

9. CONCLUSION AND INDICATIONS

9.1 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1 the purpose of this study was formulated as follows: to investigate to what extent the Lordship of Jesus Christ is a reality in the life and faith of Christians in three denominations in Soshanguve, a South African township. A short introduction to the Biblical notion of the Lordship of Christ was offered.

In Chapter 2 we have offered a short overview of the Soshanguve township, its people and its churches. Further, we have given an introduction to the history and the beliefs of the three denominations that have been chosen as objects of this study: the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA), the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and the Pentecostal churches.

In Chapter 3 we have described a survey research which was conducted among individual members of the three denominations identified as target groups. This first phase of the research was followed by a second phase during which the emphasis shifted towards a more qualitative type of research. The second phase is described in chapters 4-6.

In Chapter 4 we have demonstrated that among Lutheran Christians in Soshanguve the work of Christ is understood primarily in terms of providence and protection. The notion of his authority to rule the lives of believers by his Word and Spirit, was found to be weak. This is in line with the way salvation is viewed by Lutheran church members: there is a tendency to understand salvation in terms of a creational type of blessings (life-force, health, general well-being). An additional aspect which is detrimental to the functioning of the Lordship of Christ is the legalism in the Lutheran Church. The importance of church laws and church regulations tend to be harmful to the authority of Jesus Christ as the living Lord. Further, we have demonstrated that there is confusion with regard to the attitude towards traditional beliefs and practices. Some members reject these beliefs,

others accept it. Those members who accept traditional practices have a weaker sense of Christ's Lordship than the others. Lastly, liberal Lutheran theology has gained influence in academical Lutheran circles. Because of its shallow view of sin and repentance, it results in a defective view of the Lordship of Christ.

In Chapter 5 we have demonstrated that the Christology of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) is weak. Members struggle to differentiate between Jesus Christ and God the Father. Salvation is understood in terms of protection (e.g. against witchcraft) and providence (healing, general well-being). There is a strong tendency towards ritualism. The church itself plays an important role in the performing of rituals. As bishop Lekganyane plays a central role in church life and faith, he has overshadowed Jesus Christ in the faith of his followers. Further, legalism is strong in the ZCC. The lives of members are ruled by an elaborate system of laws and instructions. Instructions are given by church prophets. Although it is claimed that they receive these instructions from the Holy Spirit, it appears that their messages are never tested by comparing them to the Biblical message. This is detrimental to the Lordship of Christ. Lastly, these results have to be seen in the context of the fact that veneration of ancestor spirits is accepted in the ZCC.

In Chapter 6 we have demonstrated that Pentecostal Christians see Jesus Christ primarily as a 'Christus Victor', a powerful and victorious Saviour who is able to give his followers the victory over dangers in the natural realm (e.g. sickness), the supernatural realm (e.g. demons) and, to a lesser extent, the spiritual realm (e.g. falling into sin). Among Pentecostal Christian the notion of Christ's Lordship is stronger than among the other two groups, but it comes second to the 'Christus Victor' beliefs. It was found that the concept of power is very important, especially in the younger Pentecostal churches. Power is seen as something that has been made available by Christ and that is to be handled by the believers and by the church leaders in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Both Pentecostal and African power concepts play a role in this respect. There is a danger that Christ may be seen as the Saviour who played his role in the past whilst the present

era is seen as the era of Holy Spirit. Christ stands in danger of becoming a 'Christus otiosus'.

In Chapter 7 we have described two backgrounds that should be taken into account when interpreting the results of our research. Firstly, we have offered a brief exposition of relevant aspects of the traditional African worldview and religion. These aspects are the concept of God and the concept of salvation. Secondly, we have offered a brief introduction into the effects of urbanization and secularization on the African people in urban areas in South Africa.

After this we have offered a comparative analysis of the results of our research between the three denominations, interpreting these results in the light of the given backgrounds as well as the various theological premises of the three groups. A common hallmark of all three groups is a one-sided or even defective view of salvation. Salvation is still to a large extent understood in terms of having life-force, health, well-being, and protection against misfortune. It appears that the traditional African view of salvation still exerts strong influence in this respect.

We have demonstrated that the Pentecostal Christians generally have a stronger understanding of the Lordship of Christ than the other two groups. A plausible explanation here is the fact that the Pentecostal churches are more radically opposed to traditional practices (e.g. ancestor veneration) than the other two groups.

In each group we have detected tendencies which threaten the functioning of the Lordship of Christ. In the Lutheran Church this is legalism, ritualism, and liberal theology, and a soft stand on traditional African religion. In the ZCC it is the combination of legalism and ritualism, the important position of the bishop, and the role of the church prophets with their so-called instructions. In the Pentecostal churches it is an obsession with power, an admiration of charismatic leaders, and a tendency towards triumphalism, and the separation of the work of the Holy Spirit from the Word of God.

The final evaluation is that in the faith of many Christians in Soshanguve Jesus Christ is a *Christus remotus* and a *Christus otiosus*. Pentecostal Christians are the closest to the Biblical notion of the Lordship of Christ. Generally speaking, however, the Person of the living Lord is a remote figure in the faith of Christians in Soshanguve. This gap is filled

in various ways: the laws of the church, the leadership of the church, ceremonies performed by the church, even (a distorted view of) the Holy Spirit. In many cases the church itself stands in the way of an unhindered view of and communion with the living Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In Chapter 8 we set out to compare the results of our research with the Biblical perspective regarding the Lordship of Christ.

First, we have demonstrated that a Biblical view of the concept of God is fundamental. God must be viewed as a personal Being, a God who reveals Himself, and a God who enters into an intimate covenant relationship with his people.

Secondly, we have demonstrated that a Biblical view of salvation is also indispensable. A broad understanding, including both spiritual and physical salvation, is needed.

Thirdly, we have demonstrated that a Biblical understanding of the Person of Christ is indispensable. Christ is alive, He is human (not an 'ancestor' as some African theologians propose), He is God, He is the Son of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is needed in order to be able to give meaning to the Lordship of Christ.

Fourthly, we have demonstrated that Christ should be proclaimed as the present Master. Christians are his subjects, bound to obey Him. He is entitled to be their Master as He has bought them with his own blood. Therefore He can stand no competition in the form of other masters. The traditional ancestor religion will have to be done away with. The Lordship of Christ over the personal lives of believers implies an intimate relationship. Through the Holy Spirit a close unity is established between Christ and those who belong to Him. He governs them by his Word and Spirit. In Africa, where the Spirit is often seen in terms of power being given to charismatic leaders, this is an important message.

Furthermore, we have demonstrated that Christ should be proclaimed as the King of kings. He has been given full authority in heaven and on earth and He leads the history of the world to its final destination. This is a comforting thought for the church and the believers. As this notion stands in danger of being misunderstood in a triumphalist fashion, it is necessary to remember that Christ is the Crucified King. Africa is in love with power and it wants power 'now'. Christ indeed is all-powerful but Christians have to persevere until the final revelation of His power breaks through. Meanwhile the power of

Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is experienced in the regeneration of people's lives, the humility of sinners who come to Christ to confess their sins and receive forgiveness. The Spirit convicts of guilt (John 16:8). The Kingship of Christ can only be understood well in the context of a Biblical view of salvation.

9.2 INDICATIONS FOR PASTORAL, CATECHETICAL AND HOMILETICAL PRACTICE

The Lordship of Christ can only prosper in the context of a Biblical concept of God and a Biblical concept of salvation.

It is important that people are led to a personal encounter with the living God. In Africa, traditionally, God was a remote supreme being, not worshipped by people, and not very interested in righteousness. The morality of a community was defined by the community itself. Therefore people did not feel responsible towards the supreme being. He was too distant. The relationship with him could not be described in terms of love, either.

In African Christianity the concept of God has changed. God has become nearer and his image has become more friendly. Africa seems to have accepted the Christian concept of God so easily that African theologians have concluded that there was no major difference between the traditional concept and the Christian concept of God. But appearances are deceptive. It may well be that Africa has fitted the concept of God into old categories.

J.V. Taylor's fears, expressed in 1963, were realistic: "If the fatherly presence of God is stressed, and the compassion of Jesus, they are fitted into the category of the hero-gods; if the transcendent greatness is emphasized, God goes back behind the clouds, as irrelevant as he was before." (Taylor 1963:115.) Taylor rightly points out that both the West and Africa in many ways still live "in the primal myth of the lost Presence, of the *Deus Remotus*, because presence is more than we can bear" (:116). Because God's presence is unbearable, we have created for ourselves a god who is remote.

What should happen in the first place, then, is that people should realize that they are living their lives *coram Deo*, before the Lord, in the presence of God. We stand before a

holy God, a near God, an awesome God, a loving God, a God who hates sin. People should hear the gospel of a God who wants to enter into an intimate covenant relationship with them. They should also realize their utter unworthiness to enter into such a relationship with the holy God. They should understand that the wrath of God is a reality. They should also be told that his love is a reality. This they will understand only by observing the cross: there we see God's wrath and God's love simultaneously. The cross of Jesus Christ proclaims two messages, (1) "that the wrath of God against sin is so great that He could not leave it unpunished, but punished it in His beloved Son Jesus Christ" (Form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Book of Praise:595), (2) that his promise that all our sins are forgiven only for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, can be relied on.

When this happens, the African view of salvation will also change. It will be understood that salvation is not first and foremost to be experienced in abundance of life-force and harmonious relationships within the community, but that salvation first and foremost means being reconciled with God. Africa needs the original Lutheran approach: how do I find a gracious God? How can we be reconciled with God? By the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ only.

In this context the living Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, will certainly not be a *Christus otiosus*. He is continuously needed, as a Mediator, as an Intercessor, as a Bestower of heavenly blessings (including the Holy Spirit), as a Master of the believer's life, as the Preserver of those who belong to Him, as the Author of our salvation (Heb 2:10), as the Ruler of the earth, as the Fulfiller of all prophecies.

As much as African people need to meet the living God personally, they need to meet his living Son personally. They need to humble themselves, to kneel down before Him and say: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). In other words, those who are children of God need to become servants of Jesus Christ. The personal, intimate covenant relationship with God needs to be supplemented with a personal, intimate servant-Master relationship with Jesus Christ.

In this context, and only then, different aspects of the Lordship of Christ may be accepted and integrated into the Christian life. We mention some important aspects.

First, Jesus Christ must be proclaimed as *vere homo* and *vere Deus*.

In a context where dead people become ancestor spirits, without bodies, Jesus must be proclaimed as really human, and what is more: resurrected from the grave with a real human body. Ancestors are forgotten after three or four generations and fade away into the misty realm of spirits, but Jesus Christ is alive, body and soul. As such He is able to identify with the sufferings of those who belong to Him. His being alive also carries with it the promise that all who belong to Him will receive eternal life.

Jesus Christ must also be proclaimed as true God. The history of Christian missions shows that people are inclined to accept easily the heresy of Arius according to whom Christ is God's highest and first creation, but not God's eternal, natural Son. In Arius' Christology salvation is different: it is not by God himself but by a creature. Exit humility, enter human pride!

The Son of God must be proclaimed as the eternal, natural Son of God who became man in order to save us from the wrath of God. We, as believers, became children of God not by our own power, but by adoption, through grace, for the sake of Christ.

Second, Jesus Christ must be proclaimed as the *Dominus*, the present Master to whom we are bound to show allegiance and subservience. The character of this Master-servant relationship must be highlighted: it came into existence by Jesus paying with his blood in order to gain right of ownership. Therefore this Master is a loving Master and his guidelines will always be a light burden. When this is accepted, it will lead to a life of surrendering to and living for Christ. There will be a strong unity between Master and servant, a unity that is maintained by Christ through the Holy Spirit. The unity will be so strong that the believers are more and more reshaped into His likeness.

Third, Jesus Christ must be proclaimed as the *Rex crucifixus*, the crucified King. The King, indeed, even the King of kings. He has received full authority. He will lead world history to its consummation and then the Kingdom of God will be a realized reality. This

is a comforting thought to all those who belong to Him and still share in his sufferings. At the same time he has to be seen as a *crucified* King. This reminds us of our sins and the results of our sins which we still experience every day. The Bible does not promise an all-out victory here and now. The Kingdom of God is still an eschatological reality. There is much anxiety and the devil prowls round like a roaring lion. But we may cast our anxiety on Him. He will care for us (1 Peter 5:7). This 'Rex crucifixus' will not allow anybody to steal those who belong to him out of his hands. We know that He is able to do so as the almighty *Rex regum*. We know that He is willing to do so because He is the *Rex crucifixus*.

In the light of these remarks, we would like to make a few comments with regard to each of the three denominations identified as target groups.

With regard to ELCSA, it is our view that this church can do no better than return to the original teachings of Martin Luther. It is a grave mistake to think that Africa does not need a gracious God. It is a grave mistake to think that African people are more worthy before God than Luther himself. African people need reconciliation with God as much as it was needed by Luther. ELCSA leaders would do well in throwing modern liberal views of justification into the dustbin and returning to Luther's views in this respect. A personal encounter with the living and holy God will lead to a personal encounter with the living Saviour, Jesus Christ. That, in turn, will do much to combat the problems of legalism and ritualism.

With regard to the ZCC, it has been demonstrated that there is a grave distortion of the gospel. A radical reformation is needed in all respects of church life. The bishop's position will have to be dealt with, the church prophets will have to be tied up, the whole system of instructions and regulations will have to be done away with. Hopefully God will raise somebody up from inside the church ranks in order to call the church back to the Biblical truth and back to the only Lord and Saviour.

With regard to the Pentecostals, we are thankful for the signs of real faith and commitment to Jesus Christ that are encountered among members of these groups. Here the old masters have been replaced by the Master Jesus Christ. At the same time we are concerned that Pentecostal biases combined with the African power concept may lead to

distortions of the gospel. A more balanced view of the work of the Holy Spirit is needed. The empowerment by the Holy Spirit is not only experienced when healing miracles happen or demons are cast out. The greater part of the work of the Spirit is performed in less spectacular forms, e.g. to convict of guilt (John 16:8), to guide into all truth (John 16:13), to testify about Jesus (John 15:26), to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). This will help African Christians to understand that the power of the Spirit (which is the power of Christ and the power of God) is often experienced in concealed ways, visible to eyes enlightened by faith. However, with the firm hope of the final revelation in the day of the Lord.

It is our hope that the Lord Jesus Christ will take African churches under his care, and that by his Word and Spirit He will teach them to be more and more obedient and committed to Him, the living Lord and Saviour.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people (Rev. 22:21).