

VOLUME TWO

THE CRISIS OF SUPREMACY

Where Is The Hope We Must Recover?

“My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus blood and righteousness ...
On Christ the solid rock I stand
all other ground is sinking sand.

When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay ...
On Christ the solid rock I stand
all other ground is sinking sand.

In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil ...
On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace ...
On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand.”

— *Edward Mote*

VOLUME II: CRISIS

6) The Greatest Crisis of All

7) *Why Don't We Hope?*

8) *Why Don't We Care?*

Interlude II



6

THE GREATEST CRISIS OF ALL

How Did We Come to This?

Some crises can break a heart. Some crises can stun a nation. Some crises can alter the course of a whole generation.

We live in an age of crises. I had no doubt of this as I stood near my home on a mountain crest called Washington Rock Park. From this vantage point in 1777 George Washington monitored the movements of British troops in the New Jersey valley. From this rock one can see the entire skyline of New York City just 20 miles away. On this September 11 evening what I saw, however, recalled funeral pyres I'd witnessed along India's Ganges River. Smoke billowed to blanket the horizon from the steel tomb *TIME* magazine called "The Twin Terrors".

In the fall of 2001 a whole nation gazed at a crisis unlike anything we had ever seen before. It was a crisis both global and personal — one that has permanently changed the outlook of millions worldwide. As a result, noted U.S. foreign policy scholar Walter Russell Mead predicted for *TIME* that he now believes the 21st century will be remembered as the "Age of Apocalypse". He wrote: "People feel that the veil of normal, secular reality is lifting, and we can see behind the scenes, see where God and the devil, good and evil are

fighting to control the future. They believe history is accelerating, that ancient prophecies are being fulfilled in real time.” In the rise of global terrorism our nation now faces a crisis of apocalyptic proportions.

There’s another crisis looming before us that outweighs all others. It is not unrelated however. But it carries far more sobering Biblical consequences than all others. This second “ground zero” is more sobering, potentially more catastrophic than collapsing towers in lower Manhattan. It is more decisive as far as eternity is concerned. It is the crisis this chapter (and this whole manifesto) is commissioned to address head on, as we:

- **Define why our greatest crisis must be identified as a “crisis of supremacy”.**
 - **Review how the crisis of supremacy has manifested itself the past 2000 years.**
 - **Survey some of the ways the crisis is unfolding inside the Church today.**
 - **Look at the impact the crisis may be having on *your* congregation.**
 - **Revisit the contrast between a Monarch and a mascot.**
 - **Describe how the Ascension gives us leverage to confront the crisis.**
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Our Greatest Crisis in an Age of Crises

(1 John 2: 18-19; 4:1-6)

The crisis of which I speak is not, first of all, among unbelievers. It is found *inside* the Church of Jesus Christ. More ruthless than attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., this crucible carries repercussions for an entire generation of God’s people. It impacts ultimate issues touching the Kingdom of God and its advance among the nations. It affects *believers* at the heart level. Its ominous overtones echo the Battle of Ages.

Have I stated the issue too strongly? I don’t think so. Before the close of this chapter I think you’ll agree.

THINK WITH ME ...**What should we call the overarching crisis we face inside the Church?**

Some have called it a “crisis of *Christology*.” As mentioned in the opening chapter, I prefer to call it “a crisis of *supremacy*”. Either way, the challenge has everything to do with how fully Christians serve the claims of God’s Son. And that, in turn, has everything to do with how effectively we minister to the nations in the face of every other threat, including “Terrorism, Inc.”

As we started to explore in chapter 1, the “crisis of supremacy” rises inside the Church wherever Christians are paralyzed by a significant shortfall in the way they understand the person of the Son of God, His leadership in the Purposes of God, His distribution of the Resources of God and His honor from the People of God.

This disquieting discrepancy has blindsided far too many believers around us. It has sabotaged a host of unsuspecting disciples. It has preempted the vitality of our worship, prayer, community life and ministry outreach. In too many cases it has numbed our daily walk with our Redeemer. Above all, it has robbed God of His rightful praise through His people among all peoples.

More terrifying than Muslim extremists on the path of Jihad or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the world’s most precarious danger is actually manifested in many churches as a lack of adequate vision for the Lord of Glory. Every other crisis faced by the nations impinges, directly or indirectly, on how *Christians* deal with the primary one, the one *we* face, the crisis within our own ranks.

John tells us: “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching about Christ does not have God” (2 John). Period. No exceptions. Could anything be more debilitating for the global cause of Christ than this verdict? Even *Christians* can come up short on how they view and value the supremacy of God’s Son. They can also renege on living out before the world the implications of His supremacy.

This shortfall is as old as the first Easter morning. Recall Mary Magdalene’s despair before the empty tomb. Weeping over a Master she

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The erosion of Christ-centered faith threatens to undermine the identity of evangelical Christianity ... real revival and genuine reformation will not be built on flimsy foundations.

(DR. TIMOTHY GEORGE)

thought had been reduced to a stolen corpse, she stood paralyzed with fear and confusion and hopelessness. Her “crisis” sprang from doubts about His promise of ultimate power over the grave. Suddenly ... Jesus — alive and well! — confronted her, probing her: “*Who are you looking for?*” (Jn. 20). That’s the right question to put to any believer, any time. It can be asked in a variety of ways, of course. For example, on that same Easter other disciples struggling with similar despair were approached by angels challenging them: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen” (Lk. 24). It was like saying: “Do you really know *who* it is you are seeking?”

Surely, no more incisive inquiries confront the global Christian community in the 21st century than these: *Who* really is the Christ you are seeking? Do you know *why* you are seeking Him? And do you know for sure *how* and *where* to find Him?

Let’s lay it on the table. How many Christians do you know who are fully alert to God’s Son for ALL He is in the glory of His supremacy? How many Christians in your congregation may require, in fact, a *re-introduction* to Him on a number of fronts? Drawing from the last four chapters, how regularly do we worship Him as our:

- Sovereign Son of the Father, reigning at His right hand forever and ever?
- Triumphant Victor over every foe — sin, death, Hades?
- Glorious Conqueror, the dominating personality for all ages to come?
- Unequivocal Commander of heaven’s hosts, ready to obey His every word?
- Indisputable Judge of peoples and nations, to whom all must give an account?
- Undeniable Ruler of history, overseeing its path and its outcome from beginning to end?
- Incomparable King of an Empire that will ultimately fill creation with His power and piety?
- Irreplaceable Head and Heart of a people whom He has bought with His own blood?

- Reigning Redeemer of a Church universal, militant and triumphant, sending His salvation to the ends of the earth?
- Supreme Lord in this moment just as fully as He will be Supreme Lord at the End of Time?

If our churches are experiencing the “crisis of supremacy”, we must not run from it. It’s far too critical. We must expose the ambivalence God’s people harbor regarding *who* we seek, *why* we seek Him, and *how* and *where* we expect to find Him. Let’s confront the crisis and cure it!

THINK WITH ME ...

In what sense might the Church have an “identity crisis”?

Many in today’s Church wrestle with the ultimate “*identity crisis*”. It’s not so much a misunderstanding about our own identity (although in the end this is also affected). Rather, it is a disturbing confusion about *Christ’s* identity. It is our blindness to the glory of the One we claim as Lord. Many in our congregations suffer needlessly from insufficient exposure to the Grand Hope we are meant to have in God’s Son. Too few disciples are growing in their knowledge of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1) — Christ as the summation, consummation, approximation and consuming passion of Christian hope (the way **Volume I** presents Him).

Here’s my observation from years of traveling the evangelical movement: Many in our ranks need to heed something akin to the angelic announcement that shook the disciples on Resurrection Day. To paraphrase the Gospel record:

Why are you seeking the Living One in all the wrong places?

The Christ you claim to follow is not to be found
where you have been looking.

Great news: He’s so much more than you thought He was!

He’s risen. He’s Lord. He’s going ahead of you.

He’s the hope of all the victories to come!

Open your eyes to His *truest* identity
(and, find your own in the process).

The Church’s “identity crisis” over Jesus surfaced dramatically following the attacks of 9/11. Initially, national polls revealed a groundswell of renewed interest in the Gospel of Christ that fall. Attendance in churches rose significantly. In some places the increase was as much as 50% in one month. People gathered to pray, sometimes filling whole stadiums. Sobered

by predictions of more attacks to come, multitudes were attentive to Scripture like never before.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Since September 11, 2001 I have seen more clearly than ever how essential it is to exalt explicitly in the excellence of Christ crucified for sinners and risen from the dead. Christ must be explicit in all our God-talk. It will not do, in this day of pluralism, to talk about the glory of God in vague ways. God without Christ is no God. God-in-Christ is the only true God and the only path to joy. If we would see and savor the glory of God, we must see and savor Christ.

(DR. JOHN PIPER)

And yet, a year after the 2001 Al Queda invasion the long-term impact of 9/11 on the spiritual condition of Americans was negligible. Research revealed that church attendance actually declined to levels lower than before that September day. One pollster concluded that 95% of Americans had not been permanently affected for Christ at all. Apathy toward evangelism prevailed in most quarters. Giving to all charities, especially outreach ministries, was significantly down. Divisiveness among churches did not abate. On one survey over half of our fellow citizens concluded a year later that the message of Christ was decreasing in its influence. Far too often seekers looking for answers felt themselves unwelcomed when they brought their shattered hearts to local congregations. As one Biblical scholar put it, instead of helping spawn a culture-wide awakening to Christ, after 9/11 most Christians ended up simply “reshuffling the chairs on what felt like a sinking ship”.

But this story is only a tip of the troubling truth. The hour has come to wake up fully to Christ. *There’s urgency to this emergency!* We must take up the challenge with all the resolve and courage the Holy Spirit inspires within us. Everything precious to us and our churches is at stake. The very advance of Christ’s mission in this generation is on the line.

THINK WITH ME ...

What is our most strategic response to the “crisis of supremacy”?

The crisis of supremacy is so intractable and so pervasive that it will never be cured with half-hearted measures. It requires nothing short of a new kind of *reformation* — a re-forming, if you will, of vision about the *whole* Christ throughout the *whole* Church that helps us embrace *whole*-heartedly the *whole* extent of His glorious reign for the *whole* world.

Increasing numbers of Christian leaders have sensed the need for such dramatic changes. At a gut level many suspect reformation is precisely what the Spirit is moving the Church toward, on many fronts. All that really remains to trigger a fresh stirring to action may be nothing more than a clarion call — a *manifesto* — to unleash among us (what I have chosen in this book to term) “*A Campaign Of Hope*”.

Such a summons will have little impact, however, unless it spreads far and wide. The message must be delivered by an ardent army of heralds inside the Church. A “Campaign of Hope” must enlist Christians like you and me who care whether Christ receives the glory He deserves among His people. It is we who must proclaim a larger vision of the King throughout the Body, holding nothing back as we do. In fact, that’s precisely what *this* manifesto envisions: A magnificent movement of messengers — a Church flooded with Christ-proclaimers!

Stated simply, my premise is this: There’s nothing more strategic that any of us could choose to do at this moment, for the advance of the Kingdom of God’s dear Son before the nations, than to promote a vision for the full extent of Christ’s lordship among each other as believers.

Each of us must begin right now to make a decisive difference in our churches by what we say about the Savior to disciples who sit with us every Sunday. We must call *Christians* to re-engage with our Sovereign around the grand scope of the hope His supremacy secures.

Be encouraged about this. The potential for renewal is unparalleled. God’s miracle-working grace has already preceded such a campaign. Already the Spirit has rekindled countless Christians waiting in the wings, hungry for a fresh message about the greatness of God’s Son, eager to band with us to exalt Him in new ways. Already, God is raising up a multitude of willing proclaimers poised for action. I’ve met with thousands of them around the world the past two decades. And there are literally millions more.

These “change agents” must be mobilized as quickly as possible. First, they must be recruited as *Messengers of Hope*, equipped to present to fellow

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Jesus, King of Kings, I am yearning for the day your kingdom comes in power, for even momentary impressions of your dominion leave me breathless. My mouth cannot keep silent — I must tell of your mighty acts and make known the glory of your kingdom. We need your reign. Nothing else will do.

(TRICIA RHODES)

Christians a more dynamic vision of Jesus that calls them to be re-converted to Him for ALL that He is. Second, they must discover the thrill of growing as *Prisoners of Hope* as they seek to live out the promises Jesus secures for them. Third, they must form *Vanguards of Hope*, working together to overthrow the spiritual lethargy that plagues so many of our people along with showing other believers how to serve Christ in anticipation of Kingdom breakthroughs. These three steps toward mobilization comprise the “Campaign of Hope” I’m calling for. (Chapters 9-12 look at them in depth.)

Before we take on a cause with such monumental consequences, however, we need to investigate more thoroughly the source and nature of this crisis. Because ... it has haunted God’s people for a very long time.

A Crisis Resurfacing Across the Ages

(Colossians 1:22-2:10)

Let’s stake out some historical background to understand better what’s happening today. The concept of a crisis of supremacy is not a novel notion. Every generation has had its own versions. As is well known, for example, Thomas Jefferson so fully rejected Christ’s claims to divinity and lordship that, while serving as our third President, he sat down one night with razor in hand to create his own Bible. He literally cut out of the pages of the Gospels everything he found offensive about the greatness of the Savior until he arrived at a version he called “The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth”. Jefferson’s was certainly one form of the “crisis of supremacy”!

The need to restore the Church’s vision for the kingship of Jesus has been perennial. Through the centuries Christians have been challenged repeatedly to think about and respond to God’s Son in fresh, new ways. As a case in point, in the 2nd century of the second millennium, two major armies of hope-filled proclaimers surfaced in Europe to confront the crisis. First came the Franciscans. Coupling a life of simplicity with their message of hope, they brought a fresh vision of Christ into the cities of Europe. Close behind arose the Dominicans whose whole religious order was formed for the express purpose of preaching renewal in Jesus throughout the Church. Eventually thousands of these “mendicants” (Latin for “beggars”) were

traveling across the Continent and beyond, pursuing one ambition: to bring Christians back to Christ through a vigorous message of His supremacy. One might differ over certain aspects of their interpretations of Scripture, but there's no arguing with their conclusion: Whenever there's a crisis in how God's people relate to His Son, it's time to send forth heralds of hope to re-awaken believers to Him for ALL that He is.

Franklin Graham, son of the famed evangelist, assumed a similar posture. For years he consistently counseled the Church not to back off from making the deity and lordship of Christ a primary issue everywhere, and at all times. Then in 2001 while praying the inaugural prayer for President George W. Bush before an august body assembled on the Capitol steps, he "dared" to close his petition by saying "in the name of Jesus Christ". Those six little words ignited a firestorm of controversy. Finally, Graham answered his critics by publishing a bestseller titled simply *The Name*. In it he made his case for the uniqueness and greatness of the Lord Jesus and for a Christian's obligation to confess His lordship at every opportunity.

Graham held common cause with the two preaching societies of the Middle Ages, realizing that a failure to proclaim Christ for *all* that He is, especially among His people, debilitates Christian worship and witness and in turn discourages vision for His mission to the nations. That same "power failure" has become, once again, the greatest crisis of *our* times.

But the waxing-and-waning of vision for our Lord is not an inevitable cycle of history. Understanding past and present struggles can help us uncover effective, more enduring cures for the crisis in the 21st century. History's insights can strengthen our resolve to pass on to the next generation a panorama on the glory of God's Son that's more thoroughly Biblically consistently.

THINK WITH ME ...

What are some ways that the crisis has manifested itself over the ages?

Right from the get-go the Gospels record a variety of occasions when every one of the first disciples, not just Mary, stumbled over their Master's true

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Christology is the true hub round which the wheel of theology revolves, and to which its separate spokes must each be correctly anchored if the wheel is not to get bent.

(DR. J.I. PACKER)

identity. They doubted Him, challenged Him, denied Him, betrayed Him, abandoned Him, gave up on Him. Following His resurrection, however, they were *reconverted* back to Him as their victor. They found in Him a Kingdom-sized hope that looked, ever after, with expectancy toward the end of the earth and the End of Time (compare Lk. 22 and 24 with Acts 1).

This revolution didn't stop with the Twelve, fortunately. A Pharisee from Tarsus wrestled with his own crisis about the Messiah. This led him to hunt down and imprison early believers. Then came his life-changing Damascus road encounter when Paul asked Heaven's Highness: "Who are you, Lord? ... What would You have me do?" (Acts 9). The vision of God's Son, along with the answers to his questions, seized him and became the catalyst for most of his epistles, spanning three decades.

Paul challenged legalists at the Jerusalem council who argued that Christ alone was not adequate for salvation (Acts 15). He confronted Peter's compromising retreat from Gentiles in Galatia because it raised suspicions about the sufficiency of God's Son (Gal. 2.) He exposed Gnostic enticements that invaded the little church in Colossae because they suggested that Jesus was merely a stepping stone into larger mysteries. He patiently nurtured naive new believers in Rome who desperately needed to understand the radical nature of their union with Christ. In all these situations the Apostle found himself caught up in a marvelous mission — restoring *Christians* to a higher view of the supremacy of the person and work of the Messiah.

In its opening centuries the Church tackled numerous other Christological heresies, such as Athanasius' refutation of the Arians' claim that Christ was created and not eternally God. Some early confrontations were precipitated by the desire of *all* parties, interestingly enough, to preserve for God's Son in their own ways the highest possible honor as Lord of all. This can be seen in the 2nd century controversy with Marcion over his teaching that Christ was *too* exalted as God (!) to ever become fully human. It took the councils like Nicea (A.D. 325) to resolve many of these tensions. Fourth century bishops concluded that if Christ were not both fully human and fully God at the same time, He could not be the supreme revelation of God to us — which would mean that to worship Him as supreme Lord would be nothing short of blasphemy. Dealing with these arguments often resulted in major Confessions and Creeds that still serve us well today, such as the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed, each of which reaffirmed an exalted view of the Savior.

Challenges to the supremacy of Christ resurfaced frequently over ensuing centuries. These ranged from Constantine's pragmatic co-opting of the cross symbol in A.D. 324 to solidify his empire; to multiple bloody Crusades bent on reclaiming the Holy Land for the name of Jesus; to Medieval "passion plays" that incited violence against Jews more than love for the Lamb; through a variety of demoralizing papacies in the Middle Ages; to the deadly veneer of a politicized Christianity in post-Reformation Europe; on to the existential appeals of 18th century Unitarianism in New England; and to the emergence of Christo-paganism among scores of African tribal groups in the 19th century; up to the current Jesus Seminar whose regular dissertations, media blitzes and mass-marketing savvy has recast Christ for millions as a mere mortal at best. These and a file full of other "winds of doctrine" (as Ephesians 4 describes them) have mocked the truth about God's reigning all-righteous Regent. Spiritually, they have paralyzed the Church in one generation after another.

The 20th century, it should be noted, saw its share of assaults on the supremacy of Christ. Take the writings of theologians like Germany's Bultmann. The professor reasoned that most of what we know about Christ is based on myths of human concoction. Dismissing any appeal to the uniqueness of God's Son, he undermined confidence about the ministry for thousands of clergy. To this add what some called the "Anglican Unitarians", so preoccupied with Christ's humanity that they were forced to discount His deity. Next, from Latin America emerged "Liberation Theologians". They convinced multitudes of impoverished Christians to champion Jesus as their ultimate "freedom fighter". Characterizing Jesus as one of the world's outcasts — abused and powerless — this camp intended for Him to inspire the poor everywhere to liberate themselves from oppression (if necessary, through armed revolution).

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

The Church has become uncertain of Jesus, even uncomfortable with Him. We instinctually sense that the foundation of salvation is in trouble. And it is. Church history is sadly replete with a tendency to forsake Christ. The Church has a long history of discomfort with Christ. The maneuvering of Christ to the margins of our culture — and to the margins of many of our churches — may diminish the status of Christianity (Christendom). At the same time, it also puts believers in a position to experience the transforming power of the gospel in new ways, for the gospel is most empowered when it is least encumbered.

(DR. JAMES R. EDWARDS)

THINK WITH ME ...**Who is Jesus in America, and how much hope do Americans place in Him?**

This quick overview hasn't even begun to unwrap the crisis of supremacy as it has evolved within U.S. culture. Boston University professor Stephen Prothero in his *American Jesus*, revisited a pantheon of Christ-images that Americans have concocted over the past two centuries, including (what he calls) the Enlightened Sage, the Laughing Jesus (life-affirmer), the Sweet Savior (feminine-like and intimate), the Manly Redeemer (muscular Christianity), Superstar, Elder Brother, Black Moses, and Oriental Christ (a Dali Lama personage). All of these, as Prothero documents, have transformed the Son of God into what he calls a "national icon", ubiquitous throughout popular culture. He's "the man nobody hates", allowing Americans of all religious persuasions to "embrace whichever Jesus fulfills their wishes". Dr. Robert Orsi of Harvard University concurs, stating that in American life "imagining and re-imagining Jesus has been one way men and women have engaged the challenges of their times".

Americans live in what sociologists conclude is the world's most religiously diverse nation, ever. Although the United States houses more Christians than any other country in human history, recent statistics show our country currently is home to more than 2,000 mosques and 600 Hindu congregations, with at least 200 Buddhist centers in Los Angeles alone. In many ways the Church here finds itself enveloped by a post-Christian world where Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity have been blended into a religious "stew" from which everyone is welcome to sup. This has profound implications for how Jesus is ultimately perceived, even by believers.

How well, do you think, is the testimony of our Master prevailing within the pantheon of gurus offered on the *BeliefNet* website? What is the future for a growing movement in some quarters called "The Christ Myth", insisting that Jesus is merely a Xerox copy of one primitive pagan god that became the primary model of all other gods — Egyptian, East Indian and Christian? Is it even "politically correct" anymore to propose in public that Jesus is Lord, triumphant over all other faiths and the only hope of the universe?

Published within a few months of Prothero's book, a professor from Yale University issued a complementary treatise: *Jesus in America*. Richard Fox confirmed Prothero's critique in his subtitle: "Personal Savior, Cultural

Hero, National Obsession”. Fox wrote (based on broad surveys): “Jesus, for most Americans, is the God-man who offers forgiveness, succor, and hope ... he makes them feel better by loving them and he makes them feel worse by reminding them of their failure to love him and their neighbors.” It appeared that Jesus exists to meet *our* needs. Such a Jesus has retained “multiple identities” throughout our land, Fox concluded. He is frequently “liberalized into a God of pure love” by those rejecting old-fashioned constraints to boundless freedom. Though the majority of our citizens indicate to pollsters they believe Jesus is God, was born of a virgin and was raised from the dead (nearly 70%), “he is so pervasive culturally that some representations of him have no apparent religious reference at all”. Maybe you’ve noticed that crucifixes have become the new hip fashion statement.

Returning a moment to *American Jesus* (borrowing words from its subtitle), we need to ask ourselves: How did the Son of God become “a national icon”? Though Americans may never reach consensus on who Jesus really is, Prothero found that in a country divided by race, ethnicity, gender, class and religion, Jesus mattered to most because He functions as our “common cultural coin”. In a recent Presidential debate one candidate actually named Jesus as his favorite “philosopher”. Unfortunately, Prothero admits, “this cultural Jesus is only a *shadow* of the Biblical Son of God”.

It came as no surprise, frankly, when a Pulitzer Prize winning ex-Jesuit priest authored a best-selling book with the disturbing title: *Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God*. In it, to critical acclaim, he reasoned that at the opening of the 1st century “God was under extreme duress”, weary with eons of ineffective restraints over His enemies. So, He came up with the last-ditch idea of Jesus to try to salvage His reputation. In His failed effort to defeat His foes, He used Jesus to implement a new strategy: co-opt their rebellion with sacrificial love. “Jesus” resolved God’s crisis over His own *impotency* (is the claim). Jesus was God’s final stab at effecting some kind of meaningful change in the world.

Jack Miles’ book simply highlights the ages-long struggle for the soul of the Church. Do we have a crisis in the life of *God*? Not at all! Rather, the Church regularly hosts deadly disturbances in

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The bottom line here is that Jesus of Nazareth saw himself as the Son of God. Whatever we do afterwards, we must first decide what to do with this. If he was correct, we must fall down and worship him. If he was not correct, we must crucify him.

(DR. DONALD MACLEOD)

the life of *God's people*. It is a crisis over how we define the supremacy of God's Son. It shapes how we see Him and seek Him — and finally, how we speak of Him.

The Same Crisis Infects Today's Church

(Luke 19:37-45)

We were forewarned by Jesus long ago to expect this tug-of-war: “For many will come in my name claiming ‘I am the Christ’ and deceive many” (Matt. 24). Decades later the Apostle John gave the same alert when he wrote: “This is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come” (1 John 2). (Hint: For “antichrists” think “antacid”, as in tablets. These teachers tried, often subtly, to *neutralize* the impact of the glorious greatness of God's Son.)

Well, the crisis of past ages has returned with a fury! And it may be manifesting itself *inside* the Church more than anywhere else.

Not long ago at an annual national gathering of Christian leaders, a furor erupted when one pastor stood to challenge the convention with the question “So, what's the big deal about Jesus?”, suggesting there may be many other avenues for salvation. His question highlighted the fundamental struggle among God's people as we plunge into the 21st century. The Church is once again facing an insidious dismantling of Biblical Christology across the board. Once-settled certainties about Christ and His preeminence in the universe are receding, even among evangelicals. And the outcome of the trend is not at all certain.

THINK WITH ME ...

What are some ways this crisis is making its appearance inside the Church?

Surveys suggest that on many Sundays sermons heard across the evangelical spectrum major more on helping parishioners grapple with challenges in daily living than on grabbing hold of the hope Jesus brings. Emphases on the pragmatics of spiritual survival can gut unwittingly the impact of Christ's lordship. Too often we've encouraged each other to incorporate

Christ into our lives when and where *we* feel the need for Him. We mimic Him to mold ourselves into more caring communities. We invite Him to enhance the fulfillment of self and family. We run to Him to sustain our sanity in a dog-eat-dog world. But more often than not, for all practical purposes, God's Son finds Himself discounted when it comes to expectations regarding direct and decisive displays of His dominion over our everyday experiences.

Even among Bible-based Christians there is evidence of a significant rise in the number of "nominal" or "vague" evangelicals. Many in our churches have a *form* of evangelicalism (they can recite the date they were "born again", let's say) but deny the primacy of the One who presides over them. Though active in Gospel-minded churches, many have found ways to bypass the fuller implications of Jesus' claims. Compared to other kinds of lukewarm Christians, nominal evangelicals may be in double jeopardy: Why? Because, according to Jesus, those who profess to "see" but really don't, end up twice as blind (Matt. 13 and Jn. 9).

Among the emerging generation of younger American Christians, researchers have uncovered a shift from rational, logical, systematic outlooks on spiritual realities to longings for experiential, mystical engagements with the "divine". In the words of Dan Kimball, consultant on post-modern evangelism, "personal preferences have replaced predetermined truth". Diminishing discoveries about Christ's dominion have often led by default to a more "me-centered" approach to Christianity. Therefore, steeped in modern religious pluralism, a significant number of Christian young people have succumbed to the culture around them. In a recent finding superficial faith among youth from evangelical families has left only 35% claiming to be "absolutely committed" to Christ as *supreme* Lord and Savior. In fact, most research indicates that the percentage of those who profess faith in Christ in North America, 30 years and under, is smaller (3% to 6%) than at any time in our nation's history. Such trends raise serious implications for dealing with the wider spiritual emergency our churches face.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

In the United States, Jesus is widely hailed as the "King of Kings." But it is a strange sort of sovereign who is so slavishly responsive to his subjects...The American Jesus is more a pawn than a king, pushed around in a complex game of cultural (and countercultural) chess, sacrificed here for this cause and there for another.

(DR. STEPHEN PROTHERO)

The crisis of supremacy embroils whole denominations as well. Even as I write, some are debating the doctrine of Christ's nature and role as Lord. One of the largest denominations just acquitted its head bishop of heresy — for the fourth time! — even though he openly denies Christ's divinity, atonement and resurrection. More radical feminists, promoting a movement called “Re-Imagining God”, have encouraged us to pray to a feminine Jesus whom they call “Christa”. Uneasiness about the uniqueness and exclusivity of Jesus also dominates the front lines of world evangelization. Numbers in the missionary community are rethinking the primacy of the Savior due to the onslaught of fierce resistance from the ancient faiths of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *U.S. News* have regularly weighed in with front-cover reports on these painful religious controversies.

In his book *Surveying the Religious Landscape* George Gallup, Jr. concluded his research on contemporary religious culture by suggesting that the main shift taking place is not so much an aggressive resurgence of base paganism. Rather, he identified a subtler surrender to what he called “syncretism”. In short, many inside our churches are attempting to combine a Biblical faith with neo-pagan trappings. They are mixing their seeming devotion to Christ with various superstitious practices, or Eastern religion rituals, or false doctrines like reincarnation. Maybe that helps explain the popularity of *Religion for Dummies*. Compiled by a priest and a rabbi, it offers “a spiritual buffet” (as they put it) to help their readers “sample faiths from all over the world”.

So, which Lord *do* we worship when all is said and done? In a nation “infatuated with Jesus” (in Fox's words) — actually with many “Jesuses” distilled from a rainbow of cultural impressions, including African American, Latino American, Korean American, Anglo American, Irish American, Native American, Italian American, Chinese American — is the *real* Son of God the one most Christians follow here? Our historically unprecedented religious diversity has tempted far too many U.S. believers to “pick and choose” from a spiritual smorgasbord piled high with Christian and non-Christian delicacies. In the end, I fear, many have unconsciously pieced together a deity that's a far cry from the Biblical Sovereign whose name “is above every other name” and before whom “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ ” (Eph. 1 and Phil. 2).

Is the evangelical movement infatuated with the *real* Redeemer — with a Jesus who claims to be “all”? Let me ask it another way: Throughout the

land how regularly do we publicly, intentionally and consistently proclaim the supremacy and glory of our Lord, confessing Him boldly as the One who has trumped every other form of spirituality Americans embrace. Do we even talk this way about Him among *ourselves*?

THINK WITH ME ...

What are other tangible ways to measure the crisis among us?

It should be no surprise that Western Christendom is experiencing a precipitous drop in new recruits for ministry. This is due, in many cases, to the private doubts of millions inside our churches about the *finality* of Christ's lordship over all things human or divine, both at home and abroad. What does it say about modern evangelical Christology when it is statistically verifiable in America that there is an epidemic of people in pastoral leadership who are living in quiet desperation? Every month 1,400 clergy leave the ministry. Every week 53,000 parishioners forsake the Church never to return. According to the National Network of Men's Ministries, nearly 70 million American men never darken a church door. However, 85% of *those* men have chosen to leave a church they once attended! And consistent church attendance continues its disturbing decline among the 27 million men who remain members.

Over 80% of U.S. congregations are either stagnant or dying. With every passing year there are approximately 3,000 fewer churches in America than there were the year before, with so many closing their doors. In proportion to population there are fewer than half as many churches today as there were only a century ago. In fact, the United States is considered by some to be one of the largest unchurched nations in the world, in a class with China, India, Indonesia and Japan. According to the book *Lost In America*, some studies suggest that the United States is so extensively unchurched that if the non-Christians in our land were to form a nation by themselves, it would become the largest mission field in the English-speaking world, the fifth largest among all nations.

Should not such facts send forth strong warnings? Shouldn't these developments challenge us, at the very least, to re-examine in what ways the glory of Christ Himself is currently *mis*-understood and *mis*-communicated *inside* the Church by those who claim His name?

Tragically, countless Christians live in a theological fog. Biblical illiteracy in many churches is confirmed consistently by national polls. A Barna Research survey found that only 4% of Americans come at life with anything

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

In Jesus Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of this world.... Henceforth one can speak neither of God nor of the world without speaking of Jesus Christ. All concepts of reality which do not take account of Him are abstractions.

(DIETRICH BONHOEFFER)

comparable to a Biblical worldview, with nearly half of the nation's pastors exhibiting the same deficiency (while other research confirms that 40% of clergy admit they are addicted to another topic: pornography!). Barna reflected: "The most important point is that you can't give people something you don't have."

This may help explain why millions of Americans who declare themselves as Christ-followers also concede, when surveyed, that Jesus struggled with sin like the rest of us. When it came to temptation He suffered defeats like every other human. Another national survey found that

only 41% of those who call themselves "born again" believe God's Son is the one true way for salvation. This dissipation of delight in our Lord's exclusive rule as Earth's Redeemer reinforces Charles Colson's conclusion: The Church is "dumbing-down" its message, moving from a Word-driven vision of Christ to one that is image-driven and emotion-driven.

On one other front we need to ask: How truly adored is the Head of the Church when, in some parts of Christendom, multi-millions of dollars in lawsuits have been brought against predator pastors? Thousands — both Catholic and Protestant — have sexually abused a multitude of children under their care — and done so while their superiors often stood by in silence. The *Boston Globe* reported, as one example, on the court appearance of a 73-year-old priest. He protested that for years his sodomizing of young boys was merely an attempt "to show them that Christ is human." He went on: "I felt that by having this little bit of intimacy with them it would make them feel like they were being with Jesus." When whole segments of the Church start declaring financial bankruptcy due to the magnitude of court-mandated monetary penalties, maybe it is time for all of us to ask ourselves: What has *really* become "bankrupt" here? Our coffers? Or our *Christology*?

All this upheaval is happening despite the fact U.S. churches have spent over \$500 billion *on ourselves* the past ten years, primarily to shore-up the internal commitment to Christ of our parish members. What does *that* suggest about our crisis of supremacy?

Sociologist Thomas Wolfe gives one answer in his ground-breaking volume *The Transformation of American Religion*. In it he concludes that

although Americans are still a pervasively religious people, our form of godliness is neither culture-shaping nor life-arresting. He finds little in evangelical churches that's different from the world around us. Wolfe refers to this as the "toothlessness of evangelicalism", suggesting this condition is due to how we have "ignored doctrines, reinvented traditions, switched denominations, redefined morality" even as we have allowed our call to verbal witness to be downgraded to a non-intrusive lifestyle, at best. This conclusion was reinforced in 2004 by a Family Research Council report. In it blame for much of the downward slide of American culture was laid on congregations' lack of passion for the Kingdom, which rendered them mute and uninvolved in combating "depravity run rampant".

Coming back to Wolfe's thesis, theologian John Armstrong adds: "Truly we evangelicals have created a religion for dummies." Unfortunately, the story elsewhere in the world has proved equally discouraging sometimes. There are additional warning signals we must not ignore.

THINK WITH ME ...

In what ways does this crisis manifest itself in the Church worldwide?

According to mission statistician David Barrett, 91% of what we think of as global Christian outreach to the totally unevangelized does not target non-Christians at all. Frequently missionaries are forced to minister within nominally Christian populations, desperately trying to re-convert them from a waffling, superficial devotion to Christ as Lord which our own efforts reproduced.

This tragic condition is especially evident in "Christianized" Europe. In some nations fewer than 3% attend any church. It would be difficult to separate the relationship between these dramatic downsizings and the rampant deficiency of vision for Christ and His Kingdom. Recent surveys of clergy in Great Britain, where church attendance is at an all-time low, verified that over 50% of these leaders don't believe in Jesus' supernatural birth, with fully one third actually denying He rose from the dead! One of the marks of Pope John Paul II's final years has been his repeated sharp warnings of the "loss of Europe's Christian memory and heritage", of a growing secularism and indifference that "rules as out of order" any references to Christ. "This has sown widely," he observed, "a growing fear of the future." According to Greater Europe Mission, 14 of 27 countries are

less than 1% Christian. Things are actually so spiritually “burned over” that more Christ-followers can be found in Islamic countries than in Europe today.

The Church in many parts of the Two Thirds World, though clearly more dynamic than the Church in the West, at times fares little better. The World Evangelical Alliance concluded that Asian, African and Latin American churches face what WEA called a “crisis of cultural evangelicalism”. Multiplied congregations have retained only a residue of vibrant hope in a sovereign Savior. Christian leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, suggested that among the 53 million that claim to be evangelicals, there are signs of serious “decline and defection”. Recent research indicated that significant numbers are forsaking Christ altogether. Said one leading Latin missiologist: “Defection has been higher than most leaders ever thought it would be.” In many cases a pastoral strategy devoted to meeting people’s material needs, he said, has left them hungry for more of Christ, making them vulnerable to any other teaching that claims to fill that longing.

What about China, where glowing reports on church growth have thrilled us in recent decades? Without question the spiritual harvest there has been unprecedented over the past half century, for which we must praise God. There may be as many as 100 million there who claim to be Christian. Yet we must be circumspect about these apparently amazing results. A senior China research specialist at the U.S. Department of State for 25 years and a deeply committed Christian scholar, warned recently in a publication from the U.S. Center for World Mission: “This revival looks statistically incredible, but it is spiritually vulnerable.” From personal observations, she suggested that millions of Chinese Christians may be “just one unanswered prayer away from moving on to another religion”. Why? Some mass conversion methods, she notes, have left a shallow faith for many. Efforts for “quick results” and “short cuts” have created a revival movement that she describes as possibly “a mile wide and an inch deep”. Many, it appears, may need to discover a fuller vision of the glory of Christ’s true greatness if the momentum is to continue. Even in the midst of a Chinese “harvest” a crisis of supremacy threatens.

THINK WITH ME ...**Where do you see the crisis manifesting itself in your church?**

I don't need to multiply statistics and stories to convince you about the challenge we face, however. It is quite *self-evident* when you come right down to it. To see what I mean, try this experiment.

For the next 30 days monitor the conversations that go on among your Christian friends. Listen as well to what you hear taught in Sunday school or in your small group Bible study. Ask yourself two questions: (1) How often do I hear the name of the Lord Jesus mentioned *at all* (apart from quoting one of His sayings, or a phrase at the end of a prayer, perhaps)? (2) And whenever I hear His name, if I do, are the things said about Him intended in any way to magnify more clearly His glory as God's Son? — or to celebrate more fully the advances in His global cause?

In other words, do the Christians around you ever spend time talking to each other about the *supremacy* of God's Son (by whatever terms they use)? If so, do they speak in ways that indicate a desire to deposit with each other *larger* visions of who He is and how He reigns? Whether conversing between worship services, or in a weekly home Bible study, or at a Saturday men's breakfast — do the Christians you know seek to promote among themselves greater *hope* in Christ and His Kingdom? Do they freely talk about issues that draw on Biblical teachings regarding the focus, or fulfillment, or fullness or fervency of His supremacy (see chapter 1)?

After one month if your congregation is like the vast majority where I've applied this test, I think you'll be stunned by what you hear (or, shall I say, by what you *don't* hear). Jesus taught that words reveal what's in a person's heart. So your findings will provide "proof enough" there *is* a disturbing drought of Biblical vision and passion for the Lord Jesus among the Lord's followers. It is real. It is serious. It is spiritually debilitating. And it is *now!*

The Divine Conquest by A.W. Tozer raised a sobering speculation. The author viewed the mid-20th century evangelical movement with this question: "May not the inadequacy of much of our spiritual experience be traced back to our habit of skipping through the corridors of the Kingdom like children in the market place, chattering about everything, but pausing to learn the value of nothing?"

Good question! Let me slightly re-phrase Tozer's probing to ask a similar question of the Church in the 21st century:

May not the Church's loss of hope and passion toward Christ

be traced back to how we chatter on about everything else, but rarely pause to draw one another into the larger vision of the supremacy of God's Son?

THINK WITH ME ...

What is the crux of the evangelical movement's "identity crisis"?

In his popular book *And The Angels Were Silent* pastor/author Max Lucado discussed his concerns over what he called a "computerized Christianity" in which God has become the "ultimate desktop", with the Bible as the maintenance manual, the Holy Spirit as the floppy disk and Jesus as the 1-800 service number! When we replace the glorious greatness of God's Son — when we ignore the focus, fulfillment, fullness and fervency that His supremacy sets before the whole universe — we can end up with "computerized" forms of discipleship. Push the right buttons, insert correct data, format rituals and (Voila!) print out spiritual success. He concluded: "God hates it. It crushes his people. It contaminates his leaders. It corrupts his children." Max Lucado has captured the crux of our identity crisis. It's a predisposition that should set off alarm bells inside every congregation in the country.

Lucado's comments remind me of the intriguing metaphor we discussed at the opening of chapter 1. There I describe my most disturbing observation while traveling the evangelical movement: In many parts of the Church Christ has become our *mascot*.

For me this one metaphor represents more effectively than any other the damage that's been inflicted by the current crisis of supremacy. What's so deceptive about the image of a mascot is that it seems to encourage us, at first. It suggests excitement, strategies, camaraderie, celebration, victories. It promises a form of discipleship richly appealing in our event-oriented churches. But it is utterly counterfeit. It promotes the *opposite* of what our Lord's supremacy actually means for His people. Eventually this deceptively subtle shift — moving from Christ as our Monarch to Christ as our mascot — diverts our hearts from Him. It diminishes our hope toward Him. It depletes our passion for Him. It destroys our effectiveness in His global cause.

We call Him "Lord", but do we end up *welcoming* Him as Lord? When you get right down to it: Do we give Him much more honor than what is expressed by Europeans for national royalty? In Denmark, Norway, Great Britain, for all practical purposes, kings and queens are treated more as highly favored figureheads, kept around for ceremonial purposes, to

embellish philanthropic events, or to lend dignity to national celebrations. But they have no final authority over day-to-day activities in government or marketplace. Similarly, Jesus gets feted Sunday after Sunday — highly praised and cheered. Displays of devotion toward Him rarely linger into Monday, however. Though we may return to Him at moments when the demands of the week become too much for us, we engage Him too seldom on a daily basis as the One on whom depends the destiny of all nations — not to mention our very own future — and before whom every life stands or falls.

How about *you*: Are you captivated by His Royal Highness? Or, for all practical purposes has He evolved in your thinking into someone much more akin to a figurehead? Observing your daily walk with Him, what would a fellow believer conclude? Which model of our Lord's role — Monarch or mascot — would they find at work in your life? None of us should be too quick to answer. Let me tell you why.

For most of us the crux of this Christ-related identity crisis boils down to our misunderstanding of His *supremacy* in contrast to His *centrality* (discussed in chapter 1). Clearly both concepts are Biblical truths. Both speak to the glory of God's Son and His place in the universe. Both fill out the true meaning of this manifesto's title "*Christ is all*". However, "centrality" when isolated from "supremacy" can unintentionally relegate Jesus' place in a Christian's life to the "mascot" position. When my commitment is *only* to keep Him at the center of who I am, where I'm headed, what I'm doing and how I'm blessed, I'm just a few steps removed from assuming He is there primarily for *me*. That perspective, if left to stand alone and taken to its logical conclusion, will eventually recast Him as my "mascot" — the "ultimate desktop" (as Lucado says) ready to print out my demands.

"Supremacy", on the other hand, incorporates the idea of "centrality". Then it lifts things to a higher level. It has "Monarch" written all over it. To profess my Savior as preeminent automatically requires that I see myself caught up in who He is as the Son of God, where He's headed in the

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

Unbelievers do not see Christ as their greatest treasure. *Neither do most believers. We live as blind people, chasing after the light we can see — the satisfaction that blessings bring — and not valuing the light we cannot see — the glory of Christ. More is available to us in Christ than we dare imagine. We settle for so much less. We taste Him so little.*

(DR. LARRY CRABB)

Purposes of God, how He's imparting the Resources of God and what He receives from the People of God. Without qualification, the truth of Jesus' reign demands that my eternal existence remains all about *Him!*

But, a special blessing awaits me if I am willing to make Him my Monarch, not my mascot. My *own* "identity crisis" gets resolved. I am united with the Lamb-on-the-Throne. I have an unspeakably hope-filled destiny, not only because I'm wrapped *around* Him (centrality) but also because I'm wrapped up *in* Him (supremacy). Peter, you may recall, vividly describes this: "(God) has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish ... (sufferings come so that your faith) may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed ... Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1). With such promises tied to the Monarch of millennia, why would any of us ever settle for a mascot?

THINK WITH ME ...

Why is the *Ascension* key to rebuilding our vision of Christ as our *Monarch*?

Someone has said that the most neglected holy day in the Church calendar is Ascension Day. Think about it. Multitudes celebrate Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, plus a host of dates dedicated to key saints (like St. Patrick). But most of our congregations have given little, if any, thought to the one event when Christ was crowned King of the Universe — that moment, 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1), when He ascended into Heaven to vindicate His supremacy once and for all. Yes, there really was a day, like today is a day, when He was bestowed a Name above every name before which all nations, demons and angels must bow (Eph. 1; Phil. 1; Rev. 5). Can you remember any specific Sunday when your church commemorated the coronation of our Savior?

Why is this question so important? Quite simply, it strikes at the very heart of the short survey we've just conducted. It explains the critical nature of the 2,000-year-old battle over the true parameters of Christ's sovereign glory. What we've discovered is that frequently from its inception — and especially in recent decades — the Church has been required to choose between two radically different perspectives on God's

Son. Evangelical theologians describe it as a choice between a “Christology from *below*” versus a “Christology from *above*”. Each time the choice was made, the outcome shaped a generation’s message about Him and service to Him.

Think of it this way: We must, of course, embrace the truths about the humanness — the Incarnation — of Jesus (this is the “below” perspective). But the “above” approach attempts to filter every facet of our vision of the Redeemer (including the Incarnation) through one primary lens: *Who He is, at this very hour, seated upon the Throne of Heaven*. It invites us to see Him as “God of God” — exalted to the Father’s right hand, incomparable in authority and majesty, reigning over earth and Heaven — and to regard everything else in this light: worship, prayer, service, fellowship, the gifts of the Spirit, evangelism and missions, lifestyle choices, applications of Scripture, our struggles with sin, as well as the macro “sea-changes” (political, religious, economic and otherwise) among the nations.

The four Gospels, it must be remembered, were written just a few short decades after Jesus’ ascension. Their take on the life of Jesus was selected, arranged and composed in a climate where the universal lordship of Jesus had become the daily diet of discipleship. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John — they reflected on Jesus’ earthly life and teachings as those who (with all believers) had already been raised up with Him, seated with Him on His throne, invested with His authority and living for Him in realms of glory. (Compare passages like Romans 6 with Ephesians 1 and 2.) As vital as the “below” vision of Christ’s earthly ministry was (and is), the Incarnation was not the final word for New Testament Christians. Even His atoning sacrifice was viewed through the lens of who He is *now*, the Anointed One (Christ) to be honored “above”.

Even so today, whether studying Scripture, singing Sunday praises, witnessing to neighbors, serving Christian relief works or sharing the Gospel with unreached peoples, the scope of the Son’s sovereignty — His person, His position, His purposes, His praise — must dictate what we think and feel and seek and choose and do. Ultimately, above all else and before all else, it must define how we *hope*.

Sometimes I call this springboard for living “*super-spective*” (a word coined by Ralph Winter). The Ascension helps Christians put everything into its *proper* perspective. Our Sovereign longs to fill our horizons with a view of Himself that is *super* — overflowing with the realities of His wonder, greatness

and grandeur as Lord of all. To do this, He invites us to interpret all of existence, ours and creation's, perched on the footstool of His throne. The opening chapters of *Joyful Manifesto (Volume I)* help you regain this vantage point — this *super*-spective — as it lifts you from one mountain range of His glory to the next, from one promise of His Kingdom onto another.

Personally, I'm looking for the time when throughout every Christian tradition we will annually celebrate Ascension Sunday, making as much out of that day as we do out of Christmas, or Good Friday, or Easter. Only because of *that* day does Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection have any permanent redeeming impact.

I envision Ascension Sunday as not only a day of "pomp and praise" but also as a sacred season of *repentance* — a time for turning from specific ways we have reverted (individually and corporately) to treating Jesus as a mascot; a time for calling the Church to be re-converted back to Him as our Monarch and, in the process, to recover all the hope in Him we are meant to have.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

We need a Jesus who can explain the Christ of faith: one big enough to account for Jewish hostility and Roman fear; one big enough to explain why he became the subject of such a book as the Gospel of John; one who made such an impression that people easily believed that he had risen from the dead; such a colossus that within a few years of his death those who had known him best were identifying him with Yahweh and laying down their lives rather than refrain from worshipping him; a figure of such universality that his church has had a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural appeal without precedent in the history of religion. What manner of man was he: able to overcome the scandal of his crucifixion and exert such an influence on human history that to this day scholars eagerly discuss his impact not only on religion but on art and science, politics and literature? (He alone) renders Christianity explicable.

(DR. DONALD MACLEOD)

Looking Ahead: The Elephant or the Flies?

The crisis of supremacy — we’ve just begun to expose it for what it really is. The next two chapters expand on the theme in two directions. They study the crippling effect it has on a Christian’s loss of *hope* and loss of *passion*.

Before you turn the page, however, let me make you a promise:

Standing in front of an elephant cage at the zoo, one can choose to look at the elephant. Or, one might simply study the size of the flies buzzing around it. Similarly, as we dig deeper into the crisis — even when our findings are thick with flies, so to speak — I intend to keep all eyes on the *elephant*. The “bugs” uncovered in chapters 7 and 8 may appear to be fairly ominous. But in the end, compared to the One who never ceases to dominate every crisis with Himself they are *only flies*. Reading on, you’ll discover that our Lord Jesus Christ (the “elephant in the room”) remains at the forefront — as well He should, since the crisis is about Him and the cure is in Him! The goal of this manifesto is nothing less than the restoration of a giant-sized portrait of Christ for ALL that He is — a picture to help put everything else, including every other crisis, in proper perspective.

Not long ago Os Guinness related a story about one person’s desire to see the “Elephant”. It took place in a weekly Bible study on Capitol Hill involving a number of Senators. When asked to open a session in prayer, one of the newest believers among them caught everyone by surprise. In childlike faith he said: “Father, may all the Hindus confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. May all the Muslims confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. May all the Jews confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Then he ended: “And, may all the *Christians* confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!”

Said a thousand different ways, that brief petition summarizes the chief agenda I’ve heard expressed all across the land, in all sizes of prayer gatherings for church renewal. It’s the prayer *Joyful Manifesto* is designed to help answer. Each of us needs to plead: “May all *Christians* confess — and ultimately *proclaim* — Jesus Christ as Lord, the *supreme* Lord of His Church!”

When that prayer is answered, something wonderful will happen! A re-awakening of fresh hope and passion toward Christ will be released throughout all parts of His Body. Believers will once again engage with Him, not only as Lord over global concerns but as the One who is *their* “all in all” — as the One supreme over *them* forever.

The greatest crisis of all will be dealt a fateful blow when the “Elephant” re-takes the room and rules!

