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The Institutions of Hope

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THE SABBATH AS A concept and an institutional complex is uniquely forward looking in the Bible, and the ministry of Jesus bears a unique and foundational relationship to the Sabbath. From all biblical evidence, the fundamental reason why Jesus' opponents put him to death is because of his deliberate and persistent challenge of the prevalent interpretation of the Sabbath through words and deeds.¹

I Act One

When Adam and Eve fell, the effects of their transgression percolated and reverberated throughout the created order, necessitating a redemption no

less than sin's cosmic reach. The Sabbath day together with its derivatives, the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee, are to induct the concerned entities into the overall redemption of God. All the three concepts and corresponding institutions are founded on the same ideas, but applied to different aspects of God's creation. Given man's unique sentience among God's creatures, he is the first and only fitting recipient of God's instructions regarding the Sabbath.² Man is thus the leader of the Sabbath for the rest of creation and this is one sense in which the Sabbath is made for man rather than the other way around.³

The Sabbath for man is founded on God's sovereign and creative acts. In the beginning, God exercised his freedom to create. Thereafter, God did not remain indifferent towards his creation, but judged each individual part to be good and the synergistic totality very good—a qualitative leap. He takes pleasure in the works of his own

1 C. Fung, 'Sabbath, The Alpha and Omega of God-Man Partnership', *Asia Journal of Theology*, 20:2 (October 2006), p. 455, and 20:1, pp. 182-204 (or http://www.geocities.com/layman_chrisfung/Hope as at February 2008); Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 207-208.

2 Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation, An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), pp. 77-78, 224.

3 Mk. 2:27, 28.

hands. But he did not create a mechanistic clockwork which follows its own laws to move towards a target with totally predictable exactness. Instead, he bestowed on one of his creature types—humans—freedom of choice and action.

Not only does the mechanism of this freedom elude the exerciser, but the exercise of this freedom also causes God himself surprises, pleasant and otherwise. That is why God did not stop working after he celebrated his pleasure in his creation in his first Sabbath. He continues to work⁴ in response to the creative choices taken by his free creatures—humans. Yet he looks forward to a grand finale in which the freedom of man exercised with respect to God and to the rest of creation will be aligned with his own. This will be the ultimate Sabbath which unites the Sabbath of God with the Sabbaths into which God has initiated humans and nature.

The Sabbath for man and for God as a concept of creation is founded on freedom, responsibility, work and ultimately the hope of pleasure in one's free and responsible creation. This explains why the Sabbath was instituted for the Israelites only after they had been freed from their slavery in Egypt, at a time when they could hope for a future of their own,⁵ be held accountable for their actions and also work diligently and meaningfully towards that end without having the fruits of their own labour robbed from them by their slave masters.

Among all the festivals and feasts in

the Old Testament, the Sabbath is unique.⁶ First, all the other biblical commemorations look to an event within history for remembrance, yet the Sabbath alone is super-historical by its reference to the super-historical act of God's creation and by extension also to a future which transcends history.⁷ Second, while all other festivals are annual observance, thus pegged to nature's rhythm, the Sabbath is supernatural by imposing rhythms not found in the natural daily and yearly cycles.⁸ Third, no other biblical festivals demand man's work but look to God's work for commemoration, but the Sabbath is process-goal balanced through insisting on man's work first—the process—which is then to be punctuated by a Sabbath of rest and pleasure—the goal.⁹

Fourth, the other feasts and festivals look to a return to the past, but the Sabbath is purposeful through accustoming man to and reminding him of that ultimate future pleasure in his own work as God had in his. Fifth, while the other festivals all testify to the incompleteness of man's repeated annual observances, the Sabbath heightens this sense of incompleteness through its much more frequent periodic reminder. Hence man's Sabbath is incomplete. Sixth, while all other festivals invite only observance, the Sabbath invites meaningful participation

⁶ Fung, *Sabbath*, pp. 188-191.

⁷ Ex. 20:9-11.

⁸ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (HarperCollins Canada, 1979), p. 10; Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 285.

⁹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, p. 28; p. 22.

⁴ Jn. 5:17.

⁵ Deut. 5:14-15.

through leaving room—without specifying the details of observance—for man to express his creativity. Finally, the Sabbath is yet to be consummated by God and humans together when the final Sabbath dawns, but all the other festivals have already found fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath day is the spearhead in the Ten Commandments which are for the sentient being—the human. On the other hand, the Sabbatical year, being modelled on the Sabbath day, is meant for the land.¹⁰ On its own with its lack of sentience, it may seem that the land is to be laid idle¹¹ by man only once in every seven years so as to allow it to recuperate from being overworked. This seems to follow from the superficial understanding of man's Sabbath, namely to grant respite—something they did not have in Egypt—from their works through the newly initiated Sabbath day, yet there is no record of the land being abused by its pre-Exodus inhabitants. On the contrary, the description of the land as flowing with milk and honey and its confirmation by spies¹² suggest the very opposite. A deeper meaning must have been intended.

Romans 8:18-22 matter-of-factly¹³ attributes to non-sentient creation a

longing for freedom which corresponds to the central idea of the Sabbath day for man. This freedom of the children of God, within the context of Romans 8, is that the law of the Spirit would enable them to do joyfully what they have been intended, but so far unable, to do to serve the purpose of God. No more coercion, goading and disciplining are necessary. With that goes the associated pain and suffering. Freedom, albeit only a foretaste and incomplete, has finally arrived for these first fruits. Nature's longing and freedom are modelled on these first fruits.

God has indisputably intended man to be sustained physically by the land—nature. There are two ways this can be done: to dictate to the land what man wants through agriculture or to live off the land directly. The first can allay man's insecurity about the future more if he has lost faith in the overall integrity of God's creation and ultimately God. But this, because of man's ignorance of himself and nature, would gradually reduce him to an impoverished and hardscabble existence and further alienate him from nature¹⁴ which in this process suffers man's harsh treatment exacerbated by wanton greed. This goes against the integral design of God.

The Sabbatical year aims to undo this alienation and bring nature and man into confidence in each other. For six years, people can force the land to produce what they think they need, but for one in seven, man is to give up this prerogative and place himself at the discretion of nature, over which he is charged to exercise stewardship, and

10 Lev. 25:2-7.

11 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), p. 60; Oswald T. Allis in the *New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 164-165.

12 Num. 13:17-28.

13 Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 163-164.

14 Gen. 3:17-19.

more importantly to place himself in the hands of the Creator. The Sabbatical year makes room for nature to come into its own when man's ploughing and pruning—mutilating—stop. By living off the land directly, man will have to allow nature to show him what it has been designed to produce which is also good for him. During the Sabbatical year, man takes from the land what nature naturally produces to sustain himself. In case man's faith is small, he can draw on God's extra provision before the Sabbatical year to tide him over.¹⁵

But the goal remains though the steps are gradual. In this way, man and nature are brought into a harmony which gives a foretaste of the mutual freedom of the final Sabbath. As in the Sabbath for man, the Sabbatical year looks forward on nature's behalf to the finale when it will spontaneously satisfy and enrich man in multitudinous aspects. Man and nature will have entered into a redeemed mutuality while retaining their unique role and identity. In this way, the Sabbatical year draws nature into this hope of cosmic redemption through the sentient man.¹⁶ Practising the Sabbatical year goes beyond abstract faith in God, but trustingly rests oneself in God and his creation.

The mutual trust built up through seven Sabbaths of years would give man confidence in celebrating the Jubilee. The Jubilee consummates¹⁷ both the Sabbath day for man and the Sabbatical year for the land but the

unmistakable reference of the Jubilee is God: First, man must not take advantage of others but fear God because he is YHWH; Second, the land must not be sold because it belongs to God and men are but aliens and tenants of God's land. The services of man and nature may be valued according to their utilitarian worth, but man and nature per se must not be so valued because they belong to none other than God himself. That is why hiring servants is acceptable, murdering is severely punished; picking from nature is acceptable, destroying it incurs great divine wrath.¹⁸

Hence, this is also the favourable year of the Lord and all the instructions pertaining to this year must be seen as the Lord bestowing favour on man and the land and in this act he brings both man and nature into the forward march of the grand redemption of the Lord. Yet the goal of the Jubilee is not the compartmentalized redemption of man and of nature separately, but redemption of the relationship between man and his fellow humans, between humans and nature and ultimately between God and his entire creation. A grand and all-encompassing harmony is the goal of this redemption.

The Jubilee is indeed the Lord's periodic Sabbath called by another name, and it is distinguished from his original Sabbath celebrated only once upon the inauguration of his first creation. This periodic Sabbath of the Lord goes with the paces of man and nature to bring both into his redemptive rhythm which looks forward to the future. The seven Sabbatical attributes

15 Lev. 25:20-22.

16 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 68.

17 Lev. 25:8-17.

18 Gen. 9:5; Rev. 11:18.

identified before for man's Sabbath also hold for the Jubilee: First, God the creator initiated history and will bring history to a close in a super-historical redemptive act; Second, God—the ultimate super-natural being—pulsates with the rhythm of nature by taking a year as the unit of counting time and then super-imposes a super-natural reference on both man and nature.

Third, without God's intervention and redemptive work, there can be no Jubilee and without the Jubilee, the Sabbatical year has no direction, hence God's periodic Sabbath balances the goal with the process. Fourth, God looks purposefully to the ultimate Sabbath when he can take pleasure in a harmonious creation through the freely-given submission of man and man's tutorship and leadership of nature; Fifth, the Jubilee is still periodic, testifying to its incompleteness, looking for completion through the continual work of God. Sixth, God seeks the willing participation of sentient man to bring about the Jubilee, but has also fittingly included sub-sentient nature as a necessary partner and a foundation of his grand creation. Seventh, God's final Sabbath will be consummated with the totality of his entire creation and himself—the Creator and his creation, the covenantor and the covenantee—in consummated unison.

The individual looks forward to the pleasure in his own work in the Sabbath day. Under the tutorship by man in the Sabbatical year, the land—nature—looks forward to its freedom. In the Jubilee of God, every aspect and individual part of God's entire creation looks forward to its respective pleasure in each and every part of God's

creation and God looks forward to the complete redemption of his creation. These Old Testament institutions are thus intended to march man and nature inexorably forward in perfect unison to the final tryst with God himself. The Sabbath day, Sabbatical year and Jubilee are thus the institutions of hope in the Old Testament because individually and collectively, they uniquely point towards a bright and inspiring future rather than looking backward to what has already taken place in history.

II Concluding Act One

In bestowing free-will, hence also partial freedom of choice and action, on one of his creature types—man, God has willingly denied himself the right to exercise direct and absolute control over man and the consequential areas of influence to allow man to find himself in God and his creation. This is a process necessitated by the creative image of God in man which prompts him to go beyond the dictates of his surroundings¹⁹ to discover and to create for himself.

The process is not complete, if it ever will be, until the creative potter—man—has fully impressed upon the clay of God's first creation²⁰ his own creativity-driven idiosyncrasies. Knowing and understanding the creation in which he is placed would be the pre-requisite in this process. Yet he

¹⁹ Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 206; Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 46.

²⁰ Daniel Joseph Boorstin, *The Creators* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 43.

was not handed this knowledge when he made his debut in God's creation. He still had to learn and to carve out his as-yet-undefined but dynamic and interactive niche therein.²¹

Naming God's creatures is the first step towards this discovery and is just the way man shows God how he wants to order things creatively. Then God listens and accepts provisionally: 'and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name'.²² The process continues in the cycles of the Sabbatical Year which bring nature directly into this onward journey of mutual discovery. Since man is made to be the steward of God's creation and this steward cannot act against his basic nature of creativity, his stewardship must be creative and open-ended, to be guided only by a future vision born out of a partnership between God and man, after fully appreciating the wholesome integrity of nature.

This self-emptying has been taken one step further in the Sabbatical year to relate man to nature. After man has re-constituted nature—worked the land for six years, he is to reverse the order of the communication and let nature talk back in the seventh, allowing his creation to show him its goodness. God did this in his first creation—after declaring his creation very good, he rested on the seventh. The major dissimilarity with God's self-emptying is that man has fallen and nature is cursed because of man, but the goal of God remains: let creation speak to its steward. Nature is not creative in the conscious and delib-

erate sense of sentient man, but it is prodigious, prolific, dynamic and abundant in its material creativity. It constantly shows off its mind-boggling intricacy and pours forth its awesome power to the utter amazement of the humbled man.²³ Man's only proper reaction is to say to nature's Creator: 'How great Thou art!'

The process of self-emptying is now complete with the Sabbatical year. The all-knowing God has instituted for man what he himself practised—to limit the exercise of his power to leave room for his creation to tell him what is good for man's sake and for nature's sake.²⁴ Yet this freedom for man created through the self-limitation of God is not without limits.

In nature, physical laws are made known to all and they deal mercilessly and swiftly with those who trifle with them. But in the moral realm, there is by necessity a delay between actions and reward. This delay is but the temporal aspect of God's self-limitation, yet it can mislead transient sentient beings into believing that there is no moral consequence to their actions, be they good- or ill-intentioned. Instructions, encouragements, warnings and goalposts will thus have to be given to guide them to their destiny. Following the powerful redemption of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, God gave the Decalogue for their instructions together with encouragements and warnings.²⁵ He then set the Sabbath day, Sabbatical year and the

21 Kung, *On Being a Christian*, p. 393.

22 Gen. 2:19.

23 Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 88.

24 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 77; p. 258.

25 For example Ex. 20; Deut. 27-28.

Jubilee as distinctive goalposts for them to measure progress towards the final Sabbath. In this consummation when all creatures would rejoice in the wholesome goodness of God's creation, the self-limitation of God would have gained the voluntary adoration and praise of his handiwork thus making God's self-limitation obsolete.

All the transient self-limitations, through God's patient tutorship of man and man's patient tutorship of nature, would now be replaced by the spontaneous alignment of the three wills—God's, man's and nature's (with the last being an expression of its own natural potentials). Yet this voluntary alignment would not bring about the elimination of one's will.²⁶ On the contrary, it would lead to a mutual self-expansion into the will of each other.²⁷ God will have reclaimed more than what he has given up in the Sabbath and man will also have reclaimed more than what he gave up in the Sabbatical year. Though creatures are still creatures and the Creator is still the Creator, this self-expansion would eliminate many of the limitations that creation has experienced, be it self-imposed or through it being creation per se.

Creation, in its multi-faceted manifestation as we know it now, will be set free into the freedom of the children of God which in turn would be set free into the freedom of God. The spontaneous yearning of creation and the spontaneous longings of the children of God would reverberate and resonate

with the call and purpose of God. Freedom in the fullest possible sense for us creatures will arrive. Redemption is now full and wholesome. Self-limitation will have achieved its goal of freedom for all. Harmony and freedom are one and the same.²⁸ The morning stars will once again sing together and all the sons of God shout for joy.

Impressive as this plan to bring man and nature into God's forward march and continual creation is, it has not achieved its purpose. The instructions to guide man—the lynch pin in the process—on his way have not been heeded and in the end, man has failed miserably through flouting what God explicitly taught. Man fell off the intended track. As opposed to finding sustenance in nature, man finds himself struggling against nature. As opposed to finding love within the human community, he finds himself fighting against other members of the community. As opposed to finding hope in the pleasure in his work, he finds himself enslaved to phantoms. As opposed to finding his destiny in a loving God, he finds himself under God's wrath. As opposed to finding harmony in existence, he finds discord and dissonance everywhere. The higher the goal set for man, the more spectacular was his fall.

But God did not give up. He chose individuals, a family, a tribe and eventually a nation to carry on his plan. Along the way, he gave detailed instructions and instituted reminders to help his people. Yet, these also

26 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 190.

27 Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM, 2002), p. 123.

28 St. Augustine, *City of God* (New York: Doubleday, translated by Walsh et al., abridged version, 1958), pp. 540-545.

failed. The basic institutional reminders of his goal, the Sabbath day, the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee have been flouted with no attempt, no matter how feeble, to implement the last two.²⁹

The Sabbath day was originally observed, but the underlying intent became so twisted that it became an abomination.³⁰ The delayed retribution finally kicked in³¹ with the land enjoying freedom from man, but without the intended reciprocation of man learning from nature. Meting out the promised punishment for not practising the Sabbatical Year brings to a close the first experiment. No further warnings against repeated offences were issued. Instead, Ezekiel looked towards a new era in which individual and moment-by-moment responsibility is the rule, and Jeremiah, a time when the laws of God are internalised like Ezekiel's swallowing of the scrolls. These are the first stirrings of a new episode.³²

III Act Two

The new approach entails God going beyond self-limitation to self-sacrifice. But this sacrifice is not any sacrifice just to impress upon the beholder how much pain God has suffered. It entails a specific engagement with the people on the very institutions that God has placed for man's instructions—a

struggle for the hope encapsulated in the Sabbath-Jubilee complex.

It is clear from the biblical record that the fundamental earthly reason for putting Jesus to death was his unyielding position on the Sabbath.³³ his claim to be the Lord of the Sabbath, his repeated provocations of the people on the Sabbath, allowing almost no neutral bystanders on the issue and his unique statement on why the people were putting him to death.³⁴

The apparent loser in this struggle for the Sabbath was Jesus because, instead of the people grasping the true meaning of the Sabbath, he died a condemned criminal. But God considered him worthy to be resurrected, thus turning this apparent failure—a lost-sacrifice—into a success such as creation has never seen.

Jesus' engagement on the Sabbath must at least be part of the reason for this reversal.³⁵ Under the Jews, the Sabbath had been turned into a stricture and a burden to the people, the very opposite of the freedom, responsibility, labour and pleasure of which it was intended to remind the people. Jesus wrested this cosmic pointer of hope—the Sabbath—from the custodians of the Jewish laws so that it could once again be the universal pointer of hope for all and sundry as intended.

On the earthly level, Jesus lost his life in the struggle, apparently going down with the very cause for which he fought. But God had a better plan. In Jesus, willingly and unflinchingly pay-

29 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 289; Yoder, *Politics*, p. 73, quoting D.W. Blosser, *Jesus and the Jubilee: The Year of Jubilee and Its Significance in the Gospel of Luke*.

30 Is. 1:13; Amos 8:5.

31 2 Chr. 36:21.

32 Is. 40; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 3, 33.

33 Fung, *Sabbath*, pp. 185-187; Kung, *On Being a Christian*, p. 335.

34 Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 129.

35 Kung, *On Being a Christian*, pp. 382-383.

ing with his life for challenging his opponents on the Sabbath, the foundation of the institutions of hope, the hope of the whole creation, has irrevocably, inseparably and uniquely been identified with and vested upon Jesus. When God resurrected Jesus from the dead, this cosmic hope in the Sabbath-Jubilee complex was resurrected together with its bearer, not to the old form of the letters of the law, but to the newness of a life in the resurrected Jesus Christ, never to be destroyed again.

With the Sabbath vested in the ever living person of the resurrected Lord, this cause became a living hope for all. Only in the resurrection does hope remain possible. If God cannot fail, then the cosmic hope vested in Jesus cannot be snuffed out and, as such, Jesus must resurrect to become Jesus Christ. The unity of the cause and its bearer in death has issued in a personified and embodied vision in the resurrection.³⁶ Jesus' seemingly blasphemous claim to be the Lord of the Sabbath in the previous earthly struggle has now been concretely validated in the cosmic Lord of the Sabbath.³⁷ The supra-physical material attributes of the resurrected Jesus—not constrained by walls, doors and space, but fully interacting with the physical in acts such as eating and touching—has now become embodied in the hope of this new Sabbath. Jesus Christ becomes the first fruit and his children are another type of first fruits awaiting the redemption of their bodies. And the cosmos, having tasted this new cre-

ation, looks forward to a grand harvest.

With this reversal of events in the resurrection, what was understood to be a static set of laws for perpetual and unchanging observance has now been transformed into a life, personally leading forward to a future consummation. The first three commandments relating man to God and the last six commandments relating man to other humans are now led by the personified and embodied hope—the living Sabbath—based on the transformed fourth commandment in relating man to himself and his future. These are then summarised in the often-repeated virtues—faith, hope and love of the New Testament with hope³⁸ being the dynamic and living pointer.³⁹ The resurrection has brought about more than a name change—a fundamental transformation has been wrought to the institutions of hope themselves.

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, he established the Lord's Supper so that as often as his followers gather together, they will remember him through the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine. Accordingly, after Jesus died and then resurrected on the third day, his disciples gathered to re-enact the Lord's Supper as instructed. Here the disciples had a choice in interpreting the frequency ('as often as') of this remembrance since Jesus, unlike God in his instructions in the Old Testament, did not specify it. To Jesus, man must be left room to fill in the 'as often as' for themselves.

36 Kung, *On Being a Christian*, p 383.

37 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 123-125.

38 Schwarz, *Eschatology*, p. 368.

39 Heb. 11:1.

The first obvious choice would be to peg this remembrance to the Passover as this forms the unmistakable and most significant background for understanding Jesus as the Messiah and he has indeed been called the Passover Lamb.⁴⁰ This would be a yearly observance and would be how most people would be or would want to be remembered. But instead, the disciples have spontaneously opted for an extraordinary choice: as often as the creation of God is to be remembered in the weekly cycle of the Sabbath. By pegging the remembrance of Jesus' death to God's creation, the disciples have grasped the undeniable cosmic import of Jesus' resurrection.

The first day of the week recalls the beginning of God's creation process. In this first-day-of-the-week choice, the disciples have spontaneously proclaimed that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, he has started a new creation, the like of which is at least on par with the original creation of God. This means not just one individual resurrecting, even though only Jesus Christ has resurrected so far. If it were just one individual, the event would be appropriately celebrated yearly as birthdays (in this case rebirth) are celebrated. But now the entire creation will be made anew in a way similar to how God has created *ex nihilo* in his first creation and this creative process will transcend the rhythm of nature itself just as the Sabbath is super-historical and super-natural.

With the Lord's Supper embedded in and forming the essential core of the

Lord's Day celebration,⁴¹ the sacrifice of Jesus and the hope from the ensuing resurrection are united in the celebration. The remembrance of what happened on the night of the betrayal and the looking forward to the Lord's return are now inseparable. The shedding of blood remembered in the cup is now transformed into the wine of celebration when Jesus Christ will drink it anew in the Kingdom.

Though one cannot say that this weekly observance is not intended by God, we do not see God dictating it in the way it eventually took shape. But believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit have joyfully institutionalized this Lord's Day celebration which is then accepted by God as his own when Jesus appeared on that day to guide his new creation forward.⁴² By its spontaneous weekly observance, redeemed man, that new creature in Christ,⁴³ is telling God that he too wants to sign on to be part of the forward march of God's new creation. It is as if man is demanding to be enlisted in this cosmic cause rather than God recruiting him.

What a contrast it is to the Israelites' reception of the erstwhile prophets! While the Sabbath is to celebrate the completion of one's work, the first-day-of-the-week-turned Lord's Day is to celebrate the newness of God's creation and the excitement of being a partner in this on-going march, looking forward to the final consummation. In the shift from the Sabbath to the Lord's Day, man is picking up his

⁴¹ Acts 20:7; 1Cor. 16:2.

⁴² Rev. 1:10.

⁴³ 2 Cor. 5:17.

⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 5:7.

hoe all over again for that future. O what a cosmic future this is and the excitement⁴⁴ has just begun for God's children!

In the Lord's Supper set against the Passover celebration, God's children remember Jesus' suffering. Bread and wine rather than the cross are used as symbols. The cross symbolizes the suffering of mankind, but bread and wine given for our sustenance represent the wholesome integrity of creation. Through the breaking of the bread, the brokenness of the universe and the brokenness of the relationships therein are being taken up in the broken body of Jesus. Through the wine symbolizing blood, the life being given up to mend the brokenness of creation is now shared among his children.

But it does not and must not end here. Jesus Christ resurrected, gives tangible proof that the brokenness of creation leading to his death, is indeed done away with. The all-pervading brokenness induced by man's rebellion is now on the mend. The process of the healing of the cosmos has started. This new beginning is also shared among his children who henceforth will look forward⁴⁵ to the day when Jesus will drink the wine anew in his Kingdom. A new hope, an engaged hope for all creation, is born on the Lord's Day.

Out of the expectant communities formed by Jesus' followers scattered to different parts of the then-known world arose many organizations called churches identified in the Bible by their geographical locations. These took the

name from the 'church' which Jesus founded after Peter recognized him as the Christ.⁴⁶ Jesus did not found this church on any royal lineage, sacred rites, organizational principles or talent pool,⁴⁷ but on the simple identification of himself—apparently a mere man born of a human mother—with the Christ, the son of the living God,⁴⁸ the creator of the universe.

If this impossible-sounding claim is substantiated, then the redemption of God has broken into the created order in a tangible and recognizable form. What has hitherto been the call of God through the Sabbatical Year to bring God's own creation into his redemption has now been set on a clear foundation in this matter-of-fact recognition: Jesus Christ is none other than the creator of the universe and is continuing to work with man to bring about full redemption, not only of humans, but as appropriate for the Christ, of the entire creation. No matter how fierce the opposition to God may be, this truth of Jesus, the man, being the Messiah, the supernatural Christ, the redeemer of God's entire creation, will never be snuffed out. The gates of Hades, first to foil redemption, then to limit redemption's scope⁴⁹ will not prevail.

Redemption is either cosmic or nothing. Jesus Christ is either the cosmic redeemer or he is nought. There can be no partial redeemer and this truth founds his church.

⁴⁴ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 232.

⁴⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 310.

⁴⁶ Mt. 16:15-18.

⁴⁷ Kung, *Christian*, pp. 285-86.

⁴⁸ Hans Kung, *The Catholic Church, A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2003), pp. 4-5.

⁴⁹ Mt. 16:21-23.

The reason Jesus shunned the populace's demand for him to be their leader was definitely not because he understood his Messiahship as only spiritual—which it cannot be if God is creator—and not because he espoused non-violence—which in fact he did.⁵⁰ He did not accede to this popular request because he could not allow his cosmic redemption to be hijacked and limited by politics or any other causes less than cosmic in dimension. Consequently he rebuked Satan who was behind Peter for suggesting a toned-down redemption, one not involving his death, and therefore also without his resurrection to usher in the new and living hope of the God-man-creation Sabbath.

Jesus could not and did not settle for a reform when the prize is a new creation. The role of the Sabbatical Year, sandwiched between the hope of the Sabbath day for humans and the universal hope of the Jubilee, has now been taken up into the church that Jesus founded. What nature has been unable to 'observe' because man has failed it is now being championed by the community of the eager, founded on the simple truth that Jesus is Christ. The creator of the universe is now inducting and engaging his full cosmic creation through his church.

But unlike some megalomaniacs, Jesus never made claims about his divinity without commensurate verifiable action as he challenged sceptics to believe him on the basis of his works.⁵¹ Yet this work cannot be just the display

of raw super-human power, just as the wanton use of force bespeaks moral bankruptcy rather than godliness, but must be the right work. To claim to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, is a theological proposition demanding verification by the right work. That work is the series of pitched battles which Jesus fought with the Jews on the Sabbath issue. In doing this, Jesus vested upon himself the cosmic cause. The less confrontational alternative—to die as just a sinless and benign human being—would not have him living up to whom he really is⁵² and claims to be: the creator of all that has come into existence. Also, the need of a one-and-only cosmic Messiah because of man's all-pervading sin would not be met. He would just be the saviour of mankind, in a pitifully compartmentalized redemption.

The redemption of the cosmos will have to be left to another saviour specially assigned for that job. Jesus would be just an amoral sacrifice whose only job is to cancel out man's moral debt, thus rounding the bottom line of the divine accounting of guilt. He would be powerless for anything else. But as the biblical facts show clearly, Jesus uniquely considered his Sabbath challenge to be the basis of his opponents' murderous motive,⁵³ yet he persisted in his Sabbath provocations regardless. When he made clear to his disciples, immediately after he revealed himself to be the Messiah, that this son of the living God must suffer many things and die at the hands of

50 Yoder, *Politics*, p. 94-97.

51 Jn. 10:37; 14:11.

52 Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:15-17.

53 Jn. 7:19-24.

his opponents,⁵⁴ he was appropriately vesting upon himself the cosmic cause of the Sabbath and taking it to the cross.

What started out as an identification of Jesus being Christ, followed by the proclamation of the founding of the church, is now progressing to its tangible manifestation as Jesus Christ set his face towards Jerusalem to bring to completion his long-running conflict on the Sabbath.⁵⁵ Of all the causes Jesus took up, only the Sabbath has the cosmic dimension to link the flesh-and-blood Jesus to the super-natural Christ to enable him, upon his resurrection, to become the indivisible Jesus Christ as he has so adamantly and forcefully claimed must be the foundation of his church. The truth of Jesus being Christ is proclaimed not only in words, but now in the earth-shattering validation of the resurrection.

In this series of events, the role of the Sabbatical Year to bring nature into God's redemption has been assimilated into the church founded on Jesus the Christ. The church is not the New Testament counterpart of the Sabbatical year. The church is more. But any entity worthy of the name church can no longer shirk this responsibility of cosmic redemption. Humans and the entire creation of God must be initiated into a grand harmony under God through the church which must give a foretaste of the freedom and bliss in the Kingdom.⁵⁶ Jesus initiated this process when he pointed to how even the birds of the sky and lilies of the

field are sustained and beautified by the creator⁵⁷ and in so doing updated the intention of the Sabbatical Year for a new beginning.

When Jesus inaugurated his ministry, he read from Isaiah 61:1-2a, the personalized poetic version of the Jubilee, and announced that this has been fulfilled among his listeners. He went on to preach the Kingdom, impressing upon his audience that the favourable year of the Lord—the Jubilee—is now fulfilled in the Kingdom of God or of Heaven. While the sum total of the aspiration of man and nature in the Old Testament is the Jubilee, Jesus started outlining the Kingdom in the Beatitudes⁵⁸ as a future for man before which one would feel totally inadequate.

While the realization of the Jubilee was bogged down in man's waywardness and was never even attempted collectively, the aspirants to the Kingdom—humans—would consider themselves blessed when persecuted for the Kingdom's sake. While those in the Old Testament who mourn because their meekness has disadvantaged them (resulting in their hungering and thirsting for justice) can look forward to the Jubilee, and if they relapse and live long enough, even the next Jubilee, those in the Kingdom will be blessed by being comforted, inheriting the earth and being satisfied, respectively. Unlike the Jubilee, the blessings in the Kingdom are now final, no longer subjecting the aspirants to relapsing into another round of longing.

The Jubilee seems to administer jus-

54 Mt. 16:21.

55 Fung, *Sabbath*, pp. 192-194.

56 Kung, *Christian*, pp. 478-484.

57 Mt. 7:26-32.

58 Mt. 5:3-10.

tice more on the side of the oppressed, restraining the rich and powerful in their ambitions, but the Kingdom has a place even for these earthly winners if they are merciful, pure in heart and peace loving. The Kingdom transcends socio-economic boundaries and goes right to the heart of the matter—the heart of man. The Jubilee is imposed from above, though no less to the rejoicing of many, the Kingdom is what all people of good faith, regardless of their walks of life, would naturally aspire to without prompting, even at the cost of being persecuted. The Jubilee has God as the ultimate arbiter between humans and between man and nature, but the Kingdom sees God as the ultimate of all that his children aspire to with the deep longings of the cosmos being satisfied therein.

Like the taking up of the Sabbatical Year into the church, Jesus has backed up his transmutation of the Jubilee into the Kingdom with dramatic actions at the height of his career. Right after founding his church, he stated factually that those around him would see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom. This puzzling foretelling came to pass in the only pre-resurrection ‘supernatural’ event of Jesus recorded outside of the Gospels—the Transfiguration.⁵⁹

A week after founding his church, Jesus went up on a mountain and was transfigured before the eyes of three of his apostles, then Moses and Elijah appeared. Yet at Peter’s very suggestion that Jesus, Moses and Elijah might be sheltered in human tents, the latter two were immediately removed from the scene in favour of Jesus with a

direct pronouncement from God. From now on, Jesus is the only figure to be followed. God gave the Law through Moses and enforced the Law through Elijah, among others. The institutional aim of the Law is the Jubilee in which all would obey God, resulting in the planters of vineyard enjoying their grapes, the builders their houses and the fiercest creatures commingling in the land with the most defenceless and a little boy leading them all.

But both Moses and Elijah failed to deliver God’s promises by not measuring up to the Law and being disheartened in work, respectively.⁶⁰ In time, the Law with the dynamic pointer of the Sabbath in its core has been misunderstood as static and turned into the very opposite of liberation—a stifling burden. In conferring with Jesus on how he would suffer and die in Jerusalem, these two Old Testament giants have passed their torches to Jesus with an admission of their own failures to reach the Jubilee.⁶¹ In Jesus’ struggle on the Sabbath, he has re-invested the proper dynamism into the Law so that it is the pointer to the transformed Jubilee once more.⁶²

Henceforth Jesus would transmute the Jubilee into the Kingdom to complete what Moses and Elijah had started but failed to complete. Yet the promised Son of Man coming in his Kingdom, with the wonderful pronouncement among divine brilliance, speaks of a mission not of unbroken glory, but first of sacrifice to the point

59 Mt. 17:1-8; 2 Pet. 1:17-18.

60 Ex. 2:12 vs. Ex. 20:13; 1Ki 18-19, cf. 19:1-3.

61 Lk. 9:31.

62 Kung, *On Being a Christian*, p. 216.

of death. Just as for the church, the brilliance of the Kingdom leads not through gradual improvements of man's work first, but the death and resurrection of the one who proclaimed the fulfilment of the Jubilee in the Kingdom.

When Jesus had drunk his last vine on earth, he looked forward to drinking it anew in his Father's Kingdom. The old institutions—the Sabbath day, Sabbatical year and Jubilee complex—had passed away and were buried with Jesus upon his death, but have risen with the resurrected Christ in the celebration of the Lord's Day, the proclamation of the church and the hope of the Kingdom.⁶³ Henceforth, every person who calls upon Jesus Christ as Lord has been united with him in his death, has been resurrected with him and has been ineluctably inducted into the new institutions of hope.

IV Act Three

This Kingdom is new wine in an old wineskin. Starting from the appetizing description in the Beatitudes, its power to burst old constraints would issue forth in all directions to achieve what the Jubilee could not do. It grows silently from the smallest seed into a big tree, but is hardly recognized by people because of the tares that grow up to obscure it, until the discriminating harvest reveals its presence. Unlike the Jubilee, it has no institutional structure to be reckoned with, yet it is the ultimate destiny where Jesus Christ will be drinking the vine anew. When the image of this Kingdom

comes into better focus, one sees a city, a river and a tree constituting the new heaven and new earth.⁶⁴

Like the aspired Jubilee, the city⁶⁵ is where man's patience and labour are consummately rewarded, where God accepts the decidedly human-centred measure of man as his own and where God welcomes the glory kings and nations are bringing in.⁶⁶ Man has been placed on an esteemed pedestal⁶⁷ despite his former rebellion. God claimed sovereignty over the land in the Jubilee, but nature is now nourished directly from God through the river in the Kingdom. The tree of life thriving by the river will produce spontaneously for the sustenance and healing of the nations without having to suffer the pains of hoeing and pruning by man.

Explicitly mentioned is the absence of tears, pains and deaths in this future, but just as conspicuous is the absence of the groaning of creation under its own decay and through battling man with thorns and thistles.⁶⁸ The curse on the land is no more. The mutuality and justice that the Jubilee could see realized only in rigid institutions are now fulfilled in the Kingdom in spontaneous harmony. This loving mutuality is all encompassing, extending to every nook and cranny, warp and

⁶⁴ Rev. 21, 22.

⁶⁵ Rev. 21:17, 24, 26.

⁶⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Cambria: Paternoster, 1997), p. 162; Schwarz, *Eschatology*, p. 284.

⁶⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), p. 89-90; Ellul, *City*, p. 177.

⁶⁸ Gen. 3:17-19.

⁶³ Schwarz, *Eschatology*, p. 321.

woof of the cosmos. The tabernacle of God has now covered that of man and the cosmos.

The space that God has created for man in the Sabbath through limiting himself and further emptying himself and the space that man has created for nature in the Sabbatical year has now been filled with the rejoicing of the universe in the Jubilee-transfigured Kingdom. The prime mover of the emptying process, the Lamb—Elohim and YHWH⁶⁹—has now carried the Sabbath cause of creation to its Omega point. And the community of the eager is his partner.

In bringing Jeremiah's prophecy⁷⁰ to pass, God established a new covenant with his people by writing his Law into their hearts so that no one needs tell his brothers to know the Lord since they all know him. When the disciples exercise their freedom to institutionalise the Lord's Day and the 'church,' they fulfil this prophecy. Whatever his children decide within this covenant in the Spirit, God accepts, not reluctantly, but indeed as his own just as he accepted each part of his original creation as good.

Showing his acceptance, Jesus appeared to John, not on the anniversary of his resurrection, but on a man-instituted Lord's Day, and he addressed individual churches as if they were directly founded by him. These churches are not structured according to divine proportion like the Temple⁷¹ but according to the needs of the situation of man and his world. In

the city, the measures of man are nonetheless angelic and the handiwork of kings and nations nonetheless glorious. Starting from the simple act of naming living creatures, God's chosen have now fulfilled the role of stewards of God's creation and are embraced by both the Creator and his creation.

V Between Acts Two and Three

In the first creative acts of God in the first chapter of the Bible, two of his attributes are apparent: freedom of will and action and a desire for purposeful consummation of his creation.⁷² Humans are made in God's image and consequently share these two attributes in creaturely form: they have partial freedom of will and action, and they desire their work to be consummated in the grand mosaic of the creator. To grant partial freedom to humans, God has limited his direct action in human affairs. To consummate his creation, God seeks partners in humankind. But after the Fall of man from God's grace with the consequential disharmony that percolated throughout the created order, both the partial freedom of man and his role in God's grand mosaic have been thrown out of kilter.

To remedy the situation by once again giving man a clear vision and setting him on a path to the future, God instituted hope among his chosen people through the Sabbath Day, Sabbatical Year and the Year of the Jubilee. Yet these top-down institutions never caught on and were even distorted by

69 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 15.

70 Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Heb. 8:8-12.

71 Ex. 35-39.

72 Gen 1, compares the 'good' and 'very good' usage.

man's ungodly genius into the very opposite of what they were intended to be.⁷³ The institutions imposed on the people demonstrated that God's self-limitation did not elicit the intended response.

God has not changed, but deepened his commitment to his creation: to take his self-emptying, of which self-limitation is the first form, one step further to self-sacrifice in having his own son die on a cross. By vesting upon himself the first institutions of hope and resurrecting, a new hope has henceforth been born. The resurrection so excited God's people that they spontaneously initiated new institutions which unwittingly fulfilled and transcended the old institutions to radiate a contagious cosmic hope.

These new institutions start with the Lord's Supper as the core of the creative Lord's Day which is then celebrated within the hopeful communities that confess Jesus as Christ, the creator and redeemer of God's creation, to look forward to the Kingdom. The hope that was misdirected and short-changed in the Fall is now restored: God's children have properly exercised their freedom in building and sharing in the institutions of hope and through the same institutions, they have also seen much more clearly the real content of this hope, the hope of universal redemption which must reach to every corner which sin has once touched.

The hope hinted at in the Old Testament is now given fuller dimensions in that it is first, a living rather than a lifeless irresponsible hope, led by a risen and ever-living Lord who can respond

to every situation as the world changes in response to creatively dynamic humanity; second, a participating rather than a passive hope, though founded indisputably on Jesus' death and resurrection, which was institutionalized by man who is to shape a future that God will accept and in which he will take pride; third, it is a harmonizing rather than a compartmentalized hope, so that each participant in shaping this hope will find and be excited by his role in the beautiful and intelligent mosaic of God in fulfillment of the longing of all creation;

Fourth, it is a self-emptying rather than an assertive hope so as to welcome the future through constructive sacrifice and not destructive coercion; fifth, it is a present-transforming rather than a distant hope through the redeemed first fruits acting out their anticipation in the here and now and in the process bringing the present closer to the substance of the hope; sixth, it is a tension-filled⁷⁴ rather than a lopsided hope so as to balance man's present-transforming element with the element of sheer anticipation. The former may foreclose the latter with misguided human power (e.g. military power) while the latter may lapse into disengagement from reality if the tension is not properly maintained. Seventh, it is a godly rather than a human hope which sees the beginning and end of this hope in none other than God himself, despite man's participation.

The centrality of this hope in the Bible is best summed up by the Epistle to the Hebrews which contends that all Old Testament types and regulations

73 Mk. 2:23-28.

74 Schwarz, *Eschatology*, p. 128 (footnotes).

have either been made obsolete or fulfilled, but one goal still remains—the Sabbath rest of the new covenant—and one leader to follow to that goal—Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. The original and only mandate of man—to steward God's creation—has not changed throughout the eons even after the Fall of man. Indeed, the need of faithful stewardship has been made more urgent, given man's destructiveness and ignorance resulting from his Fall.

With man voluntarily enlisting in the New Testament's institutions of hope, the real journey to full stewardship of creation has made a solid and irreversible start. Man's debut in nature was the task that God initiated with him, to name the animals. This contains two parts—to gain an appreciation of nature and to manage it for man's own good. Correspondingly, this task was split into two for the Israelites: the working years and the intervening Sabbatical years. The goal is that these two seemingly separate tasks—work the land and appreciate creation—would so complement each other that they would merge back into the one intended task to be completed with the redemption of the cosmos. This will happen in the Kingdom.

The goal of this stewardship is not to move backward to 'pristine' conditions, if such existed at all in the past, but to go forward to a dynamic future which will again usher in a harmony that has been lost since Adam fell. Man's continual creativity in the institutions of hope should not throw this future out of kilter, but will be fully nurtured and accommodated in the grand harmony of the Kingdom. The hope of creation lies in the redeemed's

dynamic stewardship guided by the future of a God-man-creation rendezvous.

The institution of the Jubilee-turned-Kingdom has now become a vision, a goal and ultimately a hope. It is what all the institutions of hope are pointing towards. In itself, it is not exactly an institution, but rather what energises and leads forward the institutions. It cannot be bound by any institutions, but will give rise to institutions dedicated to moving creation towards it. It is a super-institution, transcending the more tangible and formal institutions that man is used to.

The arithmetic of the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee offers an interesting ambiguity⁷⁵ with rich theological overtones in elucidating the link between the Kingdom and the church. The question is: is a Jubilee fixed in time in relation to the closest Sabbatical Year? The Bible allows no definite interpretation, but however one understands the relative timing, the Sabbatical year does not exactly coincide with the Jubilee. In fact, the Sabbatical year initiated for the land is never meant to be the Jubilee of the Lord. As later clarified by Isaiah, the Jubilee is the favourable year 'of the Lord' rather than of man. God is the actor, bestowing favour on his creation rather than man creating a utopia, despite his efforts in the Sabbatical year.

In the same way, the Kingdom, being the goal of the church, remains paradoxical. Every redeemed mortal must seek earnestly the Kingdom, but no mortal has the right to proclaim a

⁷⁵ Compare Yoder, *Politics*, p. 71 (footnotes) with Allis, *Commentary*, p. 164-165.

human entity to be the Kingdom of God. Any time this is proclaimed, no matter how godly the entity may seem to be, the announcer is completely wrong and the steps to straying further from the goal of the Kingdom have already begun. The church will remain that entity constantly struggling⁷⁶ against the gate of Hades and aspects of the Kingdom will break out within the church from time to time to varying degrees, but the Kingdom per se is ever out of reach of the provisional church. Political, economical or even Christian Messianism must always be a heresy.⁷⁷ Yet the tension between these institutions⁷⁸—Lord's Day, church and Kingdom—will keep our hope blazing until the end.

The Promised Land is not the Israelites' final destination. Rather, it is the land which enables the progressive promises of the Sabbath, then the

Sabbatical year and finally the Jubilee to be realized. This promise is not a divine transfer of some externalities to man, but a joint venture of God and man⁷⁹ with nature being as much a partner as an enabling condition.

Throughout the long journey of the church towards the Kingdom since her foundation on Jesus being Christ, she has, under the guidance of God, created many more enabling conditions for her forward movement. These come in the form of the full enterprise of humanity—socio-economic-political-techno-cultural—and the challenge for the church is to submit these to the draw of the Kingdom through remembering her Lord in the bread and wine. In the recent struggle for stewardship of creation, human greed⁸⁰ usually has the upper hand. The institutions of hope should redeem us from this losing streak.

76 Schwarz, *Eschatology*, p. 207.

77 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 1373.

78 Kung, *On Being a Christian*, p. 221.

79 Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 146-7; p. 107.

80 Ellul, *Subversion*, p. 178.

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