

H.L. Rossier

Comments on the book of the Prophet Haggai

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bible@beauport.eu

Rue du Château d'Or n°16/6

1180 Uccle (Brussels)

Belgium



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1.....	11
Chapter 2: 1–9.....	16
Chapter 2: 10–19.....	22
Chapter 2: 20–23.....	27

Introduction

The circumstances that necessitated the prophecy of Haggai take us back to the final events of the Old Testament. When the moral ruin of Israel had reached its final stage, God declared this people to be ‘Lo-Ammi’ (not my people). Long afterwards, the ten tribes were taken into captivity, and later still, Judah and Benjamin. The enemy overthrew and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, which had already been deprived of the glory of God. From then on, in the eyes of men, there was no longer a house of God on earth.

The seventy years of captivity, foretold by the prophets (Jer. 25:11, 12; Dan. 9:2), having come to an end, Cyrus was raised up for the restoration of the people. At the king’s call, in the year 536 BC, a remnant of Judah and Benjamin, totalling 49,697 men, returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, to build the house of the Lord (Ezra 1:2, 3).

In the seventh month, they rebuilt the altar on its site (Ezra 3:2, 3), offered their sacrifices there, and thus re-established the great public testimony of their relationship with God.

‘In the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem’, they laid the foundations of the temple with a joy mingled with sorrow. The enemies of Judah offered to take part in the work of God’s people; the leaders refused, but the rest of the people were afraid, and the work was abandoned.

The interruption lasts sixteen years, caused for six years by fear alone, and for a further ten years by the absolute order not to work, issued by Ahasuerus. This prohibition must be regarded as God’s punishment upon the remnant because of their lack of faith.

In the second year of Darius, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are raised up; their exhortation has its effect. From then on, everything changes; the people no longer worry about kings, nor about men and their opposition; the work resumes, and this great edifice is completed after four years.

Throughout this time, they prospered, not by Darius's decree, but 'by the prophecy of Haggai... and Zechariah', and completed their work 'according to the command of the God of Israel', from whom emanated the decrees of the rulers who governed them. (Ezra 6:14).

In the year 515 BC (Ezra 6:15), the house being completed, the people joyfully celebrated the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ezra 6:19–22).

This is where the first part of the Book of Ezra relating to our prophecy ends. It comprises three major events: 1) the building of the altar; 2) the laying of the foundations — then, after a hiatus of sixteen years, followed by a revival among the people, 3) the building and completion of the temple.

* * *

This history of Israel is of importance to us too. 'All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written down to serve as a warning to us, on whom the ends of the ages have come' (1 Cor. 10:11). The circumstances of the earthly

people can be compared with those of the heavenly people, with this difference, however, that the material events of Israel have a spiritual counterpart for us Christians.

Is this not evident in the case of the Church? She is, like Israel, of divine institution; like Israel, she is established here on earth on the basis of her responsibility; like Israel, she has failed and been utterly ruined, man having introduced corrupt and corrupting elements into her. Where is Israel to be found today? Where is the Church of God to be found now? Undoubtedly, in God's eyes, it continues to exist in its unity, and faith sees it thus. Undoubtedly, He who is its architect as well as its bridegroom will present it in glory at the end; but, left to its own responsibility, it is, in the eyes of the world, nothing more than a wretched heap of ruins (*).

(*) In this article, we speak only of the Church, the house of God, whose building is entrusted to human responsibility. The Word of God also considers the Church from other perspectives. We shall not address that subject.

Now that the ruin is complete, God is calling today, as in the days of Ezra, a small remnant to rebuild His house. For a Jew,

the house of God was the physical temple where He chose to dwell; for a Christian, it is a spiritual temple made up of living stones, intended to be ‘a dwelling place of God through the Spirit’ (Eph. 2:22).

Note that it is by no means a question of the remnant of Israel rebuilding a second house, or of the Christian remnant rebuilding a new Church. Many have been mistaken in this regard and have attempted, in ignorance of God’s thoughts and with the self-sufficiency of the flesh, to rebuild a new house. We hear them speak of ‘their Church’, as if they had rebuilt something according to God. Their work is but a new ruin added to the old ones. The Holy Spirit takes care to warn us against such folly. In God’s eyes, the Church, just like the temple in Israel, is one, remains one, and there will never be a second. Hence, regarding the temple, expressions such as these: They ‘began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem’ (Ezra 5:2). Although destroyed, it was still there. ‘We are building the house that was built long ago, many years ago’ (Ezra 5:11). The new house is the same as the old one. The king of Babylon ‘destroyed this house... King Cyrus gave orders to build this house

of God’ (Ezra 5:12, 13). The rebuilt house is the same as the destroyed house. And again, in Haggai, speaking of a time to come: ‘I will fill this house with glory’, and ‘the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former’ (Haggai 2:7, 9). The prophet does not say: ‘The glory of this latter house’, for though the glory may differ, the house remains the same in the eyes of God and of faith. Indeed, there were several temples in the past: Solomon’s temple, Zerubbabel’s, Herod’s; there will be one in the future, that of the Antichrist, and a final one, the millennial temple of Ezekiel. Yet God does not count five, but only one. For us, therefore, to rebuild the house of God is not to build a new house, but to bring back into the light, in a time of ruin, the house of God as He had established it. Today, as in days gone by, this is the task of all those whom God has awakened to restore the truth of the Church amidst the present corruption. They are to bear practical witness to what it ought to be. Such a restoration is not without a sense of deep sorrow and humiliation. For the two or three of Israel who were rebuilding the house, the joy of seeing the foundations laid anew was mingled with bitter tears, when they compared the present

poverty of this work with the richness and fullness of the original institution (Ezra 3:11–13).

Those who do not know what the Church is imagine that this work of restoration took place during the Reformation and that what is called the Protestant Church was its manifestation. Nothing could be further from the truth. What characterises the Reformation is the Word of God, breaking the bonds with which Satan had sought to chain it. This Word brought to light the great truths of individual salvation, whilst, in establishing churches of the multitude, the Reformation ignored—indeed, denied—the truth of the Church of the living God.

The first testimony of the remnant of Israel was, as we have seen in the book of Ezra, the gathering around the rebuilt altar. In our own day, it has been the same. It is the Lord's Table that has gathered together the few witnesses whom God has raised up to 'rebuild' His house. Gathering Christians round the Lord's Supper is, on the surface, nothing; but in reality, it is everything. Around the Lord's table, His redeemed proclaim that they possess a living relationship with God, based on re-

demption. This table brings together all those who share in salvation, and its nature absolutely excludes the world and separates them from it, forming them into a unity of which the Lord's table is the sign (1 Cor. 10:16, 17).

The restoration of the altar is not something to be done, for it has already taken place in our day. The Lord's table is set; no one has the task of setting up another. A small remnant of believers proclaims there the unity of the body of Christ. What does their number matter, if the altar is re-established? The Lord's table is by no means, as many claim, found in all the sects of Christendom. These undoubtedly preserve a memorial of Christ's death, but they are completely unaware that the very nature of this memorial is to separate God's children from the world and to be the visible sign of the unity of the body of Christ. In the face of the Enemy, the safety of the poor remnant of the exiles lay there: 'They set up the altar on its site; for the terror of the peoples of those lands was upon them' (Ezra 3:3). The union of God's children, gathered around the visible sign of the Church's unity, cannot please Satan. His power over them is rendered null and void as long as they maintain this

unity; thus the Enemy aims (and succeeds all too well) to destroy it by scattering the sheep.

The benefits of believers gathering round the Lord's table are not long in coming. New insights necessarily accompany obedience to God's word, and souls return to the apostolic teaching and to Christ, the only foundation upon which the Assembly can be built.

Now that Christ has been recognised as the sole centre of our gathering, the task is to add living stones to the edifice, and difficulties are not long in arising. What befell the poor remnant is proof of this. 'We will build with you,' say the enemies of Judah and Benjamin. Had the latter consented to this, it would have been the very negation of that unity of God's people which had just been brought to light by the altar and the foundations of the temple. God does not allow this plan to succeed. The blessing which the faithful have found in their unity as God's people causes them to reject with indignation any joint action with the world: 'You have no part with us in building a house for our God; but we alone will build for the Lord, the

God of Israel' (Ezra 4:3). The enemy's ruse is thwarted, but he does not give up; he acts through fear and stirs up opposition, then persecution against the faithful. With all sorts of excuses to hand, their hands grow weak. Israel eventually loses interest in the building and abandons the work they had begun. How many desertions have we, too, seen taking place in our own day!

It is at this point that Haggai steps in to show the remnant the causes which, after those beginnings of strength and joy, had hindered the work God had entrusted to them. May we also find in our prophet the exhortations and encouragement we need today.

Chapter 1

This was the people's reasoning at the time Haggai was sent to them: 'The time has not yet come to build the house of the Lord' (1:2). What is the point of this work that cannot be completed? Alas! How often do we hear these words among Christians, even among those who, having set to work, consider their

efforts to be in vain. This has a name: discouragement, the cause of which is fear and our inability to withstand the obstacles that the power of the Enemy places in our path. Let us ask ourselves whether this discouragement is not an affront to the power and faithfulness of our God?

But the prophet will show us that discouragement itself was, in essence, merely a pretext. Behind it lay a principle that the remnant scarcely suspected, or of which they did not realise the gravity: selfishness and worldliness. ‘Is this the time for you to dwell in your panelled houses, whilst this house lies in ruins?’ (1:4). God’s people valued their own affairs more than those of the house of the Lord. They settled into comfort, allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by luxury as they panelled their houses, whilst the interests of the temple were pushed into the background.

The foundations have barely been laid, yet, following our natural inclination, we return to our homes and think only of finding a place of rest there for ourselves and our families. We began by following the One who had nowhere to lay His head,

and now it is we who treat Him as a stranger and scarcely grant Him a home amidst those He has saved and made His own. Ah! certainly, zeal for the house of God has not consumed us as it did Him! We love the comfort of our panelled homes, thus reducing ourselves, we bourgeois of heaven, to the level of ‘those who dwell on the earth!’

Now, let us note this phrase: ‘Consider well your ways’ (1:5), a phrase that recurs as many as five times in this short prophecy. Let us pause to reflect on our ways; let us consider their consequence. That consequence is the Lord’s discipline upon us, concerning our worldliness and our selfishness: ‘You have sown much, yet you reap little; you eat, but you are not satisfied; you drink, but you are not filled; you clothe yourselves, yet no one is warm; and he who works for wages works only to put them into a purse with holes’ (v. 6).

Let us recall the words, the sermons, the truths widely proclaimed, when God granted us the grace to gather round the Lord’s table. How the seed multiplied then in our hands! When harvest time came, where were the barns bending under the

weight of the harvest? ‘You bring in little!’ Was it that the seed was lacking? No, it was we who were lacking!

But God’s discipline does not merely affect our work; it strikes us personally. ‘You drink, yet you are not satisfied.’ Perhaps we are very busy with the word of God. How many interesting questions have been clarified, difficulties resolved, doctrines established and learnt? Is there not enough there to refresh our souls? No, the heart remains parched, and we continue to drink without quenching our thirst. Moreover, though we have clothes to wear, ‘no one is warm’; we remain cold. Finally, the fruit of our labour, intended to be hoarded for ourselves, slips through the holes in our purse until nothing remains!

‘Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Consider your ways carefully: go up to the mountain and bring timber, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified,’ says the Lord. You expected much, but behold, it was little; and you brought it home, and I blew it away. Why?’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘Because of my house, which lies in ruins—yet each of you runs to his own house.’

Yes, let us consider our ways once more. Work according to God is to add living materials to His house. It was not this work alone that the remnant was pursuing; they had sought to bring together two irreconcilable things: the work of God's house and the satisfaction of their own interests: 'You run each to his own house.' These things could not be reconciled. In such a partnership, it is always God's side that suffers. They had 'contributed little' to the house of God. But He, who does not want divided hearts, had 'blown upon it'. Their little work had been reduced to nothing. Such was the Lord's judgement on their activity. He no longer entrusted them with the materials for building, since they were building for themselves.

Is it not remarkable that the world, so eager to hinder their work for God, had offered not the slightest opposition when they were each rushing home? Satan is an enemy whose hatred is far-sighted. He knows full well that the work cannot prosper with divided hearts.

But now, by God's grace (vv. 12–15), the leaders listen, the people fear and receive the message of the Lord's messenger.

The cry: ‘Consider your ways,’ has found an echo in the conscience of Israel. May it find one in ours too!

The result of this revival is not long in coming. God Himself encourages the first steps of those who decide to follow the path of obedience. ‘I am with you,’ says the Lord. Nothing could be more touching or encouraging: ‘I am with you.’ The fears of many vanish, and their souls realise that integrity is valued by the Lord and pleases him. They receive the assurance that they have pleased God. A general revival takes place, as a reward for the zeal of a few. They ‘came and worked on the house of the Lord of Hosts’.

Chapter 2: 1–9

The book of Haggai contains four revelations. This one follows on from the revival brought about by the first. God encourages his witnesses in a time of ruin by revealing the resources they still have and the glorious hope with which he wishes to fill their hearts. These verses bear a striking resemblance to the Second Epistle to Timothy. Like the remnant of Israel, Timothy

had been on the verge of losing heart and allowing himself to be intimidated by the evil growing around him. The apostle exhorts him to ‘stir up the gift of God’s grace’ that was within him. His hands must not grow slack in the building up of God’s house, whatever its condition might be. ‘God,’ adds the apostle, ‘has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind’ (2 Tim. 1:7). And further on: ‘You... my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus’ (2:1). The same applies here: “But now, be strong, Zerubbabel,” says the Lord, “and be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and be strong, all you people of the land... and work... do not be afraid” (2:4, 5). To encourage his people, God in no way downplays the reality of the ruin, any more here than in 2 Timothy. On the contrary, he states it in all its reality: ‘Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory, and how do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?’ (2:3). Indeed, what could they think of the present state of this house compared with its former state? What remained for this poor remnant? Where was the ark with the tablets of the law, and the mercy seat, and the throne of God between the cherubim? Where were

the Urim and Thummim for consulting the Lord? What had become of the kingship that bound the people to God? Zerubbabel, son of David, could not even bear the title of king. What had become of the priesthood? Joshua wore filthy garments, instead of his garments of glory and beauty (Zech. 3:3). Where was God's presence to be found among his people? Where was the glory to be found? 'Icabod' (*) had been uttered once more. What a humiliating contrast between the present state of this house and its former glory; but also, what a contrast between the present state of the Church and its appearance at the time of its institution! Should we therefore lose heart? On the contrary, 'work on this work,' says the Lord. To those who have carefully considered their ways under his discipline, who have been awakened by his call, he will repeat these comforting words: 'For I am with you' (2:4). Did not the Lord come to take his place at John's baptism alongside the remnant awakened by the prophet's word? Did He not do so in the days of Haggai? Will He not do so in our own day? He joins Himself to the two or three whom His Word has awakened. If we lack strength, He has kept it in its entirety. Does He not possess the seven Spirits

of God and the seven stars? ‘Go in the strength you have’ (he had it in that very word), he said to Gideon in a time of ruin, just as in a time of prosperity he said to Joshua: ‘Be strong’.

(*) Deprived of glory.

Yes, we have this strength in Him for the work of His house, to bring into it those who are to be part of it according to God. How many Christians are completely unaware of this? Do they have at heart the building up of the church upon Christ, the only divine foundation, or the acquisition of proselytes for their various sects? And when this is pointed out to them, they shirk their responsibility by claiming that the sole mission of Christians is evangelism. They do not want to hear of anything else! Certainly, evangelism is a great task, but it is not the only one of God’s servant. Ask the Apostle Paul, that great minister of the Gospel, whether he considered this ministry superior to that of the congregation, or rather, whether both were not of equal value to him? (Col. 1:23–25). Certainly not; evangelism is not everything, neither for the Lord nor for his witnesses. He loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. How could she become indifferent to Him? God is honoured by the work, how-

ever small, that builds up His house, His Church here on earth, and whoever disregards this despises what glorifies God and deprives himself of the blessings of which we are about to speak.

God's approval brings new graces to the obedient remnant. These are the same graces we also find mentioned in 2 Timothy. 'The word by which I made a covenant with you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you; do not be afraid' (v. 5). An understanding of the Word, and the realisation of the Holy Spirit's presence, cannot be found where his house is despised, or where people cease to labour in it.

God is not content merely to bestow His blessings upon the poor remnant awakened by His Word. He presents them with a glorious and imminent hope. It is the same today. The present hope of the Lord's coming has been revived among those who recognise the Assembly of Christ. 'Once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations. And the object of desire of all

the nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. ‘The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,’ says the Lord of hosts; ‘the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts; ‘and in this place I will grant peace,’ says the Lord of hosts” (vv. 6–9).

For us Christians, the Jewish earthly hope is replaced by the heavenly hope. When he returns, he will fill with glory this house whose building he had invited us to take part in; a house which, through our fault, is despised today, though he is there with his own—and that must be enough for them—but when, in glory, he dwells in the Church, the value he attaches to his house for eternity will be plain for all to see. ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men!’ (Rev. 21:3). The final glory of this house will surely be greater than the first! Then we shall have bidden farewell forever to toil and strife, for in that place the Lord will grant peace.

What assurance all these promises give to our faith! What a reward for faithfulness God sets before us! Let us therefore carefully consider our ways; let us ask ourselves where the hiatus

in our work comes from. Let us cease to put our own interests before those of God's house; let us awaken from this paralysing slumber. We shall find God Himself with us, along with His Spirit and His Word, and we shall be encouraged by the coming of the Lord, who promises us unclouded glory with Him!

Chapter 2: 10–19

The revelation of chapter 1, intended to reach the conscience of the remnant, is not the only one. This passage contains another (*). May we, like the remnant, have heard the first. Alas! The time was to come when this degenerate remnant would crucify the Object of the nations' desire and their own Messiah, He who had been brought back to Jerusalem expressly to receive them. Thus the lampstand of Israel was removed from its place and the people themselves carried beyond Babylon. So it is with every testimony that has become unfaithful. God does not need us for his testimony. If we despise him, he places it in other hands. Did he not say concerning Israel, 'He will give his vineyard to others'?

(*) As we have already said, the book of Haggai contains four revelations. The first and third are rebukes; the second and fourth, prophetic encouragements.

The first revelation speaks of selfishness, the second of holiness.

We possess an unalterable holiness before God in Christ, just as we have an unassailable righteousness, having been made the righteousness of God in Him. But we are called to put this positional righteousness and holiness into practice here on earth. Practical holiness consists of a real separation from all evil and a living communion with what is good, with God, the Father and the Son. This holiness had been lacking in the remnant; many years later, it failed them in an even more lamentable manner. They defiled themselves by taking the daughters of the Canaanites as wives (Ezra 9), by violating the Sabbath and by profaning the priesthood (Neh. 13). On this subject, the prophet questioned the priests, saying to them: ‘If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches with the fold of his garment bread, or any food, or wine, or oil, or anything that is eaten, will that which he has touched be sanctified? And the

priests answered and said, “No” (2:12). The case he presents to them is that of a man to whom the holy meat he carries in his cloak imparts a character of outward holiness. Will the fruit of his labour (bread, oil, wine, the product of man’s activity) be sanctified by it? Not at all. The work must be the very fruit of holiness to be accepted. God recognises as done for Him only that which flows from this source. No outward position of holiness, no profession, makes our work pleasing to God. This is a serious matter and one worthy of reflection in our day, when professing Christians live under the illusion that God recognises their ‘charitable works’ as being done for Him.

The prophet adds: ‘If a man who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these things, does it become unclean? And the priests answered and said, “It is unclean”’ (v. 13).

In Israel, a dead body was the most complete symbol of the terrible consequence and ultimate fruits of sin. If separation from evil, from sin, is not a reality for us, how can the work of our hands be pure and acceptable to God? It is defiled, unclean. This is what needed to be engraved on the conscience of the

remnant, what must be imprinted on our own. There may be much activity in grinding grain, pressing the juice from grapes or oil from olives, so that they may serve our purposes. What is that to God? The fruit of sin. What remains is that which is offered to Him from a pure heart, that which is done for Him alone; it is Mary's perfume. Filling one's own storehouses is not the work of a witness, but rather filling God's granaries and storehouses. 'And Haggai answered and said: "So is this people, and so is this nation before me," says the Lord, "and so is all the work of their hands, and what they present there is unclean"' (v. 14).

This is what, in our day, marks our work with a relative inadequacy; as it is said: 'When one came to a heap of twenty bushels, there were ten; when one came to the vat to draw fifty measures, there were twenty' (v. 16). We say 'relative' because, if God is compelled to chastise us, He does so with restraint. He is patient, merciful, full of infinite goodness. What does the work of our hands yield today? What it ought to yield, we have learnt from the prophet: materials for the house of God, souls not only saved, but added to the Assembly. Is this the case?

Alas, no! God's children gather with difficulty. The light is so faint that it lacks the power to draw to itself those who dwell in darkness, even though, hating it, they would be compelled, like moths, to come and burn their wings there, thus receiving their own condemnation. Barely does this light manage to penetrate, like a faint glimmer, through the closed eyelids of the soul, to awaken it.

But the punishment had gone further. 'I have struck you with blight and mildew and hail, upon all the work of your hands' (v. 17). God had condemned the very sources of their labour. The door to blessing was shut.

Had the remnant at least repented? 'None of you has returned to me,' says the Lord!

But now, 'consider well... what is about to happen... consider it well, I pray you,' the word of God urges us: 'From this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day the temple of the Lord was laid in foundation; consider it well... From this day on, I will bless' (vv. 18,19). If on this day, considering and judging your ways, you set to work to

build this house which your selfishness and worldliness have caused you to abandon, after having laid its foundations; from that day on, I will bless!

Brethren, let us do the same; let us heed this call. We can regain the blessing. A little energy of faith, of renouncing our comforts and interests, of separation from the world, of hearts devoted to Christ, zealous for the building up of the house of God, and at that very moment we shall regain the lost blessing!

Chapter 2: 20–23

And now, behold, in a fourth revelation, the encouragement addressed to the poor remnant whose conscience had been awakened, and who, in fact, four years later, had completed the building of the house of God. This encouragement is a promise (Heb. 12:26). ‘I will shake the heavens and the earth, I will overthrow the thrones of the kingdoms, and I will destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations, and I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride them; and the horses shall be slain, and those who ride them, every one by the sword of his

brother’ (vv. 21, 22; cf. 1:6; Heb. 12:26). Everything would be shaken, and why? So that the ‘unchangeable things might remain’ (Heb. 12:27). Now these unchangeable things were, in chapter 2, the introduction of the Messiah into his glorious temple. But here, what astonishment seizes us when we learn that it is a matter of establishing and sealing forever the weak Zerubbabel! ‘On that day,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant,’ says the Lord, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,’ says the Lord of hosts’ (v. 23).

Undoubtedly, Zerubbabel, the prince, was to a small extent a type of Christ, but above all he was the representative of the remnant before God, just as Joshua, the priest, is in chapter 3 of Zechariah. Well then! All things will be shaken, in order to establish this remnant for ever. The same applies to us. ‘Therefore, receiving an unshakeable kingdom,’ it is said of Christians, quoting the prophecy of Haggai (Heb. 12:28). The Lord has already established the Lord at his right hand and us in him, but soon he will establish us on the throne with him.

‘And I will set you as a signet ring.’ The weak Zerubbabel, like the weak assembly of Christ, will be the seal of all the ways of the Lord’s antiquity. In him, as in her, all eyes will see what the Lord intended to do and what He has accomplished. ‘In that day it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel: “What has God done?”’ (Num. 23:23). In that day, the Lord will be ‘glorified in his saints and marvelled at in all who have believed’ (2 Thess. 1:10).

This is the reward for faithfulness and devotion to his service, but it is much more than that: God’s grace must triumph in the end, proving itself superior to all our weaknesses and all our unfaithfulness: ‘For I have chosen you,’ says the Lord of hosts (v. 23). The grace of election must shine forth before all eyes. It is the sole cause, the first and final cause of the eternal blessing of the redeemed!

Grounded in our hope, which is Christ, and in the certainty of God’s salvation, let us therefore apply ourselves, in continual self-examination, to carrying out the work of God’s house,

gathering souls around Christ, the sole centre of their gathering and their blessing.