a stronger appeal to people. In place of the traditional Lutheran concern for forgiveness, during the rise of Hitler, Bonhoeffer found powerful attraction to "the kingly rule of Christ."<sup>30</sup> Rather than repudiating grace, Bonhoeffer insisted that one only experiences grace when one gives up all to follow Christ. This view did not constitute a "works" solution for

Bonhoeffer because he believed that “*only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.*”<sup>31</sup> In this sense, grace comes most to the martyr in their hour of trouble, because they truly believe in Christ who stands beside them.<sup>32</sup>

As Mediator Christ calls people to follow him, and he cuts them off from everything else. All else in heaven and earth can only be experienced properly in and through him.<sup>33</sup> Because of his mediation, however, relationships with others become a true possibility as well as genuine prayer to God. By this act of mediation, Christ creates the church, his body, through which people experience salvation. Bonhoeffer does not mean that they experience salvation by virtue of joining an organization; rather, he stresses that salvation is the corporate experience of those “taken up in the Body of Jesus.”<sup>34</sup> In this regard the church is not an institution, but a person, the real presence of Christ.<sup>35</sup>

As Lord of his own body, Christ also offers to some a unique privilege to share the sufferings of the cross:

But there is a far greater form of suffering than this, one which bears an ineffable promise. For while it is true that only the suffering of Christ himself can atone for sin, and that his suffering and triumph took place “for us,” yet to some, who are not ashamed of their fellowship in his body, he vouchsafes the immeasurable grace and privilege of suffering “for him,” as he did for them.<sup>36</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer himself met a martyr’s death on April 9, 1945.

## **Monasticism**

Monasticism developed in the closing period of the persecutions of the early church. Asceticism had its place within the churches before monasticism developed, but as a movement apart from the life of the congregation, monasticism had its great impetus toward the end of the third century on the eve of the last great persecution of Diocletian. Anthony (b. 251) of Egypt inspired many to follow the life of a hermit monk as the monk succeeded the martyr as the model of obedience and devotion to the Lord.<sup>37</sup>

Several of the fathers prepared the way for monasticism to succeed martyrdom as a way of totally following Christ. Clement had

seen martyrdom as a special calling for a few and not the model for Christian perfection. The broad model consisted in a willingness to die for Christ made manifest in how one lived.<sup>38</sup> Christians may bear witness to Christ by living for him as well as by dying for him. Those not called to die may still achieve martyrdom by the excellence of their daily lives, whereby they conform themselves to the teachings of Christ. To this concept, Origen added the notion that one pursued perfection in the imitation of Christ through asceticism and not just through suffering unto death.<sup>39</sup> Tertullian, Cyprian, and Commodian also provided undergirding to the developing ideal of "spiritual martyrdom" through living for Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Spiritual martyrdom required both the desire of martyrdom and the experience of some form of suffering that the martyr bore patiently out of love for God through the example of Christ. This suffering might take the form of an ascetic practice, such as was recommended by Athanasius, Pachomius, Macarius, and Diodochus of Photice; adoption of a lifestyle such as virginity, as recommended by Methodius of Philippi, Jerome, Basil, and Ambrose; or the experience of some form of externally inflicted malice, such as envy, hatred, or ill will.<sup>41</sup> The Irish saints of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries included "white martyrs" (those who renounced the secular world), "green martyrs" (those who practiced penance and self-mortification), but no "red martyrs" (those who died for Christ).<sup>42</sup>

The monks of the southern Egyptian desert who followed the example of Anthony led in the conversion of pagan Egypt, often through the demonstration of the miraculous. Accounts of the miraculous often coincided with those figures who devoted their lives as an offering to their Lord, whether among the pagans of south Egypt, Ireland, Gaul, or Germany. Evangelism in these encounters frequently occurred as a clash between Christ and the demonic forces feared by the local people.<sup>43</sup> The miracles surrounding the Desert Fathers fell into four categories: prophetic knowledge, healing, dreams and visions, and nature miracles. Their breadth indicates Christ's power and deity in all realms.<sup>44</sup> The prophetic knowledge and the dreams and visions have a striking similarity to the experience of the martyrs. The victory over the demonic came in confessing the Lordship of Christ: "I have Christ as my King, whom I adore without ceasing; you are not my king."<sup>45</sup> Many converts came

to faith through the example and ministry of these ascetic monks who bore witness to Christ by offering their lives and by manifesting Christ's power.

The approach to monasticism offered by Pachomius (d. 346) proceeded from an understanding that the physical body and the human spirit cannot be divided from one another. Thus, the ascetic practices he advocated did not represent a dualism that sees the body as evil. Rather, his approach respected the dynamic relationship between body and spirit.<sup>46</sup> Pachomius's conversion was strongly influenced by his observation of the character of love among Christians, and his development of communal monasticism reflects a concern for the community of salvation. Pachomius experienced visions and voices that led to his embrace of asceticism and the establishment of a monastic community that would serve as God's instrument of salvation for others.<sup>47</sup> Leaving the hermit model of Anthony, Pachomius established a Christian village that exercised discipline as the members supported and helped one another offer themselves to Christ. This approach to monasticism quickly spread to Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Cappadocia and Pontus, where it interested Basil.

Basil the Great (c. 330–379) and Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 330–c. 390) *decided to follow the ascetic life of retirement about 350*. Together they developed two *Rules* to regulate monastic life. *The Rule of Basil* serves as the foundation for the monastic life of the Eastern Church to this day. Martin of Tours probably established the first monastery in Gaul about 360. A monastic community developed around Jerome in Bethlehem about 390. Augustine intended to follow the monastic life, and he established a monastery in Hippo, though duty compelled him to accept the ministry of bishop.

While the ascetic life of the monks seemed to stress the outward form of human activity, the experience of the monks placed stress on the grace of Christ. He alone supplied the grace to follow a life that crucified itself daily. This experience of grace corresponded to a martyr's experience of grace in the hour of trial.<sup>48</sup> Monasticism had an equally strong attraction for women. Female asceticism had a long history in the church before the monastic movement began. Virgins consecrated to God wore a veil, just like married women, as a mark of their relationship to Christ. The virgins had already

established communities when Anthony entrusted his sister to one such house about 280.<sup>49</sup> Mary, the sister of Pachomius, established a convent near his monastery at Tabennisi about 330. Paula founded three convents near Bethlehem about 389 with the support of Jerome, and Melania founded a convent on the Mount of Olives about the same time.<sup>50</sup>

By the time of Cassian (d. 433) monasteries began to show the earliest signs of reorientation from the obedient community of spiritual martyrs to the contemplative community of learning that some monasteries assumed in later centuries. The monks under Martin of Tours did no labor except for the copying of books. By the sixth century it had become customary for monasteries to be founded by wealthy patrons, who endowed them with land and money, leaving the monks and nuns free to follow a contemplative life. As a result of the new relationship, large numbers of pagan laborers on the monastic farms of Gaul converted to Christianity or paid a fine if they did not.<sup>51</sup>

Rome used the monks to evangelize the Celtic north. To modern-day Ireland, Holland, Britain, and Germany the monks went as witnesses for Christ. The monks of the Eastern Church likewise carried the gospel into the Slavic lands beyond the Danube. In Ireland the saints were those who had led in the evangelization of the island. Because of the wonders they performed, they were judged to have a special relationship with God, by which they could intercede for their allies. The later monks promoted the shrines of the saints, which they administered as holy places for pilgrimages, building on the old Celtic belief in sacred places.

Stories of the miraculous abound in the accounts of the monks who brought the gospel into lands where the religious worldview led people to give their allegiance to the most powerful god.<sup>52</sup> After the initial work of evangelizing, however, the monasteries became centers of learning as monastic schools developed to educate the new monks from Celtic society.<sup>53</sup> From the sixth century on, the kings, bishops, lords, and popes in the West made decisions about monastic life, for the monastery and convent had become important institutions of the society they had been founded to escape.<sup>54</sup> *The Rule of St. Benedict* became the standard for monasticism in the West during this period.

Benedict (c. 480–c. 547) began his monastic career as a hermit, but the miraculous stories circulating about him drew a group of followers, for whom he developed his *Rule*.<sup>55</sup> It contains a guide to discipline within the community, but it seems to have had an intentional goal of providing a consistent ecclesiastical government rather than allowing for the earlier monastic vision of freely imitating Christ.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Benedict's *Rule* formed a covenant for the community following Christ and a basis for monastic government under Christ the King. In this sense it differs markedly from the rules of Basil, Pachomius, or Cassian, which were used in the Eastern Church and which dealt almost exclusively with the ascetic and moral virtues.<sup>57</sup>

Unfortunately, the monasteries during the Carolingian period became a base for royal power, and the abbots became de facto royal office-holders. From this time on, the history of monasticism in the West is the story of a series of reforming movements that called the religious orders back to their original ideal of following Christ and of being useful for the “winning of souls.”<sup>58</sup> Whether the Cluniac reforms of the eighth century or the emergence of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century, the ideal of giving one's life completely to Christ has continued to emerge in different fashions from ancient times to the twentieth-century streets of Calcutta and the ministry of Mother Teresa.

### **Church Government**

The recognition of Christ as head of the church has resulted in a variety of expressions of church government. In the thousand years following the peace that Constantine brought to Christianity, the church developed a highly sophisticated organizational structure. The Eastern church and the Western church developed along different lines, largely because of the different political and social realities they faced. With the collapse of the Western empire, the bishop of Rome took on responsibilities normally exercised by a secular ruler. The Eastern church, on the other hand, lived with the constant intervention of the emperor for a thousand years. While the bishop of Rome had enjoyed priority of honor among the five patriarchates (Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople), he enjoyed priority of power as well in the West. The

universal patriarch of Constantinople has never held such a position among the national Orthodox churches.

At its worst moments, the hierarchy of the church represented ambition, corruption, and political intrigue. At its best moments, however, the hierarchy of the church, East and West, sought to honor the Lord and advance his kingdom. The missionaries sent out by the pope and the patriarch evangelized western and eastern Europe. In most cathedrals, the ever-present reminder of Christ the Lord, *Christus Pantokrator*, gazed down in fresco from the ceiling in case an overly ambitious prelate should forget whose church it was.

The kingly rule of Christ in the church erupted as a major issue in the West during the Protestant Reformation. In the English Reformation in particular, the issue of his rule in the church led to a variety of splinterings. The Puritan argument could be rendered with the assertion that if one will not have Christ as King, one cannot have him as Savior.

The concept of the kingly rule of Christ took two major directions among the Puritans. One concept, which stressed the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers, encouraged individual conversion, whereby a person came personally under the rule of Christ. The other concept, which stressed the rule of Christ in the church, led to controversy over worship and discipline. Those who went into separation tended to stress the latter concept, while men like Richard Sibbes stressed the former. The two emphases did not serve mutually to exclude one another, for both traditions had a place for each other in their concept of the kingly rule of Christ, but each one had a major emphasis that tended to encourage either evangelism or controversy. The practical manifestation of these emphases came in the forms of church discipline proposed by men like Cartwright and casuistry (self-examination) proposed by men like Perkins.

Perhaps the primary complicating factor of the controversies of the Puritans lay in their understanding of Scripture.<sup>59</sup> The Puritans disagreed with the authorities in one fundamental matter: While the authorities took the general Lutheran position that things might be allowed in the church that Scripture does not specifically prohibit, the Puritans took the Calvinist position that only those things commanded by Scripture may be allowed in the church. For those who saw the gospel as the proclamation of the kingdom, letting Christ be

king in the church as well as priest meant adherence to all the commands of God. This stream of thought tended to level all Scripture as of equal import. As well as differing on the authority of Scripture, the Puritans lacked an accepted hermeneutic for interpreting it even among themselves. The disintegration of Puritanism came when they could not agree among themselves about what government and ceremonies Christ had commanded in his Word.

The Puritans viewed the Scriptures as a divine blueprint and rule for all time. Walter Travers, a Presbyterian Puritan associated with Cartwright, presented the reasoning that characterized the Puritan attitude toward the Scriptures in *A Full and Plain Declaration of Ecclesiastical Discipline*, which he wrote while in Geneva in 1574. Travers's arguments rested heavily on the Old Testament and the example of Moses and the Law of Israel. The structure of Jewish worship in the Law of Moses was rigidly and absolutely laid down.<sup>60</sup> Nothing could be added or taken away. God, the King of Israel, gave the Law fully and completely, and Moses, the faithful prophet, delivered the commandments to Israel, whereby she was disciplined.

Travers then turned to Christ, who embodied the offices of king and prophet in his establishment of the church. He reasoned that Christ must have done at least as much as Moses in giving a rule of government for the church. Travers considered it unreasonable to think that God would take less care with the church than he took with Israel.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, if Christ is a prophet like Moses, then he must have done at least as much as Moses or else he would prove to be an inferior prophet. Unwilling to let Christ be inferior in any way to Moses, Travers argued that Christ "fully and perfectly declared unto us whatsoever was needful for the government of the Church."<sup>62</sup> Based on the premises that Travers allowed, he could only conclude that Christ left a perfect rule and discipline "which is common and general to all the Church and perpetual for all times."<sup>63</sup>

The Puritan understanding and interpretation of Scripture had a direct bearing on their attitude toward church government, discipline, worship, and every other issue over which they came into conflict with the authorities of the Church of England. In *An Admonition to the Parliament*, attributed to Thomas Wilcox, which was published together with *A View of Popishe Abuses Yet Remaining in*

*the Englishe Church*, attributed to John Field, the Puritan complaints are clearly outlined. Throughout the pamphlet the criticism leveled at the Church of England is its failure to conform to Christ's model of a church. True religion consisted in doing only what Christ commanded. Herein lies the fundamental cleavage between the Puritans and the Elizabethan Settlement with respect to church government.<sup>64</sup>

They hould and mainetaine that the word of God contained in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles, is of absolute perfection, given by Christ the head of the Church, to bee unto the same, the sole Canon and rule of all matters of Religion, and the worship and service of God whatsoever. And that whatsoever done in the same service and worship cannot bee instified by the said word, is unlawfull.<sup>65</sup>

The controversy over discipline had an effect on the terms in which Puritans preached the gospel. Two major streams developed: one that stressed outward form and another that stressed inner piety. The Puritans reasoned that while preaching was the means of salvation, salvation involved more than mere assent to doctrine. They sought after conversion. For the Calvinist Puritans, election implied the setting apart for salvation, and predestination implied the eschatological realization of salvation, but salvation and the assurance of salvation emerged in the process of conversion. Since salvation involved more than a static moment of time, the Puritans had to be concerned with more than the preaching of the gospel. Since salvation manifests itself in the process of conversion, the Puritans also sought to encourage spiritual growth through discipline.

Cartwright protested the distinction Archbishop Whitgift drew between matters of faith necessary to salvation and those things of indifference introduced into the church:

But you say that in matters of faith and necessary to salvation it holdeth: which things you oppose after and set against matters of ceremonies, orders, discipline, and government; as though matters of discipline and kind of government were not necessary to salvation and of faith.<sup>66</sup>

He continued by arguing that church government, excommunication, censures, other matters of discipline, and the sacraments and

other ceremonies are all matters of faith and necessary to salvation. This conviction led to a stream of thought within Puritanism that considered church government, or submission to the kingly rule of Christ, as a fundamental element of the gospel.<sup>67</sup> The stress on the kingdom as the essence of the gospel reappeared with devastating consequences for the Puritans and their evangelistic fervency in the 1630s. This stress was a prime motivation for separation and tended to divert men from the work of preaching for conversion to the work of erecting the true church.

As presbyterianism was coming to an end as a form of church government in the late 1580s, William Perkins was developing a form of discipline that concentrated on the individual believer and the pastoral care by the pastor.<sup>68</sup> Perkins's construction of a Puritan casuistry provided a framework of personal discipline for those who sought to live a godly life. Godly living had a profound relationship to salvation for the Puritans, who believed that the assurance of salvation grew out of one's godly life. His approach to discipline reflects a concept of the gospel rooted in the hyper-Calvinist interpretation of Reformed theology. His evangelistic approach consisted in offering cases whereby people might determine if they were elect or reprobate.

Puritans from the time of Cartwright and earlier had complained about those who professed Christ as prophet and priest but refused to submit to him as king. Thomas Goodwin came to think of the gospel as the preaching of the kingdom—first, with his persuasion that as king Christ commanded the pattern of worship and government for the church, and second, with his conviction of the imminent consummation of Christ's kingdom.<sup>69</sup> In the political and ecclesiastical confusion of the 1630s, Goodwin and his followers withdrew to Holland to await the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth, safe and secure with the knowledge that in their congregations, "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."<sup>70</sup>

The concept of the kingdom affected the evangelistic fervency of the Puritans in two ways. Those who stressed the kingly rule of Christ in the church went into controversy over discipline and worship, and as a result they often separated. Those who stressed the kingly rule of Christ in the heart devoted themselves to evangelism, the only hope they saw for the reformation of the church. For the most part,

Puritans avoided controversy over ceremonies and government during the reign of James I (though ceremonies figured prominently in the Millenary Petition). Instead, they devoted themselves to training preachers and establishing lectureships. Not until renewed pressure from the authorities did the Puritans begin to shift their emphasis back again to the outward forms of obedience to the commands of Christ in the church.

These are merely representative ways of how the issue of ecclesiology emerges from the acknowledgment of the authority of Christ. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the issue can easily lead to heated debate over how Christ intends the church to organize and live out its life.

### THE EXALTATION AS GOOD NEWS

Exaltation appears to be one of the emerging themes of late twentieth-century Christian life in several parts of the world. In Korea, prayer holds the dominate integrating theme in the context of a church that is growing rapidly in a Buddhist culture. In India, the expression of power in the church in the form of healings and exorcisms popularly known as "signs and wonders" has resulted in significant growth of churches in areas dominated by tribal religion. In the United States, contemporary worship services that emphasize the Lordship of the exalted Christ have resulted in dramatic growth of churches that try to reach baby boomers and busters. All of these dimensions of the exaltation address significant spiritual issues of the groups for whom the exaltation represents good news.

#### **Prayer**

Prayer represents one of the most remarkable privileges that Christians enjoy. Through Jesus Christ, in whom a Christian lives, conversation may take place with Almighty God. Part of the religious nature of humans in all parts of the world is the quest to have some contact and interaction with the spiritual world. Depending on how people conceive of deity, these experiences can take different forms. Whether through the spinning of prayer wheels, assuming a particular posture, the recitation of fixed prayers, approaching

intermediary spirits, or the emptying of one's thoughts, people desire some meaningful contact with the transcendent. The use of tarot cards, horoscopes, tea leaves, casting sticks, peyote, channeling, and ouija boards also represent an attempt to hear from the spirit world. Rather than deal with other spirits who may be friendly, hostile, or manipulative, Christians may converse with the Creator in the mystic experience of prayer. For the person who longs for meaningful spiritual experience, the exaltation of Jesus offers good news that people may have access to God in this life.

### **Signs and Wonders**

In the premodern world people live with an awareness of spiritual realities that go beyond sensory experience. In the postmodern world people have rediscovered that science can observe the observable but that it does not speak about all possible reality. Premodern tribal peoples and postmodern technological societies have an interest in the "spirit world," though these different groups have different understandings of what this means.<sup>71</sup> It is not surprising to observe that the United States, with its amazing interest in the occult, varieties of New Age thought, and experimentation with spiritual religion, shares with underdeveloped cultures a growing expression of "power evangelism." Power evangelism occurs when people respond to Christ with faith on the basis of his exercise of authority over disease or demons through Christians who minister in his name. For people beset by fears of spirits or indecision over which spirit to worship, the exaltation of Jesus offers good news that he has authority and power over all physical and spiritual realities.

### **Worthiness**

Perhaps the greatest songs of worship in all Scripture are the songs of praise in Revelation that glorify the exalted Christ who reigns forever and ever, the Lamb who is worthy. One of the characteristics of younger American society is its rejection of authority, yet those being converted in the context of their own cultural mediums predominantly sing songs about the exalted Lord. These people have found someone worthy to submit to as their authority. The rejection of authority by this generation is perhaps more a search for a worthy authority, which they find only in Christ, who

is Lord of all. For people who have spent their lives disappointed by authority, the exaltation of Jesus offers good news that there is someone who is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power.

### **Tradition**

Religion is often seen in terms of observable structures, such as ceremonies, organization, official beliefs, and traditions. Sometimes people come to faith through these formal expressions of the Lordship of Christ over his church because of his mystic presence in the body. When this happens, it is usually unintentional on the part of the church. This phenomenon is not unusual through worship experienced in the Anglican communion and the Orthodox church. If the Lord inhabits the praise of his people, then one should not be surprised to find that his habitation has an impact on people who come into the worship of true believers. Not even my own biases and prejudices about ecclesiology and worship will allow me to ignore the number of my friends who have come to faith out of atheism through the Anglican service. For people who have shut themselves to logical argument, the exaltation of Jesus who guides his church in worship offers good news of transcendent reality to people who are not even aware that they are searching.

### **Personal Relationship**

On the other hand, many more people in late twentieth-century Western society have rejected institutional religion outright. Living in a complex, organized society, they have no interest in yet another complex structure over which they have no control. For many, the church represents the obstacle to spiritual truth. They are looking for something "that works for them." What they are asking for, in fact, is a return to something personal in an impersonal society. The message about the Lordship of Jesus Christ does not offer an organization, but a person. In spite of all the teachings of the church, it does not offer knowledge or information, but relationship with Christ. In him one becomes part of a community rather than a member of an organization. Personal relationship with Christ becomes incarnate through his body, the church. For those who long for personal religious experience, the exaltation of Jesus offers good news that it is available in him.

## Martyrdom

After two thousand years, people still suffer persecution for their faith in Christ. At the end of Communist domination of Russia and its persecution of believers, many members of Russian society now ask why atheism failed and why Christians remained true to their faith in Christ in spite of persecution. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ creates an unnerving feeling after the fact for many casual observers. Russian society now has a remarkable openness to the gospel of Christ because of the testimony of those with whom he was present powerfully during the great persecution. For people who can only think of self-preservation in the face of adversity, the exaltation of Jesus offers good news that God offers more through relationship with Christ than the world can ever take away.

## NOTES

1. See John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), and Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1989).

2. Revelation represents one long, extended elaboration of the work of the exalted Christ, leading up to his second coming.

3. J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 77.

4. *The Martyrdom of Ignatius*, chap. 2.

5. *Ibid.*, chaps. 4–5.

6. *Ibid.*, chap. 7.

7. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 2.1, trans. William R. Schoedel, *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Jack Sparks (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978).

8. *Ibid.*, 2.2.

9. *Ibid.*, 2.3.

10. *Ibid.*, 5.2.

11. *Ibid.*, 9.1.

12. *Ibid.*, 9.3.

13. *Ibid.*, 17.3.

14. *Ibid.*, 18.2–3.

15. Davies, *The Early Christian Church*, 78.
16. *The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs*, chaps. 2, 4.
17. *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 1.3; 2.3–4; 3.1–3; 4.1
18. *Ibid.*, 5.2; 6.3.
19. Tertullian, *Ad Martyras*, chap. 3.
20. *Ibid.*, chaps. 4–5.
21. Tertullian, *De Fuga Persecutione*, chap. 1.
22. *Ibid.*, chap. 5.
23. *Ibid.*, chaps. 7, 12, 14.
24. *Ibid.*, chap. 14.
25. Davies, *The Early Christian Church*, 115–18.
26. Gregory of Nyssa, Panegyric, quoted in Davies, *The Early Christian Church*, 129.
27. Davies, *The Early Christian Church*, 129–30.
28. *Ibid.*, 174–76.
29. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier, 1963), 37.
30. *Ibid.*, 47.
31. *Ibid.*, 69.
32. *Ibid.*, 100–101.
33. *Ibid.*, 64, 106–14.
34. *Ibid.*, 264–68.
35. *Ibid.*, 269.
36. *Ibid.*, 273.
37. Davies, *The Early Christian Church*, 185. Davies observes, “The Peace of the Church virtually closed the list of martyrs, within the empire, and as their heirs the monks now came forward in great numbers.”
38. Edward E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1950), 8; cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4.4.
39. *Ibid.*, 19.
40. *Ibid.*, 27–43.
41. *Ibid.*, 44.
42. Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), 10.
43. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, trans. Norman Russell, intro. Benedicta Ward (London: Mowbray, 1981), Prologue, 9.

44. *Ibid.*, 40–45.
45. *Ibid.*, 2.10.
46. Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 126.
47. *Ibid.*, 58–63.
48. Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), 112–13.
49. Stephanus Hilpisch, *History of Benedictine Nuns*, trans. M. Joanne Muggli, ed. Leonard J. Doyle (Collegeville, Minn.: St. John's Abbey, 1958), 1–2.
50. *Ibid.*, 4.
51. Don John Chapman, *Saint Benedict and the Sixth Century* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1971), 147ff., 162–64.
52. See Jean Décarreaux, *Monks and Civilization: From the Barbarian Invasions to the Reign of Charlemagne*, trans. Charlotte Haldane (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 27. “The prestige of the preacher, his ascetic virtues, the fame he achieved, the real or supposed thaumaturgical gifts he possessed, provided him with a halo. Their apologetics were rudimentary. The God of Clovis or the ‘druid’ of St. Patrick having proved themselves stronger, there was no reason why the Franks or the Irish should not join the better side.”
53. *Ibid.*, 210–11.
54. See Donald Hochstetler, *A Conflict of Traditions: Women in Religion in the Early Middle Ages 500–840* (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 1992), *passim*.
55. Chapman, *Saint Benedict*, 2–13.
56. *Ibid.*, 29ff.
57. *Ibid.*, 24.
58. Noreen Hunt, *Cluniac Monasticism in the Central Middle Ages* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1971), 18.
59. Cf. John S. Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970). Coolidge argues that the Puritans interpreted Scripture through the eyes of Paul; Stanley P. Fienberg, “Thomas Goodwin’s Scriptural Hermeneutics and the Dissolution of Puritan Unity,” *The Journal of Religious History*, 10 (June 1978): 32–49, argues that Presbyterian Puritans interpreted Scripture through the Old Testament with an emphasis on reason while Independents interpreted Scripture through Christ; John R. Knott, Jr., *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), 4,

stresses the Puritan belief in "the dynamism of the Holy Spirit acting through the Word."

60. Everett H. Emerson, ed., *English Puritanism from John Hooper to John Milton* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1968), p. 27.

61. *Ibid.*, 91.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas, eds. *Puritan Manifestoes* (London: SPCK, 1954), 45.

65. William Bradshaw, *English Puritanism and Other Works*, ed. R. C. Simmons (Westmead, Eng.: Gregg International Publishers, 1972), 1.

66. John Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1851-53), 181.

67. Emerson, *English Puritanism*, 87-88; this is a point Walter Travers made clear in his appeal for the institution of a presbyterian form of church government in *A Full and Plaine Declaration*: "Yet could not England be brought to leave that form of governing the Church whereunto it had been accustomed under popery, but divided and separated as under the doctrine and discipline of the Gospel, two things which both by their own nature and also by commandment of God are to be joined together."

68. For a discussion of Perkins's casuistry, see Ian Breward, "William Perkins and the Origins of Reformed Casuistry," *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 49 (1968): 3-20.

69. Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861-66), 12.94.

70. *Ibid.*, 70.

71. For a discussion of African understandings of "power encounters," see Cyril Okorochoa, "The Meaning of Salvation: An African Perspective," and Kwame Bediako, "Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective," in *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). For a Western view see John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).