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## The Cosmic and the Universal Christ

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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This phase of our general theme is to be considered along two lines, (a) the universality of the Person of Christ; (b) the universality of the Name of Jesus, the Christ.

The former will occupy our attention at present.

Our usage of the word "universal" is meant to imply the limitlessness of Christ in relation to time and space, but when we speak of the "Cosmic" Christ we particularly mean His significance to the Entire Cosmos, or world. (The term "Kosmos" is fully defined in another address.) It is of the utmost importance that the people of God should recognise the universality of the Christ into Whom they have been incorporated, for it is into that universality that they have been merged.

The great terms and themes of the Gospel, such as "Jesus Christ," Saviour, Salvation, Redemption, Propitiation, Atonement, Sanctification, etc., are not afterthoughts of creation, emergency means to meet something which is in the nature of an accident in the world. The sufferings of the Cross are not merely related to something subsequent to creation. The sacrificial idea did not originate as so many have taught, in the mind of primitive man and slowly developed into a highly organised ritual. The Biblical system of sacrifices and blood covenants were not taken over from pagan races and given a new meaning, although the system in general may have been the religious expression of paganism. The true and pure principles and meanings of judging, purging, and renewing through sacrifice and blood were a Divine concept before the world was.

A covenant existed before the creation of the world between the Father and the Son. This was a covenant in blood and therefore necessitated incarnation, death, and resurrection. It related not only to the earth but also to the heavens, both of which had need of being purged of some foul thing which had intruded. All pagan and heathen systems of sacrifice are distortions of the pure concept which was in the Divine mind before the world was, for "the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world." For this universal work a universal person is needed, and such a one must carry in himself the attributes which are universal. He must not belong to one age or one nation or one world. He must be vested with universal authority. Thus Jesus is the Christ, that is, the Anointed. He is anointed in Eternity, before the creation, and the anointing is His commission and His endowment for a universal mission.

The whole record of scripture throws its weight upon the fact that Christ undertook and was anointed to fulfil some work in the universe anterior to "the fall", and which embraced the results of "the fall" also. It is also very clear that upon this earth through incarnation that work was to be done. But this earth and the Divine Drama of the Cross is relative to something infinitely greater. Principalities and Powers, Angels and Archangels, and super-cosmic intelligences are interested, bound up, looking into, and being instructed by this. Having but hinted at this universality of the Person and work of Christ, it might be well to note some of the cosmic and universal elements in His earthly life and work. But perhaps it will be well to remain out in the open for a few minutes longer ere we come to the more historical.

Take, for instance, a passage like that in Colossians 1: "He is the visible image of the invisible God. For in Him were all things created both in the heavens and on the earth, both visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; by Him and for Him were all things created and He is before all" "He is before all". The "is" here means that He was not one of the created beings, not superior in rank to some angels, but uncreated, eternal, before all.

"And in Him all things consist," or have their being. That is, everything has its being by reason of Him. Wipe out the existence of Christ, and you must wipe out the universe. That is why "it was not possible that He should be holden of the pangs of death". So the resurrection of Christ was essential to the survival of the universe. Ultimately all things are to have their conscious life in Him. This is the inclusiveness of Christ, and one more emphasis upon the apostolic formula "In Christ".

Notice further Ephesians 1:10: "In regard to the administration of the fulness of the appointed times to reunite all things under one head even under the Anointed One, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him."

God has determined to have the universe summed up in His Son. It is impossible to get rid of Christ, and it is impossible but that ultimately the Lord Jesus shall have all things under His sovereign head.

This should strengthen us mightily in our confidence and in our steadfastness. So the apostle further says: "By whom also we obtained an inheritance, having been previously marked out according to a design that all things should be united under one Head." "Who is operating all this agreeably to the counsel of His own will." It was this revelation and knowledge which accounted for the fortitude, persistence, endurance, and spiritual ascendancy of the apostles in times of great stress and suffering. For a victorious spirit an adequate vision and dynamic is essential. All the uprising forces of antagonism to God and His Anointed through the ages have at length had to seek His eternal purpose and will ultimately surrender to His sovereignty. Beloved of God, the issue is

going to find Him supreme Head of the Cosmos and the universe. The next thing to remember is that "the church which is His Body" is no more an after-thought than the incarnation and redemptive person and purpose of Christ. "We were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world," and this in relation to the purpose of His incarnation. This "Body" is the instrument by which a fuller outworking of His personal mission is to be accomplished and all that is true of Him in eternity and in time, in the Cosmos and in the universe is to be effected in and through that "Body".

As the "Cosmic Body" and the "Cosmic Cross" are to be considered separately, we must now come closely to the "Cosmic Person", in His manifestation in time. If Christ is universal in His person and eternal also, everything that He says and does in time must bear a significance which infinitely transcends the hour and the place in which it is humanly expressed. It is important to remember this. There is nothing in Him or of Him which is finally wrapped up with one time, place, or people. These are but the staging of larger issues.

Now take up your Gospels and read them with this thought. Bethlehem is no event which belongs just to time. The incarnation of God in Christ is the very purpose for which God made man in His own image, and this undoubtedly for larger purposes than the redemption of one race. It is quite probable that the incarnation of Christ would have come about even if there had been no fall. Man was the chosen means and method by which a bigger issue than the sin of the human race was to be settled, and Jesus the Christ is the representative of man as God intended him to be for the meeting of other orders of evil in personal spiritual form. This alone is an adequate explanation of the intense opposition demanded by His "covenant" people to all forms of demonology, spiritism, necromancy, etc., as well as of all the direct references to the Satanic system. Through man - unique man - in vital corporate union with God this universal conquest and settlement was to be made, and the incarnation goes to the heart of the matter. The angel-songs embrace eternity and all realms, and are the expression of the wonder and awe of the magnitude of the reach of this thing. In like manner all the other definite steps of the earthly progress of His mission bear the marks of something super-historical.

The Baptism declares that the universal question of "ALL righteousness" is to be settled through a representative death - by which "him that had the power of death - that is the devil - should be destroyed" (Heb. 2:15), and in a resurrection there should be a life and victory which can never again be destroyed, but in the power of which the Divine undertaking should be wrought out to its consummation.

In the Spirit's descent like a dove there is recognised, firstly, the time attestation of the eternal fact, that He is the anointed Son of God for this universal mission, and secondly, that He is the representative of all who through the spiritual experience and meaning of that death and resurrection shall come within the new creation purpose and share that anointing to fulfil it.

The temptation is the immediate and ultimate purpose of His anointing as it were in cameo. The Prince of this world is met and the battle of the universe is joined. The sovereignty of the Son is the point of challenge - "If thou be the Son". This is no mere human temptation. Man was never tempted in the dimensions of this. This is Cosmic. But we must remember that when we come to share His anointing we shall soon come to meet this enemy with a much larger significance than the local or personal. The sovereignty of Christ is then the battleground. It is only those who are thus anointed in Christ who really know the enemy. To be in doubt as to there being such a Satan or to have had no real conflict with him may be an indictment of being outside of the anointing of Christ.

The Transfiguration is a glimpse of glorified humanity, it is a passing gleam of what we shall be like when at last we "share His glory," and what God intended from the beginning. To have any adequate conception of this glory is to have some idea of the extent of "the fall". We are unable to stay here to show the Cosmic and universal character of the teaching and praying of Christ, but in another address super-Cosmic praying is dealt with and will illustrate this latter.

Let us not be bound too tightly by ages, dispensations, places, times, but keep the relation of all to the timeless and spaceless, and remember that it is a kingdom and sovereignty of the heavens of which Christ is the centre. Also let us relate all our experiences which are truly spiritual as those who have been incorporated into the eternal Christ to the eternal purpose according to which we have been called. Then shall we be delivered from the oppression and tyranny of the incidental, accidental, and temporal.