



Another look at recapitulation

Prof David T Williams
Adjunct Professor
University of Fort Hare
Alice Eastern Cape
South Africa
dwilliams@ufh.ac.za
david@davidtwilliams.com

Abstract

As an understanding of the work of Christ, the belief of the very early church father Irenaeus has been tragically neglected. Supported by a couple of biblical references, especially Ephesians 1:10, Irenaeus interpreted the life and death of Jesus as a 'recapitulation' both of world history and personal salvation. By uniting with the incarnate Son of God by faith, a believer participates in the sacrifice of his life and death, and is thereby forgiven. The mode of recapitulation may then be seen as a combination of the three traditional views of the means of atonement, and meets objections levelled against each. It must be admitted that the modern worldview is not sympathetic to the idea of recapitulation, but this is not a criticism of its validity. Rather, the theory provides a strong motivation for effective Christian living.

Keywords: Recapitulation, atonement, faith, sacrifice, example.

Introduction

About half of the New Testament is the four Gospels, stories of the life of Jesus; one must ask why such prominence, and especially in the light of the fact, a most striking thing, that the earliest confessions and creeds of the Church, such as the Apostles' creed, have little or no reference to the life of Jesus, but go immediately from the story of his birth to his death. This is very understandable; the heart of the good news is that salvation is through the death of Christ. But the story of his life is vital, surely more than just a preliminary to his death; so much so that we have four accounts of it. Incidentally, Irenaeus (*Adv Haer* 3.xi.8) felt that it was right that there were four; he cites, *inter alia*, the four winds and the four faced creatures of Ezekiel 1.

The life of Jesus is important for later Christians as it was for people at the time. On the one hand it shows the sort of life that Christians are to imitate; the example of Jesus can hardly fail to motivate and inspire. Then more than this, there is a promise of union with his life through the Spirit which generates a life according to God's desire. This has so often been seen to be a reality; indeed there are some who feel that this is the heart of the gospel, the means of eternal life. However although some do feel that in this imitation of Christ God renders a person forgivable, this is surely both unjust and impossible due to the total pervasiveness of sin; holiness as shown in Jesus is really unattainable by any others. His life, while an example, highlights our need of forgiveness; realising who Jesus was, Peter cried out, 'depart from me, for I am a sinful man' (Luke 5:8). Without this forgiveness, salvation is merely a hope, necessary, but how?

On the other hand, the gospel record is patently an account written to justify the confession, perhaps exemplified in Peter's realisation on the mount at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:29),



‘You are the Christ, the son of the living God’. The accounts of miracles, of feedings and healings, inspire wonder, but are hardly there for imitation, even if we would love it to be so. On the contrary, the words and deeds revolve around the fact of a perfect life, and only perfect because he was, or is, God himself, the second Person of the Trinity, incarnate among us.

It is this that underscores the fact, so clear from the gospels, that Jesus’ life resulted inevitably in death; without the gospel record this would be less credible. What must be striking about his life was that he went about doing an enormous amount of good. Crowds flocked to him for what they would receive, people brought the sick to receive healing. Yet initial joy turned to hostility. Jesus participated fully in humanity, as a perfect and sinless man, but as might be expected, this produced a backlash from sinful humanity, persecution, and finally condemnation, torture and death, a determination to get rid of him, and ultimately his sufferings and death (Stackpole 2019:387). Indeed, Pope Pius XI says it was the sins committed in every age which were the cause of his condemnation (Stackpole 2019:596). And this was a man who was the epitome of goodness and holiness. The whole process was an amazing sacrifice. Evil and hatred worked out in him. Not only was there a desire to be rid of this ‘thorn in the flesh’, but to inflict what must be one of the most horrible deaths that a horrible humanity has ever devised. Incidentally, however, despite the suggestion of Irenaeus, the actual means of death is probably not significant; with tongue in cheek, perhaps he would have preferred burning at the stake?

That scenario was not unique. People suffer, not only because of what they do, but because they are in a world of wrong. Indeed, the bible does tell us that suffering, animosity and hatred will be the experience not only of the wicked but also of those who desire to lead a good life, one pleasing to God. Jesus himself warned not be surprised when people hate and abuse, and say all sorts of evil; after all, he said, that was the experience of the prophets. Hebrews 11 gives a frightening catalogue of pain and suffering in the lives of those who it characterises by faith, so an attitude of pleasing God. So why did Jesus suffer? Why did Jesus die? It was essentially because he was human, because he became incarnate, and shared in the common experience of people, participating in a sinful world. Essentially, just being in the world of sin causes, indeed guarantees, suffering and death; and this is what Jesus experienced. Indeed, this is what he came to experience. Then in his case, the effect of this world’s sin was magnified because of who he is.

Recapitulation

There was a common realisation in the early Church, sadly seemingly almost forgotten today, that the identification of Jesus with sinful humanity was more than just a demonstration of God’s love. Such suffering, such pain, such sacrifice, just in coming from the glory of heaven, even more in his dying, was surely more than to do a few miracles, even more than giving such a tremendous example of lifestyle and commitment to God. But the realisation of the Church was that this sacrifice involved the entire life of Jesus, that this is what saved. It was not only that he came to die, but that he came to live and to die.

Although he is particularly remembered in this regard, Irenaeus was not alone in his view that Jesus came, as such a unique person, for a process that we refer to as ‘recapitulation’. This is an interpretation of the work of Jesus, which probably because it is very ‘daring’ (Denney 1917:34), has been sadly, and I feel unjustly, neglected.

‘Capitulation’ means to bring under a single head. So ‘recapitulation’, *anakephalaiōsasthai* (Ephesians 1:10) is to change the head; Irenaeus means that humanity changed from the headship of Adam to the headship of Christ. The ‘caput’ also bears the nuance of ‘summing up’ (cf ‘chapter’); John 1:14 is the recapitulation of the previous thirteen verses (Grant 1997:50). Notably, in Greek practice, the summing up of figures was put at the top, so the



head (Foulkes 1963:52). The other New Testament occurrence of the basic word is in Romans 13:9, where Paul echoes the words of Christ (Mk 12:31) that the commandments of the law are 'summed up' in love of neighbour. In Ephesians the nuance is of obedience; Mozley (1915:101) says that Irenaeus stressed the obedience of Christ, contrasting the disobedience of Adam. It should probably be taken as bearing both meanings; while Hendrikson (1967:86) notes that the noun *kephalion* never means 'head', but sum (Acts 22:28) or a summary (Hebrews 8:1), he cites A T Robertson (*Word pictures in the NT* Vol 18 5:8-9) that the word in Ephesians 1 derives from *kephalé*, 'head'. The two are then most likely aspects of one; in Christ we are obedient to him, possible by unity with him; in obedience to him we are united with him and in this, with each other in the Church.

Many feel that Irenaeus primarily used the word in a cosmic sense, seeing Christ as summing up the entire world history, so that all, such as the law, the sacrifices and the covenants are fulfilled in him; he therefore replaces by fulfilling them (Atkinson 1969:285). For him, therefore, Romans 5 is a significant chapter. Details for him are significant; examples are the fact of redemption through a tree, countering the original sin by a tree, another is the contrast between Eve and Mary. Mary is then the recapitulation of Eve (*Adv Haer* 3.xi.8, Grant 1997:52)

However, he feels that the basic principle can be applied also to individuals; in the incarnation, Christ unites with and sanctifies every part of the human experience, from birth to death, by experiencing and participating in them. Indeed, this is the most natural understanding:

For, in what way could we partake of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? Wherefore also he passed through every stage of life, restoring all to communion with God (*Irenaeus Adv Haer* 3.xviii.7).

Significantly he then proceeds by condemning those who reject the incarnation. A person is saved by faith, uniting with, and being under, a new head, Christ, so being 'recapitulated'. We duly die because of our sin, but as are in Christ, that sin is then part of what Jesus himself died for; we are justly forgiven. Finally, we share in the resurrection, and in the ascension, of Christ to life eternal. A Christian having united with Christ and receiving forgiveness, lives in the post-resurrection forty days, empowered by the Spirit received in the baptism of Jesus.

Indeed, incarnation must mean more than the second Person simply adopting the material of a human body. Rather he assumed its life, the interaction of that material. Without that, it is not a real incarnation, but the adoption of the Apollinarian heresy; rather he has a real human life. This is essential; as Gregory of Nazianzus said, what is not assumed is not healed; thus for salvation, God must enter every aspect of human life (White 1991:59). Thus Jesus took a real human life; this is the foundation of recapitulation, which then adds that salvation is by union with that life.

Richardson (1958:242) explains that the saving work of Christ is effected by unifying God and man, restoring the original unity destroyed by sin. This is by 'taking manhood into God'. In Christ we share in the character of God, 'partakers of divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).

For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become what we are so that the corruptible might be swallowed up in incorruptibility and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive adoption as sons (*Irenaeus Adv Haer*



3.xix.1).

It was repeatedly said in the early Church that Christ became what we are in order that we might become what he is. Thus Irenaeus (*Adv Haer* 5.i.1): '*Verbum Dei, Jesum Christum Dominum Nostrum, qui immensam suam dilectionem factus est quod sumus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod et ipse*'. Thus Kelly: 'God in Christ is doing everything that we have to do, but cannot' (White 1991:60). Wikipedia gives a good description:

Irenaeus conceives of our salvation as essentially coming about through the incarnation of God as a man. He characterizes the penalty for sin as death and corruption. God, however, is immortal and incorruptible, and simply by becoming united to human nature in Christ he conveys those qualities to us: they spread, as it were, like a benign infection. Irenaeus emphasizes that salvation occurs through Christ's Incarnation, which bestows incorruptibility on humanity, rather than emphasizing His Redemptive death in the crucifixion, although the latter event is an integral part of the former (Irenaeus, *Wikipedia*).

The death of Christ is seen not just as a fulfilment of the Jewish system, but as the culmination of the kenotic life of total dedication to God (Philippians 2:8). Such a life is indeed a sacrifice more pleasing to God than those of animals, and it is this that is shared in by faith in the life of a Christian.

The emphasis is seen to fall on the change in people by their relationship to God in Christ, a process which we generally refer to as 'sanctification'. Torrance (2009:441) says that it is important that Jesus assumed, so affected, the mind. This demands mental renewal (Rom 12:2); significantly, Paul connects this with the incarnation (Phil 2:5f). However, salvation must be more than that, because it must include a means of dealing with sin in forgiveness, the event of 'justification'. Thus although the emphasis in recapitulation, as indeed reflected in the Gospels, lies on the incarnation, the death of Christ is a vital part of the means of salvation, the 'climax of atonement' (Lawson 2006:11). After all, a significant part of the gospel narrative deals with the events of the last week. Incidentally, the shed blood of Jesus is then significant, as it would seem to have been to John (John 19:24). Probably here the understanding of blood as life (Lev 17:11) is what matters. For John, the life of Jesus had demonstrably ended; for Christians, in Christ the old ends. By uniting with Christ, a Christian shares in his death, so his death is for his or her sin. However, it is the whole process, life and death that saves. Incidentally, this highlights the extent of God's love, as it is seen not just in the death of Christ, but in his entire life and death.

The heart of the Christian life is then the relation to God. This reflects the New Testament, where Paul frequently sees the heart of faith as being 'in Christ'. Through this a Christian becomes an adopted child of God (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5), sharing in Christ's life in him. Incidentally this, sometimes called the 'mystical union', is sometimes seen as 'divinisation', *theosis*; Irenaeus is often taken as the originator of this doctrine (Hallonsten 2008:285). However, adoption, as in recapitulation, is a relational sharing, not an essential change; Starr (2008: 90) denies that 2 Peter 1:4 sees Christian divine status as absorption, but rather a participation in God, only pertaining fully at Christ's return. Thus Sanders sees a 'participatory union' (White 1991:57). This parallels the relational unity between the Persons in the Trinity and between the natures in Christ, where distinction is maintained while unity comes through relation. A Christian shares in the life of Christ, which then ultimately saves. At the same time, the relation with Christ immediately saves and helps; if the relationship with Christ is a reality, it implies that eternal life in the present is also a reality, not just a hope for the future, wonderful though that is. This is indeed asserted three times in the gospel of John (3:36, 5:24, 6:47), where the tense of the verb indicates not a future experience but a present reality. Torrance (2009:440) refers to a fragment of Irenaeus, in



which he stresses that Jesus touched a leper, and thereby healed. This was not a transfer, but a relating; Jesus did not become leprous. However, a reality may not in fact be appreciated; I John 5:13 indicates that the little epistle has just that purpose, of knowing. Incidentally, the evidence that is given there is of prayer. Indeed, what is asserted in the idea of recapitulation is a relation with Christ; such communion naturally manifests in communication. Naturally being 'in Christ' affects day by day living and worship. One example of this is indeed in prayer whereby a Christian shares in the intercommunication of the Son with the Father.

The present relation with Christ also enables empowering and, in particular, strength to overcome temptation. Again the experience of this is evidence of the reality of being in Christ. Incidentally here, I would suggest that this empowering is not so much from the action of the Spirit, except in his relating to Christ. Here Aulén (*Christus Victor*) in fact saw the victory of the presence of Christ as of the essence of salvation.

Thus while most ideas of the atonement see the New Testament affirmation of a Christian being in Christ as a result of salvation, here it is seen rather as the cause.

The power of the Holy Spirit is obviously essential in this process. He is the one through whom Jesus offered his life and death as a sacrifice acceptable to God (Hebrews 9:14). As the one who relates the Persons in the Godhead, he is also the one who unites the Christian into the life of Christ. As the one who empowered the incarnate life of Christ (Luke 4:14), he is the one who fills and empowers the sacrificial life of the Christian. Notably, for Irenaeus, the Spirit is a gift that has to be attained (Lawson 2006:8); he is not universally received.

Summing up

While it primarily means a change in head, the second meaning of *anakephalaiōsasthai* (Ephesians 1:10) is to sum up, which then has a further nuance in that *ana* bears the meaning of 'up', as in the placement of the sum at the top of a column of figures. Incidentally, the two may be seen in John 3:3, where *anōthen* means not only the beloved being born 'again', but also being born 'from above'.

In this case, Ephesians 1:10 means not only 'renewal', or 'uniting', but also improvement. Significantly, 'reconciliation is for Barth a kind of recapitulation' (Gunton 1998:163, referring to Barth 1956:13). He indicates that it is not only a completion of the original intention, but also an enrichment rather than a simple return. Irenaeus believed that Adam and Eve were created in a 'child-like' state (Gunton 1998:201), so needing perfecting. Thus, as is often observed, the result of the disaster of sin, was, in the goodness of God, ultimately for benefit. As Augustine exclaimed, '*O felix culpa*'. The sufferings of Christ, and indeed of his servants, are finally beneficial. In passing, it may be observed, in the context of speculation as whether the incarnation would have happened if there had been no sin, that the fullness of eschatological glory depends on it. What is not clear, as it does not need to be, is the nature of that glory, but the idea of recapitulation would see it in terms of the glory of the ascended Christ, with whom his servants remain united, renewed and improved.

Of course, before the ascension came the resurrection. Jesus, significantly did not go immediately to heaven after this, but remained for the forty days with his embryonic church. It is in this resurrection life that the church lives, enjoying the newness of life, and in expectation of the coming glory.

It must be noted that this pre-ascension life is not trouble-free, and includes the suffering that is an inevitable concomitant of faith in a fallen world. This is then also borne in the relation to Christ; with reference to the much discussed Colossians 1:24, Carson (1960:51) prefers the view that Christ suffers in Paul because of the mystical union; he endures the suffering



necessary to build up the church; 'why do you persecute me?' (Acts 9:4). Incidentally, Carson notes that the word *thlipsis* is never used of the atoning sufferings of Christ; however, this is irrelevant in that the whole life of Christ is an atoning sacrifice for sin.

Towards a unified theory of atonement

While there is obviously a single event, or process, enabling salvation, centred on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, explanations of the link between the two are many. How is that people are saved, receiving forgiveness and eternal life? How is this related to the experience of Jesus?

Reflection can be grouped under three main headings, although there is variation within each. Essentially, some stress the bestowal of forgiveness of sin through the death of Christ, commonly viewed as a sacrifice; cleansing from sin enables the relationship with God that goes on through death into eternal life. The cross may be seen as a sacrifice, or as a payment for sin, sometimes as a ransom, or as a legal satisfaction. Here the resurrection of Christ is almost incidental, functioning more as a proof of his Person and so guaranteeing the reality of redemption. Likewise his life is really only a preliminary, having the primary function of demonstrating the divinity of Christ, essential for the effectiveness of his death. On the other hand, others see the cross as almost incidental; Jesus had to die, but the essential thing is his resurrection. Through this a person has victory over sin and the devil, and in participating in it, lives forever. Then there is a third view in which the emphasis falls on the example of the life of Christ, which so affects the worshipper as it inspires a life of holiness in imitation, God then responding in forgiveness of sin.

These are significantly different approaches to the atonement, and it must be impossible to simply say that one is right, others are wrong. As these all refer to a single Person and a single action, it must be more satisfactory to see not so much exclusivity but inclusivity, the approaches being seen, as Stackpole (2019:491) concludes, as aspects of an overall explanation of the means of atonement.

Aspects are part of a unity, and so if this is indeed the case, there must be a valid means of relating them to each other. They cannot simply exist side by side in an unrelated way. Indeed, it is possible to suggest a number of paradigms which can well do this. For example, the work of Christ may be described in terms of his 'office' of prophet, priest and king (cf Williams 1997:128f), again a unity, and the three aspects of atonement seen to belong to each, thus forming a unity in Christ. As these are aspects, then the three theories should also be seen as aspects of a single comprehensive understanding of what Christ did to enact salvation. Significantly, the three relate to different aspects of Christ; forgiveness by the sacrifice of his death, new life by union with the resurrection, then the influence to change by the example of his life. Mozley (1915:173) sees the roles of Christ as substitution, representative and inspirer, so seeing atonement as acting on God for man, in God as man, and as man for God.

Another possibility is from the understanding of God as theistic; he is therefore at the same time both transcendent and immanent. Again the theories of atonement can relate to these aspects of unity.

Macquarrie, in his *Principles of Christian Theology*, relates the second and third groups (Stackpole 2019:496), which indeed do fairly naturally fit together, but this does not include the first, sacrificial theories. Significantly, the idea of recapitulation does stress the obedience of Christ; however, it is here that the idea of recapitulation provides also an explanation of the connection between the death of Jesus and salvation; this is really lacking in the example theories, which do not really explain why Christ died. Recapitulation then strengthens the example theory, otherwise really quite weak, by showing a positive



mechanism by which the life of a person is improved. In our salvation, we become more lovable. Not of course, as Stackpole (2019:390) says, that he did not love us before that.

In contrast, the New Testament frequently refers to the means of forgiveness as a sacrifice, and that it fulfils the Old Testament system. Despite the frequent belief that God is able, in his love, simply to forgive sin (eg Stackpole 2019:389), the Bible stresses the need of sacrifice; 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins' (Hebrews 9:22). In this, there was an identification of the worshipper with the sacrifice, a transfer of sin, which then died in the victim. Recapitulation however sees not only the death of Christ as the sacrifice, but appreciates that he was a sacrifice from the very start of the incarnation. In this, one of the frequent objections to the penal substitutionary view of the atonement is dealt with, which tends to sever Jesus' life and death, not really providing an explanation as why Jesus had to die (Stackpole 2019:411); why was death necessary? Stackpole (2019:428) points out an ongoing problem with theories that see Jesus' death as a sacrifice in that they do not at all explain what the connection is between sin and sacrifice; it seems to be arbitrary. Moreover, not only is it not clear why atonement requires a sacrifice, it is not obvious why the sacrifice had to be what it, or he, was. In recapitulation, there is a fundamental link between the death of Jesus and sin.

The same issue is raised by the theory that sees the death of Jesus in legal terms. For the Jews of the day who facilitated the crucifixion, the death of Jesus was a legal penalty for his perceived rejection of the Law. Death, the end of life, is indeed a fitting penalty for sin, insofar as the essence of sin is a severing of the lifegiving relationship with the Source of life.

This means that the death of Jesus was not something arbitrarily imposed on Jesus for atonement. It was not something which then pleased God so that he could justly forgive (Stackpole 2019:411), outweighing the effects of sin; how could such a thing be pleasing? Rather it was the culmination of sin.

In the Thomist version of the sacrificial theory, the sacrifice is not just the death of Christ, but includes his entire life (Stackpole 2019:411). This point is absent in Anselm (Stackpole 2019:400, cf. 403). Without appreciation of, or perhaps just with passing reference to Irenaeus, this idea renders Jesus' death as an intelligible part of salvation. Likewise Urs von Balthasar:

Since the sin of the world is 'laid' on him, Jesus no longer distinguishes himself and his fate from those of sinners ... and thus in that way he experiences the anxiety and horror which by rights they should have known themselves (*Mysterium Paschale*, p 104-5, cited in Stackpole 2019:535).

Both the substitutionary and legal theories also have to explain the application to the believer; why should the death of Jesus affect anyone but him? As Kant pointed out, how can it be just for the death of Christ to pay for our sins? It is immoral! Stackpole (2019:464f) does attempt to answer this, but essentially by pleading that it is a special case. He does point out that being punished for others, such as by paying fines, is normal practice in society, but in fact it is still immoral! There is no fundamental reason for him dying for our sins; both substitution and representation are questionable. Rather, the idea of recapitulation states that justice is done, that each dies for his or her own sin (Rom 6:23), but that death is in Christ, united to his by faith.

A slightly different emphasis is found in Jesus' own words, that he would 'give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). The stress here must fall not so much on a price paid for forgiveness, but on the freedom achieved. Certainly in the union with Christ comes freedom, which includes, but not exclusively, that from sin; Paul for example highlights freedom from the law (Galatians 5:1).



The recapitulation view sees the relation to Jesus as fundamental; the application of his death follows naturally. The Pauline understanding that Christ became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13), the affirmation of Isaiah 53:4 that he bore our sins, so often cited in the New Testament, and so often seen as a basis for penal substitution, readily belong to a recapitulation explanation of the death of Christ. Indeed, I want to suggest that the idea of recapitulation provides a more fundamental idea of atonement so may also unify the various disparate theories.

That it is more fundamental is because of a stronger connection between incarnation and atonement, the Person and work of Christ. While the deity of Jesus is a necessary precondition for most of the theories, forgiveness being possible because Jesus is divine, in recapitulation, forgiveness is effected in that Jesus is divine.

It must also be suggested that recapitulation links closely with the biblical understanding of the nature of humanity as in the 'image' of God, which is surely the image of Christ, initially in the pre-incarnate state (Genesis 1:26) (Irenaeus *Adv Haer* 5.i.1). Irenaeus believed that it, and the likeness, were lost in Adam, restored in Christ (3.xviii.1, 4.xxxviii.4). In recapitulation, so in union with Christ, a Christian is then naturally being conformed to that image (Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:18). We will 'bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Corinthians 15:49). It must also be observed that recapitulation is consistent with the very words that Jesus used to explain who he is, the 'son of man', and moreover in the oft-repeated affirmation of the nature of a Christian as one who is 'in Christ'. Again, in this idea this is not incidental, but fundamental.

Objections to recapitulation

White (1991:64) notes what is perhaps the most obvious objection, that Jesus did not take all of human experience; there are many aspects such as old age, marriage, even modern communications that he never experienced. White dismisses this, saying that Jesus did take the key aspects of being human. Perhaps more to the point is that what Jesus assumed was life, the interaction and process; it is this that was taken (John 1:4) and so gave salvation, the gift of new life.

Perhaps the main problem with the theory is however not a matter of its truth and correctness, but rather in lies in its intelligibility in the modern world. The theory rests on two pillars, both of which are difficult in the modern worldview; however, is this not so much a problem with the theory as with the worldview?

On the one hand, the theory rests on the fact of the incarnation and so its acceptance depends on belief in it. This must be difficult for people in a scientific age, where the intangible almost by definition does not exist. At the same time there is a legitimate demand for evidence. This was hard enough for people in the first century, who had the privilege of first-hand experience of Jesus, far harder two millennia later. Then of course the evidence of deity comes to us through the writings of the scriptures, with all the issues attached to them; how can they be seen as reliable? It must be added here that even accepting the New Testament as infallible and authoritative does not prevent some from denying that they present Jesus as fully divine. It is here that the resurrection of Christ is so vital, not only at the heart of the idea of recapitulation, but also as evidential. Of course it does not provide absolute proof, but many books exist discussing the compelling evidence for its historicity. It is not an accident that the preaching of the early Church, as seen in the book of Acts, focusses on the resurrection.

On the other hand, the view of atonement in recapitulation rests on the reality of union with Christ. It is one thing to believe he is divine, another to believe in such a relating to him as to



share in his experience of death and resurrection. Indeed the modern world, focussing on the individual, is uncomfortable with close relating; witness the divorce statistics. And again, where is the hard evidence for the assertion of union with Christ? It must just be pointed out here that the essential idea is a fundamental part of modern life; we all use transport, for example getting into a car, and sharing in its journey and destination.

Possibly the problem is a little easier than belief in the incarnation as it is the Holy Spirit who relates a person to Christ, and the presence of the Spirit, even if intangible, is evidenced. Paul refers to the 'fruit' of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-3) and even if such qualities are subjective and far from empirically verifiable, they are certainly experienced and provide a strong indication of the presence of the Spirit. Notably, they are qualities of the personality of Christ himself, and so also strongly suggest that relating to him. Even more convincing are the 'gifts' of the Spirit, although perhaps here the source in Christ is not so evident; after all, Jesus is never described as speaking in 'tongues'! Of course, as God he did not need to; Paul does point out that in the consummation, when we are like Christ, they will have passed away (1 Corinthians 13:8).

The Gospel appeal

It is a feature of the modern world, at least in the West, that faith is in decline, that churches are shrinking and closing. This must be a matter of concern to Christians, and a pain in the heart of God. The obvious question is why this is, and then immediately, what is to be done? Sheer love demands that the offer of the Gospel is presented clearly and attractively.

Essentially, for most today, there is no real consciousness of sin and therefore no desire for forgiveness. The traditional views of the meaning of the death of Christ are just not understood. Certainly the idea of an atoning sacrifice is incomprehensible. The need of a legal punishment for wrongdoing is a bit, but not much, better, but there is no appreciation of a legal satisfaction. It is hardly surprising that churches which major on these are shrinking; the ones which grow are those which speak of this worldly benefits in peace, comfort, and, incidentally, prosperity. It must be emphatically stressed here that this does not, in any sense, mean that the older theology is wrong; the cross is a sacrifice, is a legal satisfaction, but worldviews, perceived needs and emphases have changed. It takes only a brief look at church history to see the way in which dominant concerns in one time are nearly forgotten in the next.

It is here that the understanding of recapitulation can well provide a powerful stimulus for the gospel, as its heart is the union with Christ and so the enjoyment of new life; this is what people want! Then what is seen here is that faith gives a powerful reason for a new life; whereas many successful modern churches simply preach on the level of emotion and psychology, here is a theological reason why a Christian life is good, and, it is totally, unlike in many churches, Christocentric. At the same time, if it is appreciated that union with Christ in recapitulation is seen to provide these benefits, then there should be an appreciation of Jesus' suffering and death, and so an awareness of sin that is otherwise so absent from the consciousness of most people.

Indeed, whereas many do come to church for benefit in life, this is usually simply seen as a blessing from God. Recapitulation gives the reason behind these, and so makes them a matter of faith and confidence rather than optimism. At the same time, it should be appreciated that the heart of the Christian life is not so much the benefit, but the reason behind them in union with Christ. The quality of that relationship should benefit, with effect in aspects such as prayer.

It must nevertheless be appreciated that the whole life of Jesus was one of suffering; if we are in Christ, it must be expected that we will share in this, and indeed the witness of the



New Testament is that this is in fact the case. Christ summons not so much to a life of ease and comfort, but to pain. In the case of Jesus, it was the eschatological benefit of the relation with God that sustained him; 'for the joy set before him' (Hebrews 12:2). At the same time, the idea of recapitulation highlights the reality of comfort in pain, because of the intimate presence of Christ. Jesus participated in human suffering, and brought good out of it (Stackpole 2019:647). This is then also an ongoing experience for today; not just a mental comfort, but an existential reality. He was not conquered by suffering, even of such a kind, so neither, in him, need we be.

More than this, the life of Jesus is seen as one of purpose. Jesus did not just come to the world to exist in it, but with a specific work to do. In a life in union with Christ, a person unites with that purpose. This does not of course mean that a person simply mirrors Christ; there is after all a different context of time and space. However, the essence of like is to live as Jesus would, with the same essential purpose of obedience to the Father. In this comes great satisfaction, and an answer to the prevalent feeling of meaninglessness. It was this that underpinned the emergence and attraction of movements such as existentialism. Such a sense of purpose and motivation is enhanced in the view of recapitulation; obedience to God and a sense of purpose is not simply from imitation, but from an ontological relationship.

Repent and believe

The first words of Jesus must be significant (Mark 1:15); we mirror his gospel appeal. Again, one problem with the traditional preaching of the churches is the absence of a call for decision. It is not felt that anything needs to be done. Of course, this is partly because of two features of the Gospel, which again are absolutely true, but need to be accompanied by other aspects to put them into perspective. First is the wonderful truth of the love of God, but in its appreciation has come the view that God could never allow anybody to be lost. At the same time, the glorious Reformation emphasis on grace has had the same effect. His death must be effective for all, therefore, it may be validly suggested, all are saved. Immediately, of course, this must be repudiated by the example of so many, both biblically and later, who suffered and sacrificed just so people could hear and be given an opportunity of acceptance (cf Rom 10:14f, where he does however continue to speak of the more general revelation of God).

Here the understanding of recapitulation is indeed that salvation results from the love of God, that it is indeed adequate for all, but at the same time there is a need of a decisive turn to be united with Christ. Salvation is from the establishment of that relationship with God in the incarnate Son. In that union with Christ there is, obviously, no hint of quantification, that the sacrifice of Christ had to be big enough for all to be saved. However, while the death of Christ is adequate for all, but salvation is by relating to it by faith. Here perhaps Irenaeus' view of recapitulation can well be seen as implying universalism (LaCugna 1993:26), as he saw it in cosmic terms; however when the paradigm is seen on an individual level this is not the case (cf. Hendrikson 1967:86). Wallace (1981:68) stresses that Irenaeus saw the need of faith and knowledge (*adv Haer* 3.xviii.7, 3.xix.1). Related to this is that LaCugna sees the effect on people as divinisation (*theosis*); however again this is not a necessary inference. In this regard, speaking of 2 Peter 1:4, sometimes taken in that sense, Starr (2008:83) emphasises that the means of achieving this 'partaking of the divine nature' is not automatic, but by knowledge, specifically effective knowledge, one that results in moral change, an awareness of forgiveness and a loss of the desire for sin. Although Christ unites all things, so including men, he is the head of a 'new community of the righteous' (Lawson 2006:10).

At the same time, another feature of modern Christianity should be dealt with, which is the scandal of sin and corruption within the church. Paul had to deal with this in Romans; it is an obvious perversion. If we are saved by grace, there is no need to obey (Romans 6:15); in any case the law is past. Even, why not sin so that grace may abound (Romans 6:1)? Such



ideas are not absent from the modern church! The horror that Paul expressed over the advocacy of anomianism as following salvation by faith alone is understandable. The sacrifice that Christ offered was of his life, sacrificial because it was a deliberate surrendering of autonomy; a life that results in the salvation of a Christian is likewise one of the surrendering of autonomy to God. If the essence of faith is a union with the life of Christ, and not just a mere acceptance of the benefits of his death, how can a person lightly sin? After all, it was the obedience to God which was the sacrifice that atones.

Perhaps Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11f) encapsulates these. It is deservedly popular, but perhaps its essence needs reemphasis; the prodigal did have to act, did receive by relating to his father, did turn lead a life presumably in conformity to him. It is noteworthy that the preaching of Jesus stressed a life in conformity and union with him; for him his death followed, but it largely fell to his followers to explain it.

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