

# Premodern Teleological Thought

By Pastor Douglas Shearer

Paul, in common with almost everyone steeped in a pre-modern culture, thinks teleologically - meaning, he assumes that any given existential phenomenon - whatever it might be - is governed by a *fixed destiny*; and it's *that* destiny - what Aristotle called "telos"<sup>i</sup> - which defines its *real* nature, its consummation, its perfection - or, to use Aristotle's terminology, its "*entelecheia*" (*εντελεχεια*). That, of course, begs the question, "Did Paul make use of Greek philosophical categories?" It's a question that some expositors find almost repugnant - wholly convinced that Greek thought and Hebrew thought are diametrically opposed; that, therefore, the use of Greek philosophical categories distorts the meaning of the New Testament text. But that's not true. Let me explain ...

It was my privilege as a young man to have studied Plato and Aristotle under Dr. Marvin Zetterbaum, Professor of Political Philosophy at the University of California, Davis, and to have worked as his graduate research assistant. Dr. Zetterbaum himself studied under and was personally mentored by none other than Dr. Leo Strauss of the University of Chicago - who in Germany had worked alongside Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger. It was also my privilege to have been enrolled in a seminar taught by Leo Strauss himself for a small group of honors graduate students.

What's particularly fascinating about Strauss is his insistence that neither

Plato nor Aristotle was a novel thinker; that the philosophical categories they developed arose from a primordial intuition *rooted in all premodern cultures*. That intuition, Strauss contended, is no longer accessible to modern intellectuals - because the culture that informs and governs their thoughts is so far removed from antiquity. It's buried under the sophistries that emerged during the Renaissance and Enlightenment - a conviction shared by Ludwig Wittgenstein. What we're left with, Strauss suggested, is a wholly artificial culture stripped of the underpinnings needed to make it truly authentic.

The premoderns, both Zetterbaum and Strauss claimed, were far closer to the truth; indeed, their culture was impregnated with it - though even then it was



Leo Strauss  
Athens and Jerusalem

under attack and beginning to dissipate - which is exactly the point Plato was trying to make in so many of the dialogues he attributes to Socrates - especially his dialogue with Thrasymachos recorded in *The Republic*.

If Strauss and Zetterbaum are right, there's no need to insist that Paul was either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. The same fundamental presuppositions that guided Greek culture also guided Hebrew culture; namely, that the universe is the product of design; and that God, not man, is its author. In short, both the Greeks and the Hebrews thought teleologically.

Strauss, of course, didn't play down their difference between, as he and Heidegger put it, "Athens" and "Jerusalem." Indeed, he was quick to acknowledge that one was a culture of "Reason" and the other a culture of "Faith." Nevertheless, the two cultures were not as radically dissimilar as William Barrett made them out to be in his epic study *Irrational Man, a Study in Existential Philosophy*. The difference between the two does not lie in their basic conclusions, but in how those conclusions were reached; one by reason, the other by faith.

The bottom line here is simple and straightforward: anyone attempting to study the Book of Romans cannot be put off by the use of Greek philosophical categories. Teleological thinking is basic to understanding Romans - and was as common to Jews as it was to Greeks.



Ludwig Wittgenstein  
*The Difficulties of Language*

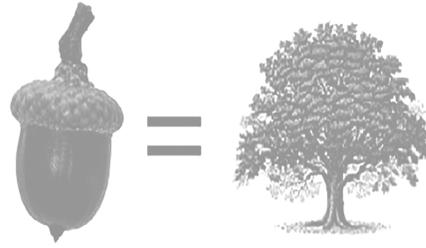


William Barrett  
Professor of Philosophy, NYU, had much to do with suggesting that Hebrew and Greek thought are radically different. Studies since have proven him wrong.

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## Teleological Thought in the Book of Romans

A premodern teacher like Paul can hold in his hand an *acorn* and call it an *oak tree* - because its “telos” - meaning its ultimate destiny - is the *form* of an oak tree, not the *form* of an acorn. That’s precisely what Paul does, for example, in Romans 8:9 - where he categorically asserts that believers “... *are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.*”



The Oak Tree is the Acorn’s Telos

He’s holding, so to speak, *justified* believers in his hands and insisting that they’re all fully *sanctified*. Why? Because that’s their *fixed* destiny - that’s the “telos” God has imparted to them in Christ - that now lays claim to, governs, and directs their lives. Believers are - to use another Biblical word laden with teleological meaning - *sealed*, indicating that their ultimate destiny has been fully ratified and is now a settled matter.

Likewise, in Romans 6:18 Paul is speaking teleologically.

... having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

*Rom. 6:18*

The sense here is that believers can’t help but be righteous - which is true, but only teleologically. In short, believers are ultimately cast in the form of perfect righteousness. And though their lives may not at present reflect perfect righteousness, its attainment is a certainty.

A simple “dictionary” definition of “telos” is usually inadequate. Why? Because the lexicologists compiling the dictionary seldom take the time to mention its *dynamic* nature; moreover, many seminary graduates haven’t been trained in classical Greek philosophy and are therefore unaware of that omission and the inadequate definition they’re left to work with.

It’s certainly true that for Plato telos was, by and large, a static concept;<sup>ii</sup> but for Aristotle, whose concept of telos is far closer to the original, more culturally rooted definition, telos is not inert; it’s dynamic - an overriding impulse that draws to

Ernest Barker, who for years lectured at Wadham College, Cambridge University, and at the University of Cologne, and who completed one of the finest English translations of Aristotle’s *The Politics*, coined a term for the dynamic nature of telos: he called it Aristotle’s doctrine of “immanent impulse.” Actually, however, it was not at all unique to Aristotle. It was common coin throughout the ancient world, not just in Greece, and not just with Aristotle.

itself the phenomena possessed of it. Telos, properly defined, then, is not just a fixed destiny, *it's a self-propelling, self-actuating fixed destiny.*

The use of teleology is underscored again and again in scripture, but nowhere more emphatically than Romans 5:12 - 5:21 ...

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*

*(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*

*Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.*

*But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.*

*And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.*

*For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)*

*Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.*

*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.*

*Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,*

*so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Romans 5:12-21*

... where Paul contrasts Adam's humanity, basically Adam's telos, to Christ's humanity, basically Christ's telos; and, then, highlights the irresistible dynamic underlying both. In short, anyone possessed of Adam's telos is destined to sin and death; whereas anyone possessed of Christ's telos is destined to righteousness and life.

But it's not just Paul's epistles that reflect a teleological bent, Peter's epistles do so as well - especially 1 Peter 1:23 ...

*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides for ever.*

*1 Peter 1:23*

The "corruptible seed" corresponds, of course, to Adam's telos; whereas the "incorruptible seed" corresponds to Christ's telos - which guarantees a believer's eventual transformation into the image of Christ. Many more examples could be marshaled, but these suffice.

For anyone familiar with Greek philosophy, Aristotle's "telos" is nothing more than Plato's "archetype" rescued from pure transcendence and inserted into existential phenomena. Thus, in some sense, *both* Plato and Aristotle are wholly teleological in their thinking. And it was Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical categories that dominated Hellenic thought and, hence, the entire Roman Empire, including Palestine, at the time of Paul in the First Century. The concept itself, however, was an integral part of both a Greek's and a Jew's cultural baggage long before either Plato or Aristotle got hold of it.<sup>iii</sup>

The bottom line is simple: telos was not merely one of many concepts swirling about in the minds of premodern scholars and academicians - whether Semitic or non-Semitic; it was the very framework within which they formulated and developed their concepts; it was the paradigm that governed their intellectual discourse.

#### Teleological Thought and Freedom

Freedom, for example, is a concept Paul grounds in telos - and not only Paul, but virtually every other premodern thinker as well. For Paul, freedom is not cast in a negative light, "*freedom from*," but in a wholly positive light, "*freedom for*." I'm truly free only when I've been bound to the telos God has assigned mankind. Romans 6:18 is, once again, a case in point.

*... and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

*Romans 6:18*

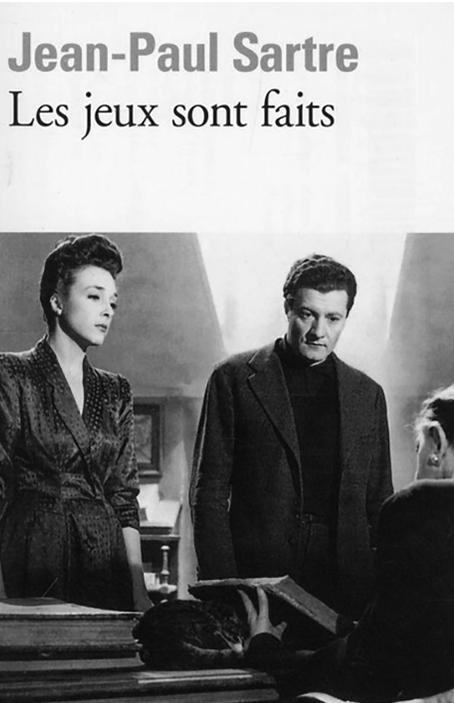
It's not when I've been liberated from the chains of sin that I'm truly free; it's when I've been "enslaved" to the righteousness of Christ, the telos that governs and guides redeemed humanity, that I'm truly free. Plato's *Republic* is no different. A citizen is only truly free when he's "enslaved" to whatever political, social, and economic status or role that best serves the well being of the "polis," the city-state to which he belongs.

Modern thinkers - thinkers nourished in the tradition of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment - have severed completely the link that once bound freedom to telos. For us, freedom is not "freedom for;" it's only "freedom from;" it's the freedom of the void.

The distinction Sartre draws between “en soi,” “being *in* itself,” and “pour soi,” “being *for* itself,” sheds a telling light on just how far contemporary intellectuals have embraced “freedom of the void,” and, correspondingly, have jettisoned teleological presuppositions - and how terribly difficult it is for us, living in the 21st Century, to accommodate ourselves to a teleological mind-set. “Being in itself” corresponds to Plato’s archetype and Aristotle’s telos: a fixed destiny. “Being for itself” is the very opposite: it’s an on-going, never ending “project” with no fixed destiny. Sartre makes “being in itself” the refuge of cowards - anyone who refuses to assume the terrifying burden of continually redefining himself; and that, of course, includes the vast majority of men and women.

It’s a claim he makes the centerpiece of his best known novel, “*Les Jeux Sont Faits*.” “Being for itself,” on the other hand, is embraced only by the courageous few - those willing to shoulder that onerous burden. In short, contemporary intellectuals - from Nietzsche to Sartre and culminating with the postmodernists - have heaped scorn on teleological presuppositions and anyone who embraces them - including, of course, Christians.

That freedom could possibly consist of being bound - of being restricted - that’s a wholly alien notion for most of us! That freedom could possibly consist of being “enslaved” - that’s hard for us to wrap our minds around! But unless we do, Paul’s epistles will always remain a bit enigmatic.



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# Teleological Thought and Predestination

Predestination is still another of Paul's concepts that can only be grasped against the backdrop of telos - its meaning and the implications that follow in its wake. There's no doubt whatsoever that the Bible teaches predestination; but it's not what's usually taught from the pulpit or, for that matter, from the lecterns of many of our best Bible schools and seminaries. Boice and his fellow Calvinist John Piper are two cases in point: for them, specific individuals are the focal point of predestination - the hub around which its meaning revolves; but that's *not* the meaning Paul gives to predestination. Ephesians 1:11 illustrates well the meaning Paul gives to it - and it's a meaning grounded in telos ...



*In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose (προθεσιν) of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will...*

*Ephesians 1:11*

The word "purpose" translates the Greek word "protheisen" (προθέσιν) - which can also be translated "plan." The two words are virtually interchangeable. What Paul is saying here is simple and straightforward: it's not the fate of specific individuals that predestination turns upon; it's God's eternal plan - and the purpose that plan reflects. In short, predestination is conceptually grounded in God's plan, not in the fate he supposedly assigns specific individuals. Put slightly differently:

- God's plan is God's choice - that's where his sovereignty is anchored - that's its real situs - that's where it's found.
- The fate of specific individuals is left to those individuals - whether or not they choose to conform their lives to that plan. God has made that their choice, not his.

Calvinists, of course, deny that man is any longer capable of "choosing God." They insist he's too depraved to make that choice. But Romans One and Two make it abundantly clear that man is not totally depraved; that, even in his fallen state, he's neither devoid of a moral sensitivity or a God consciousness - a point I'll expand upon shortly.

Ephesians 1:4 illustrates just how profoundly a teleological perspective alters the usual interpretation of certain key passages.

... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in

love ...

*Eph.1:4*

If Ephesians 1:4 is read without imbedding it in a teleological framework, personal choice appears to have been written out of salvation. However, when we set it within a teleological framework, what we have is quite different:

- it's *not* that God has predestined *specific individuals* to be holy and blameless before him in love;
- it's that *God's plan* for man is that he be holy and blameless before him in love - that's the *telos* he has predestined for mankind - the purpose to which a man must conform his life if he's to be truly human.

In the first instance, the focus is on *specific individuals*; however, in the second instance, the focus is on *God's purpose - God's plan*.

In short, Ephesians 1:4 tells us nothing about the personal fate of each individual man or woman. Within a teleological framework, that choice is left to them - whether or not to conform their lives to that telos - and, in so doing, become fully free - meaning fully human. And that's no different from what we find ...

- in any of Plato's writings, from *The Apologia* to *The Republic*
- or in any of Aristotle's writings, from *The Politics* to *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

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## Teleological Thought and The Individual in Community

Individualism, a mind-set virtually unknown to the authors of scripture, is so deeply entrenched in the Western psyché that it's seldom called into question; and the few who do challenge it run the risk of being consigned to the margins of intellectual and moral respectability. It has been the organizing principle of Western Culture<sup>iv</sup> for at least three hundred and fifty years. Indeed, it's enshrined in the second paragraph of our own country's founding document, *The Declaration of Independence*...

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights ... that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men.*

There it is: rights and privileges *inhere in individuals*; they're not derived from the collective. Moreover, the sole purpose of the collective is to secure those rights. That's the fundamental precept lying at the heart of individualism. Put a little differently, a social collective - whatever it might be - is subordinate to the individuals who comprise it. It has no life of its own. It's wholly contrived, an artificial construct fabricated by the persons who make it up. It amounts to little more than the sum of its parts. Its key features are so obvious, the very warp and weft of our lives, that we're apt to overlook them ...

- Identity is rooted in the parts, not in the whole.
- Individuals don't "belong" to social collectives - not in the sense that they become organically united to them and so lose their autonomy.
- They join them, but aren't "subsumed" in them, meaning they don't acquire a *corporate* identity that supplants their *personal* identity.
- Finally, social collectives - whether the state, a church, a labor union, whatever - exist for the individual's benefit, not the other way around.

Which is primary? Is it the whole or the parts? Americans and Europeans are apt to respond with knee-jerk alacrity: "The parts!"

But that's wholly at odds with Paul's mind-set. For Paul - and virtually every other thinker before Thomas Hobbes and John Locke - whatever rights and privileges individuals enjoy are derived from the social collectives to which they belong; it's their class - meaning the social standing to which they're born and the institutions arising from it - that determines their rights and privileges. In short, for Paul, it's not the individual who's imbued with meaning and purpose; it's the collective. That's the rationale underlying the importance Paul ascribes to both Israel and the Church.

Israel is much more than merely the sum of her parts. In a very real sense, Isra-

el's existence lies beyond the individuals who comprise her. That's why Paul can so confidently assure us in Romans 9:6 that Israel's standing before God has not been jeopardized by the inexcusable failure of so many Jews - indeed the overwhelming majority of them.

*But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.*

*Romans 9:6*

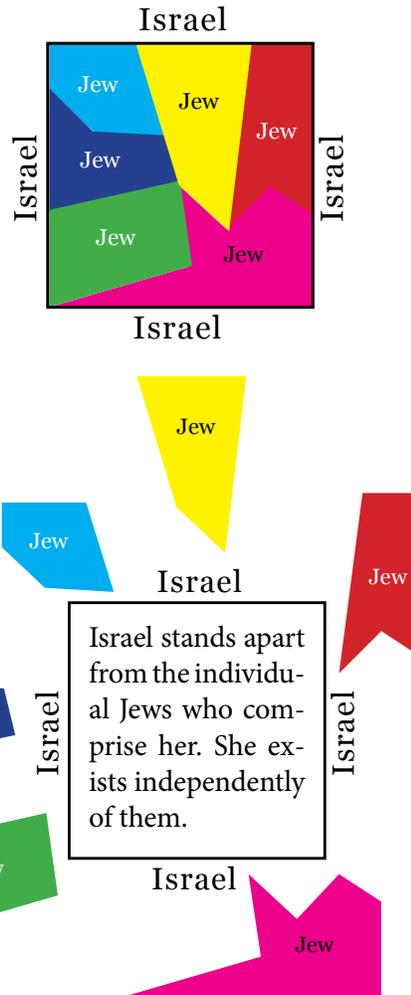
The phrase "... *they are not all Israel who are of Israel*" poses no real difficulty for a premodern thinker; that's because, once again, the collective stands apart from and is prior to the individuals who make it up.

- Only within Israel can individual Jews live out the telos God has ordained for them.
- Only to the extent that they are *organically* incorporated into her can their lives acquire meaning and purpose.
- Indeed, outside Israel their lives are bereft of any real significance.

The Church is no different. She too, like Israel, exists prior to and apart from the individuals who comprise her. It's only to the extent that individual Christians are organically incorporated into her ...

- that their lives acquire significance;
- that they're enabled to live out the telos regeneration has imparted to them.
- Simply put, an individual Christian cannot live out his faith without being built into the church - without committing himself to the church and becoming one with her.

In short, for Paul sanctification is not a solitary quest for personal holiness. It can



only be undertaken within the Church - a truth too many pastors fail to teach their congregations.

Once again what we have here is a cultural mind-set, a way of thinking common to the entire premodern world, *not just the premodern Semitic world*. Plato and Aristotle, for example, share the Torah's outlook: individuals alone are unable to lend meaning to their lives. It's the "polis"<sup>v</sup> that supplies their lives with purpose - that imparts to them the full measure of their humanity.

It's hard for 21st Century Americans to grasp the horror the Torah ascribes to being "cut off." For us, it's merely a matter of being unwelcome - no doubt embarrassing, certainly inconvenient, but seldom lethal. It's not the "end of the world" for us. We simply move on to new friendships and new collectives. If the "Lions Club" revokes my membership, I join the "Moose Club" and get on with my life. But for a 1st Century Jew, whose personal identity was derived almost wholly from his corporate identity, being "cut-off" was tantamount to a death sentence. It's not just that his physical well-being was jeopardized - though, no doubt, that's true - the wound he suffered was far deeper and more profound than that: he was alienated from all his emotional and intellectual moorings, and was cast into a terrifying isolation that quite literally eviscerated his psych . How different for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Evangelicals! Once again, for us, "excommunication" is more of a "bother" than the terrifying sanction the New Testament meant it to be.

In short, individualism has stripped Christians of the mind-set that at one time enabled them to both grasp the meaning Paul gave to the Church and to live out that meaning in authentic community.

#### *Community - the depository of telos*

The relationship between discrete individuals, the telos that directs and governs their lives, and the community to which they're linked - *that relationship* is finely balanced and charged with subtle nuances. No one metaphor conveys the full range of meanings that characterize it. One that comes close, however, is the metaphor of a depository: though telos is personally possessed by each individual, it can only be "drawn upon" within the community that subsumes those individuals. In a sense, therefore, community is where an individual's telos is deposited. An individual can't actualize his telos - meaning his humanity - apart from community; it can't be made concrete and tangible.

#### *The communal nature of personal ethics*

The train of Paul's thought extending from Romans 5:1 all the way to Romans 15:13 reflects a teleological bent that's very seldom picked up on - though it's so obvious that when pointed out we're left wondering how it's possible to overlook it.

Romans 5 through 8 sums up Paul's teaching on personal sanctification - the dynamics underlying the ethical changes justification leads to - what it means to be conformed to the image of Christ and how it occurs. That's all patently clear. But what does personal sanctification lead to? That's not as clear - not because Paul doesn't highlight it, but because our non-teleological thought patterns by and large blind us to it. What it leads to is community!

In short *personal* sanctification, contrary to what's so commonly taught in Evangelical Bible studies and from Evangelical pulpits, is not meant to produce merely sanctified individuals; it's meant to produce the church - individuals built up with one another - integrated into a whole that's far more than merely the sum of its parts. Romans 5 - 8 leads to Romans 12:1 - 15:13. And isn't that exactly the truth Jesus himself is pointing to in Matthew 22:37-40?

*Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, you shalt love your neighbor as yourself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

*Matt. 22:37-40*

Jesus begins in verses 37-40 with "the personal," each individual's relationship with God, and ends with "the communal," love of neighbor. And he insists that what we have here is the very consummation of the law and the prophets. The personal and the communal can't be divorced from one another. In a very real sense, they're the opposite sides of the same coin.

#### *Not a matter of personification*

We're often tempted to think that Plato is merely personifying the polis in *The Republic* and that Isaiah is doing the same with Israel in Chapters 40-66. But that misses the point altogether, and reflects the linear thought patterns that have developed here in the West since the Enlightenment. Personification implies that the collective is not real; that it's a fiction, used to describe a mass of individuals engaged in a joint effort; for example, "*America waged war against Japan from 1941 through 1945.*" It's not that anyone here in the West truly believes there was an actual "America" that fought an actual "Japan" during the four years from late 1941 to 1945. The term "America" is meant only to refer to individual Americans acting in concert with one another, just as the term "Japan" is meant only to refer to individual Japanese acting in concert with one another. That's the way we think in the West.

But that's not the way Plato thinks; nor is it the way Isaiah thinks: Plato isn't merely personifying the polis in *The Republic*; nor is Isaiah merely personifying Israel in Chapters 40-66. For Plato, Athens is real corporately; likewise, for Isaiah, Israel is real corporately.

And it's the other way around as well: for Plato a particular individual can embody within himself Athens - not just the meaning of Athens, but Athens herself and all the individuals who comprise her. For example, it's clear from Plato's *Apologia* that Socrates embodies Athens just as Athens embodies Socrates.<sup>vi</sup>

And the same holds true for Isaiah. That's why it's so difficult to tell if "The Servant of the Lord" described in Chapters 40-66 is the nation of Israel or an individual Jew. The debate has been endless; but it's largely beside the point; and that's because a premodern thinker has little trouble "shuttling back and forth" between the two. *The one entails the other.* And that's characteristic of *all* premodern thinkers, not just Isaiah, or Plato, or Aristotle.

### *Christ is the Church*

Paul reflects the very same mindset. Christ, a single individual, gathers into himself, meaning he embodies within himself, all the discrete individuals who comprise the Church. Indeed, he is the Church - just as in Isaiah 40-66 the "The Servant of the Lord" is Israel. *Thus, Christ's history becomes our history.*

- It's in this sense that we died with Christ on the Cross (Rom. 6:8).
- It's in this sense that we were raised with Christ in the Resurrection (Col. 3:1).
- It's in this sense that we are even now seated with Christ in the heavens (Eph. 1:3).

And it's the other way around as well:

- It's in this sense that *we* complete Christ's suffering (Col. 1:24).
- It's in this sense that *we* complete Christ's mission (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

It's the same rationale underlying Paul's claim that Christ is in us and we are in Christ.

*To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory.*

*Col. 1:27*

*There is therefore now no condemnation to **those who are in Christ Jesus**, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

*Rom. 8:1*

But that's not the end of it. Christ's identification with the church is carried even further: for Paul, the church is not merely a community; it's more than that: it's an extension of Christ himself; it's his body; it's his eyes, his ears, his hands, his arms, etc. Furthermore, it's not just his body figuratively, but actually. For example, when Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:27 that we are the Body of Christ ...

Now you (plural) are the body of Christ, and members individually.

*1 Cor. 12:27*

... he means that quite literally: we **are** Christ's hands and feet - ministering reconciliation to a lost and dying world.

### *Christ is Israel*

Not only do the scriptures clearly tell us that Christ embodies the Church, they also tell us just as clearly that Christ embodies Israel. Matthew 2:15 is decisive - though its implications are seldom spun out ...

... and (Jesus) was there (in Egypt) until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son."

Matthew 2:15

... a quote taken from Hosea 11:1 and there clearly pointing to Israel's exodus from Egypt under Moses, but applied to Christ here in Matthew. In short, *Christ is Israel's telos* - meaning Israel finds her consummation in Christ just as surely as the Church finds her consummation in Christ. Clearly, then, the *Servant of the Lord* Isaiah describes in Chapters 40-66 is none other than Christ himself. And that sheds a new light on Romans 11:16-26 - the implications of which we'll be taking up in our exegesis of Romans 9-11 in Volume III.

### *Extended through time - past • present • future*

The corporate nature of both Israel and the Church is not limited to the here and now, but extends through time as well - meaning it embodies not just believers living at the present, but believers who have lived in the past and believers yet unborn. And the metaphors used in Scripture have been carefully crafted to reflect this important truth; for example, the metaphor of "the root and branches" used in Romans Eleven - where the root symbolizes Abraham, the father of faith.

### *Mystery of Israel's rejection*

Salvation can't occur apart from a redeeming community - whether Israel or the Church. Given Paul's teleological mind-set, that's unthinkable. It would not even occur to him. And if Israel, for the moment, has repudiated Christ, who is as much her telos as he is the Church's, then the Church, as a redeeming community, becomes the sole repository of that telos - the collective framework within which redemption is both preached and lived out. And it's precisely here that the meaning of Israel's rejection is found: God, while preserving her, no longer saves individual Jews into her. They're saved into the church. Israel has lost that privileged status - and won't regain it until she at last acknowledges Christ as her Messiah at the end of the Tribulation.

### *Necessity of a redeeming community: eschatological implications*

The eschatological implications here are both profound and somewhat disconcerting. Why? Because so many of us were raised to believe in a pre-tribulational

rapture; but the necessary correlation between salvation and a redeeming community seems to call that into question. All premillennialists acknowledge that conversions occur during the Tribulation - on a scale that's without precedent, both for Jews and for Gentiles. But if Israel does not turn her heart back to God and embrace Christ until the very end of the Tribulation - a fact that's incontrovertible - then those salvations must surely occur within and through the Church - entailing her presence during almost that entire time-frame. Hundreds of millions of souls redeemed in the absence of either the Church or a redeemed Israel - which is what a pretribulation rapture requires? The very idea is incomprehensible to a premodern, wholly teleological intellect - so much so that Paul wouldn't even bother to stress it - nor would any other author of the New Testament Canon. It would simply be taken for granted.

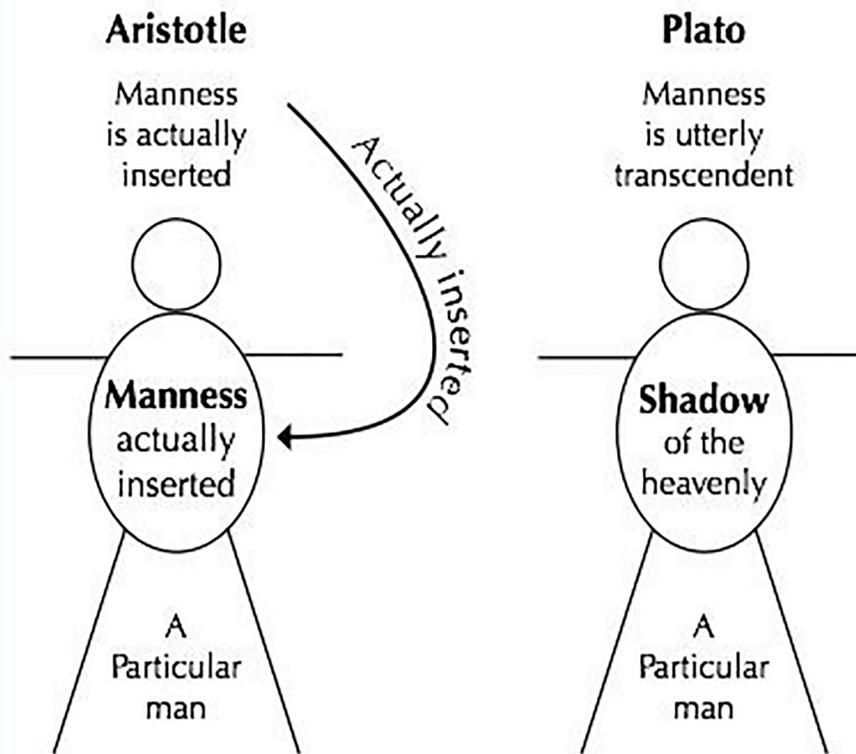
### Israel Finds Her Consummation in Christ

That there is a distinction between the Church and Israel is a truth underscored in the most unmistakable of terms throughout Romans 9-11. However, that distinction can be pressed too far. Ultimately, Israel no less than the Church, finds both her identity and her consummation in Christ - meaning Israel will stand incomplete and deficient until she at last acknowledges that Christ is her Messiah.

It's not just a matter of salvation - that salvation is wrought no differently for the Jews than for the gentiles - that the Jews are not provided a means of salvation that circumvents "Christ on the Cross" and their need to embrace that truth openly and plainly. It's that, of course; but it's much more: Christ is Israel's calling - her destiny - the ground of her existence. Christ is what Israel is all about. Without Christ, Israel is broken. It's that simple.

The failure on the part of some Christians - ostensibly, friends of Israel - to proclaim this truth is a sad and tragic fact. Some ignore it all together; others, lacking the courage of their convictions and unwilling to offend Jewish sensitivities and undermine the status they have gained within the Jewish community and among Jewish leaders, play down this truth. Unwittingly, they have become enemies of the Cross.

## Static and Dynamic Telos Both Found in Scripture



For the most part, the premodern teleological thought found in scripture is cast in an *Aristotelian* guise - meaning it's dynamic and fully imbedded in existential phenomena. Once again, Romans 5:12-21 is a good example: anyone possessed of Adam's telos is destined to sin and death whereas anyone possessed of Christ's telos is destined to righteousness and life. However, the static and utterly transcendent *Platonic* teleology is also found in scripture. A good example is Hebrews 8:1-5 ...

*Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,*

*a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord and not any mortal, has set up.*

*For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.*

*Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.*

*They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one; for Moses, when he was about to erect the tent, was warned, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."*

*Heb. 8:1-5*

What we have here looks as if it were pulled straight out of Book VII of Plato's *Republic*, the Allegory of the Cave: the true sanctuary is fully transcendent, not subject to change, and entirely static. Its existential counterpart on the earth is, therefore, only a sketch and shadow of the heavenly and can never match its splendor. And the same can be said of Hebrews 10:1 ...

*For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.*

*Heb. 10:1*

Here again we have a contrast between "the shadow on earth of the perfect in heaven" - teleology cast in a Platonic guise, not an Aristotelian guise.

The point here, once again, is not to suggest that Paul or any of the other New Testament authors was either a Platonist or an Aristotelian, but that teleology - whatever its form - was the paradigm governing all premodern intellectual discourse - whether Semitic, Hellenic, or otherwise.

#### *Once again*

For Aristotle, "humanity" is inserted into every concrete, existential man and woman - meaning every man and woman is born with "humanity" as an inherent part of his being. And that's precisely what the Bible also posits: for the unsaved, it's Adam's "humanity" - leading to sin and death; for the saved, it's Christ's "humanity" - leading to righteousness and a splendor which fully matches the splendor of Christ's very own humanity. Once again, Romans 5:12-21 reflects this form of teleological thinking.

On the other hand, for Plato, "manness" exists only as a transcendent reality - and concrete, existential men and women are only shadows of that reality, unable ever to fully match its splendor. Nowhere in scripture, however, is Platonic teleology found applied to men and women, only Aristotelian teleology. Once again, however, it is applied to the true "Sanctuary of God" found in heaven alone - with the concrete, existential sanctuary built by Moses only a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary.

## Endnotes

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- i Also what's called "final cause" - distinguishing it from Aristotle's other three causes: material, formal and efficient.
- ii The term he preferred was "archetype" or "ideal;" and his best description of it is given in his well-known "Allegory of the Cave."
- iii Once again, I'm not at all suggesting that Paul was either a Platonist or an Aristotelian, only that teleological presuppositions were imbedded in 1st Century thought.
- iv Individualism is a product of the 17th Century "Age of Reason" – an era that set the stage for the "Enlightenment" one hundred years later. Historically, it has not been the predominant mind-set throughout the world – certainly not in the Middle East, and most certainly not in 1st Century Palestine. It has only been within the last three and a half centuries that individualism has been pushed and shoved into ascendancy – and then only within Europe and North America. It was first clearly articulated by Thomas Hobbes in his book, *The Leviathan*, published in 1651, and three decades later by John Locke in his book *Two Treatises on Government*, published in 1688.
- v The Greek city-state.
- vi Socrates willingness to commit suicide at the behest of the Athenian magistrates, notwithstanding his innocence, reflects the profound identity between Socrates and Athens.