

The Adamic Administration

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MAN was created in the image of God, a self-conscious, free, responsible, religious agent. Such identity implies an inherent, native, inalienable obligation to love and serve God with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind. This God could not but demand and man could not but owe. No created rational being can ever be relieved of this obligation. All that man is and does has reference to the will of God.

But man was also created good, good in respect of that which he specifically is. He was made upright and holy and therefore constituted for the demand, endowed with the character enabling him to fulfill all the demands devolving upon him by reason of God's propriety in him and sovereignty over him.

As long as man fulfilled these demands his integrity would have been maintained. He would have continued righteous and holy. In this righteousness he would be justified, that is, approved and accepted by God, and he would have life. Righteousness, justification, life is an invariable combination in the government and judgment of God. There would be a relation that we may call perfect legal reciprocity. As this would be the minimum, so it would be the maximum in terms of the relation constituted by creation in the image of God.

This relation falls short in two respects of what may readily be conceived of as higher. (1) It is a contingent situation, one of righteousness but mutably so, and likewise of justification and life. There is always the possibility of lapse on man's part and, with the lapse, loss of integrity, justification, life, the exchange of these for unrighteousness, condemnation, death. (2) There is the absence of full-orbed

communion with God in the assurance of permanent possession and increasing knowledge.

In addition to the account given of man's creation and of the creation ordinances, we find a special series of provisions dispensed to our first parents. In other words, there are data which cannot be construed in terms simply of creation in the divine image and the demands of awards belonging to that relationship.

THE DATA

God gave to Adam a specific command or, more accurately, a specific prohibition. The term prohibition is significant. It is negative and, as such, differs from all the other ordinances. It is in character and intent not in the same category and stands off in this distinctness (Gen. 2:17). It applied to Adam and Eve alone and had relevance to the particular conditions of Eden. We are constrained to ask: Why or for what purpose?

To disobedience was attached the threat of death (Gen. 2:17). Failure to comply with the other ordinances would have been disobedience and disobedience would carry the consequences of penal judgment. But only in connection with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was this eventuality enunciated. Again we ask: Why?

There was also in Eden the tree of life (Gen. 3:22, 24). As the other tree represented the knowledge of good and evil, this tree must have been symbolic of life, and we may infer that in some way it would have been the seal of everlasting life (Gen. 3:22 — 'take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever'; also Gen. 3:24 in that Adam having forfeited life was prevented from access to it — 'to keep the way of the tree of life'). There must have been in the institution some provision for eternal life. And it is natural, if not necessary, to infer that it is the opposite of what actually transpired that would have secured this life, that to obedience was appended the promise of life, after the analogy of Genesis 2:17 in respect of disobedience. Although from Genesis 3:22 we infer that Adam had not partaken of the tree of life, and although it was not forbidden as was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (cf. Gen. 2:16), yet, apparently, by the arrangements of providence or of revelation, it was recognized as reserved for the issue of probationary obedience. This would explain Genesis 3:22, 24 (cf. Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14, especially the expression, 'right to the tree of life').

We know that Adam acted in a public capacity. Not only his destiny but that of the whole race was bound up with his conduct for good or for evil (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45, 46).

The race has been confirmed in sin, condemnation, and death by Adam's trespass. Surely this principle of confirmation would have been applied with similar consistency in the direction of life in the event of obedience on Adam's part.

Analogy is drawn between Adam and Christ. They stand in unique relations to mankind. There is none before Adam — he is the first man. There is none between — Christ is the second man. There is none after Christ — he is the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:44-49). Here we have an embracing construction of human relationships. We know also that in Christ there is representative relationship and that obedience successfully completed has its issue in righteousness, justification, life for all he represents (1 Cor. 15:22). So a period of obedience successfully completed by Adam would have secured eternal life for all represented by him.

The Adamic administration is, therefore, construed as an administration in which God, by a special act of providence, established for man the provision whereby he might pass from the status of contingency to one of confirmed and indefectible holiness and blessedness, that is, from *posse peccare* and *posse non peccare* to *non posse peccare*. The way instituted was that of 'an intensified and concentrated probation', the alternative issues being dependent upon the issues of obedience or disobedience (cf. G. Vos: *Biblical Theology*, 22f).

This administration has often been denoted 'The Covenant of Works'. There are two observations. (1) The term is not felicitous, for the reason that the elements of grace entering into the administration are not properly provided for by the term 'works'. (2) It is not designated a covenant in Scripture. Hosea 6:7 may be interpreted otherwise and does not provide the basis for such a construction of the Adamic economy. Besides, Scripture always uses the term covenant, when applied to God's administration to men, in reference to a provision that is redemptive or closely related to redemptive design. Covenant in Scripture denotes the oath-bound confirmation of promise and involves a security which the Adamic economy did not bestow.

Whether or not the administration is designated covenant, the uniqueness and singularity must be recognized. It should never be confused with what Scripture calls the old covenant or first covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; 2 Cor. 3:14; Heb. 8:7, 13). The first or old covenant is the Sinaitic. And not only must this confusion in denotation be avoided, but also any attempt to interpret the Mosaic covenant in terms of the Adamic institution. The latter could apply only to the state of innocence, and to Adam alone as representative head. The view that in the Mosaic covenant there was a repetition of the so-called covenant of works, current among covenant theologians, is a grave misconception and involves an erroneous construction of the Mosaic covenant, as well as fails to assess the uniqueness of the Adamic administration. The Mosaic covenant was distinctly redemptive in character and was continuous with and extensive of the Abrahamic

covenants. The Adamic had no redemptive provision, nor did its promissory element have any relevance within a context that made redemption necessary.

THE NATURE OF THE ADMINISTRATION

The administration was sovereignly dispensed by God. It was not a contract or compact. Sovereign disposition is its patent characteristic.

That Adam was constituted head of the human race and acted accordingly, we necessarily infer from the following considerations:

1. All that befell Adam as a consequence of his disobedience has as much reference to posterity as to Adam. Death is the lot of mankind, not through a repetition of the temptation and fall of Eden, but by solidarity with Adam. The earth is cursed for all, even though they do not individually pass through the crisis of Adam's fall and the direct pronouncement of God's judgment. The same is true of the judgment upon Eve.
2. The solidarity is clearly implied in Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:22.
3. The plan of redemption is erected on the principle of representative identification, and the parallel by which righteousness, justification, and life come to lost men is that exemplified in sin, condemnation, death through Adam.
4. The principle of representation underlies all the basic institutions of God in the world — the family, the church, and the state. In other words, solidarity and corporate relationship is a feature of God's government. We should expect the prototype to reside in racial solidarity. At least, racial solidarity is congruous with what we find on a less inclusive scale in the other institutions of God's appointment.

We need not suppose that Adam knew of this headship nor of the consequences issuing for posterity. All we know is that God constituted Adam the head. We do not know how much Adam knew of this relationship.

THE CONDITION

The condition was obedience. Obedience was focused in compliance with the prohibition respecting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The effect, however, was not to confine the demand for obedience to this prohibition. It was not the only command given to Adam, but it served to exemplify in an acute and condensed way the obedience owing to God, obedience unreserved and

unswerving in all the extent of divine obligation. The ambit of obligation was not contracted, but the intensity required was thereby illustrated.

In order to appreciate the significance of the tree as the test of obedience we must observe the twofold circumstance under which the obedience was to be rendered, probation and temptation.

1. *Probation*. It was symbolized by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The question we may ask is: What is denoted by the knowledge of good and evil? There are four possibilities.

(i) The good and evil would refer respectively to the issue of a successful or unsuccessful probation, the knowledge of good in the former event and of evil in the latter. But there are two objections.

(a) The phrase scarcely allows for this view. It is the knowledge of good *and* evil, not good *or* evil. Good and evil are correlatives and not alternatives.

(b) In the sequel of an unsuccessful probation it is said that 'man is become as one of us to know good and evil' (Gen. 3:22), not simply evil, as the interpretation in question would require.

(ii) The tree derived its name from the foreordained result. This view has the advantage of relating the designation to an event; it eliminates the question: How the knowledge of evil on the alternative of a successful probation?

It is difficult to rule out the relevance to the alternative of a successful probation since there are elements in the situation that do have reference to this alternative. Besides, since evil was present in the universe, it would seem necessary for Adam's enlarged knowledge to include this phase of God's all-embracing providence. Eve, at least, encountered this evil in the state of integrity. So, to some extent, it came within her acquaintance, and the knowledge derived from this encounter would have been hers even if she had resisted the temptation.

(iii) The tree had reference exclusively to the knowledge to be attained through successful probation. This would require us to regard Genesis 3:22a as irony, not as a statement of fact, an interpretation scarcely tenable, since verse 22a is given as the reason for verses 22b, 23. Irony would not provide the ground for the liability and the expulsion of these two verses.

(iv) We seem, therefore, to be shut up to the fourth view that the knowledge of good and evil describes the issue of either alternative of the probation.

In the event of a successful probation the experience of the crisis of temptation, and the experience of assured and indefectible goodness, would have imparted a renewed and greatly increased knowledge of the contrast between good and evil, and a renewed appreciation of the good as the opposite of evil. Furthermore, as suggested above, Adam, if elevated to a higher state of knowledge, would be given enlarged knowledge, not only of God but also of created reality and of God's providential order. The latter would include the system of evil of which Satan was the prince. Empirically, knowledge is knowledge of good and evil as correlated and contrasted realities.

In the event of unsuccessful probation, the event that actually occurred, the experience of all the evils that befell our first parents gave them a vivid sense of the bitterness of sin and its consequences in contrast with the good of their former condition. They knew the good of integrity; they came to know the evil of apostasy.

We must not suppose that the knowledge would have the same content in either case. How diverse the states of consciousness! By the fall there invaded man's consciousness elements that would never have crossed the threshold, the sense of guilt, of fear, of shame. There entered a new dispositional complex of desires, impulses, affections, motives, and purposes. We may never conceive of knowledge as a state of mind apart from the total condition of heart and will.

Yet in both cases the description applies, the knowledge of good and evil. This advises us that, in the usage of Scripture, two diverse states of mind, totally diverse in complexion, may be denoted by the same term. It also reminds us that of man as fallen is predicated the knowledge of good and evil, though we cannot ascribe to the knowledge predicated the qualities that belong to man's knowledge when renewed and illumined by the Holy Spirit in the operations of saving grace.

Probation in the nature of the case must be limited in duration. A destiny contingent upon an event can never become settled until the event has occurred. We see this exemplified in Adam, the elect angels, and Christ himself. How significant is Christ's word from the cross, 'It is finished' (cf. also John 17:4)!

2. *Temptation.* This was symbolized by the serpent (cf. John 8:44; Matt. 13:38, 39; Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 John 3:8; Rev. 12:9). The sense in which temptation is used in this instance is that of solicitation to sin and the placing of an inducement to sin in the way of another. It is temptation in this sense that is denied of God (James 1:13). He did not solicit sin in Adam and Eve; he did the opposite. He warned them against it and placed the inducement in the opposite direction. God did try our first parents. He was the agent of the probation. The

serpent was the agent in the temptation. It is of God to try and prove with a view to moral and religious strength, confirmation, and increased blessing (cf. Gen. 22:1, 12, 16-18). It is satanic to seduce and it is designed for weakening and degradation.

In the temptation our first parents were accosted by the serpent as the instrument of Satan and were subjected to doubting, unbelieving, and apostatizing suggestions and allegations. These suggestions did not originate in the mind of Eve. They were injected. It was not sin for Eve to have been confronted with these suggestions and solicitations, and it was in the circumstance of this temptation that our first parents were called upon to fulfil the condition of the administration. The temptation was of divine appointment, though Satan, not God, was the agent.

It was in the double circumstance of probation and temptation that our first parents were called upon to obey. The probation was epitomized in the prohibition, the temptation was directed to the contravention of the prohibition. Thus the stringency of the condition was pointed up in the tension between the demand for obedience to the divine prohibition and the pressures of temptation in the tempter's allegations. Our first parents had the ability to resist the temptation and to obey the prohibition. But they did not will to obey¹ and so they fell.

PROMISE

That there was a promise, though not expressly enunciated, we infer from the following data:

1. The tree of life represented everlasting life (Gen. 3:22). But it could not have this application unless there had been some provision connected with Eden which contemplated such life. Adam's expulsion signified forfeiture of that which the tree of life symbolized and was complementary to the fulfilment of the threat of Genesis 2:17 and the pronouncement of 3:19. It must have represented the opposite of death, as its designation also clearly indicates. Furthermore, the references to the tree of life (Rev. 22:2, 14) hark back to Genesis 3:22, 24 and they are fraught with this meaning.
2. The analogy of Romans 5:12-19 would require that confirmation in righteousness would carry the same of life.
3. In view of the foregoing, and the usage of Scripture in general that a negative in command implies the positive, we should infer the promise of life from the threat of death (Gen. 2:17).

¹ cf. Calvin: *Inst.*, I, xv, 8.

It may be that Genesis 3:22 implies a disposition on Adam's part to grasp at the life he knew he had forfeited, and thus sacrilegiously to partake of the tree. If so, then Adam must have known of its significance and therefore of the promise involved. But we cannot be sure of this. Genesis 3:22 may imply no more than the liability on Adam's part to partake of the tree which now, by reason of his sin, could not have for him any benefit, but rather the opposite, and would entail further judgment. It would have been sacrilege for him to partake, and mercy as well as judgment is evident in expulsion from access to it.

Difficulty resides in the words 'eat and live for ever' (Gen. 3:22). How could this be when Adam had forfeited the life signified, and of which the tree would have been the sign and seal? It is possible that the words do not refer to what would have been the actual sequel, but to Adam's intent in eating, namely, that he should live for ever and thus attempt to defeat the judgment of God. In that event we would have to suppose knowledge on Adam's part of the purpose of the tree. However, this construction is harsh. 'Live for ever', in the syntax, points rather to a result. On this assumption what is the import? A dogmatic answer is not warranted. But a possible solution can be proposed.

We found that the knowledge of good and evil described the result on either alternative of the probation. This is striking because in Scripture knowledge is equated with life. Yet the double reference is required. A radical difference is necessary between the two states in the respective cases, as observed already. In one case it is knowledge in a state of death, in the other it is knowledge in a state of indefectible blessedness and life. By analogy, may we not regard the tree of life as having likewise a twofold reference, the sign and seal of life on the highest level of realization on the one hand, and also of that life in death and misery to which Adam by sin degraded himself on the other? In this condition and state the tree would still have its sealing significance, but in the opposite direction, confirmation in the life of sin and death. In Adam's expulsion we should find, therefore, a signal manifestation of preventive grace, not only the grace of preventing an aggravation of Adam's sin, as noted already, but of preventing *confirmation* in sin, misery, and death, of preventing a sin that would have sealed his doom. God shielded Adam from the sin that would have put him outside the sphere of redemption.

In connection with the promise of life it does not appear justifiable to appeal, as frequently has been done, to the principle enunciated in certain texts (cf. Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12), 'This do and thou shalt live'. The principle asserted in these texts is the principle of equity, that righteousness is always followed by the corresponding award. From the promise of the Adamic administration we must dissociate all notions of meritorious reward. The promise of confirmed integrity and blessedness was one annexed to an obedience that Adam owed and, therefore, was a promise of grace. All that Adam could have claimed on the basis of equity was justification and life as long as he perfectly obeyed, but not confirmation so as to insure indefectibility. Adam could claim the fulfilment of the

promise if he stood the probation, but only on the basis of God's faithfulness, not on the basis of justice.² God is debtor to his own faithfulness. But justice requires no more than the approbation and life correspondent with the righteousness of perfect conformity with the will of God.

THREATENING

The threat was death (Gen. 2:17; 3:17-19). Death has a threefold aspect, spiritual (moral and religious), judicial, and psycho-physical. In Genesis 2:17, as interpreted by the pronouncement of Genesis 3:17-19, the emphasis falls upon psycho-physical death (cf. Rom. 5:12-19). It may well be that this is the only aspect expressly intended. But in the broader context of Scripture we shall have to take account of the other aspects. For example, when Paul describes the condition of the unregenerate as being 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Eph. 2:1), we cannot exclude this death from the death threatened in the original reference to death. Again, judicial death, as will be noted, consists in separation from God and the infliction of the curse. But sin is said expressly to be the cause of both separation and curse (Isa. 59:2; Gal. 3:10). This separation is symbolized in expulsion from Eden, for it meant expulsion from that which betokened the favour of God.

Spiritually our first parents became dead in the day they sinned. Their sin constituted this death; they estranged themselves from God and their mind became enmity against God. *Judicially* they also died the day they sinned; they became subject to the curse. *Psycho-physical* death can be said to have befallen them the day they sinned, in that mortality became their lot. They became mortal even though the actual dissolution did not take place. This death consists in the separation of the integral elements of their being, and exemplifies the principle of death, namely, separation. Since it is this aspect of death that is in the foreground in Genesis 2:17 and 3:17-19, and properly so, because of the prominence given to what is phenomenal in the administration as a whole, we are advised of the significance of this aspect in the judgment upon sin. It is not a mere incident. It consists in the disintegration of man's person, and demonstrates as such the gravity and total abnormality of sin and of its consequence. The body returns to dust and sees corruption, and the spirit, though it continues to be active, is no longer existent or active in its normal and natural relationship. Death is not merely a physical event; it is separation of body and spirit; and disembodied existence for man is punitive and expresses God's condemnation.

Spiritual death describes man's moral and religious condition; judicial death describes his status in reference to God; psycho-physical death describes the

² cf. Shedd: *Dogmatics*, II, p. 153; Witsius: *Economy of the Covenants*, I, pp. 61, 91.

disruption of his very being.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE ADAMIC ADMINISTRATION

We may subsume the necessary observations under two captions, negative and positive:

Negative

1. The special prohibition of Eden does not apply to us now. It was restricted to the conditions and circumstances of Eden and has no relevance outside the same. The whole-souled obedience it was intended to exemplify is our obligation, but not this way of discharging it.
2. As individuals we do not undergo probation in terms of the Adamic administration. It is totally wrong to say we are all Adam, and sin as he did. His sin was unique, in that it was from integrity he fell. We do not individually fall from integrity. Hence to construe the probations that we undergo as individuals, or even in our corporate responsibilities, in terms of the Adamic probation, fails to take account of the unique character of Adam's situation and relationships.
3. We cannot attain to life in terms of the Adamic institution. This possibility was once for all forfeited for Adam and posterity by the fall of our first parents. And the Adamic institution had no redemptive provisions.

Positive

1. We all stood the probation in Adam as our representative head, and failed in Adam. His sin was our sin, his fall our fall, by reason of solidarity with him. Likewise the fulfilment of the threat draws posterity within its scope. All who die, die in Adam, and in Adam all died (cf. Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22). The threat exercises its sanction with unrelenting severity, unless totally different provisions of redemptive grace intervene.
2. Christ's vicarious sin-bearing on behalf of the new humanity included the Adamic sin as well as all other sins. This aspect should not be overlooked.
3. The obedience Christ rendered fulfilled the obedience in which Adam failed. It would not be correct to say, however, that Christ's obedience was the same in content or demand. Christ was called on to obey in radically different conditions, and required to fulfil radically different demands. Christ was sin-bearer and the climactic demand was to die. This was not true of Adam. Christ came to redeem, not so Adam. So Christ rendered the whole-souled totality obedience in which Adam failed, but under totally different conditions and with incomparably greater demands.

We are liable to regard the Adamic administration as abstract, unrelated to our situation and practical interest, and so far removed from us that it has little or no relevance. If we are inclined to think so, it is because we do not have a biblically conditioned way of thinking. The Adamic institution is intensely relevant if our thought is regulated by the biblical revelation.

We are sinners and we come into the world as such. This situation demands explanation. It cannot stand as an empirical fact. It requires the question: Why or how? It is the Adamic administration with all its implications for racial solidarity that alone provides the answer. This is the biblical answer to the universality of sin and death.

We need salvation. How does salvation come to bear upon our need? Racial solidarity in Adam is the pattern according to which salvation is wrought and applied. By Adam sin-condemnation-death, by Christ righteousness-justification-life. A way of thinking that makes us aloof to solidarity with Adam makes us *inhabile* to the solidarity by which salvation comes. Thus the relevance of the Adamic administration to what is most basic, on the one hand, and most necessary, on the other, in our human situation.