

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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THE WORTHY LAMB

The late G. C. Berkouwer observed, “A church may even – in times of spiritual inertia – be well-nigh exclusively oriented toward the present and have no eye for either the historical or the eschatological. That is the condition when she is secularized, when she thinks that she has here an abiding city, notwithstanding the emphatic apostolic teaching to the contrary (Heb. 13:14); cf. 11:10, 14-16). She has then lost sight of the motivating principles by which alone she can live. She no longer looks for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10), but substitutes her own ‘now’ for the ‘now’ of Scripture which preaches God’s salvation. Her redemptive-historic consciousness has then succumbed to the temptation, and her expectation has faded. She loses her orientation toward the *parousia* as well as the *sessio*, and grieves the Holy Spirit. Because the message concerning in *heaven* no longer penetrates its heart, the true ‘Maranatha’ is no longer heard. Then, since the interrelations of salvation are inseparable, the secularized church finds that its Lord’s Supper, too, inevitably deteriorates into nothing but a traditional institution, and the prayer in the *didache*, in which the ‘Marantha’ is connected with the Lord’s Supper, becomes incomprehensible.

“The questions which arise in connection with the above-mentioned dilemma are far-reaching. It is very important for the Church to understand that her life can never be understood on the basis of this dilemma. The impossibility of this dilemma becomes manifest in the inseparable connection between *sessio* and *parousia*.”¹ Richard Muller defines the *sessio of Christ the sitting or act of sitting of Christ at the right hand of the Father (ad dextram Patris)*; apart from the basic agreement of Lutheran and Reformed that the *sessio Christi* is the highest exaltation of Christ as the God-man and that the expression, *sedet ad dextram Patris*, ‘he sits at the right hand of the Father,’ is a figurative expression, the *sessio Christi* marks a point of fundamental Christological opposition between Lutheran and Reformed. The Lutherans emphasize the biblical usage of ‘right hand of God’ as a figurative description of the exercise of divine power. Since the power of God is exercised everywhere, the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God is an indication of Christ’s *ubiquitas* (q.v.) according to his human nature, which is the subject of the exaltation. The Reformed deny this communication of a divine attribute to Christ’s humanity and argue from the ascension of Christ *in coelis* that the heavenly session indicates the removal of Christ’s human nature from the earth. The figurative usage, *ad dextram Patris*, the Reformed interpret as the highest exaltation of Christ as God-man, as an indication that Christ in his humanity now participates in the divine majesty and rule, not as though the right hand of God indicates a place (*ubi*), but rather an honor conferred upon Christ. For the Reformed, however, the heavenly *sessio* indicates *ubietas*, or ‘whereness,’ specifically, the location of Christ’s finite humanity in heaven.”²

The Lord Jesus reigns and His reign extends throughout *His* creation and in every culture. He sits at the Father's right hand as Prophet, Priest and King. He possesses all those abilities, all those royal and glorious endowments necessary as King of kings and Lord of lords.

I. THE ENSIGNS OF HIS KINGLY POWER. "It is undeniable that the expectation of the Church is unique. This is because the message concerning Christ's coming links the past with the future, as is shown in the doctrine of the *sessio*, which both refers back to the redemptive-historic past and points to the future. Scripture never depreciates the past when it deals with the future. In the Revelation of John the apocalyptic visions are replete with references to him who is the first begotten of the dead (Rev. 1:5) and who washed us from our sins in his own blood (Rev. 1:5). Christ is in the midst of the seven candlesticks as one like unto the Son of man (Rev. 1:13). He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5) who is worthy to open and to read the book of history, the Lamb who receives the adoration: 'Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood' (5:9, KJV; cf. 5:8, 12, 13; 7:10, 14, 17; cf. also 11:8; 12:11; 13:8). The eschatological imagery is replete with holy memories of the past, and everything is presented in the light of that which took place – the battle which was crowned with victory (12:5, 7ff.; 17:14), the following of the Lamb (14:4), the testimony of Jesus Christ (12:17), the song of the Lamb (15:3), the faith of Jesus (14:12), the marriage of the Lamb (19:7), the bride of the Lamb (21:9), the apostles of the Lamb (21:14), and the Lamb's book of life (21:27). Here the expectation of a glorious future is permanently safeguarded against the threat of a vague ahistoric longing for a better world. This expectation is deeply rooted in history and derives its strength from what became historic reality in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ."³ We read in Revelation 5:9 and 12 that the Lamb is *worthy* to receive adoration and praise. The grounds for this is His death and the blessings this has brought His people. He possesses power and wisdom to accomplish salvation. This echoes Isaiah 52:13 where we are told that the suffering Servant of the LORD "will act wisely."

- A. ***Worthy to Receive Authority.*** In Matthew 28:18 Jesus declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Note that this was said *prior* to His ascension.
- B. ***Worthy of Riches.*** Wealth is associated with royalty. He has obtained an inheritance because He is heir of all things (Hebrews 1:1-4).⁴
- C. ***Worthy to Receive Strength.*** He not only has the authority, He has the power to rule as King. This is demonstrated in a number of ways, but notice how this is connected in Acts 2:33 with the outpourings of the Holy Spirit.
- D. ***Worthy of Honor and Glory.*** Honor is due Him. Glory was His before the foundation of the world (John 17:1-5).

CONCLUSION: Christ reigns not only in His church by His Word and Spirit, He reigns in the world. It is true that all fallen human beings (and their cultures) are in rebellion against God's anointed One (Psalm 2), but this does not prevent Him from ruling and carrying out His purposes. Christians are called into His service. Our vocation is to serve King Jesus in His church and in the world. I close by once again quoting Berkouwer, "Here we have the real touchstone of all Christian expectation. This expectation derives its content from the act of God in Jesus Christ and is, in the holy dynamics of God's activity, its historic and final-historic consequence. The holy remembrance in the Lord's Supper ('we proclaim the Lord's death till he come,' 1 Cor. 11:26; 'this do in remembrance of me,' Luke 22:19) is connected with the expectation of the marriage feast of the Lamb (Luke 22:16); and the admonition to remember that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead is

connected with the testimony of the Lord from heaven: 'These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lives again.' (Rev. 2:8; cf. 1:17, 18)."⁵

ENDNOTES

¹G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Work of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 246.

²R. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), p. 281.

³Berkouwer, p. 247.

⁴The Bible does not allow wealth and riches to be monopolized by the type of crass materialism that permeates our society. Listen to this summary by Moulton: "*Ploutos* comes from the same root as the Greek verb *pimplemi*, I fill, and is connected etymologically with the Latin word from which 'plenty' comes, with the Sanskrit *purnam*, and with the English 'fill.' And it is true that we are made far more rich, full, complete (another word from the same root) on the spiritual level than we can ever be on the material. The New Testament therefore uses our series of words for riches thirty times in a spiritual sense." H. K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance* (Bagster, 1977), p. 202.

⁵Berkouwer, p. 247.