



DISCUSSION BRIEFS

Seven Theological Categories For Relating the Gospel and Academic Work

5. The Integrity of Salvation History

Working in the fulfilment of God's promises

'Integrity' speaks of wholeness: consistency, honesty and an internal unity. It ensures that who we are at work is not sharply divided from who we are in ourselves. Such integrity has not been encouraged by late modernity. This instead has emphasised a radical freedom of choice: to be who we want, and to do what we want, without a necessary link between the two. That has its attractions. We can choose an employment position or a research subject without people inferring anything about us personally. The distinction of our private and public capacities can seem to protect us from laying ourselves on the line through what we do in an office, lab, or journal article.

Christianity, however, promotes an integrity so profound that our personal faith in Christ automatically entails a public responsibility to do good in the service of his creation. This situation arises because of the function of our faith. Faith joins us to the person of Christ and so our identity is changed at the deepest level. Who we are now derives from who he is. Christ's righteous standing before God becomes our own. As this union is real it has implications beyond the question of our justification, explaining our adoption as God's children and our future resurrection body. So what about our role in the workplace? If integrity requires an alignment of our working lives with who we really are, then Christian integrity at work will require an alignment of our public role with Christ's.

To explore this further we will need to trace what it means for Christ to be king and its implications for our daily work. For both of these tasks we will need to understand the character and function of salvation history, whose Old Testament expectation set the context of Christ's arrival (cf. Heb. 1:1, Jn. 6-11, 15-17).

Clarifying Christ's public role

Last time, we compared Adam and Christ. Fundamental to Adam's humanity was the happy paradox that although he was made of dust God had raised him to an honoured position of authority and rule, or, dominion, over the rest of creation (cf. Ps. 8). Likewise, the Father's glorification of Christ not only included his bodily resurrection from the dust of the grave but also his ascension and installation at God's right hand with the authority to rule over all nations: Matt. 28:18, Heb. 1-2, Acts 2:33-36, cf. Ps. 2, Ps. 110.

We can now add further detail to the picture of Christ's exaltation - as indicated by these texts, above. His being placed at God's right hand is not only the greater fulfilment of Adam's original position over creation, but it is also - in the same person and the same event - the fulfilment of God's promises about the future of the *Davidic kingship of Israel*. Old Testament Israel and its monarchy were established by God as the historical means or vehicle by which his incarnate Son could pick up and fulfil the original Adamic obligation of obedience and to be rewarded with the super-restoration of all that Adam lost, for Humanity 2.0.

But why should we continue to think of Jesus' rule in terms of Israel's story, if now, in the one person of Christ, the role of the Davidic king has been combined with that of the last Adam. Isn't he now a universal figure? How does that particular phase of salvation history help us now?

1. Detailing what it means to do good

As far as Christ's public role is concerned, the historical context *details* what kind of monarch he will be. His is a constitutional rule - a Davidic rule, which was originally established by covenant so that the king would rule according to God's law, on God's behalf (cf. Deut. 17:14-20). This is good news for creation because God's laws are not arbitrary but they are consistent with the way we have been designed to thrive. Of course, all these themes clearly echo Adam's original role of royal stewardship - his 'dominion' was not to be an oppressive exploitation but to 'tend and keep' the garden, to help it to flourish as God intended.

For ourselves, as Christ's loyal people, there is a significant practical advantage to the constitutional character of Jesus' rule as Lord. When we now enter our own workplaces, to 'tend and keep' them, we don't do so with a lack of information about how creation should flourish, what God wills for it, and hence the stance of our Lord's rule toward it. Through our access to Scripture - including all the covenants and laws through which Christ's own office was established - we have access to a *divine specification* for creaturely flourishing in contexts beyond that of the garden of Eden. The way God ordered national life in the promised land of Canaan - a second Eden - gives us an insight into wise and good principles for public order. Theologians throughout the ages have noted that the law of Moses reaffirms and clarifies the God-given natural law of creation. Of course, to understand and unlock such insights for today's world requires us to interpret the Old Testament in the light of Christ's coming (below).

For now, though, it is clear from the continuity of salvation history that to enter the workplace with integrity as a Christian, united to King Jesus and under his Lordship, *by definition* entails a commitment to enact what is good for creation as it is revealed to us in both the Old and New Testaments. This should not require any additional commands: it is a matter of integrity - an obligation internal to our union with Jesus, given *his* public role as king. In other words, when we say that our union with Christ entails our sanctification - we now have specific categories to ensure that our understanding of sanctification has not been squeezed by modernity into its privatised mould.

2. Teaching us how to interpret Scripture

Furthermore, the ongoing study of salvation history between Adam and Christ teaches us how to interpret Scripture as a whole - and hence place ourselves within it.

First, we learn that, as a movement between promise and fulfilment, salvation history exhibits a continuous *linear* direction. As soon as the first Adam fell into exile, the last Adam was promised: Eve's offspring would bruise the serpent's head. The rest of the story in-between sees a cumulative line of promises and covenants being made, which, together, establish the appropriate context for Christ's arrival and work. Abraham is promised descendants who will inherit the land. By the Sinai covenant they are constituted as a single corporate legal entity - the commonwealth of Israel - which carries the status of 'my firstborn son'. Israel must obey God to remain in the land or face exile. The people trigger the kingship clause within the law, and then by covenant David's dynasty is promised the status of divine sonship. The prophets clarify that a Davidic son will come who is greater than David, and so Israel's borders will be expanded to cover the whole earth. How will this happen? When the Son of God comes as a human, and an Israelite, to take the Davidic office, he lives a perfectly obedient life for his people. Those who rejected him and sought to cut him off did not reckon with the fact that he really was the king. In putting him to death they cut themselves off from him even while he bore his nation's curse. Remaining king, he was raised from the dead, carrying this commonwealth on the shoulders of his glorified body to God's right hand, anticipating his inheritance of the whole earth, where anyone can now be reconciled to its Lord, becoming citizens of his kingdom. This no longer concerns Jewish ethnicity: being the 'last Adam' his gospel offer is universal for all humans, who are joined to him by the Holy Spirit and faith.

While this linear movement to salvation history is clear - from Adam to Christ - it has been almost impossible to summarise it without also revealing, second, its *cyclical* character. Between the two Adams there are very many Adamic figures who are treated as God's sons. In different ways the covenant partners Noah, Abraham, Israel and David each showed that they pointed backward as an echo

or recapitulation of the first Adam but they also likewise pointed forward, typologically anticipating Christ ever more clearly. The cyclical pattern is also seen through the promised land of Canaan. When Abraham and his descendants repeatedly inherit the land, their entrances are at once a real fulfilment of God's earlier microcosmic promise to Abraham, and, at the same time, they become an enacted promissory type, pointing forward to the macrocosmic way that God's people will inherit the new creation. The same is true of their repeated exiles from the land in their journeys to Egypt and the east, including Babylon. All of these cyclical experiences - introduced as early as Genesis in the repeated wanderings of the patriarchs - highlight to us that God's promises would have multiple fulfilments through the cycles of salvation history - building to Christ's great exile in his humiliation and death, and his great return for us, bringing his people with him to glory. In this way, salvation history consists of imaging episodes which can be considered both retrospectively and prospectively. In each we see a pattern or promise being fulfilled *already* and a future that has *not yet* taken place.

Being both linear and cyclical, salvation history inhabits created time - patterned in days, weeks and years - and we can think of it as a spiral moving cumulatively from creation to the new creation, via Adam and Christ, and with intermediate episodes allowing each turn of the spiral to aid our interpretation of the others before it and after it.

Working between the King's ascension and his return

These tools of biblical interpretation now help us practically in two ways. First, we can begin to unlock the resources of the Mosaic law as it sheds light on social flourishing. This is possible when we realise the law both looked back to our original creation and looked ahead to Christ's life, death and resurrection. Christ's *resurrection* body fulfils the separation laws which marked out national Israel from the Gentiles: we are now sanctified as a holy nation by being joined to him in the Spirit (and so, for example, the food laws fall away). Christ's *death* fulfilled and removed the Levitical priesthood with its animal sacrifices. But this leaves Christ's perfect *life* which fulfils and affirms the law's moral teaching and so helps clarify our human design.

Second, the already-and-not-yet cyclical pattern alerts us to our next topic: the fact that the church now inhabits a unique cycle of our own - between his first and second comings. He is *already* the king of the earth, but has *not yet* come in corresponding judgment. 'Reconciliation' is the current mode of his rule and the ministry he has given us.

Discuss

1. Where is 'workplace integrity' challenging for you?
2. How do you promote goodness through your work?