

## XI.

### **The Church Before and After Christ.**

"All these having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise." *Heb. xi. 39.*



Clearness requires to distinguish two operations of the Holy Spirit in the work of re-creation before the Advent, viz., (1) preparing redemption for the whole Church, and (2) regenerating and sanctifying the saints then living.

If there had been no elect before Christ, so that He had no church until Pentecost; and if, like Balaam and Saul, the bearers of the Old Testament revelation had been without personal interest in Messiah, then it is self-evident that, before the Advent, the Holy Spirit could have had but one work of re-creation, viz., the preparation of the coming salvation. But since God had a church from the beginning of the world, and nearly all the bearers of the revelation were partakers of His salvation, the Spirit's re-creative work must consist of two parts: first, of the preparation of redemption for the whole Church; and, secondly, of the sanctification and consolation of the Old Testament saints.

However, these two operations are not independent, like two separate water-courses, but are like drops of rain falling in the same stream of revelation. They are not even like two streams of different colors mingling in the same riverbed; for neither did the one contain anything for the Church of the future which had not meaning also for the saints of the Old Covenant; nor did the latter receive any revelation or commandment without significance also for the Church of the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit so interwove and interlaced this twofold work that what was the preparing of redemption for us, was at the same time revelation and exercise of faith for the Old Testament saints; while, on the other hand, He used their personal life, conflict, suffering, and hope as the canvas upon which He embroidered the revelation of redemption for us.

Not that the revelation of old did not contain a large element that had a different sense and purpose for them from what it has for us. Before Christ, the entire service of types and shadows had significance which it lost immediately after the Advent. To continue it after the Advent would be equivalent to a denial and repudiation of His coming. One's shadow goes before him; when he steps into the light the shadow disappears. Hence the Holy Spirit performed a special work for the saints of God by giving them a temporary service of types and shadows.



That this service overshadowed *all* their life made its impression all the stronger. This shadow lay upon Israel's entire history; was outlined in all their men from Abraham to John the Baptist; fell upon the judicial and political systems, and more heavily upon the social and domestic life; and in purest images lay upon the service of worship. Hence the *Old Testament* passages which refer to this service have not the meaning for us which they had

for them. Every feature of it had a binding force for them. On the contrary, we do not circumcise our boys, but baptize our children; we do not eat the Passover, nor observe the Feast of Tabernacles, nor sacrifice the blood of bulls or heifers, as every discriminating reader of the Old Testament understands. And they who in the New Testament Dispensation seek to reintroduce tithing, or to restore the kingdom and the judiciary of the days of the *Old Testament*, undertake, according to past experience, a hopeless task: their efforts show poor success, and their whole attitude proves that they do not enjoy the full measure of the liberty of the children of God. *Actually* all Christians agree in this, acknowledging that the relation which we sustain toward the law of Moses is altogether different from that of ancient Israel.

The Decalogue alone is occasionally cause of contention, especially the Fourth Commandment. There are still Christians who allow no difference between that which has a passing, ceremonial character and that which is perpetually ethical, and who seek to substitute the last day of the week for the Day of the Lord.

However, leaving these serious differences alone, we repeat that the Holy Spirit had a special work in the days before Christ, which was intended for the saints of those days, but which has lost for us all its former significance.

Not, however, that we may therefore discard this work of the Holy Spirit, and that the books containing these things may be left unread. This view has obtained currency—especially in Germany, where the Old Testament is less read than even the books of the Apocrypha, with the exception of the Psalms and a few selected pericopes. On the contrary, this service of shadows has even in the smallest details a special significance to the *New Testament Church*; only the significance is different.

This service in the *history* of the Old Covenant witnesses to us the wonderful deeds of God, whereby of infinite mercy He has delivered us from the power of death and hell. In the *personalities* of the Old Covenant it reveals the wonderful work of God in implanting and preserving faith in spite of human depravity and Satanic opposition. The service of *ceremonies* in the *sanctuary* shows us the image of Christ and of His glorious redemption in the minutest details. And finally, the service of shadows in *Israel's political, social, and domestic life* reveals to us those divine, eternal, and unchangeable principles that, set free from their transient and temporal forms, ought to govern the political and social life of the Christian nations throughout all ages.

And yet this does not exhaust the significance that this service always had, and still has, for the Christian Church.

Not only does it reveal to us the outlines of the spiritual house of God, but it actually operated in our salvation:

First, it prepared and preserved amid heathen idolatry a people which, as bearers of the divine oracles, offered the Christ at His coming a place for the sole of His foot and a *base of*

*operations.*<sup>2</sup> He could no more have come to Athens or Rome than to China or India. No one there could have understood Him, or have furnished instrument or material to build the Church of the New Covenant. The salvation which was cast like a ripe fruit into the lap of the Christian Church had grown upon a tree deeply rooted in this service of shadows. Hence the history of that period is part of our own, as the life of our childhood and youth remains ours, even tho as men we have put away childish things.

Secondly, the knowledge of this service and history, being parts of the Word of God, were instrumental in translating God's children from nature's darkness into His marvelous light.

However, as the Holy Spirit performed special work for the saints of those days that has a different tho not less important significance for us, so also He performed a work in those days that was intended more directly for the Church of the New Testament, which also had a different but not less important significance for the saints of the Old Covenant. This was the work of *Prophecy*.

As Christ declares, the purpose of prophecy is to predict future things so that, the events predicted having come to pass, the Church may believe and confess that it was the Lord's work. The Old Testament often states this, and the Lord Jesus declared it to His disciples, saying: "And now I have told you, before it come to pass that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" ([John xiv. 29](#)). And again: "Now I tell you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am He" ([John xiii. 19](#)). And still more clearly: "But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." These statements, compared with the words of [Isa. xli. 23](#), [xlii. 9](#), and [xliii. 19](#), leave no doubt as to the design of prophecy.

Not that this exhausts prophecy, or that it has no other aims; but its chief and final end is reached only when, on the ground of its fulfilment, the Church believes its God and Savior and magnifies Him in His mighty acts.

But while its center of gravity is the fulfilment, *i.e.*, in the Church of the New Testament, it was equally intended for contemporary saints. For, apart from the prophetic activities that referred solely to the people of Israel living at that time, and the prophecies fulfilled in Israel's national life, prophecy even as boldly outlining Christ yielded precious fruit for the Old Testament saints. Connected with theophanies it produced in their minds such a fixed and tangible form of the Messiah that fellowship with Him, which alone is essential to salvation, was made possible to them by *anticipation*, as to us by *memory*. Not only did this fellowship become possible at the end of the Dispensation, in Isaiah and Zacharias; Christ testifies that Abraham desired to see His day, saw it, and was glad.

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2 In Dutch, "life-center."

**Fourth Chapter**

**THE HOLY SCRIPTURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.**

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