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THE CHRISTIAN CLAIM FOR THE  
FINALITY OF CHRIST

Many years ago, when my second son was quite a little boy, I took him to the Dalada Maligawa, where the tooth of the Buddha is kept as a relic. It is the most famous Buddhist temple in Ceylon. In one corner of the temple is a huge statue of the Buddha. When I explained to my son who the Buddha was, he said to me, "Yes, and after he died, he would have gone to Jesus Christ. What did Jesus Christ do to him?" When Paul preached to the Athenians on Mars' Hill, his final declaration to them was, "[God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). In the parable of Jesus on the last judgment, it is the Son of man who comes in his glory as the judge. (Matt. 25:31 ff.)

To speak of the finality of Jesus Christ is to speak specifically of the man Jesus. It is to talk neither about the finality of the Christ-experience, nor about the finality of the Christ-revelation, but about Jesus Christ himself. The issue is not whether all true religious experience is an experience of God in Jesus Christ, nor whether Jesus Christ is the final and therefore determinative revelation of God; but whether it is true that

God has set, in the world and among men, this man Jesus as final—him to whom they must hearken, him whom they must obey, him through whom they will live and by whom they will be judged. Is Paul right when he says, "For although . . . there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (I Cor. 8:5-6)?

Some time ago, at an international student conference of theological students, I had a strange experience. I found myself listening to a discussion about Jesus Christ, only to find that the Jesus Christ they were talking about was simply a historical point of reference around whom a body of doctrine and ethics had been built. They kept on saying, this is the Jesus Christ whom through the centuries the church has believed in and proclaimed and whom Christians have experienced. But they denied that it was possible really to know what Jesus Christ was like or said or did, when he walked the earth in the flesh. There was a bare skeleton of events which could be attested to with certainty. The rest was claimed to be "proclamation." It is not my intention to go into this question at this time. But I do want to say that, if in any real measure it is not possible to get within hearing and seeing distance of the man Jesus, then talk about the finality of Jesus Christ is simply futile. The crux of the finality issue is whether or not in Jesus Christ men confront and are confronted by the transcendent God whose will they cannot manipulate, by whose judgment they are bound, and with whose intractable presence in their midst they must inevitably reckon.

As one lives and works with men of other faiths, one is made constantly aware not only of the fact that Christians

have different beliefs from those who are not Christian, but also of the fact that they believe in a different way. The very act of faith is different. The basic reason for this is that the coordinates within which the graph of the Christian faith is plotted are quite different from the coordinates used in other religions and other systems of belief. It is not simply that the graphs themselves are different.

One basic difference is that whereas in all other religions the coordinates of faith are determined by the relation between the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, in Christianity they are determined by the relation between the universal and the particular. The scriptural testimony is not that Jesus Christ is a finite manifestation of the infinite, but that he is the universal become particular—the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Jesus Christ is neither a darshana nor an avatar.

The point at issue is the difference between the different experiences of meeting God and the experience of the compulsive specific obedience which one has when one meets Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth, whenever he addressed men, addressed them with specific demands—leave your nets, take up your bed, sell what you have. He is still the same Jesus. The experience of meeting God which is known as the mystical experience, and which is testified to by the devotees in all religions, is best understood within the relation between the infinite and the finite. However, when one is talking about the finality of Jesus Christ, one is talking about how this mystical experience is pegged down to this earthly life. To paraphrase Paul, the particular consists "in the works he has prepared for us to walk in" (Eph. 2:10).

That which is being contended for is not the prestige of a particular place of meeting between God and man, but the

peculiarity of what happens when men meet God in Jesus Christ. When Jesus announced that "the kingdom of God is at hand," and demanded of men that they "repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14), he was asking not for some general response to the requirements of religion or morality, but for a specific commitment to a particular event and person. The religious man is one kind of man; a Christian disciple is another kind of man. There is no substitute for the "shattering" which takes place when men meet God at God's place and hour of appointment, and for the consequences in discipline and discipleship of that experience.

Attempts have certainly been made, again and again, to change this axis around which the Christian faith rotates, to change these coordinates within which the graph of that faith is plotted. There have always been those who have desired to understand the Christian faith, not in terms of the relation between the universal and the particular, but in terms of the relation between the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal. In this discussion the crux of the argument has always been concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The New Testament insistence on the decisive significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ constitutes a denial of the view that Jesus is a temporal manifestation of the eternal God, a finite appearance of him who is infinite. The finite and the temporal are categories which apply to that which is repeatable. The resurrection faith, however, is concerned with the eternity and the universality of Jesus Christ himself. What the New Testament is announcing is not that the Christ-experience cannot be destroyed by death nor that the Christ-revelation includes a revelation of death as not final, but that Jesus himself rose from the dead. The testimony is not to the life of Jesus after death, but to his conquest of death. What the New Testa-

ment makes clear is that while the risen Christ offers himself only to the perception of faith, he is nevertheless to be proclaimed to all men as having risen from the dead. There is a happening apart from faith which is proclaimed, even though it is to faith that the proclamation is addressed. As Paul puts it, "[God] has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). When Peter says, "This Jesus, . . . you crucified and killed. . . . But God raised him up" (Acts 2:23-24), he is talking not about something that had happened to the disciples, but about something that had happened to Jesus.

Also, even as by its testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ the New Testament witnesses to the eternity of the specific man Jesus, even so by its testimony to the ascension of Jesus Christ the New Testament seeks to say that in Jesus the distinction between the infinite and the finite is an irrelevant distinction. "Seated at the right hand of God" is a way of saying that here is the operative reality, the whole is present at this point and in this person, this is both the infinite and the finite, he is what God is with respect to all things—their Sovereign and Savior, their Judgment and their Judge.

Now we can see how it is that, while the New Testament testimony is to a specific event which happened, it is able also to speak of this event in the present tense. For precisely in the fact that the New Testament faith concerning Jesus Christ is stated unambiguously in terms of the relation between the universal and the particular lies the ground for the New Testament witness that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever (I Heb. 13:8). The finality that is asserted is not the finality of an event in the past or a person in the past, but the finality of him who is continuously and identifiably present. "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his

fect." (I Cor. 15:25.) "I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt. 28:20.)

When God revealed himself to Moses, he revealed himself as one who was recognized by being continuously present, and by being known by that presence alone. (Exod. 3:14). Moses had to lead his people to follow a God who would never become past tense. The second commandment, "You shall not make yourself a graven image" (Exod. 20:4), is a commandment not to attempt to make God static. Indeed, no understanding of God which is delimited by a past tense is satisfactory. The attraction of thinking in terms of the infinite and the finite is that the finite can keep on repeating itself. There is no finality because there is constant progress and process. As the Bhagavad Gita has it, "Though unborn and immutable in essence, though Lord of Beings, yet governing Nature which is mine, I come into being by my delusive power. For whensoever right declines, O Bharata, and wrong uprises, then I create myself" (iv 6-7).

The biblical faith has a different thrust. The finality which is affirmed about Jesus Christ is set within the context of an ongoing activity of God, whereby the past does not remain past, but is continuously becoming present. In the Exodus passage to which reference has been made, it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who reveals himself to Moses as "I am." So also, the New Testament witness to the finality of Jesus Christ is not simply to the finality of a past event, but of a present Savior. It is the same bush which is burning without being consumed. When the church confesses, "And I believe in Jesus Christ—born, suffered, crucified, died, and buried; who rose again and has ascended and will come"—it is of the same Jesus that this confession is made. (Acts 1:11.) It is he who is final; not that everything is over, but that he encompasses everything that takes place. In the closing words of the Bible, as Jesus

speaks them, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:13).

This way of relating past tense to present tense takes the discussion from a consideration of the person of Christ to a consideration of his work. Mark gives to his gospel the title, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Luke says that in his gospel he recorded "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). When Jesus declared that the kingdom of God had come, there was a double thrust in that declaration. The event of the coming was past tense. But the kingdom of God itself was present continuous tense. The finality of Jesus Christ is the finality of an ongoing work.

This indissoluble connection between the person of Jesus Christ and his work, when speaking of his finality, leads to a clarification of a second basis of difference between the coordinates of the Christian faith and those of other faiths and beliefs. The scriptures of other religions deal fundamentally either with the interior life or the life after death. The Christian Scriptures, however, speak in the first instance about this present life in all its concreteness and its particularities. Other religions hold that the important thing in the drama of life is what happens to the actors, while the Christian Scriptures affirm that what happens to the actors is only a part of God's concern. His total concern encompasses the whole drama—men, women, and children, and all of nature, in their relationships to one another and in their several particularities of age and sex, of community and race, of nation and religion, and across the generations of time. It is this insistence on this world which gives to the New Testament declaration that in Jesus God became man its true context.

When the name of Jesus is announced as "Emmanuel"—"God with us" (Matt. 1:23), the announcement affirms the

"with-ness" of God on which human life depends. Man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). This imaging relationship, in which man is perpetually placed before God, constitutes the meaning and responsibility of human life. The God-man relationship is a treble one. "In him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28.) But this God, in whom we are, is also the God who is within us. (Col. 1:27.) He is constantly in our lives and within our personalities, seeking to evoke in us a true response to himself. In the third place, that to which response has to be made is also constantly present as the reality of God outside us, impinging on us, both in wrath and in mercy, both in judgment and in demand. (Rev. 3:20.) There is no way of simplifying the God-man relationship, so that any one of these three relations—God's inclusiveness, his immanence, and his transcendence—is subsumed under the other two. When Scripture testifies to the finality of Jesus Christ, it is speaking of this fact of Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, in the richness of this threefold relation, and in so doing, bears witness to the several aspects of the work of Christ.

1. The first strand in the biblical testimony to the work of Jesus Christ is that it is *he from whom all things proceed and receive their vocation*. Paul states this quite directly when he says, "All things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1:16). Scripture does not find it a logical burden to attribute to Jesus Christ the origin of things, because it sees clearly that their meaning is in him. All things were not only made through him, but nothing made is outside him. (John 1:3.) He is the one in whom all things are, and who is in all things. Their true nature and vocation is what he is in them and what they are in him.

The significance of what is being said here lies in the fact that, by this way of saying it, the Creator and his creation are shown as being bound together. He through whom all things

were created is also the first born of all creation. (Col. 1:15-16.) The whole of creation is invested with meaning because he is part of them. In him the "with-ness" of God is affirmed. All things are from him, and he is of them.

2. The natural next step in the biblical testimony is to speak of Jesus Christ as *he in whom all things cohere and work together*. (Col. 1:17.) Everything keeps moving and changing, and yet the whole thing holds together. Things do not fly apart. Life remains a unity in spite of all its diversity. The mystery of evil, too, is held within the exercise of God's sovereign grace. (II Thes. 2:7-8.) An inclusive purpose binds everything together, a purpose which belongs to someone in ultimate authority. Men experience this ultimacy in personal life, as they see how he rules and overrules all things, "in everything [working] for good with those who love him" (Rom. 8:28); while, in the life of society, this ultimacy is maintained and declared through a mission. "All authority in heaven and on earth," Jesus says, "has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-19). The apostles are sent everywhere and to everyone, because everywhere and over everyone Jesus is already in authority. No wonder Paul in his close-knit argument in his letter to the Romans, makes Jesus Christ the key to the understanding of the whole of history. No failure, he says, is final. No betrayal or disobedience is ultimate. There is always a way out of what seems a blind alley. No one is outside the overarching purposes of God. "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! . . . For from him and through him and to him are all things." (Rom. 11:33-36.)

This way of stating the finality of Jesus rests on the fact that, as he is part of creation and is himself involved in human history, that which happened to him must become the source

of that which happens to all. He is "the pioneer of [our] salvation" (Hebrews 2:10). So that even as it is possible to speak of the whole as being infected by sin, we can speak of the whole as being infected by salvation. (I Cor. 15:21-22.) The pioneer does not set an example to be followed; he opens up a highway by which men can now go to the land that has been won for them by him.

3. However, the teaching of Scripture is not that in Jesus all is now well, and well anyhow. Jesus is he by whom all things are judged and brought to judgment. His finality bears a consequence for all things.

As John puts it, the fact that God has sent his son into the world sets before men a real choice—either to believe in him and so to share in eternal life—the life which he lives in the world—or to live apart from him and so to perish. (John 3:16.) That which has perished has no use. Just as a fruit which has perished is useless for eating, so he who has perished is of no use to Jesus Christ. And, conversely, to be of no use to Jesus Christ is to perish.

The point is that there is a determining reality in the world which is Jesus Christ at work in it. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4.) This light has now come into the world. (John 1:9.) So that, the life he lives in the world becomes the way by which all men must walk, as it also decides the way in which all men must work. As he himself explained it, only those who work with him gather, while the rest scatter only. (Luke 11:23.)

4. But this testimony to the activity of God in judgment, of which Jesus Christ is the judge, because he is God's intervention in and God's decision for human life, is set within the context of the promise that Jesus is he through whom all things fulfill their destiny.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah the new beginning is set out

in these terms: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:33-34). A great act of forgiveness is the matrix within which judgment is exercised: or, in New Testament terms, Christ's act of atonement forms also the basis of the judgment he exercises.

The New Testament does not worry about the logical contradiction between its teaching that damnation is a possibility for men, so that this may be the judgment which is pronounced on some at the last, and its teaching that God's plan in Christ for the fullness of time is to unite all things in him. (Eph. 1:10.) Indeed, the New Testament shows that it is out of this very contradiction that there arises both the gospel which is proclaimed and the reason for proclaiming it. If salvation is by grace, damnation cannot be by works: so that the issue of faith and unfaith must be stringently understood in relation to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This recapitulation, however, of all things in Jesus Christ, at the end of the process of history, is already taking place in the world. It is personal experience that when the entries in the book of men's lives are brought under the heading of Jesus Christ, many a transaction which seemed at the time to be gain will be seen really to have been loss, while others which seemed at the time to have been loss will be seen to be gain. Besides, because this life and activity of Jesus Christ is his life and activity in the world, it is meaningful to speak too of human cultures being recapitulated in him and through him. Thus, when an Indian thinker speaks of "wedding the Spirit of Christ with the spirit of India," he is asking that Christ's presence in India be discerned so that that which belongs to India may be brought into his obedience and into the service of his glory. "They shall bring [unto Zion] the glory and the honor of the nations." (Rev. 21:26.)

5. The climax of the biblical testimony, therefore, to the finality of Jesus Christ is that it is *he unto whom all things go*. This is the natural climax to the affirmation that the finality of Jesus Christ is not simply the finality of himself as a person, but is also the finality of his work as the effective presence in the world of the kingdom and reign of God.

On the one hand, there is this reign as it impinges on human life through the exercise of Christ's Lordship and Saviorhood. On the other hand, there is the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of men, evoking repentance and faith, and enabling the response of obedience and discipleship. The finality of Jesus Christ receives its full trinitarian affirmation only as it takes seriously this New Testament witness to the work of the Holy Spirit. For apart from him the gift of grace in Jesus Christ is not received. It is the Holy Spirit who teaches men to live by the Father's welcome, enabling each man to say, "Abba"—"my Father." It is also by him that they are led to inherit that which Jesus Christ has made their inheritance. (Rom. 8:16-17.)

This essential work of Christ and the Holy Spirit has as its center the way in which things and persons are brought by them to participation in the crisis of Christ's death and resurrection. Individuals die with him in his death and find that in losing themselves they save themselves. Also, every perception of truth and every system of moral behavior is brought to dissolution by him, when it is submitted to him, and then resurrected to new life within his obedience and in his service.

The finality of Jesus Christ, as the Bible declares it, however, does not consist only in the finality of the Person and his work. It also consists in the finality of the witness borne to him. The community which carries his name bears this finality as a mark of its life.

When Scripture works out the relation between the universal and the particular in the structure of Christian faith, it also includes in its teaching the way in which this relation is exemplified in the reality of the church—that is, in the relation between the purposes of God for the whole of creation and the work of God in the community of witness. This is why the Christian community is compared to the first fruits of a harvest. The first fruits are the guarantee of the whole harvest and part of it. As James has it, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). The call and the blessing of Abraham, which is the first act in the story of how the whole human community took particular form in a people bearing God's name, has this relation between the universal and the particular explicitly stated in the call itself. "I will bless . . . you, . . . and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves." (Gen. 12:3.)

How does this happen? The answer given, on the one hand, is to speak of the representative nature of Christ and, on the other hand, to speak of the way in which the church participates in that nature. In his letter to the Hebrews the writer says, "As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to [man]. But we see Jesus" (Heb. 2:8-9). The thrust of the verse is not that that which is not yet will be accomplished because of what has already happened in and to Jesus Christ, but that what has happened in and to Jesus Christ is already the end, the end toward which all things are set. "We . . . grow, . . ." says Paul, "into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

Jesus Christ is representative man. That which happened to him happened to all humanity, so that it is this happening which is then unfolded through the process of time. The passage in Daniel (Dan. 7:13-14) to which the verse in Hebrews alludes, speaks of the Son of man. The Son of man is man in his divine human-ness. He is what God intended man to be. When

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Jesus chose this title for himself (Matt. 16:13), this was the claim that he was making. "I am man." And, when his disciples called him the Son of God (Matt. 16:16), that was their way of accepting his claim. For the Son of man is Son of man only because he is the Son of God. He is God's decisive deed on man's behalf. He is for man his new beginning. In him all humanity is represented.

Also, since there is only one name by which men can be saved (Acts 4:12), only one way to the Father (John 14:6), therefore in him all must meet. If there are many ways for men to attain their destiny, they can go by those several ways without meeting one another. But if there is only one way and one door, all men must meet. The human community is constituted by the finality of Jesus Christ. All things are not only from him, but unto him.

In this representativeness of Christ the church shares, because not only are all things set toward him, but he himself who is the end has happened to the church. In Paul's words the church is that on which "the end of the ages has come" (I Cor. 10:11). It is that for which tomorrow is over. In describing the Christian life both John and Paul use violent metaphors. John speaks of a second birth (John 3:3), while Paul speaks of a death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4). There is one thing certain about every child when it is born—it will die. Paul makes the claim that, for the Christian, this certain event is over. He has already died. The death he will die some day is only the physical counterpart of a death he has died already. That is why death has no sting and the grave no victory. (I Cor. 15:55.) The life of the church is this resurrected life. "Destroy this temple," Jesus said, "and . . . I will raise it up" (John 2:19). John adds the comment, "He spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2:21).

How many Christians live as those for whom death is over?

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What will it mean to do so? It will mean, will it not, that when they do something well they will be able to forget it and not be disappointed if no one gives them credit for it. They will know what it is to have the signature of death written across all their achievements, just as it has been written across all their sins. How many (and here I am talking about Ceylon) profess that they are prepared to carry the cross for Jesus' sake, but decide to emigrate if they are overlooked for a promotion on the ground that they are Christians! No, it cannot be said of most of us that we are dead. We are very much alive to what we think the world owes us. The Christian practice of death means nothing more and nothing less than allowing people to treat us as they treated Jesus himself. When Paul said, I am dead, but Christ is alive in me (Gal. 2:20), he was saying, You can deal with me as you dealt with Jesus Christ. That is the crux of the Christian calling. "Are you able," Jesus asks, "to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38).

The other side of this truth is that not only is death over but the resurrection is over, too. He who is risen is already the Lord. And yet, how little acknowledgment is made of this lordship. There is too great a readiness to harbor grievances, to press claims, to ask for recognition, as if the final reality is not the lordship of Christ but the freedom of men. It is true, is it not, that as far as any man is concerned, he is not at another man's mercy, not even his own, for Christ is already Lord of all men and all things.

But it is not only in this personal dimension that witness is borne to the finality of Christ: for it has this implication, too, that those who so witness are committed by the witness they bear both to believe in the presence of Jesus Christ in the history of all other faiths, as well as to accept their responsibility to declare to men of other faiths the identity of "the unknown



God" by whom each man's faith is validated and their systems of faith are judged. (Acts 17:23.)

To disclose the "unknown God" is not to rename the known gods. Instead, it is to uncover a presence which has been there even though unidentified: indeed, a presence that was forgotten and lost, if not denied. To put the matter in another way, the known gods represent the past tense in one's religious history. It is the present tense, the way in which God is contemporarily present, which needs to be discerned and named. That this present tense has always been present is what makes the name of Jesus appropriate for it.

This witness to the unknown God rests, too, on another fact: that when Jesus Christ makes his place and time of appointment with men, he does not always give his name. I can imagine a man such as Jawaharlal Nehru saying, "But when did I see you naked or hungry or in prison?" (Matt. 25:37-39). The point is not that there are alternatives to commitment to Christ, other ways by which men can be saved; but that to speak about the finality of Christ is not to tie oneself to where his name is actually pronounced. As he himself tells us, he determines the form and occasion of his presence, and where and to whom he will come incognito. Also, is it not the converse of this fact that he is emphasizing when he says that if the son who has said "Yes" will not obey, then the father will win his obedience from the son who says "No" (Matt. 21:28-31)?

To fulfill, then, the Christian responsibility with regard to other faiths and their adherents, Christians must, as it were, be prepared to engage simultaneously in three dialogues. First, there will be the inner dialogue through which their own faith in Jesus Christ is matured and fructified by the testimony of other men to God's ways with them. The Christian must never forget that he is always as one who sees baffling reflections in a mirror (1 Cor. 13:12), and that others constantly make clear

to him many things which he finds perplexing. Secondly, there will be the outer dialogue in which Christians and those who are not engage each other in conversation. The intent of this dialogue is to discern the ways of God in each other's religion and religious experience—in the questions that are asked, the search which is conducted, and the answers found. For nowhere has God left himself without witness. (Acts 14:17.) Also, since Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are at work in the lives of all men, each man is at a particular moment in Jesus Christ. It is this moment, with respect to each, which needs to be discerned, so that the dialogue may take place in the company of Jesus. And finally, there is the essential dialogue between each man and Jesus Christ in which, as it were, those in outer dialogue stand by one another silently, upholding one another in mutual concern. The culmination of this essential dialogue for all men has to be their conversion to Jesus Christ—him with whom they must die and by and for whom they must live. The witness of the Christian to the finality of Jesus Christ is a witness through and within all these three dialogues.

But Christian witness to the finality of Jesus Christ has a third implication also: for there is the witness to be borne together by those who bear his name. The issues concerning church union have their own inherent difficulty. This is no place to talk about them. Nevertheless, it is essential to remember here that no one may talk about the finality of Christ and, at the same time, remain careless of the necessity of all those who bear his name belonging to one family and living a common family life. Jesus Christ must be sufficient for his people, both to unite them and to enable them to be enriched by their differences. The tragedy of denominations is that they are an attempt to organize dogmatic differences, to give to "the baffling reflections" institutional and structural expression. The

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finality of Jesus Christ is a standing judgment on denominational separateness. He is enough; he alone must be enough.

The church cannot fulfill its role as the home of the human dialogue, the dialogue between man and man and between man and God, if it does not in its own life sustain that dialogue. It is the foundation of the church which is fixed; its walls on every side must have open gates through which the traffic of life can flow. To close these gates against fellow Christian or fellow man is to deny the nature of the church.

We have referred already to two basic differences in the structure of faith as between Christianity and other religions. We have seen that the coordinates within which the graph of the Christian faith was plotted were determined by the relation between the universal and the particular as this relation is in Jesus Christ, and also by the this-worldliness which the coming of Jesus Christ signifies and to which it gives effect. We can state now the third factor which constitutes this difference: that whereas in all other religions and systems of belief the present is determined by the past, in Christianity the present is determined by the future. It is to this difference that the Christian community bears witness by the eschatological nature of its existence.

An integral part of the good news of the gospel is in this fact that the future is over, and that the history of man is not something that is being pushed from behind but is something that is being pulled from in front. Indeed, this witness to an accomplished future toward which all things are set is part of the biblical testimony to the transcendence of God. Here is the reason for that intractability and intransigence with which men find they have to deal, both in their personal lives and behavior and in their life together as communities. Whenever Scripture speaks about predestination, it is about the destination that it speaks. It is the destination which has been determined.

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To believe that today is determined by yesterday is to believe in salvation by works, whereas to believe that today is determined by tomorrow is to believe in salvation by grace. Yesterday is over, yes; but tomorrow is over, too. He who will be crowned Lord is Lord already. He who will come to judge is already engaged in judgment. The final consummation is already the end toward which all things are set. The fruits of men's labor are already the gifts of his love.

"Jesus, knowing that . . . he had come from God and was going to God . . . girded himself with a towel." (John 13:3-4.)