

*Let Us Glory in This—  
That We Know God*

**By Geoffrey Bingham**

## *Foreword*

For the two last decades at least there has been a resurgence of Trinitarian theology. In the short bibliography at the end of the book the writers quoted are contemporary. Most of them see the doctrine of the Trinity in the Scriptures and almost all will acknowledge their debt to the Cappadocian Fathers to whose fountain many of us go, time and again. The present writers are also theologians who are concerned with the practical use and outworking of their theology. This does not mean they are pragmatic, but they seek to set forth the matter of Divine and human relationships in regard to our present society, and the future of the nations.

The chapters of this book were a series of lectures I gave in 1991 to a large class who were doing a Course on the theme of 'Mission in Today's World'. I had thought it proper for us to do a theology of the Trinity as an Introduction to the Course. This first part of the Course we titled 'Theology—the Triune God'. Some who took the Course with a view to what they would have called 'the practices of Mission' were surprised that we should first lay as a foundation, the knowledge of the Trinity. In fact some, disappointed, dropped out of the class. Others, who persisted, found the Course transforming to their thinking and experience of God.

This book is quite compact in its development of the theology of the Trinity and especially in regard to Divine and human relationships. Man being in the image of God, has granted to him the same kind of relationships which are in the Godhead, by which God is known to subsist. I believe that the Trinity is—and has ever been—on Mission. Not until we know the fires of God's heart of love will we realise what God is about in creation, and so, of course, in redemption and the final glorification and perfection of all things.

It is a fact of history that not only have most—if not all—heresies been connected with inadequate and even false views of the Persons of the Trinity, and, so, of course, of the Trinity itself. A theology of God must be judged by what we may call the internal relationships of the Three Persons, and at the same time a true appreciation of their unity as the Triune God. Church history has shown that at certain times emphasis has been given to one Person to the detriment of the two others, so that a theological imbalance obtains. Often theological manuals speak of the doctrine of God, and then go on to speak of Christology and Pneumatology. Would it not be better to present first the doctrine of the Trinity, and then indicate that there are three disciplines—Pateriology, Christology and Pneumatology? It is impossible to speak of the Person and Work of the Father (Pateriology), without speaking of the Person and work of the Son (Christology) and the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology). If the relationships of the ontological Trinity constitute the ontological relationships of Man—the human race—then will not deficient or wrong views of the Trinity greatly affect inter-human relationships? Are not the ontological relationships of the Trinity expressed in what we call the economic Trinity, that is, in the works of the Godhead in creation and redemption? Will that not mean, then, that the works of humanity will be

deficient and even wrong, when true views of the ontological and economic Trinity do not obtain?

As I understand it, the matter the Church has been well served by the truth of the Scriptures as it came to the apostles, and was taught by them. The Church Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries and the Creeds developed through them have helped to define the Trinity. Their basis for doing so was the Holy Scriptures. Aberrations in Trinitarian belief have brought problems, and even tragedy to the Church. We know the Reformation brought a renewal in knowing God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ; as our own Father personally in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, and then the knowledge of Christ as Redeemer and Lord, and, finally, the knowledge of the Holy Spirit as 'the Lord and Giver of life', the One who glorifies both the Father and the Son.

It may well be that from time to time trends in thought and theology have called for a reconstruction in theology, a renewal in the full doctrine of the Trinity. Such a renewal deeply affects our inter-Divine and our inter-human relationships, along with our worship and Christian practice of life. That is why I felt that inadequate views of the Trinity would conceal the heart of the living God in His passion for a lost world, as also the tremendous fact that He has ever been on mission in His creation which He so loved that He gave His only begotten Son for its salvation and its ultimate glorification.

I sincerely hope that readers will persist in the study of this book, and arrive at the wonderful conclusion which God has for all humanity and all other elements of His creation. It has not been written for 'easy-to-read' minds, but deep down all of us want what is basic and what is needed to make sense of God, humanity and the creation. I do, then, commend persistence.

*Geoffrey Bingham.*

Let us Glory in This—That We Know God

## *The Christian Theology of the Triune God*

### **I. The Approach to Theology**

Another title for the series of studies on the nature of God could be ‘Coming to Know God’, with the thought in mind that we cannot know God without knowing Man<sup>1</sup>. It is Man coming to know God. Of course, each comes to know God personally, but even this is not possible except in the experience of corporateness.

### **The Nature of Theology**

We now need to discuss the nature of theology. Theology. Hooker defined it as ‘the science of things divine’. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines it as ‘The study or science which treats of God, His nature and attributes, and His relations with man and the universe.’ We will proceed on the basis of this definition. Every human being is a theologian for every one thinks about God. Agnostics profess they do not know whether He exists, and if so what He is. Atheists—anti-theologians—insist they know God is not, and if He were, then what He would not be or ought not to be and ought not to do as theists claim He is and does. In all religions people are theologians. It is inevitable that there are many differing theologies. It is also certain that there is no one system which can be proven to be valid in informing us of the true God, His attributes and His relations with the universe and man. Christians would claim that the Bible is the only document which informs us truly concerning God.

### **Many Religions**

There are many religions because human beings seek to rationalize the ideas of God, of the universe and of Man. Thus we have the disciplines of theology, anthropology and cosmology<sup>2</sup>. We can talk about anthropological theology meaning that Man has devised his system of thought about God, Man and the cosmos. Anthropological theology begins with Man and seeks to develop the idea of God from that basis. Animism is another one of these rationalized systems which, itself, has a variety of approaches. It always thinks in terms of spirits and other occultic forces. The religions which have several deities, idols and lords, have developed beyond simple animism. Then there are the religions which claim to be revelatory, i.e. God has revealed Himself to humanity to that degree He wishes. The three

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<sup>1</sup> By ‘Man’ we do not mean the male human person, but the male-female unity which constitutes true humanity (cf. Gen. 1:26–28; 5:1–2). To be sexist is to part these two from their dual-unity and insist on the autonomy of each of the genders. Only together is the male true male, the female true female and the both truly Man.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking theology—once called ‘the queen of the sciences’—is not anthropology (the study of Man), nor cosmology (the study of the universe), but in order to be true theology it must subsume anthropology and cosmology under its regimen. Today we have theology which is anthropological, i.e. Man is primary and God is interpreted through Man. Man’s actions are primary.

greatest of these are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These have great teachers and prophets who communicate to Man what he could not know unaided. These three have their Scriptures from which they derive their theology. They claim their writings are revelatory and therefore go beyond Man's natural way of thinking. In them God comes to Man and reveals Himself. There is, of course, no way of proving this.

### **The Matter of Theological Authority**

God is, of course, authoritative, but for the purposes of knowing Him it is necessary to come under His authority. Each religion is certain it has authority for its structure and system. Animists have teachers, *gurus*<sup>1</sup>, and *shamans*<sup>2</sup>—those who hold the traditional knowledge of their cultures and religions. In some religions there are the writings of the leaders such as in Hinduism and Buddhism. The 'peoples of the book'—Jews, Christians and Muslims—believe their writings are authoritative for faith and practice. Systems such as the Bahai faith are synchronistic, i.e. they have brought together religious elements from different belief systems what they believe to be universal principles, and have distilled a theology which incorporates and rationalizes the many religious insights which they have accepted..

Probably most people consider their minds to be the most dependable authority, since they reckon to discover—by their minds—what they consider to be the truth about God, Man and the universe. Often the ability of the theologian, the guru or the shaman is said to be the measure of the truth. This means authority for truth remains in the human sphere although theologian, guru and shaman would attribute its source to the supra-natural realm. In all cultures there are people we call hierophants, those who have been taught and trained in the accumulated wisdom of their cultures, and this they pass down to their people.

From what we have said above there is no basis for irrefutable proof regarding the nature and attributes of God and His relations with the universe. There are, of course, interesting systems of proof which have been put forward and are worthy of consideration. Even so, in every case we must point to the faith of the person appropriating the system of their choice.

### **The Biblical Presentation of Knowing God**

We state clearly that what we present now is biblical<sup>3</sup>. That is we are seeing the Scriptures as an integrated whole, having their own innate unity<sup>4</sup>, and—so to speak—their unique ethos. The listener or receiver must make his or her own response as a person convinced and moved to do so.

Man Knowing and Not Knowing God

The following points need to be considered,

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<sup>1</sup> Guru is an Indian word in Hindi for teachers as *ustad* in Urdu, something like *rabbi* in Judaism, and *master* in English, i.e. a person accomplished in a system of thought.

<sup>2</sup> Shamans are priests or priest-doctors, also known as medicine-men, who work on the basis that good and evil are operative through spirits both good and bad. They claim to be able to influence these spirits by certain forms of knowledge, rituals and incantations. Generally these persons—male and female—are pneumatic, charismatic, inspirational and possess mysteries which grip their devotees.

<sup>3</sup> By 'biblical' we mean what appears to be the general and consistent view of the Christian Scriptures. Jews would likewise claim they are biblical as they open their canon of the Hebrew books. Muslims insist that they believe the books of the Old and New Testaments—the Law, the Prophets, the Holy Writings and Gospel (the NT), but they see Mahomet as the latest and final prophet who brings a later revelation which outmodes the former. Mahomet's revelation is the latest and the final one.

<sup>4</sup> Some readers of the Bible understand it as composed of interesting documents fortuitously come together to form a reasonable entity, but as requiring contextualization of the documents, understanding of their contemporary cultures and genres. The view above and this view both require close study of the texts and the use of a critical mind.

- (i) Created but unfallen Man—so far as we can understand—must have had all the required knowledge of God that comes with innocence. Being in the image of God he would have had that intimacy which is true knowledge because it is relational knowledge.<sup>1</sup>
- (ii) Man's rejection of God at the fall, and his endeavour to become autonomous excluded him from true [relational] knowledge of God. Autonomy means a person is not under the law of God but under his own, devised law.
- (iii) Man has to—so to speak—re-rationalize the whole system of God, Man and the creation. This meant he would have to depart from the truth. Not to know God relationally is not to know the truth.
- (iii) It follows that human beings being so many and so varied the theological, anthropological and cosmological systems would be also be many and varied. Rejection of what is ontological means that (a) devised systems are unontological, and (b) are anti—ontological. No system, however fine and brilliant it may be, can be relied upon, especially if it comes from or through a prophet, guru or shaman. Rejection of all such systems does not mean attainment to the true one.
- (iv) The Scriptures make it clear that no human being—unaided—knows God. In Romans 3:11–12 quotes Psalms 14:1–12; 53:1–2, 'No one understands, no one seeks for God.' This categorical statement is supported by Jesus who said, 'If you had known me, you would have known my Father also,'<sup>2</sup> 'no man comes to the Father but by me,' 'No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me, draws him,'<sup>3</sup> 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him'.

These things being biblically so does Man not know the truth, or does he not seek after it? Man does not naturally seek after God who is his natural habitat, yet there is an ontological pressure to do so, which he has to fight continually. There are persons seeking after God, but the initiative lies with God. The glory of the gospel is that the Father seeks His children (John 3: 13; 4:23; Luke 15:20; 19:10). All human beings seek something, but not necessarily God (cf. John 1:11; Rom. 10:21).

Romans 1:18 says, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.' To 'suppress the truth' means 'to hold it down', so that in some sense the sinner is fighting the truth, *suppressing something he knows*. In that sense all men have the truth, but they seek to deny it, and substitute their own 'truth' for it. Romans 1:28 says, 'Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God<sup>4</sup>. We can conclude then that man is wholly aware of God's existence, but rejects the knowledge of Him. True knowledge of God confronts man in his sinfulness, in his devised autonomy, and makes demands on him he does not wish to accede to.

### **The Knowledge of God Highly Prized**

The Biblical presentation would see the substitution of idols for God as something would naturally follow rejection of Him (Rom. 1:21–23). By nature of the case these surrogate 'gods' could bring no ontological love, peace and joy, and this deprivation of God would

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus and John both gives us the clue that to know God is true constitutes eternal life for the believer (John 17:5; I John 5:20). To know God is life because it is an intimate relationship constantly lived out. To know *about* God is another matter. See my story 'The Theological Student' (*I Saw In the Night, Visions*, NCPI, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> A paraphrase of John 8:19.

<sup>3</sup> John 14:6; 6:44, 65; Matthew 11:27

<sup>4</sup> The AV has, 'did not like to retain God in their knowledge', and JB has 'since they did not see it was rational to acknowledge God'.

itself be a pressure to return to Him or to find Him or to act according to His law. The latter is called deontological. In the OT some persons are given knowledge of God<sup>1</sup> (cf. Acts 7:2) especially the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It is in the literature of Israel that we find numerous references to knowing God. Few if any are concerned with getting to know God, since all in Israel were the covenant people of God and as such were His children and related to God as their covenant Father. Just as the Lord is One and loves them with His whole Being, so they are to love Him with heart, soul, mind and strength (Deut. 4:6). What is more He will give them a heart that is circumcised to love Him (Deut. 10:6), even when they stray from the knowledge of Him. His knowing of them is His loving of them—His elective love which eternally secures them (cf. Deut. 7:6–8; Amos 3:2).

Famous passages in the Psalms such as 42:1–5; 63:1–8; 84:1–4; 116:1–7; 119:9–16 have become classical in Jewish and Christian thinking. However, it is not so much that these psalmists—and others—are seeking a knowledge of God that they never had, as it is that they are seeking a renewal in their knowledge of God. This is seen powerfully in Hosea 4:1–6 and 6:1–3. When knowledge of God disappears in the land all forms of evil come in, and the state of the nation is wretched and greatly troubled. God loves freely, and in that unconditional love alone do men and women come to know their God in all truth.

Perhaps the most powerful statement of all in the OT is Jeremiah 9:23–24,

*Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in all these things I delight, says the Lord.'*

The NT is also rich with references regarding knowing the Lord as love, knowing Him in His love, and then—armed with that knowledge of God—knowing and loving others. I Corinthians 8:3 and Galatians 4:8–9 show that God loves us and knows us, after which we know God. I John 4:7–19 develops this beautiful theme. Knowing God is by seeing the acts he has done, being effected by them, and so loving Him.

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<sup>1</sup> It is clear from the Book of Genesis and the 11th chapter of Hebrews that persons of faith have always known God. The primal couple walked with God in the cool of the day, but lost that fellowship. Even so, their descendant Enoch 'Walked with God'.

## *II. The God Who Reveals Himself*

We have already seen that man, unaided, cannot know God, of himself. We have said that it is an axiom of Scripture that God reveals Himself. We have also seen that religions are either humanly thought up, that they can be the result of mystical states of being, or are claimed to be revealed by God<sup>1</sup>, through the media He may care to use. Below we set out the Judaic-Christian forms of media. The first five media in our list are firstly Judaic and then Christian in their principles. The last three are peculiarly Christian. Again, the first two are said by some to be ‘general revelation’, i.e. God is revealed by creation and providence if people look to read and hear these. We must note two things, (a) Psalm 14:1–3 (cf. Psa. 50:1–3; Rom. 3:9–10) asserts that no one seeks God and understands Him, so that we are forced to conclude that no one reads—or hears—these media, (b) the Scriptures themselves inform us regarding such a revelation<sup>2</sup>, thus confirming the power of the media.  
Media of Revelation<sup>3</sup>

(i) *Creation*. Romans 1:19–20; Psalm 19:1–6; cf. I Timothy. 4:4; 6:17; Ecclesiastes 3:11. Note that the Scriptures tell us God created all things, e.g. Genesis 1:1–31.

(ii) *Providence*. Matthew 5:45; Psalm 104:14–23; Matthew 6:26, 28; Acts 14:17.

(ii) *The Scriptures*. II Timothy 3:14–17; cf. Psalm 119 where ‘law’, ‘word’, ‘precept’, ‘commandment’ are virtually synonyms. The Word of God is creative (Gen. 1:2; Psa. 33:6–7; 148:5) and fruitful (Isa. 55:10–11).

(iii) *History*<sup>4</sup>, i.e. the Acts of God. by the God who acts (See following section ‘the Living God’). God is the God who controls all events of all history (Isa. 46:8–11; 48:3–13). Daniel 4:36–37; Ezekiel 39: 28f.; Psalms 105; 106; 107; John 5:17.

(iv) *Prophets and Prophecy*. Luke 24:25ff. The prophet is the voice of God, cf. Exodus 6:28–7:2; Amos 3:7–8; Revelation 19:10; II Peter 1:21. Prophecy is the word of God, Jeremiah 23:29.

(v) *Dreams and Visions*. These are linked with prophecy, Numbers 12:6; Jeremiah 23:28–30; Acts 2:17ff.

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<sup>1</sup> We have seen that The Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions claim God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures they hold and believe, and claim that human beings could not have devised the elements revealed. Some rationalistic theologians think that man has evolved to these thoughts that are higher than in other religions. One of the problems with this kind of reasoning is that the highest of these thoughts may be dismissed by yet higher thoughts to be yet developed through a continuing evolutionary process, so that one never has a completed system of theology.

<sup>2</sup> Much of what we think—especially in Christian countries—has been absorbed by society from the Scriptures, and is soaked into the culture. This is what happens in Islamic countries through the influence of the Koran.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Knowledge of God* pp.23–54, and *The Things We Firmly Believe* pp. 6–10.

<sup>4</sup> Note: History as we see it is not necessarily the same as it is set forth in the Scriptures where it is primarily ‘salvation history’ which is not just a history of salvation but history that is salvation.



(vi) *Jesus Christ the Son*. John 1:14, 18; Colossians 1:15; Matthew 11:27; John 3:35; John 14:6.

(vii) *The Holy Spirit*. John 14:16; 16:7–11; I Corinthians 2:10f.; Acts 1:8. *All prophecy is by the Spirit*. I Pet. 1:10; II Pet. 1:21).

(viii) *The Church, the People of God* (Exodus 19:5–6, cf. Acts 7:38; I Peter 2:9–10).

(viii) *The Law and Conscience*. We have seen above that the Law is the voice of God. In Romans 3:19–20 Paul links revelation of God’s righteousness and conviction of it by the law. Romans 2:21–26 links law and conscience. Even so, the voice of conscience, of itself, is no reliable guide, nor is it, of itself, a revelator.

(ix) *The Names of God*. The name of a person constitutes the character, personality, position, authority and belong of that one<sup>1</sup>. For God to give Himself names throughout Scripture is to reveal, by each, something of Himself. The Hebrew word ‘el’ was simply ‘God’ or ‘god’—a term to cover any God. When used for the God of Israel it is generally qualified by something to show He is not any god, e.g. Deuteronomy 5:9, ‘I the LORD (*Yahweh*) thy God (*Elohim*) am a jealous God (*el*)’. Again *El Shaddai* = ‘God Almighty’. *Eloah* is a similar term used for God or a god as an object of worship. A good view of these names can be obtained by looking at a Concordance which transliterates the names under the general word ‘God’. Some names are, *Elyon* or *El Elyon*, ‘the most high God’ (cf. Numb. 24:16; Psa. 7:17); *Elohim*, a plural for of *el* but treated as [an intensified] singular for God (cf. Numb. 23:19); *Yahweh*, often translated ‘the LORD’ (cf., is strictly speaking the only name of God, thought by many to mean ‘He Who is’ (cf. Exod. 3:15). Compound names are used such as *Yahweh Elohim* ‘the LORD God’; *Yahweh Jireh* ‘the Lord provides’; *Yahweh shalom* ‘the Lord is peace’; *Yahweh Nissi* ‘the Lord is my banner’; *Yahweh tsidkenu* ‘the Lord our righteousness’; *Yahweh Shammah* ‘the Lord is there’. Strictly speaking these latter compounds are not names of God, but comments on His nature.

### **The Living God: The God Who Acts**

In ‘(iii)’—above—we spoke of *History* being one of the elements which reveals God. We said that history is really the purposive acts of God<sup>2</sup>, i.e. “His story”. We would have no knowledge of God if He had not acted, and if He were not to continue to act. The statement ‘Who was, and is, and is to come’ means more than that he has been, and will be, present at all stages of times. It means He has acted throughout time, although Himself not caught into time.

The term ‘the living God’ does not mean ‘God Who is alive’ as against ‘God who is dead’, for God is not alive but is Life Himself. He is ‘the fountain of living waters’ (Jer. 2:13), meaning that He constantly give life and maintains it. He ‘breathed into Man the breath of life and Man became a living being’ (Gen. 2:7). The Prophets often said, ‘As the Lord liveth,’ meaning this was the most substantial thing they could say. Life continually poured out to Man from ‘the fountain of living waters. Such life was composed of ‘the issues of life’

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller description of ‘the Names’ see *The Knowledge of God*, pages 51–54. For the significance of names in the Scriptures see J. Van Allmen’s *Vocabulary of the Bible* (London, 1966, pp.278–300. This set of articles substantiates our claim that names reveal the person, place, etc.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Knowledge of God*, pages 55–63.

(Prov. 4:23), the issues being these very elements of God Himself such as truth, righteousness, goodness, holiness and love.

Even so, the term 'the living God' was much used to denote 'the God who acts'. Israel was always remembering the acts of God in covenant promises to the fathers, in the deliverance from Egypt in the events of the wilderness, and in the establishment of Israel in Canaan. John 5:17 tells us that God always works. Examples of this in the Old Testament are Deuteronomy 5:26; Joshua 3:10; I Samuel 17:26; Daniel 6:19–27; Jeremiah 10:10 whilst in the New Testament examples are Matthew 16:16; 26:63; I Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22.

The living God is the Who lives life, gives and sustains life in all creatures, and so acts that His plan and purpose is fulfilled and He, Himself, is revealed. In John 6:57 He is 'the living Father by whom the Son lives and gives life'. In I Timothy 3:15 the church is the church of 'the living God'. He is also the God Who judges, and acts in judgement where there is sin. Hence in Hebrews 3:12 it is a terrible thing to 'fall away from the living God'; in 10:31 it is a fearful thing 'to fall into the hands of the living God', whilst in 12:22 the ultimate holy city is 'the city of the living God'.

### ***III. Coming to Know God as Father***

Moses had told Israel, ‘The LORD our God is one LORD’, meaning God was not one among many gods, or even the supreme One of all gods, but that He was and is the only One<sup>1</sup>, and that He was and is complete within Himself<sup>2</sup>. At the same time there are plural elements<sup>3</sup> about God, e.g. the use of ‘Let *us*’, and ‘whom shall *I* send, and who will go for *us*?’ (Gen. 1:26; Isa. 6:8: cf. John 12:40–41). In the New Testament the teaching of the Triune God is explicit, whilst elements of its truth are implicit in the Old Testament. At this point we will not seek to open up the glorious truth of the Triune Godhead, but simply say that God’s unity is not a bare—monolithic—unity. For example, in Islam God is holy and transcendent, but has no Son, and so cannot truly be Father, except in some metaphorical way, some way which is not ontological. In Islam the Holy Spirit is an angel, and is not God. There has been a ‘battle for the Trinity’ down through the Christian centuries and it is no less today a conflict than in former times. Much of our later studies will be given over to the beautiful and powerful mystery of the Trinity.

#### **Noetic and Personal Knowledge**

It is clear from John 17:3; I John 5:11–12, 20 that personal relationship with God brings knowledge of Him. The revelation of Exodus 34:6–7 with Jeremiah 9:23–24 that knowledge of God is intimately personal and relational. Matthew 7:21–23 shows it is possible to believe one is working with and for God and yet not be known by Him, ie. that one does not know God (cf. Gal. 4:8–9; I Cor. 12:3). Noetic knowledge is that knowledge of the mind<sup>4</sup>.

#### **A. Coming to Know God as the Father**

It is useful to look at I John 2:18–27 where the Apostle says that knowing, believing and confessing God as Father and as Son means we ‘have’ or ‘possess’ the Father and the Son. This is far from mere noetic knowledge. It is knowledge brought by the ‘anointing’ the ‘anointing’ being the Holy Spirit and his effects on us. He is both the Spirit of truth, and the very truth itself, ie. *himself* (John 14:17; 16:13; I John 5:7) so that he is the true Teacher (I Cor. 2:10–13). Being both the Spirit of the Father and the Son (Matt. 10:20; Gal. 4:4–6; Rom. 8:15) he is able to reveal the Father to us. Whilst the Spirit is the Teacher, so is the Son—as

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 4:35, 39, ‘there is no other beside him’; ‘is God in heaven above and on the earth; there is no other’.

<sup>2</sup> For coming to know God see *The Knowledge of God*, pages 64–97 and *The Things We Firmly Believe* pages 43–71. For knowing God as Father also see *The God and Father of Us All* (NCPI, 1982), *Oh Father! Our Father!* (NCPI, 1985), *The Person and Work of Christ* (NCPI, 1983), *Christ The Conquering King* (NCPI, 1985), *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, (NCPI, 1985) and *The Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> We will see, later, that the so-called ‘plural elements’ of God are different in the Three Persons, and that the ‘differentiations’ constitute what things are given to other Members by each Member of the Godhead. This constitutes *unity*. If there were no such differentiations, ie. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, then the Godhead would be monolithic without personal unity.

<sup>4</sup> See my story ‘The Theological Student’ in the little book *Primarily For Parsons* (NCPI). It is possible to have brilliant noetic knowledge of God, and this be abstract and not a matter of relationships. We have to keep reminding ourselves of this in our studies on the theology of the Trinity.

Matthew 11:27 and other Scriptures tell us. If we wonder why we should need two such Teachers to give us knowledge of the Father, then we should look back in our notes to see why Man does not know God as he needs to do. Our next paragraph takes up this point.

### **Did Created Man Know God as Father?**

This is a strong point for debate and discussion. It is argued from Luke 3:38 and Acts 17:28<sup>1</sup> (*passim*) that Adam was the son of God, and that man knows God to be Father, and that this has been so from creation. Others argue that there is no indication of Him being Father creationally in the accounts of creation. They also point to John 1:12 which speaks of believing persons being given authority to *become* the children of God.

Other points need to be considered,

- (i) If the primal parents knew God (cf. Rom. 1:21), then did they *really* know God if they did not know Him as Father since He has always been the Father of His Son?
- (ii) Are the references to God creating as Father (Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Mal. 2:10; Deut. 32:6; cf. Deut. 14:1) to be limited to Israel as God's covenantal people?
- (iii) If Man is not ontologically a son of God, then is adoption another creational work which overlays creation? That is, does God have to add to the ontology of humanity in the grace-work of adoption? If redeemed Man is teleologically a son of God as in adoption<sup>2</sup>, is there a teleology which can be separated from ontology?
- (iv) Are such references to the children of God as we find in the Sermon on the Mount to be limited to Israel, and if so, do such a references as Ephesians 3:14<sup>3</sup> and 4:6 not have any universal meaning?
- (v) Is there not innate in the passages of Genesis 1:26–27 and 5:1–3 the fact of sonship. How can one be in the image of God—which is a Father-Son-Spirit and not have sonship. Seth being like Adam was a father-son thing, and although we cannot work back to the Godhead from this fact, can we know work forward from the Godhead to this human matter?

These points have to be worked through. Because earthly fatherhood is always deficient in some way or another, and because the parental pair represent the image of God to the child (cf. Gen. 1:26f.; 5:1–2), and because children are born in or into the entail of sin, and have a resistance to authority—which the parental pair represent—the idea of God being Father is not acceptable to human thinking. That is, unless it is in some way presented without

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<sup>1</sup> Here Paul's full argument is that they worship gods (idols) made of various substances used artistically, but that since God is Father, then these concepts worked out in plastic representations are false. This is the sin of which they are to repent (v.30) i.e. of making the Father to be as these devised forms. It is an insult to Him, and degrading to them. It is interesting that he appeals to the sense within them of Divine Fatherhood. How would they have such a sense if they were not creationally children of God. It would appear that even where Man has refused his sonship, the image of true Fatherhood—however distorted it has become—still remains, and Paul can appeal to it.

<sup>2</sup> This raises the whole question of Man's ultimate sonship of God. Ephesians 1:5f. makes it clear that God has destined some to be the sons of God. Galatians 4:4–7 and Romans 8:14–30 link this sonship with glorification and ultimate inheritance. Glorification, sonship and inheritance are inseparable. Did created Man have no knowledge of these? Was his rebellion against God simply as Creator, and not as the Father who would glorify Man.?

<sup>3</sup> Commenting on this verse Armitage Robinson in his commentary (Commentary on Ephesians, Kregel, Grand Rapids, reprint 1979) says, 'According to this noble utterance of St. Paul, God is not only the universal Father, but the archetypal Father, the Father of whom all other fathers are derivatives and types. So far from regarding the Divine Fatherhood as a mode of speech in reference to the Godhead, derived by analogy from our conceptions of human fatherhood, the Apostle maintains that the very idea of fatherhood exists primarily in the Divine nature, and only by derivation in every other form of fatherhood, whether earthly or heavenly.'

offence<sup>1</sup>. If the ontological principle of God's Fatherhood is essential to true human living—through the parents—then taking away the offence will not ultimately give the child true human fulfilment.

### The Need to Know God as Father

If man has been created as a child of God (Luke 3:38; Acts 17:28) then the fall means Man has broken the filial link with God. In Trinitarian terms this means he does not wish to know God as Father, the Son as the Son and his own Brother. Nor does he wish to know the Spirit—the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. The theological statement, 'God is [creationally] the Father of all men, but not all men are the children of God', makes sense. If true it still leaves Man ontologically suspended in a relational state in which he cannot have emotional fulfilment and satisfaction<sup>2</sup>. Much anger<sup>3</sup>, if not most of it, stems from the childhood familial situation in the hierarchy of father, mother, and brother-sister relationships. If we can accept the principle of I John 4:19–20—that we love because the Father [first] loves us, and if we hate a brother then we do not love the Father—then we are drawn to the fact that to hate another human being is to hate that one's Creator-Father. It is essential then to come to know God as Father.

If Paul's statements in Acts 17:24–31 are correct, then knowing God as Father is,

- (i) a *relational need*, and it is in relationships that we have life—or death. Here John 17:3 and I John 5:20–21 are significant.
- (ii) If we are God's children by creation, then we have an *ontological* need to get back to that relationship. This will also fulfil our *filial need*.
- (iii) If this restoration (regeneration) or gift of *adoption*<sup>4</sup> brings us to His Fatherhood, then we can expect a rich emotional fulfilment. That is we will have a *familial need* fulfilled.
- (iv) We can expect the regeneration of relationships<sup>5</sup> which comes through reconciliation with God—that reconciliation being effected by God (a) through redemption, and (b) by the interior work of the Holy Spirit in our persons. This is, again, as in '(i)' above the fulfilment of a *relational need*.
- (v) If adoption and glorification go together then we have the fulfilment of a *teleological need*, i.e. we are moving towards a given goal. Man is always a 'becoming creature'.

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<sup>1</sup> There are ways of ameliorating the offence of parenthood which lessen the offence such as presenting the parent-child relationship on an equalitarian basis, or posing it as sentimental, i.e. emotion-fulfilling. The aspects of discipline, training, authority—and so on—are passed over. In the ultimate it is doubtful whether the child will be satisfied since the pressure of ontological necessity is always upon the human person. Ontologically the child needs all that fatherhood-motherhood represent in relationship to God the Father.

<sup>2</sup> I believe Christians today are missing out on the areas of true counselling. The field of psycho-therapy seems to be firstly experimental and then methodological in researching human relationships and formulating therapies. It recognises where the human problems lie. Since all life has been created by the Triune God relationships must pertain to that Godhead and its creation. There is need for using the theology we have to develop true therapy—if that is what we must call it.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Angry Heart of Tranquil Mind* (NCPI, 1987) for the causes and healing of anger.

<sup>4</sup> Regeneration is really a gift, and a gift of *restoration*. Adoption must have some element of restoration also. Grace is required for regeneration and grace is required for adoption because Man was not a son of God in the way that he will be eschatologically. Adoption is not an entirely new thing since its elements may have been present in created Man. Certainly if Man has ever been teleologically oriented then the grace of adoption will never make Man more than Man, but will make him fully into what it means to be Man. No human being is by nature a full son of God on the level of the only Son of God, for these two are different by *nature*. Grace does not change Man in his nature, but it gives to him the ultimate of his regenerated nature—fellowship with God as the Son has fellowship with His father.

<sup>5</sup> We must remain aware that although our attitudes change by regeneration the others—with whom we have relationships of some sort—do not necessarily respond. Hence Paul's statement in Romans 12:18, 'If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all men.'

Since Man is a creature moving towards his telos of goal, then Fatherhood fulfils a teleological need.

- (vi) Sons of God are those doing the will of God (Rev. 21:7) as they work with the Father. Thus the Son who works as seen in John 5:17ff. (cf. 4:34). This is called vocation and everyone has a *vocational need*, and such is fulfilled in knowing God as Father—along with all the other needs set out in this section.
- (vii) Linked with sonship is also the matter of inheritance—patrimony given by the Father. Israel saw itself as God’s heritage, but also saw that God had appointed in inheritance for it, such as promised to Abraham. Later this developed into the view that God’s people inherit the world, i.e. all nations (cf. Psa. 2:6–7; Rom. 4:13, Matt. 5:5). Revelation 21:7 (cf. Gal. 4:7) shows that God’s sons inherit the new heavens and the new earth. Thus the *vocational* and *teleological* are joined together, so that Fatherhood brings entire satisfaction and fulfilment to those in sonship (adoption).

### ***Note On Knowing The Triune God***

The conventional way of knowing the Triune God is, naturally, to know God theologically—in both biblical and historical theological<sup>1</sup> ways, but personal experience of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is what brings one into experimental and relational knowledge of the Trinity. That is why we now seek in three Sections to speak of knowing God as Father, knowing Him as Son, and knowing Him as Holy Spirit.. Sectionalising the Persons is an impediment to knowing the three Persons simultaneously and knowing that God has one centre of consciousness since He is one Being. To know God is to know the Persons. Even with the impediment of examining the Persons in turn we can add to our relational knowledge of God as the one God.

## **Coming to Know God as the True Father**

Now that we know it is essential, i.e. indispensable for being truly and fully human, for Man to know God as Father—not simply noetically<sup>2</sup> but relationally—then we need to understand how a person comes to know Him as Father.

### ***I. The Revelation of God as Father by The Son***

The answer lies in the Son. John said (1:18), ‘No man has ever seen God; the only Son<sup>3</sup> who is in the bosom of the Father, he had made him known.’ The question is, ‘How did Jesus make God known as his Father, and how did he make him known as the Father of those who would come to Him through the Son?’ From the materials of the Scriptures the answer lies generally along the following lines,

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<sup>1</sup> Students are advised to read the General and Particular Bibliographies in *The Things We Firmly Believe*—pages 312–321. This was printed in 1981 and needs many additions, but it will certainly direct readers to many of the available materials, including our own NCPI ones. Early Christian Doctrines (J.N.D. Kelly, A & C. Black. London, 1968), and *Historical Theology—An Introduction* by G. W.. Bromily (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1978) are two helpful treatments of historical theology.

<sup>2</sup> By ‘noetic’ we mean ‘of the mind’, ‘something reasoned out’.

<sup>3</sup> Some ancient manuscripts have ‘the only God who is in the bosom of the Father’.

***(i) The revelation of the Fatherhood in the Old Testament concurring with that in the New Testament.***

God created Man in His own image so that Man has the closest affinity with Him, and as God had revealed Himself to His covenant people as Father (see above, Section ‘Did Created Man Know God as Father?’), so the intimations of His having a Son in the O.T. (e.g. Psalms 2; 89: cf. Isa. 9:6f.) became prophetic and Israel lived in expectancy of a Son who was also Messiah-King. John 1:14 is the expression of the incarnation of that Son who was called ‘the Logos’ (Word). Prior to the event of the incarnation there has not been the appearance of the Son as the Son. This must mean the Son had come in the incarnation and so could reveal the Father.

***(ii) The revelation of the Father in the Synoptic Gospels.***

(a) Mark’s Gospel opens with the statement, ‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God<sup>1</sup>.’ Of course, the Gospel is written from a post-Ascension stance, but the confession by Peter (8:31; cf. Matt. 16:16) and the recorded admission of Jesus of being the ‘the Christ, the Son of the Blessed’ (Mark 14:61-62; cf. Matt. 26:63-64—‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’) show that Christ’s Sonship was understood.

(b) The revelation of the Sonship of Jesus was clearly stated in both the Baptism and the Transfiguration (Matt. 3:17; 17:5—and parallels).

(c) The teaching of God’s Fatherhood in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs 5–7) is too full to be ignored.

(d) Matthew 11:27 (cf. John 14:6) clearly shows that the Father and the Son have unique and exclusive knowledge of each other.

***(iii) The revelation of the Father in John’s Gospel.***

Here the material is so profuse as to demand much attention and understanding.

(a) John 1:14 speaks of the Word-become-flesh as the Son of God.

(b) Some 40 times in this Gospel Jesus speaks of having been sent by the Father.

(c) As in Matthew 11:27 so in John the mutual knowledge of Father and Son is exclusive and unique. One cannot come to the Son unless the Father draws him (6:44, 65), and no one can come to the Father but by the Son (14:6).

(d) The Father and the Son work together (5:17ff.), and the Father has given all authority to the Son (3:35; 5:21–28).

(e) In all that he says and does the Son reveals the Father for the Son does not proceed from himself, but the works which the Son does are the works the Father does through him (John 5:19f.; 8:14–30; 14: 1–10).

(f) The Father and the Son glorify one another (13:31–31; 17:1–5), and glorification is simply the revelation of what and whom each is.

(g) The Fatherhood is supremely revealed in the Cross in the work of the Son as the Father glorifies him (John 17:1–5; cf. Heb. 2:9–10; II Cor. 5:19).

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<sup>1</sup> We need to understand that the Synoptic view of Jesus as ‘the Christ the Son of God’ was very much in the line of Psalm 2 and related Scriptures, ie. that he was God’s Messiah, God’s King appointed by him to rule over the Kingdom. The question of him having deity or being Deity incarnated is more in line with Johannine thinking, and the thinking of the Epistles and the Revelation. We must not read into the Synoptic Gospels the understanding of a more developed Christology, yet at the same time we must be wary of excluding the possibility that the thinking that is Johannine is absolutely foreign to the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew 11:27 warns us against that.

**(iv) *The Revelation of the Father in the Acts, the Epistles and the Book of the Revelation.***

These books presuppose the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, that God is ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’, as also they presuppose He is ‘God our Father’, and ‘the God and Father of us all’.

- (a) *The Acts*: Nothing much is spoken of Jesus being the Son of God (9:20) but much of his being the Messiah.
- (b) *The Epistles* speak much of Jesus as being the Son of God and refer to him as such directly some 50 times, and indirectly many more times. Where Messiah equals ‘Son of God’ there are also many references. Perhaps half of all references are in the Johannine material. Via the Son and the Spirit believers come into *regeneration* (‘children of God’) and via *adoption* are called ‘sons of God’, and these two relation categories are how believers come to personal and relational knowledge of God. In I Thessalonians 1:1 and II Thessalonians 1:1 the church is ‘in the Father’.
- (c) *The Book of the Revelation* has only one direct reference to Jesus being the Son of God (2:18) but the whole thrust of the book speaks of God as Father by various means (cf. 7:3; 14:1; 22:4).

We conclude then that we can come to know God as Father by the revelation the Son has given of him (John 1:14, 18; 14:6, 7, 9: cf. 8:19; Matt. 11:27). This means we must listen to the Son, and believe on him, receiving him (John 1:12–13), and so being conducted to the Father. To see the Son as the Son is to see the Father, since they are one (John 10:30). To live in the Son is also to live in the Father, and to have the Son and the Father indwelling us by the Spirit is livingly, relationally and personally to know the Father.

## **2. The Revelation of God as Father by the Holy Spirit**

We have already seen that the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20) and the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6: cf. Rom. 8:9). Jesus in John chapters 14 to 16 taught that the Spirit would teach concerning himself—i.e. Jesus—and would glorify both the Son and the Father (16:12–15). The natural man cannot understand such things (cf. I Cor. 2:14–16) and Jesus had said that without new birth (spiritual regeneration) a person could neither see nor enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3–6).

The work of the Spirit is linked with new birth (regeneration) and with adoption, i.e. being made sons of God. Passages such as John 3:3–14<sup>1</sup>; Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 4:4–7, Titus 3:4–7 show the work of the Spirit in both regeneration and adoption<sup>2</sup>. What concerns us is that it is the Holy Spirit who gives the cry ‘Abba! Father!’ and so causes us to cry the same. In that cry we come to know we are His sons—His children. *This is the way to the Father. This is knowing the Father.*

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in the First Epistle of John the Spirit is not directly linked with the author’s many references to the new birth, but such a passage as I John 2:18–27 would indicate that coming into the fullness of truth and life is via the Holy Spirit (cf. 3:24 and 4:13). We could assume this is the case in John 1:12–13.

<sup>2</sup> Paul certainly points to regeneration in Ephesians 2:5; II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15 and Titus 3:5–7, but his main point in *sonship* is adoption (Rom. 8:14–15; Gal. 4:4–7; cf. Eph. 1:5) but he does not seem to use the word children (as John does) for regeneration and the words *sons* only for adoption but uses them both interchangeably for adoption in Romans 8:14–30.



### 3. Intimately, Personally Coming to Know God as Father

It is true that God has revealed Himself throughout history by the various media of which we have spoken. In a special way He has spoken to us by His Son—beyond even all He has said through the prophets (Heb. 1:1; cf. Luke 24:25–27; Acts 26:26:22-23; I Cor. 15:3–4). Then, by His Spirit, He has revealed His Son who, in turn, reveals Him. It remains, then, simply to ask ourselves whether we have—as yet—come to know the Father by the Son and the Spirit.

In John 14:6*passim* Jesus claims he alone is the way to the Father, the truth of the Father, and the life of the Father. No one—in all history—has ever been, or could be, this. Only through him can we come to the Father. In Hebrews 2:9–10 he is called ‘the trail-blazer of our salvation’, but such trail-blazing is through the Cross since on the Cross Christ ‘tastes death for every man’, bears the sins of every man and of the whole world, and works out the wrath that is upon them, the terror and horror that is innate to them, and the guilt and the shame that is wrought in Man by them. In doing this he opens up the way—blazes the trail—to the Father. His death has propitiated the evil of Man, and satisfied the Holy Father (Heb., 2:10, 17; I John 2:2;4:10; Rom. 3:24; 5:11).

It is for Man, then, to walk the way to the Father, know the truth of the Father and receive the life of the Father. To come to know the Son is to come to know the Father. This particularly is so when repentance and faith are present. Likewise it is particularly so when the Holy Spirit comes, first giving revelation of the Father as he gives revelation of the Son, and then bringing sonship of the Father to the believing-receiving person. In the light of the redemption he reveals he causes the cry ‘Abba! Father!’ first to be heard from his lips, then to be known in the heart of the one being sought by the Father (John 4:23; Luke 19:10; John 3:17; Luke 15:18–20; cf. John 11:51–52; Gal. 4:4–7; Rom. 8:14–17).

Thus it is that one comes to know the Father Who ever seeks such to worship Him. This is true knowledge which is first of all rejection of all false knowledge and then the coming into the relational experience of the loving, creating and redeeming Father. Without this experience one is outside the Family of the Father—forever.

## ***IV. Coming to Know God as the Son***

When we speak of knowing the Son we are not excluding noetic knowledge of the one known as Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of the living God. We are insisting, however, on the reality—set out in John 17:3—of knowing the Son *relationally*. We have already seen that coming to know the Son depends on (i) God the Father (John 6:45, 65; Matt. 11:27) and (ii) God the Holy Spirit (John 16:12–15; cf. Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–6; I Cor. 2:10–13), and we now enlarge on these two elements.

### **(i) Knowing the Son Through the Father**

John 6:44–46 says, ‘No one can come to me unless the Father draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, “And they shall all be taught by God”. Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.’ We are taught, then, by the Father—references to this being Isaiah 54:13 and Jeremiah 31:33–34. In practice this must mean that God has been teaching Israel primarily of the fact, coming and nature of His Son. Jesus showed in Luke 24:27 (cf. 24:45–47) that the Old Testament Scriptures referred to him. Likewise Paul later supported this claim (Acts 26:22–23).

As we have suggested, some Old Testament Scriptures of significance in understanding the Coming One to be the Son of God and Messiah were Psalms 2 and 89—which we need to read. To these can be added Psalm 110. Psalms 2 and 110 are quoted copiously in the New Testament and their usages should be examined. There are many other passages which also speak of the Coming One in terms of Messiah, Son of Man, Suffering Servant and the like, all of which constitute our being ‘taught of God’, eg. Genesis 49:10, Isaiah 9:6–7; 11:1ff.; 52:14–53:12; Daniel 7:13f. All the New Testament writings witness to the fact that God the Father took the initiative in sending His Son, and that the Son voluntarily obeyed the Father. John’s Gospel keeps telling the fact that the Son had been sent by the Father—eg. John 3:17; I John 4:9–10—to do the Father’s will and to reveal God as Father.

The statements by the Father at the baptism (Matt. 3:17) and transfiguration of His Son (Matt. 17:5; cf. II Pet. 1:17–19), confirm His sending. The sending—ie the incarnating of His Son—passages of the Epistles also show it was the Father who took the initiative—eg. Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4; Phil. 2:5–7; I Tim. 3:16; I John 4:14; Hebrews 1:6; 10:5–7. In John 5:36ff. we see that the Father testifies to the Son, and in John 13:31; 17:1–5 that He glorified the Son. The propitiating sacrifice of Christ was set forth by the Father (Rom. 3:25; cf. I John 4:10), and it was the Father who received his spirit at the crucifixion. He was raised from the dead ‘by the glory of the Father’ (Rom. 6:4; cf. Acts 2:24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:) who also declared him to ‘be the Son of God with power’ (Rom. 1:4–5). It was the Father who ‘set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places’ (Acts 2:38; 5:31; Eph. 1:19ff.; cf. Acts 1:11; 2:33; 3; I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 10:12; cf. Rev. 3:21).

We see, then, that in every way the Father has taught us regarding His Son, Jesus Christ, so that we may come to know him, to believe on him, and to receive him (cf. John 1:13; Rom. 10:9; Col. 2:6). Again, all that we have said about the Son showing us the Father pertains to the Father showing the Son (John 14:6–7; Matt. 11:27).

## **(ii) Knowing the Son Through the Spirit**

Just as the Father began showing the Son in the O.T. so did the Holy Spirit. In I Peter 1:10–11 the prophets were said to have ‘the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory’. The prophets, also, were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:20–21) for ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit [Spirit] of prophecy’ (Rev. 19:10). Thus the Father teaches His people via the Spirit and the prophets (Heb. 1:1). It is the Spirit who gives us intimations of Shiloh (Gen. 49:10) and all other prophetic teaching regarding the Son of God, Son of Man, the Righteous Branch, the Messiah, Davidic King and Suffering Servant.

In the New Testament the prophecies that go before Christ at his birth came from the Spirit. Likewise the whole of the life of Christ—including his conception, baptism, ministry death, resurrection and ascension—was through the Spirit. In every way the Spirit was setting him forth. The intimate identification of the Spirit with Christ in all his life and ministry means he was—and is—able to reveal Christ in all fullness. I Corinthians 2:10–11 tells us the Spirit searches the deeps of God, and then reveals to us what we need to know, that is, all that we need to comprehend. In this sense he is able to lead us into the mystery of everything that Jesus was and did, is and does.

Through the ministry of the apostles—which was under the leadership, revelation and empowerment of the Holy Spirit—there was a revelation of the Son, bringing the apostolic truth as Jesus said would happen, ie witnessing to Christ and revealing him—John 15:26–27; 16:12–15; cf. 14:25–26; Acts 1:8. This knowing the Son by the Spirit comes to the church, and through the church to others (I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess 1:5; I Pet. 1:12).

Just as we know God as ‘the living God’ through His acts and works, so we know the Son through his works and acts, especially as he did them in union with the Father. So the Spirit brings revelation of the meaning of those works, and thus reveals to us the true being of the Son. This covers his pre-creation fellowship with the Father, his being in the counsel of God regarding creation, redemption and the ultimate renewal of all things. It is also the revelation of his work with the Father in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, including his present work and the future fulfilment of hope—‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’ All of this helps us to understand why Christ said it was better for him to go away so that the Spirit could come and reveal all things concerning him—Christ—to us (John 7:11f.). This helps us to understand why Paul said, ‘No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit’ (I Cor. 12:3). Just as no one can say ‘Abba! Father!’ but by the Spirit so, similarly, no one can say, ‘Jesus, is Lord!’ and when saw say both of these we have said the highest things that human lips can utter—things in the vocative, and things doxological.

## ***IV. Coming to Know God as the Holy Spirit***

It appears the first thing Jesus did when he ascended to the Father was to send forth the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32). John had promised his hearers that in accordance with the Old Testament prophecies God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. We see this in such passages as Joel 2:28ff; Ezekiel 36:24–28; 37:1–14; Isaiah 32:15f.; 44:3ff. This outpouring of the Spirit came at Pentecost (Acts 2:4ff.) as a primary, principal act, never to be repeated, for it signified the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh. In the light of this meaning there were what we might call -sub-poring as in Samaria (Acts 8) upon the Samaritans, and as in Caesarea (Acts 10–11) upon the Gentiles. All of this was in accordance with the indications given to the apostles by Jesus in Acts 1:8. Thus they came—Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles—to know the Spirit. The three initial and principal outpourings on Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles meant that henceforth there would be no nation or tribe which could not be a recipient of the Holy Spirit. We need to keep in mind that God did, and does, pour out His Spirit in many situations. One example of this is in Acts chapter 4. We see that He filled His servants with His Spirit when that is a special situation as Peter before the Sanhedrin, Stephen when he was giving his testimony to Jesus, on Paul when he opposed Elymas the sorcerer; and so on. The history of the church contains innumerable events when the Spirit was poured out upon his people.

### **Knowing the Spirit Through the Scriptures**

‘Knowing the Spirit’ may seem at first sight to be a strange saying. He is the Spirit of God, of the Lord, of the Father, of the Son, of Christ, of Jesus, and as such seems mainly bent on showing not himself but the Father and the Son. In fact, this is what is stated in John 16:12–15. Yet, when we look at the Scriptures—of which he is the author—we find so much written concerning the Spirit. Commencing with the first chapter of Genesis and proceeding through the last chapter of the Book of the Revelation we find the Spirit being revealed to us in all his works.

That we can know the Spirit personally is shown in the book of the Acts. Not only were the folk on whom he was poured deeply moved, but they looked to the Spirit for leadership. In chapter 8 the Spirit talks to Philip the Evangelist telling him what to do. Likewise in chapter 10 he speaks to Peter in regard to his going to the Gentiles at Caesarea. In 13:1–3 we read of the Spirit directing the church to send Paul and Barnabas on their mission to Asia Minor. In chapter 15 at a church conference in Jerusalem, James the elder is able to say, ‘It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . .’ In 16:6–7 the Spirit tells Paul and Silas where not to go, and then where to go. In all these cases the Spirit speaks, which shows his personal nature. Similarly, in Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira are said to lie to the Holy Spirit.

In the Epistles believers are warned against grieving the Spirit—a sure indication of his personal Being (Eph. 4:30). Nor must they quench him (I Thess. 5:19) but they are to listen to what he says to them through the prophets. The fruit of the Spirit is said to be—among many other things—‘love, joy and peace’, as the Kingdom of God is also said to be ‘righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’. These affections or ‘feelings’ the Spirit brings are indications of his *personal* being, ie he can feel grieved, can bring love and peace and joy to us, so that we know him to the Spirit of love, joy and peace—amongst other such elements. In

Romans 8:26–27 we have intimations of his tenderness and personal relationship with us, and his strong striving for us, within us. So then, all of these things tell us of a very personal Person, ie the beloved and holy Spirit of God. These things are what lead us to *knowing* the Holy Spirit and not just knowing *about* him.

### **Knowing the Spirit Through the Father and the Son**

In Luke 24:46 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit ‘the promise of my Father’, and this term is repeated in Acts 1:4, whilst the idea of the promised Spirit is also seen in Ephesians 1:14. It was the Father who sent the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism (John 1:38; cf. Acts 10:38) and this ‘without measure’ (John 3:34). In Matthew 10:20 he is called ‘the Spirit of your Father’, and the passages of Romans 8:14–17 and Galatians 4:4–7 make this very clear. Thus, whilst the Spirit shows us the Father it is not apart from him that we know the Father, so that coming to know the Father is also coming to know the Spirit. Indeed it is the Father who sends the Spirit (John 14:16, 26; cf. 15:26; 16:7).

The Son speaks of the Father giving the Spirit to his followers (Luke 11:13; cf. Acts 1:4–5; cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26), and he also speaks of giving the Spirit himself (John 15:26), and in John 20:19–23 he actually breathes on them, telling them to receive the Spirit. In Luke 24:49 he promises he will send the Spirit to them, and in Acts 2:33 it is clearly stated that he has shed the Holy Spirit upon the apostolic band at Pentecost. Jesus’ life is a revelation of the work of the Spirit, and his followers can expect to know the Spirit in the way that he did. Doubtless the warning against committing blasphemy regarding the Holy Spirit is give by both Father the Son (cf. Matt. 12:31–32; cf. Heb. 10:29–31).

In every way, then, the Father and the Son seek to show the Person and work of the Holy Spirit to the people of God.

### **Intimately, Personally coming to Know God the Holy Spirit**

We have seen the Father and the Son are Persons on the divine level of Godhead. The Son having brought humanity into his being is nevertheless no less one of the three Persons because of taking that humanity upon himself.. Now we see that we can come intimately to know the Holy Spirit who is the third Person of the Triune Godhead.

We can come to know him by listening to his revelation of the Father and the Son (John 16:12–15), by believing the gospel (Acts 5:32), by repentance (Acts 11:18), and by faith (Acts 2:38; cf. Gal. 3:1–3, 14), since it is through these things that we receive him. He immediately brings the love of God to our hearts (Rom. 5:5; cf. Gal. 5:22), and so we are intimately at one with him. As we saw in Romans 8:26–27 he intimately resides in our heart (cf. John 14:17; Rom. 5:5; 8:9–11; II Cor. 1:21; II Tim. 1:14). We have to know him in personal; intimacy since he brings love, peace, joy, unity and fellowship and aids us in our prayer and worship. This intimate relationship is what keeps us one with him. He baptises us into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13), seals us unto the day of redemption (Eph. 1: 13-14; 4:30), and fills us in our spirits with himself (Eph. 5:18; Rom. 12:11).<sup>1</sup> He gives us intimacy with the Father (Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:15; Eph. 2:18) and with the Son (I Cor. 12:3; Eph. 2:18), since Christ dwells in our hearts by faith through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:16).

All of these facts are overwhelming when assembled together. We cannot live without the Spirit (Rom. 8:9–11), and to live with him is to live with the Father and the Son (cf. John

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 5:18 and Romans 12:11 really speak of us being filled in our spirits and having fervency of our spirits. Translators have taken the general meaning to be ‘be filled with the Spirit’ and ‘be fervent in the Spirit’ because it is the Spirit who fills us and brings his fervency.

14:15–23). We live in the Spirit: we walk in the Spirit: we are filled to overflowing with the Spirit, and so we know him in his presence and in his actions, and as these are revealed by the Scriptures we have objective knowledge of these facts as well as interior experience of them. We come to love the Spirit of love!

### **Conclusion to Knowing the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit**

We have chosen two ways of knowing the Persons, (i) by the revelation the Scriptures give, and (ii) by coming into relationship with the Father, the Son and the Spirit as the Scriptures direct us. Then we continue to come into increasing knowledge of the Persons as we are in relationship with Them. Our knowledge is not only noetic, but it is also personal, relational and experimental. For us to abide in the Persons, and to have Them abide in us<sup>1</sup> is what brings to us the reality of faith and eventually to ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God’, ie admission into the very Godhead itself as we have fellowship with God—the Father of the Family.. We have seen in John 17:3; I John 5:20; Jeremiah 9:23–24 and Hosea 6:1–6 how rich and powerful is the true knowledge of God. We have also seen how disastrous it is to reject such knowledge (cf. Rom. 1:218–32; Hosea 4:1–6; Matthew 7:21–23).

We must come to know the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This way of coming to know God personally does not mean we cannot build a great storehouse of theological and devotional treasures. In terms of the living God—the God Who acts—and of His plan to create and then redeem Man, our personal knowledge of God is the experience of those Divine relationships which then determine our human relationships, outwardly with others. Theology thus gives us a true anthropology and a true cosmology and it is our delight to live the fullness of the truth which all bring to us.

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<sup>1</sup> See the whole passage of John 14:15–23 where the Spirit, then the the Father and the Son will come to dwell in the truly believing person.

## ***V. Coming to Know God as Trinity***

### **The Matter of Knowing God as Trinity**

It is not a difficult matter to use the Scriptures so that we can work out the nature of God as Father, and much of His Person and Work. That same may be said to obtain for working out knowledge of the Person and Work of the Son and the Holy Spirit. While it is true that we have personal relationships with the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, yet we can fail to see the three Persons as a whole. We have worked through their interrelationships and the nature of the perichoresis, and this is greatly helpful, yet we need to receive by the Holy Spirit, through the Scriptures, that revelation of God which allows us to see him as One LORD. Doubtless the doctrines of the everlasting covenant, the theological matter of salvation history, and the whole biblical matter of the glory of God will help us to do this. For us there is one God, the Father and one Lord, Jesus Christ, and one Spirit who is the Holy Spirit. By the following material we seek to develop our understanding of God in Trinity.

#### **The Unity of the Godhead**

We see the proclamation of Moses regarding the unity of God in Deuteronomy 4:35. 39; 6:4, ‘To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other beside him . . . know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart that the Lord God is in the heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other,’ ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.’ In the New Testament Jesus quotes the latter reference (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:29–30; Luke 10:27), and from such Deuteronomic references Paul says ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and ‘there is no God but one’ (I Cor. 8:5). The statement of Exodus 3:14, ‘God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” ’, affirms that unity. When we want to know the substantial Being of that One then the revelation that we have is *a spoken one*. BY this we mean the word of God is the revelation of God Himself. No one arrives at a view of God by his own contemplation or discursive thinking. God says many things regarding Himself but covenantally Exodus 34:6–7 is perhaps the most comprehensive, given as it was to Moses as the revelation of His glory

The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but will be no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation.’

This revelation follows the many revelations of God to the patriarchs, and is made within the covenant with Israel, given by God through Moses. It is on the basis of His unity and the non-ontological nature of the devised gods (idols, lords) that Israel lives in and by the unity of God. It is that unity Israel attacked in the desert in the making of the golden calf, and which angered Him,

And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down; for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; they have turned aside quickly out of the way I commanded them; they have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”’

Moses and the people of Israel had sung—after their deliverance from Egypt and the army of Pharaoh,

Who is like unto thee, O Lord among the gods?  
Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,  
terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

Later Israel was saying of the golden calf, ‘These are our gods, O Israel, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt!’ What they failed to realize was the Self-revelation of God by His words and His deeds. Those of us of the new covenant are possessors of this ancient heritage as well as the newer revelation of God through the incarnate Word.

### **The Non-Presumption of Humility in Knowing God**

In Section One we spoke of the inability of Man to know God, of himself, especially because he had rejected the knowledge of God. We saw the media by which God constantly communicates Himself to His creation. We also saw that Man devises idols to be a substitute for God. True knowledge of God can only come in the midst of true worship, but worship makes demands on Man in every way: hence the false worship. Israel was given the gift of worship (Rom. 9:4) in which the people could know God, and the new community of Christ was also given the gift of worship, and—in one sense—a better worship (cf. John 4:20f.; Phil. 3:3 which sprang from the event of Pentecost) since the Father, the Son and the Spirit are shown to be wholly involved in such worship (cf. John 4:23; Heb. 8:1–2; Phil. 3:3; I Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6), and the community—as was the case with Israel, is a spiritual priesthood (I Pet. 2:4–10).

In I Timothy 6:15–16 the scripture speaks of ‘the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see,’ and such words make us wonder whether we have ever known—or can know—God. It is obvious that God’s appearances to such as Abraham, Moses and others were not direct but mediated appearances, i.e. theophanies or manifestations of the Angel of the Lord. All His media utter His voice, i.e. His words, and since we think in words the *given* words enable us to know Him—*provided we are listening*. To listen with faith is to listen with humility.

When it comes to knowing the unity of God there is no way we can—as Luther puts it—‘climb up to God’<sup>1</sup>. If we had God’s wisdom, i.e. if we could contain God’s wisdom and live by it, then we would understand that unity. We do not have God’s wisdom and so we need a revelation of that unity which—we find—was simply *pronounced* to Israel, and Israel had to be a faith people<sup>2</sup> and believe it. In addition to this faith-inheritance of the Old

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<sup>1</sup> Luther opposes a *theologia gloriae*, i.e. the theology which attempts to know God directly, and insists on the *theologia crucis*, i.e. the theology of the Cross, for it is alone through the Cross that we come to know God. Paul confirms this in his saying of I Corinthians 1:23, ‘Christ [crucified] the power of God and the wisdom of God’. If we would know the power and wisdom of God we must come via the Cross. Thus Luther says, ‘. . . we must not climb up to examine the divine majesty until we have well comprehended the child Christ; we must ascend to heaven on this ladder . . . so I give you this counsel: Remain on this road and use this ladder and presume not to seek out this divine majesty.’ (Quoted by G.S. Hendry in *God the Creator*—Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1937, p.93).

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews chapter 1 speaks of the people of faith. These alone truly knew God—as He had revealed Himself to them.



Testament we also have in the New Testament the fact that God speaks to us by Christ as in Hebrews 1:1–2 ‘he has spoken unto us by a Son’. At the same time this Son is the *Logos* the Word (John 1:1–4, 14, 18). We must have faith in him for only by him will we know God. The extraordinary statement of John 1:14 is ‘And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father.’ ‘Full of grace and truth’ is a fine summary of Exodus 34:6–7 and some scholars have claimed this is the case. In full, we see the glory of the Father in the Son.

#### Seeking to See God’s Glory

We may say that it is ‘natural’ for a person to wish to see God’s glory. Because Man was made in the image and likeness of God and is the glory of God (Gen 1:26; I Cor. 11:7). Man imagines it would be a ‘glorious’ experience. In fact he must see God. The fact that he has rebelled against Him, and has gone against Him does not prevent him from wanting to see God and somehow have something fulfilled in himself which he insists he needs. I Timothy 6:15–16 says this act of fulfilment—of seeing God’s glory—has never happened, and God told Moses that no man could see Him and live. Theophanies frightened the viewers who believed they had seen God (e.g. Manoah and Isaiah), thinking they must die. Idolatry was devised in order to see divine glory, but idols are made *out* of the creation: they do not *make* the creation.

There is a legitimate desire to see God and His glory, and this is expressed in many of the Psalms. However, this is expressed by those within the covenant, and they are content with the views they have of God. Longing for God is shown in Psalms such as 34, 40, 42, 63 and 84. Other Psalms praise God for His work in creation, in His release of Israel from Egypt and in His other deeds. Israel had many views of God and saw something of His glory. Even so, there was always that hunger to have a wider view of it, and it is in the New Testament that we see more of the Divine glory.

Christ is the glory of God as we see in John 1:14; Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:3 and other places. He claimed to have come from God and to have revealed Him. He knew and spoke the words of God. So then *it was Christ’s humanity by which we came to know the nature of God*. This is the principle we intend to follow when we pursue the knowledge of the unity of God, or as we now propose to discuss God as Unity-in-Trinity. There are no high metaphysics by which we can come to understand the nature of God for such are the philosophical way of reasoning about deity, but Jesus was called ‘Emmanuel’ or ‘God with us’ (Matt. 1:23: cf. Isa. 7:14). ‘The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us,’ ‘he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh,’ ‘he was born of woman, born under the law,’ and he as ‘the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature’.

Thus it is to his humanity—‘the word become flesh’—that we look in order to be conducted to the reality of the Divine unity—the Trinity itself. What we are trying to say is that when we try by some high kind of speculative theology which is itself almost philosophy, or endeavour by mystical knowledge and exercises to ‘climb the ladder directly to God, then we cannot succeed. It is what the Son tells us (John 8:40; 14:10, etc. and what he shows us in his relationship with the Father, as also by what he does of the Father’s will (John 5:19ff.; 9:14; 14:10; 17:1-5) is the witness (John 18:37) which brings us into the truth of the Father. The Son reveals the Father (John 1:18; 14:6–7; Matt. 11:27) , as also the Father reveals the Son (John 6:44, 45, 65; Matt. 11:27. We have also seen that the Holy Spirit reveals the Father and the Son (cf. John 16:12–15).

### **Coming to Understand the Trinity: Being in Communion**

It is clear to us through these studies that there are three Persons in one Godhead. What is not as clear is how three Persons can constitute one Godhead, when God to be One must have one

centre of consciousness. If there are three centres of consciousness then uniting the three must constitute Tritheism, and if there is one centre of consciousness and what we call ‘modes of Godhead’ be Father, Son and Spirit then we would appear to have the heresy of Modalism, also known as Sabellianism.

The answer lies in the fact that God is Father. Paul said (I Cor. 8:4–6),

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that ‘an idol has no real existence,’ and that ‘there is no God but one.’ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven and on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things and for whom all things exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things and through whom we exist.

What we must start with is the fact that ‘there is one God, the Father’. As Paul says, ‘from whom are all things, and for whom all things exist.’ The Son is from the Father. Theologians call this ‘the eternal generation of the Son’—a concept difficult for us to conceive since for us generation happens at a point in time. There never was when the Son was not the Son, for it follows that God could never have been Father if there had not always been the Son. The Son has always been because God is Father. Likewise the Holy Spirit has proceeded from the Father. Some theologians say he has proceeded from the Father and the Son, and some that he has proceeded from the Father, through the Son.

What matters to us is that the three have the one conscious centre of being since God is Father and all generation has come from Him. If we use a human analogy we will not be able to comprehend this, but if we use the word ‘communion’—i.e. ‘com-union’ then we will allow for one centre of consciousness since God is love, and yet allow for the Father being the Father, the Son being the Son and the Spirit being the Spirit. God cannot be love and be Father unless the Son is the Son of His love (Col. 1:13) and the Spirit is ‘the Spirit of love’ (Rom. 15:30).

If we hold to what we have said above—that what we know of the Father is what we see via the humanity of Christ—then the high-priestly prayer of John 17 shows us that the Persons have unity by their communion, and communion is utter unity, but not as we account unity—an agreeable form of oneness which is not necessarily utter oneness. Jesus prayed,

I do not pray for these only but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

Before we try to distil the principle of communion from these wonderful words, we must remember that Man as created must have known utter oneness with God, albeit that that oneness had never been tested. Because of the fall—even given in the regeneration of our humanity—utter communion with God does not come naturally. Utter union with God would be full communion. It would mean that likewise we would have utter communion with our fellow believers—the other members of Christ’s body and whilst in principle this is organically and functionally so, we know how easily—and naturally—we tend to withdraw from such inter-surrender of our beings. That is why we limit, in our thinking, even the communion of the three Persons of the Trinity. The Generator of the Son and the Spirit is the Father, and they can never be without generation, never have a mind which is not the Father’s even though they have been given the differentiations of Son and Spirit, and know the differentiation of the Father’s fatherhood.

We say, then that each Person of the Triune Godhead is ‘other-Persons-centred’, i.e. is turned outward to the other members. Even ‘other-Persons-centred’ is not a sufficient term: the three Persons are other-Persons-*Concentred*’. This principle is really enunciated in Philippians 2:1–9 where the source of unity was Christ and the Spirit. The Philippians were enjoined, ‘in humility count others better than yourselves’, and ‘Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also<sup>1</sup> to the interests of others.’ For human beings to have this ‘mind of Christ’ would be for them to have the mind of God, i.e. His wisdom in planning the whole counsel of His will for the good of His creation, and in particular for Man whom He created in His own image.

### **Communion is Love and Unity**

When we speak about fellowship which is the same word as communion—*koinonia*—we think of people coming together, and seeking to one. When we talk about unity we think of separate entities coming together and seeking to be one. With God this is not the case. The Son has always been in the Father, and the Spirit in the Father and the Son and in that way they are one. Their communion does not come out of a voluntary union which then becomes communion. They have ever been one: they have ever been love: they have ever been in communion. We have no earthly analogue that parallels this Divine communion. In order that we might know God, God has set out in His wisdom to bring us to communion with one another and with Himself. To do this He planned to reveal Himself. He planned to reveal the inner communion of the three Persons. How, then would it possible for us to know this? Why are we even, at this point in time, speaking about such a thing? The answer must be that God has revealed it, and primarily in the incarnation of His only Son.

### **God’s Revelation of Himself Through the Incarnation of the Son**

We have noted a number of things already and mainly that God has ever sought to reveal Himself. For this He has used a number of special media, so much so that we can come to know the Son through the Father, the Father through the Son, and both of them through the Spirit. What we now seek to see is the relationship that the Father, the Son and the Spirit have in their unity of Godhead. As we have seen, the passage of John 17:20–22 speaks of the fact that the Father and the Son are in each other,

I do not pray for these only but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

Whilst we take this as a statement of fact we wish to see how this principle worked out through the incarnation of Christ. It happens this way: The Son in his humanity so related to the Father, that as we see this relationship we see the communion of the two, especially as we see how the Father related to the Son in his humanity. If we try to get behind this relationship with and from the man Christ Jesus—the Son of God—then we will strike great difficulty. That is, if we are trying to work through some metaphysical scheme to get an understanding of the three Persons being one in communion, then we will find ourselves baffled. We must see all we see from the Son living out his human life in relationship with the Father, and what

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<sup>1</sup> Some translations omit this ‘also’, since the ‘not only’ covers this thought (cf. *RSV* and *NRSV*)

will come to us will be humanly understandable—at least noetically—even if we find it incredible and miss understanding it at the personal relational level..

Incarnation is the Way God Intended to Go

It is clear from Philippians 2:1–8 that God became Man in Christ, and this was always the intention of the Father. Thus with Romans 8:1–2; John 1:14, 19; !! Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3; 2:14ff. we see that God expresses Himself truly in the incarnation. Whilst this was ‘for us men and our salvation’, it was equally to reveal the nature of the Godhead, the Triune relationships, the communion of the three Persons, and their nature of unity and love, since—in fallen human experience—there is no equivalent. In one sense and one sense only, we can say that for God to become Man was for God to be truly God; that Man was made in the image of God so that He—God—could become Man. This was always part of His perfect wisdom. P.T. Forsyth’s comment is here appropriate,

Let us escape, then, from the crude notions of finite and infinite, of weakness and omnipotence. If the infinite God was so constituted that he could not live as finite man then He was not infinite. There was a limitation to that extent of his power’s infinity, and one which He Himself did not impose. But if He did live as finite man, then so far was it from being a limitation of His freedom (except externally and formally) that it was the greatest exercise of it. It was the greatest act of moral freedom ever done. The Godhead that freely made man was never so free as in becoming man. His self-limitation was so far from impairing his being that it became the mightiest act that we know. It was not limitation so much as concentration. Was Christ less mighty for his work when he was straitened till it be accomplished? It was the most condensed expression of holy love. It was holy love acting at a point once for all.

### **The Hierarchical Order of the Triune Godhead**

If we can grasp the fact of superordination and subordination in the Godhead, and if we can understand it adequately, then we will be able to proceed with our understanding of the divine relationship of the three Persons in the one-subject conscious Trinity, and this will be of immense importance to us as the people of God. It is not curiosity which drives us to understand the Godhead, but necessity so we will know our humanity as it has been created in God’s image. What we must keep firmly in mind is that there has always be an *order* in the Divine Community, i.e. the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our ideas of order or hierarchy are tainted with views which come from our human [sinful] fallenness, i.e. think that any order in which there may be precedence of one over another is to be rejected. The word ‘priest’ is *hierus*, the temple *hieron*, the high priest *arkierus*—from *arke* and *hierus*—and so a hierarchy is a *sacred* order in which something comes down from the level above. It comes down in order to assist those below it. In Greece the priest was called a hierophant and as such was an official expounder of mysteries or revelations, these being known as hierophanies. Whilst today we use the term hierarchy to denote any entity which contains orders of persons, usually of a functional nature, yet if we lose its sacred connotation we lose a true view of hierarchy.

Whilst, for the moment are subject is primarily the Godhead, yet hierarchy—if it is the order of the Godhead—must be the order for Man made in the image of God. We have seen that the relationships between the Three Persons and their Unity as One God would be unknowable for us were it not for the revelation God has given us, and especially in and by His Son and through His Spirit. It is an extraordinary thing that human beings are permitted, let alone moved personally by God, to view these relationships. Then it is even more extraordinary that through the gift of adoption—following the liberating action of the atonement—that human beings are reconciled fully by God, to Himself made one with Him since their lives are hidden with Christ in Him. Thus the powerful truth of the Triune God

dwelling in the persons of His people, and they dwelling in the Triune Godhead. Via the *imago dei* resultant relationships must emerge and they are the only true relationships human beings can know since they derive from and comport with the law of Christ—the true law of God. Of course the reality of Divine love (*agape*) is the great power by which true relationships obtain (I John 4:11,12,19).

What we must keep in mind is that these relationships do not come as prescriptions. They are not legal requirements or even specified roles although they often appear to be. They issue from the archetype of the Godhead. They are also linked with the principle of hierarchy. Speaking of the *imago Dei* Thielicke (op. cit. p.155) says,

It is characteristic that the various references to the divine likeness in Genesis (1:26; 5:1; 9:6; cf. also Wis. 2:23; Sir. 17:3<sup>1</sup>) do not give statements of ontological content but restrict themselves to these hierarchical relations, to the position of man in the total cosmos. This is true even of a verse like Genesis 5:1, where the concept of the divine likeness is, as it were a preamble to the first genealogy in the Bible, the one that ends with Noah.

### **Ontological Hierarchy-Divine and Human**

When we talk about ontological hierarchy we must keep in mind that the division of the Trinity into two categories—ontological and economic—is not satisfactory. God is not subsistent without being actus. We must keep in mind the corresponding actional nature of the *imago Dei*. We now take one or two hierarchies that came into being at creation. In Genesis 1:14–18, i.e. the hierarchy of sun and moon, and Man's rule over creation. As man was to rule over all living creatures, so each of these was to rule—the sun by day and the moon by night. What was the place and effect of these hierarchs? The answer is: they had a task to perform—a vocational task of goodness—to give light, and to mark out days and nights. There is also the sense that they were to keep creation within the prescribed boundaries of their rule. If the creation of man and woman in hierarchical order were such, then the order would have been purely with a view to ruling creation for its own good, and presumably, for God's glory (cf. Psa. 8:3ff.; Psa. 19:1ff.). It is difficult to escape this principle as we read the text. Linked with this is the whole matter of the creation being subjected to futility through the fall of man and—in particular—the curse upon the earth. The rehabilitation of the sons of God into 'the liberty of the glory' will also rehabilitate the creation: hence man's hierarchical authority must have been meant only for good (Gen. 1:31).

If there is a Divine hierarchy, and there is a human hierarchy then each can be considered, but we do have a hierarchy that involves both God and man in I Corinthians 11:3, and this should be helpful in establishing the principle of hierarchy, 'But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.' The order is interesting. It starts with Christ and ends with God. It is not stated as a descending order even though it can be seen that way. Why is it set out in this way? Because Paul is talking of the order of a man and his wife. The man does not stand alone as superordinate to the wife. He stands under Christ, and this alters matters considerably. If he were standing alone in his headship then the wife would be immediately

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<sup>1</sup> Wisdom 2:23 says, 'For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity'. Sirach 17:1–4 says, 'The Lord created man out of the earth, and turned him back to it again. He gave to men a few days, a limited time, but granted them authority over the things upon the earth. He endowed them with strength like his own, and placed them in his own image. He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds'.

and only subject to him and his approach would be conditioned by his autonomous headship. As Christ is his head his effective headship is of his Lord. Likewise Christ is not standing outside the Father in exercising his Lordship of the man. The wife is not outside her husband since Man is man and woman—a unitive entity—face-to-face. Both are standing together *in the imago Dei* and as the *imago Dei*—as active in vocation fulfilling the will of God, being—as one—purposive.

### The True Nature of Hierarchy

In human most hierarchies are not of the sacred kind. They do not exist in *communion*, i.e. love and unity. They are often devised by Man, are political, utilitarian, used for commercial purposes and the word ‘communion’ is foreign. Thus man-wife, parent-children, employer-employee hierarchies—to name only a few—are utilitarian, functional structures. *True hierarchy is a relation-functional entity of love whose members are in communion, i.e. in love and unity, and who are purposive in that they are about doing that will which is wisdom i.e. the outworking of love.* If we see the Persons of the Godhead in this way, and understand what has been called the *perichoresis-circumincessio*<sup>1</sup>—i.e. the interpenetration of the three Persons, and the circulatory movement of their giving to one another, especially out of their differentiations—then we begin to see the true nature of the Triune Godhead<sup>2</sup>.

### The Incarnation the True Expression of the Godhead in Communion

We notice with hierarchy<sup>3</sup> that the goodness—if we can use that term—comes down through the order, and all members are in communion with one another, in one another, and for one another. The Divine hierarchy expresses itself in the Incarnation, for the Divine communion—with its *perichoresis-circumincessio*—‘comes down to Man in the incarnation. Again we emphasize that the incarnation is not an end in itself, not an entity on its own, not something to be worshipped as such, for the incarnation was ‘with a view to’, i.e. it was ‘for us men and our salvation’, and it was for fulfilling the wisdom of God. Yet it is in this incarnation that we begin to understand the Persons of the Godhead, yet the Three as the One, but their unity also delineating the character of each Person. Thus Jonathan Edwards says,

... let it be considered that the whole Divine office is supposed truly and properly to subsist in each of the three, viz., God and his understanding and love, and that there is a wonderful union between them that they are after an ineffable and inconceivable manner, one in another, so that one hath another, and they have communion in one another and are as predicable one of another; as Christ said of Himself and the Father, I am in the Father and the Father is in me, so it may be said concerning all the persons in the Trinity, the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, the Holy Ghost is in the Father and the Father is in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost is in the Son and the Son in the Holy Ghost, and the Father understands because the Son who is the divine understanding is in Him, so the Son loves because the

<sup>1</sup> The *perichoresis-circumincessio* is a theological way of talking about the inter-communion of the three Persons of the Triune Godhead. Obviously it has its weaknesses in that it speaks of the Persons giving and receiving from each other, when in fact this is a presupposition of pure *communion*. However it helps us, on the human level, to know how to go about communion, providing we do not see communion as a technique rather than a relational state, a being of entity.

<sup>2</sup> In another place, later, we will have occasion to see that everything is in an hierarchical order. As with the Divine Family—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—so with the family on earth from the father, mother, and children in descending order of age. So too in all society. We will see that as hierarchy is Divine love so that divine love is intended to move through the earthly orders, and give them their correct place and function. To can be shown, I believe, that there is no free-lance love. Love is commanded—love to God, to parents, to one another, one’s neighbours and even one’s enemies. Love cannot truly subsist in an equalitarian structure—if such could ever be devised in practice. It is the order of the Godhead, and so of all humanity, and of the creation. We find that what we call ‘nature’ is hierarchical in its orders.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix I, ‘The Triune Hierarchy’ for discussion on of the Trinitarian hierarchy.

Holy Ghost is in Him and proceeds from Him, so the Holy Ghost or the divine essence subsisting is divine, but understands because the Son the divine idea is in Him. Understanding may be predicated of this love because it is the love of the understanding both objectively and subjectively.

Of the act of incarnation *not* being humiliation P.T. Forsyth says,

This self-renouncing, self-retracting act of the Son's will, this reduction of Himself from the supreme end to be the supreme means for the soul, is no negation of his nature; it is the opposite, it is the last assertion of his nature as love; it is no negation of his freedom; it is rather the freest energy of his whole will. He never willed anything so mightily and freely as the subjection, the renunciation of self-will to the holy requirement of God. It is the concentrated omnipotence of love, and not of mere power, that underlies his earthly existence. And it is incessant obedience. The whole detail of that earthly existence is the expression of the act of will by which, in his omnipotent love, he entered the world . . . To appear and act as Redeemer, to be born, suffer and die, was a mightier act of Godhead than lay in all the creation, preservation, and blessing of the world. It was openly in the exercise of perfect divine fulness (and therefore power) that Christ could empty and humble himself to the servant he became. As the humiliation grew so grew the exaltation of the power and person that achieved it. It was an act of such might that it was bound to break through the servant form, and take at last for all men's worship the lordly name.

and Karl Barth adds,

For, according to the New Testament, it is the case that the humility of this man is an act of obedience, not a capricious choice of lowliness, suffering and dying . . . but a free choice made in recognition of an appointed order, in execution of will which imposed itself authoritatively upon Him, which was intended to be obeyed. If, then, God is in Christ, if what the Man Jesus does is God's own work, this act of the self-emptying and self-humbling of Jesus Christ as an act of obedience cannot be alien to God. But in this case we have to see here the other and inner side of the mystery of the divine nature of Christ and therefore of the nature of the true God—that He Himself is also able and free to render obedience.

Barth then says the incarnation, and the salvation it effects through the Cross is the intention of the Triune God, and the Son is free in what he does,

For, according to the New Testament, it is the case that the humility of this man is an act of obedience, not a capricious choice of lowliness, suffering and dying . . . but a free choice made in recognition of an appointed order, in execution of will which imposed itself authoritatively upon Him, which was intended to be obeyed. If, then, God is in Christ, if what the Man Jesus does is God's own work, this act of the self-emptying and self-humbling of Jesus Christ as an act of obedience cannot be alien to God. But in this case we have to see here the other and inner side of the mystery of the divine nature of Christ and therefore of the nature of the true God—that He Himself is also able and free to render obedience.

We can conclude then that the incarnation of the Son was that which issued out of the will of the God, primarily being the will of the Father, and then, by communion, the will that the Son and the Spirit desired to follow, and to share in the wisdom of the Father, and so of the Godhead. For this reason we must go back to the beginning, retracing our steps through much that we said in the beginning of our writing, and see the three Persons working so that the 'counsel of His will' should come to fulfilment.

### **The Place of the Spirit in the Incarnation and Ministry of the Son**

We cannot think of the Son's coming to reveal (i) the nature of God as Father (ii) the nature of the internal relationships so that (iii) God's people should live by means of, and within, the Godhead as the Godhead also lives in them, without at the same time thinking of the ministry

of the Spirit to aid the Son *to* incarnation and then *in* the incarnation—the processes of his life, ministry and redemptive work.

Key passages to help us to see the work of the Spirit in the incarnation are those contained within the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel. Prophetic of the incarnation are the angel's song regarding the birth and ministry of John the Baptist (1:14–17), the prophecy of the angel to Mary regarding her conception of Jesus (1:26–38) the inspired utterance by Mary of the Magnificat (1:46–55), the Benedictus of Zechariah (1:67–79), the message of the angels in 2:8–14), the words and actions of Simeon (2:25–35), and the prophetic word of Anna (2:36–38). By use of the prophetic word, and through the messages of angels, the Holy Spirit informs us that the incarnation of the Son in the mystery of conception proceeds from him. Whilst the Holy Spirit is not mentioned explicitly in all of these events he is certainly the agent of the Father in them. In particular we look at 1:30–38, especially at verse 35,

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High  
will overshadow you;  
therefore the child to be born  
will be called holy,  
the son of God.

We have seen other Scriptures which speak of the incarnation of the Son such as John 1:14; Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4; I Timothy 4:16 and Hebrews 2:14–18 where it would seem the initiator of the incarnation is primarily the Father. What Paul calls 'the mystery of our religion' (I Tim. 3:16) is the work of the Father and the Spirit together—as in Luke 1:35—which brings about the incarnation of the Son.

The work of the Spirit in the incarnated Son is shown in the growing of the child Jesus (Luke 1:80; 2:52), in his baptism where the Spirit anoints him (Luke 3:21–22 and other references) so that his ministry is by the Spirit (Luke 4:18–19) especially as he declares the Kingdom of God (Matt. 12:28). His offering up of himself in the sacrifice of the Cross (Heb. 9:14), his resurrection (Rom. 8:11; cf. 1:4) and his ascension (cf. Rom. 1:4; Eph. 1:19–20) were all by the power of the Spirit.

Often in trying to preserve the deity of the incarnate Son some have sought to show that certain acts of Jesus sprang from his deity, and certain within the realm of his humanity. It is better to say that all that Jesus did he did in dependence upon the Father, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Whilst it is true that he was unique amongst men in that he was God's appointed and anointed Messiah, yet it is also true that the same power of the Spirit would not be withheld from any human person who would live wholly by faith in God. The mystery of deity and manhood existing in the one person is beyond our solving: nor do we need to solve it, but we must insist that the Son required the Spirit 'without measure' to become incarnate, and fulfil the life ministry, redemptive work, resurrection and ascension that the Father had appointed for him.

When it comes to the 'how' of the work of the Spirit we find that it is hidden for us. I Timothy 3:16 calls it all 'the mystery of our religion' and describes the events and their outcome and not simply the modes of those events.

Seeing, then, the the fact and purpose of the incarnation through the work of the Father and the Spirit along with the obedience and submission of the Son we are now free to turn to the Persons and works of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This will aid us in understanding the Triune Godhead, for—as we will see—the three work as One, and their goal or *telos* for Man and creation is that for which they work together.



# *1. The Person and Work of the Father*

**Introductory Note.** This and the two following chapters will deal with the Persons and Works of the three Members of the Triune Godhead.

One of the best places for us to begin to speak of the person and work—or works—of the Father is I Corinthians 8:4–6 in which he says ‘there is no God but one’, and ‘for us there is one God, the Father.’ This helps us to see that the Father is the initiator of all works—‘God the Father, *from* whom are all things and *for* whom we exist’. The Father is here distinguished from ‘one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things and *through* whom we exist’. The works of both members of the Triune Godhead are distinguished yet not separated.

Down through Christian history it is the confusion of the Persons and their works which has caused so many heresies and so much consequent wrong action or *praxis*. This is partly because the three Persons of the Godhead never act apart from one another. They act together and this sometimes makes it difficult to see what is indeed the work of each Person. As we have seen in our former notes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all work in creation, redemption and the final restoration, unification, filling up, sanctification and glorification of all things. We can make a simple proposition that the Father is the Initiator of all things, the Son is Mediator of them and the Holy Spirit is the Agent of them. It is not that the Scriptures explicitly nominate the Father, the Son and the Spirit in this way, but such is certainly inferred. A study of I Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15–16; Hebrews 1:2; 2:10; Genesis 1:2–3; Psalm 104:29–30 will show this.

## **God the Father as Creator<sup>1</sup>**

The first statement we can make about God is that He is ‘a faithful creator’ (I Pet. 4:19), that is (a) He will only make creation that is essentially good, (b) He will bring that creation to its ultimate perfection (cf. Rev. 21:1ff.). We now look at the work of the Father in creation,

(i) *His prime work was creation* (Rev. 4:11; 11:36). Notice that redemption is a restorative work, eg. II Corinthians 5:17; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 21:1ff.; cf. Romans 11:33–36).<sup>2</sup>

(ii) *He created a true, functional and appropriate creation*. See Genesis chapters 1–2, and in particular Genesis 1:31 with Ecclesiastes 3:11; I Timothy 4:4; I Corinthians 10:26.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that generally the term ‘God’ in the NT is used for the Father. Jesus is spoken of as ‘the Son of God’, and the Holy Spirit as ‘the Spirit of God’. In Hebrews chapters 1 and 2 this distinction is clearly made of the Father and the Son in regard to creation and redemption. In I John 4:7–19 the distinction is made in regard to redemption—and so on.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst in this study we do not go in particular to the purpose of God for Man, we must note here that His ultimate purpose is not to restore man to his original Adamic state, but had always been to bring him to a glory that he did not even know in his state of innocence. I Corinthians 2:6–14 spells out the ultimate glory Man was to know. With Man in mind we also have to think of the rest of creation, and of God’s purpose to bring all creation—including Man—to ultimate sanctification, glorification and perfection.

(iii) *A functional creation is an orderly creation.* See Acts 14:15f for orderly times and seasons (cf. Gen. 8:22; Psalm 104).

(iv) *He created a purposive creation,* ie. it is not only ontological (Gen. 1:31; Eccles. 3:11) but teleological (Proverbs 16:4; Revelation 21:1ff.; cf. Acts 17:26–27)<sup>1</sup>.

(v) *He created all nations through one man, Adam* so that Man has his true being in God, and the boundaries of the habitations of the nations is also set (Acts 17:26ff.).

(vii) *The creation before the curse was always benevolent, and remains essentially so,* even though the curse is upon it. Romans 8:18–25 speaks of the futility into which creation was placed, as it related to the curse but creation itself has no evil of itself. See I Corinthians 10:26; Acts 15:10.

(viii) *The creation consists of things celestial and things terrestrial.* There are things ‘seen’ and things ‘unseen’, but they are all of the one creation. Celestial creatures are linked with Man (Heb. 1:13, 14)<sup>2</sup>.

### **God as Creator-Father**

(i) It can be asserted that God created all human beings as His children (Luke 3:38; Acts 17:28). Making them in His own image and likeness can indicate filial likeness to His Fatherhood as can be seen from Genesis 5:1–3. Note the statement, ‘God is the Father of all human beings, but not all human beings are the children of God’<sup>3</sup>. Our previous studies have shown that ‘there is one God, the Father’ and that is the nature of the first Person of the Triune Godhead. It was impossible for God to create and not be Father as He created. He created as a Father. That does not necessarily mean He created Man as a son, but for Man to be in the likeness and image of God (Gen 1:26–27; I Cor. 11:7) tells us Man is the closest creature to God the Father, The New Testament makes it clear that Man—redeemed Man—is the closest creature to God, and that his sonship is not figurative but ontological by reason of regeneration. This surely makes his original creation a filial one.

(ii) Genesis 4:26 and 6:1–2 should be studied closely. The idea that angels—who are certainly called ‘sons of God’ in the OT—can cohabit with female human creatures, ie. creatures celestial and terrestrial are cohabitable with one another would seem untenable. I John 3:10f. gives us the indication that Cain was a child of the devil and Abel a child of God, so that Cain was going against creational nature, and Abel was going with it. This could account for the terms ‘sons of God’ and ‘daughters of men’ in Genesis 6:2. This being so God created as Father. See again, Luke 3:38 and Acts 17:28.

(iii) In Israel God is certainly spoken of as being ‘like a father’ (Psa. 103:13), but He is more than a figurative Father to the nation. Although the term is never explicitly used He is

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<sup>1</sup> As our Study proceeds we will see that redemption was also His purpose before time.

<sup>2</sup> Note that all angels have functional operations to perform. This is seen in the visitations of angels to men in the OT and the NT. The book of Revelation specifically designates the particular functions of certain angels. See also *What's All This About Angels?* (NCTM).

<sup>3</sup> Some have spoken of God originating human beings and in this sense only is He ‘Father’, but this is to beg the question. If in any sense they are His children, then that must pertain to His Fatherhood. Whilst regeneration is restorative it is restorative to what was, so that it is not a new creational miracle done over and above the [supposed] non-filial nature of created man.

‘Covenant-Father’ to the nation. The difficulty is that God is also spoken of a Creator in Isaiah and generally this means ‘Creator of Israel’ so that ‘Father’ and ‘Creator’ may refer to Him as Father and Creator of Israel or possible as Father and Creator of the world or may mean both. Two references which point back even before time may be Isaiah 63:16 and 64:8.

(iv) Certainly God is Father to Israel. The following references need to be closely examined: Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:6; are two clear verses regarding God being Father to Israel. The New Testament also interprets Old Testament texts in the light of Fatherhood (a) I Peter 1:14–17 uses Deuteronomy 7:6 and Leviticus 11:44., (b) Exodus 4:22 and Hosea 11:1 speak of Israel corporately as ‘My son’, and then Hosea 1:10 should be read in the New Testament in the light of Romans 9:26, and II Corinthians 6:17–18, (c) Numbers 12:7 speaks of Israel as ‘my house’, and Hebrews 3:1–7 (cf. John 8:34–36) speaks of Jesus as ‘the builder of the house’, (d) Acts 17:28–29 interprets Jeremiah 2:26–27 is regard to God being Father, and the idols wrongly being given that office by their devotees, (e) Jeremiah 3:4, 14, 19 speak clearly of God being Father to Israel, (f) Both Malachi 1:6 (cf. Isa. 1:2-3) and Malachi 2:20 should be read together regarding God’s Fatherhood to Israel.

(v) When we come to the New Testament there is no question of God not being Father, not only to Israel but to all who come to Him by the Son (John 1:14, 19; 14:6; Matt. 11:27; Gal. 3:26). It is to such who ‘call on God as Father’ (I Pet. 1:17), that Peter tells ‘You can trust your soul to a faithful creator’ (I Pet. 4:19), ie. expecting them to know Him Who is Father as Him who is Creator. All the redeemed are sons, and in the Book of the Revelation this thought is strongly emphasised (cf. Rev. 7:1–8; 14:1; 22:4) and the Book is concerned very much with God as Creator (cf. 4:11, etc.) and with Him as Covenant-God (cf. 11:19) and at the same time with Him as Redeemer and the One Who causes the regeneration (recreation) of all things. In fact the Book of the Revelation is the revelation that He is ‘a faithful Creator’ since He causes His creation to arrive at its noble renewal. This is the thought also of Romans 8:18–25.

### **The Creator-Father as the Covenant-Making God**

We have partly dealt with this above, ie. that God is Creator, that He is Father and so Father-Creator and the this is related to His being the Covenant-Father of Israel. As we are talking about the person and work of God as Father we need to see that covenant is one of His works. When we look at covenant we see from Genesis 12:1ff. and throughout Genesis that His covenant with Abraham is a personal one with that patriarch, but also that it is universal ‘in you seed shall all the earth be blessed’, for the nations that bless themselves by Abraham shall be blessed. Next we see that the universal covenant was—so to speak—funnelled down into the covenant with Israel—often called ‘the Mosaic covenant’, and that within that covenant was the Palestinian covenant, ie it was to do with the land which God had given to Israel. Then, within Israel came a broadening of understanding that the covenant was for all nations, hence the prophecies of Genesis 3:15 and 49:10 find their widening in prophecies of Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Davidic king, Righteous Branch, Suffering Servant<sup>1</sup>—and so on. Typical of all these intimations is Isaiah 42:6–7 and 49:6—the Servant is to be one who restores the preserved of Israel and is to be a light to lighten the nations, and this prophecy is repeated by Simeon in Luke 2:29–32.

The matter of the covenant including the Gentiles is brought out in Zechariah’s Spirit-inspired ‘Benedictus’ in Luke 1:68–79. So then we find the opening of the New Covenant

<sup>1</sup> For all of these titles and offices see the NCTM publication *The Person and Work of Christ*.

predicted by Jeremiah 31:31–34 and other OT prophets. Matthew 26:28, Galatians chapter 3 and the Epistle to the Hebrews discuss this ‘better covenant’. The outcome of the covenant is what we call the *telos* (the goal of history) when ‘the sons of the covenant’ (Acts 3:25) are glorified.

So then the covenant is a relational work of the Father, but of course at the same time is also one of the Son and the Spirit. Since *covenant* is always linked with *redemption* we now proceed to see the work of the Father in redemption.

### **The Creator-Father-Covenant-God as the Author of Redemption**

The work of redemption arises from His Being as Creator-Father for (i) He will be ‘a faithful Creator’ (I Pet. 4:19) and rescue creation from the effects of the fall of Man (cf. Rom. 8:18–25; Rev. 21:1ff.), and (ii) He will rescue Man from the effects of the fall, by saving him from his depravity, from judgement, and eternal death, and by bringing him out into eternal life.

It is clear from such passages as Ephesians 1:3–8 and II Timothy 1:9–10 (cf. I Cor. 2:6–10) that God had planned before time to redeem Man. This is borne out by I Peter 1:2; 1:18–20 and Revelation 13:8. Isaiah 63:16 emphasises this.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Father Was the Initiator in Redemption**

- (i) He planned salvation before time, and this was ‘the counsel of His will’,
- (ii) He sent the Son: 40 times in John’s Gospel are the verbs ‘to send’ used. As in John’s Gospel so in I John 4: 10, 14 it is ‘the Father’ who sends. This is also shown in the Epistles, eg. Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 10:5–7<sup>2</sup>.
- (iii) The Father initiated the Cross, I John 4:9–10; Romans 3:25, and in this it is He Who made Christ to be sin (II Cor. 5:21; Isa 53:4–6, 10) by laying on him ‘the iniquity of us all’. Thus the Father ‘judged sin in the flesh’ (Rom. 8:3).
- (iv) It must be seen that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses against them’.

### ***The Father Sent the Spirit to Apply Redemption***<sup>3</sup>

- (i) The sending of the Spirit was promised by the prophets (Ezek. 36:24–28; Joel 2:28). In the New Testament the Spirit is known as ‘the promise of the Father’ (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4) and as ‘the promised Spirit’ (Eph. 1:13–14, etc.). In John’s Gospel it was the Father Who was to send the Spirit (chs. 14–16) and He sent him at Pentecost
- (ii) The Spirit was essential for human understanding of the truth of redemption (John 16:7–15; cf. Rom. 8:), and well as for applying it to humanity. Thus repentance, faith, forgiveness, justification, regeneration, sanctification—which are all elements of redemption—are worked out in the lives of persons through the Holy Spirit.
- (iii) The Father goes on supplying the Spirit. This is seen in Galatians 3:–5, especially verse 5. Being continually filled with Spirit is from the Father’s giving. Thus all the life of the new community is by the supply of the Spirit.

<sup>1</sup> Readers are referred to *The Day of the Spirit* (NCTM, 1985) pp. 12-14 for nine elements of God’s purpose before the foundation of the world. Briefly they are (i) the chosen people of God, (ii) chosen to be holy, (iii) chosen to have salvation, (iv) chosen to be His children (v) chosen to have eternal life, (vi) chosen to enter the kingdom, (vii) chosen to be glorified, (viii) whole creation to be brought into unity by Christ, (ix) all evil will be judged.

<sup>2</sup> In Hebrews it is not so much that the Son is sent as that he appears. The Father prepares a body for the Son. The two are in agreement and salvific work, but there is no doubt that it is the Father who initiates ‘the better covenant’.

<sup>3</sup> See later section on ‘The Person and Work of the Spirit’ and also the NCTM publication under the same title.

### *The Father's Work of Fatherhood In the Believer and the New Community*

Without doubt the work of redemption is with a view to our becoming human sons of the Father. This is seen clearly in Galatians 4:4–7 and Romans 8:14–17. It is spoken of in Romans 9:4 as having belonged to Israel, and now it belongs to the new community, in Christ. The Father sent the Son to reveal Him as the Father (John 1:18; 14:6; Matt. 11:27, etc.), and the revelation came primarily in the Cross, though in 'the days of his flesh' he revealed the Father by his person and work. The Son was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father (Rom. 6:4) and seated by Him at his right hand (Eph. 1:20f.). The Father Himself is continually 'above all, through all and in all' (Eph. 4:6) which is what keeps the church in unity. The following are some of the continuing works of the Father,

- (i) The Father transfers His elect 'from the powers of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love' (Col. 1:13). The Kingdom is that of the Father and Christ (Eph. 5:5; cf. Rev. 11:15).
  - (ii) The church is *in* the Father (I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1), ie. its life and security derive from the Father, doubtless through the Son and the Spirit.
  - (iii) Grace, mercy, peace and love are continually supplied by the Father to His children (cf. salutations of the Epistles; Eph. 6:23). All blessings keep coming from the Father (Eph. 1:3ff. cf. II Cor. 1:3), hence He is the inspirer of thanksgiving in His children (Eph. 5:4, 20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 1:12; 3:17).
  - (iv) Coming to know God as Father causes the sons to walk in the Spirit (Rom. 8:14; cf. 5:16, 18, 25-26). The sons are inspired to imitate the Father (Eph. 5:1-2) by walking in love.
- The Works of the Father With the Son and the Church

History is proceeding according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11; 3:9–11) so that through the Son the Father is unifying all things (Eph. 1:9–10), filling all things (Eph. 1:23; 4:10) and reconciling all things (Col. 1:19–21). He is putting down all the enemies of Christ and Man and making the Son head over all things (Eph. 1:22; I Cor. 15:24–29; Heb. 9:12). He has sealed His children with His mark (Rev. 7:3; 14:1; 22:4). Through the Son He is destroying the enemies called the red dragon, the beast, the false prophet and Babylon. He is setting up all things for His children, in His home (John 14:1; Heb. 3:1–7). All history will climax in the triumph of the Father. That will be when all evil is defeated and judged, when the new heavens and the new earth appear, and when all suffering is finished. The marriage of the Bride and the Lamb will take place, and all the people of God will enter the Holy City and so Him Whose name is marked on their forehead, and they shall see Him face to face.

### **Conclusion to the Person and Work of the Father**

All of this is called 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God' which can only have meaning when all the elect—the sons of God—are conformed to the image of His Son and will therefore be fully partakers of the Divine nature, and be inducted into the mystery of the Triune Godhead and have fellowship with the One God Who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This will be the Family of God before its Father, its Elder Brother, and the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

## ***2. The Person and Work of the Son***

Having spoken of the Person and Work of the Father is virtually to have spoken of the Person and Work of the Son<sup>1</sup>, since Fatherhood presupposes Sonship and Sonship presupposes Fatherhood. We have seen that the Son is said to be eternally generated from the Father, this generation having no beginning and no end, so that as the Father is the First and the Last, the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1:8), so is the Son likewise (Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13). It is clear that Son always was, and from our point of view in time was existent before the foundation of the world. In John 17 he talks of the glory which he had with the Father before the world began (John 17:5; 17:24).

### **The Son and the Work of Creation**

From the following passages it is clear that the Son—also known as ‘the Word’ (Logos) was in the work of creation: John 1:1–4; I Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 1:1–3. We have called him the mediator of creation, but it is clear that nothing was made apart from him. This may accord with John 5:17 where Jesus claim that his Father and always worked and he with Him. The fact that the Word (John 1:1–4; cf. Psalm 33:6; 148:5; Gen. 1:1–3), ie the Son (Col. 1:13–17; Heb. 1:1–3) who became the man Jesus, has taken part in creation, and indeed everything exists *through* him and *unto* him (Col. 1:15–16), ie by him is both upheld and held together, and its ultimate goal is him, tells us the work of the Son before time, and at the beginning of time.

### **The Son Always Working With the Father For the Fulfilment of His Plan**

When Man was created it was in order that he share in the Father’s plan for all history. This is partly indicated in Genesis 1:28f.; Proverbs 16:4 and has been made more explicit in Exodus 19:5–6 and I Peter 2:9–10. Man was—and is—to be a fellow-worker with God (cf. I Cor. 3:9). He could be called in primal time God’s creational fellow-worker and now, since Christ, God’s fellow-redemptional worker. Man’s fall through sin and rebellion means he now works for himself.

In John 5:19 Jesus said, ‘My Father is working still, and I am working.’ When we ask what work God is doing in addition to creating and providing for his creation the answer must be, ‘He is working at salvation history, and the end of that history is the redeemed family of the elect before the Father—a kingdom of priest unto their God, reigning forever.’ The Son continually works with the Father in this plan, as is shown in passages such as I Corinthians 15:24–28; Philippians 2:9–11; Matthew 28:18–20.

### **The Son Always Working in the Old Testament**

We began to see (above) that the Son created along with the Father (John 1:1–3; Col. 1:15–17; I Cor. 8:6). With the Father he also upholds creation (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:16). But the

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller treatment of the subject see NCTM’s *The Person and Work of Christ*.

Son, though not explicitly described as such in the Old Testament, was always working. I Corinthians 10:1ff.; John 12:38–41/Isaiah 6:1–10 give us some indication of this, but since he was slain as the Lamb before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; I Pet. 1:18–20) the sacrifices of the Old Testament only had their efficacy through him (cf. Heb. 9:22; 10:1–4). He was prophesied as the Seed of the woman, the Righteous Branch, the Prophet to come, the Davidic King, the Messiah, the Son of God and the Son of Man, as also the Suffering Servant, and the Holy Spirit was ‘the Spirit of Christ’ within the prophets. Prophecy is also a dynamic work, and so ‘the testimony of Jesus was—and is—the Spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 19:10). Some scholars see Jesus as the ‘Angel of the Lord’ in the Old Testament. All of the Son’s work was to fulfil God’s ‘salvation history’.

### **The Son Always Working in the New Testament**

The Son came willingly—as against the old unwilling Adam—to do the Father’s will, and he rejoiced in doing that will (John 4:34; 5:17ff.; 8:28; 9:4; 10:37; 14:10:11; 17:4; Heb. 10:5–7; Psa. 40:8). What that will was and is, is opened up greatly in the Epistles (eg. Eph. 1:3–14; 3:1–11; I Cor. 2:6–10; Rev. chs 21–22, etc.), as also it can be seen powerfully from the Gospels, the Acts and the Revelation. The following are some of the elements of that willed work of the Father.

#### ***(i) The incarnation of the Son was the great purpose of the Father,***

(a) to reveal him as the true Father-God. John 1:14; 14:6, 10; Matthew 11:27.

(b) to render saving obedience for the salvation of Man: John 3:14–18; I John 3:9; 4:14; Romans 8:1–3; II Corinthians 5:14–21, etc. This obedience has been called,

(1) Active, that is the obedience of Christ from the womb to the Cross was in his obeying the law and will of his Father, and

(2) Passive, ie. he submitted to the work of the Cross to complete the work of salvation. These two forms of obedience—which are really one work—are the theme of Romans 5:12–21. Paul does not see them as two forms. Obedience to him is one work.

#### ***(ii) The work of the Son was to bring Man to sonship of God.***

Above we saw that he came to reveal the Father, but that revelation was to bring the elect into full sonship of God (John 1:14, 18; 14:6; Matt. 11:27; Heb. 2:9–10; Gal. 3:26 etc) Without the Son none can come to the Father.

(a) When we ask ‘What was the purpose of human beings becoming the sons of God?’ the answer is that God has planned for them to be conformed to the image of his Son that he—the Son—might be the first-born among many brethren (Rom. 8:28–30) The work of the Son—as also that of the Father and the Spirit (cf. Gal. 4:4–17; Rom. 8:15–16)—was to shape them into such sonship, and so to bring them into conformation with his own image.

(b) This work involved—and involves—his dwelling in the persons who were his brethren and their dwelling in him. (John 14:23; 15:1–11; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:16f.; Col. 1:27). It also involves his constant ministry for them, ie. to intercede and intervene for them (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:14–16; 7:25; I John 2:2; etc.).

(c) The work of the Father and the Son in bringing many sons—his brethren—to glory (Rom. 8:29; I John 3:1f; cf. I Cor 2:6ff.; Col. 1:27) was to bring Man to the rich inheritance God had planned for him (Rom. 8:17ff.; Gal. 4:7; I Pet. 1:3; cf. Eph. 1:18; etc.).

(d) The climax of this work of the Son was to bring his brethren to ‘the liberty of the glory of the sons of God’ (Rom. 8:22). When God will have conformed his elect to the image of his Son—through the trinitarian work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit—then these sons will be admitted into fellowship with the Godhead. If this seems too great a matter, and too high a calling, and too grand an effecting, then we must remember the following things,

- (1) There is a present indwelling of the Three Persons of the Triune Godhead and the Three Persons in the elect (John 14:15–23; Eph. 4:6; John 17:20–26; I John 3:24; 4: 12–13, 16; John 15:1–11; Matthew 28: 20; Rom. 6:1ff.; II Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Ephes. 3:16; Col. 1:27; II Cor. 1:22; Rom. 5:5; 8:9–11; Gal. 4:5–6; II Tim. 1:14; etc.).
- (2) We have present fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (I John 1:3; I Cor. 1:9; II Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1).
- (3) We are at present partakers of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). The outcome of this will be what is called *theosis*, or the divinising of redeemed Man. Divinising does mean Man will attain deity, but that he will participate in the life of the Triune God. It could not be otherwise since the church is the Bride of Christ the Son, and being married to him must thus be inducted into the life and mystery of the Godhead.

### **Conclusion: The Son is Always Working and Consummates the Plan of God**

We saw the Son worked in creation, in the times of the Old Testament, and in the New Testament in his incarnation, active and passive obedience, is working in his Session at the right hand of God, and in the working principle and action set out in I Corinthians 15:24–28, which is further expanded in the Book of the Revelation and related teleological and eschatological passages. It is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who is the Lamb who is worthy to open the seven-sealed book and so administer all history—including its many judgements, battles and victories—until the consummation of the new heavens and the new earth, the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and the entrance of the elect people into the Holy City.

We conclude that the work of the Son was to bring us to the Father and so to glory, our inheritance, and the liberty of the glory of the sons of God which is full participation in and with the Triune Godhead. Whilst the elect never become divine—ie. attain deity—yet they are at one with the Godhead and forever partakers in the divine nature, through the Son.



### ***3. The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit***

Just as the *telos* of the Father for the world he loved and made was the same *telos* for the Son, so it is for the Spirit. We will see that he is both the ontological, eschatological and teleological Spirit. We are about to see, therefore that just as the Son said, ‘My Father is always working, and I also go on working with him’, so it can be said of the Spirit who is ‘the eternal Spirit’ (Heb. 9:14), ie he has worked in creation, in providence, in redemption, and in the final renewal of all the creation, as also in the judgements which free it from the forces of evil. He is the one who is the Spirit of hope and brings the sons into their ‘liberty of glory’.

#### **The Spirit and the Work of Creation and Providence**

Genesis 1:1ff. shows us the Spirit was present at creation. In the *tohu wa bohu*—the formlessness and the void—the Spirit was *moving* across the face of the waters. His creative power moved with the word of God—‘Let there be light!’ and so creation took its form. Hence Psalm 104:30, ‘When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground.’ Verse 29 is also significant, ‘When thou hidest they face they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath (*ruach*: spirit) they die.’ Man is nothing without the Spirit. The word of the Lord and the Spirit go together in creation as in Job 33:6, 9 (cf. Psa. 148:5), ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath [*ruach*: Spirit] of his mouth.’

Psalm 104:29—as we have just seen—is what sustains life and so is providential for the creation—‘When thou hidest they face they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath (*ruach*: spirit) they die.’ That he is the Spirit of life is seen also in many places, especially in the prophets for when God sends forth his Spirit all things revive, both morally and materially (eg. Isa. 32:15ff). He is also the Spirit which makes the spirit of man to be continually fresh and full of life (cf. Ezek. 37:1–14; Rom. 8:3; II Cor. 3:6).

#### ***The Spirit Always Working in the Old Testament***

Whilst the Son is not described explicitly as working in the O.T. yet the Spirit is so spoken of. He is the one who dwells or strives in man—even sinful man (Gen 6:3 *passim*). In some sense man became ‘Spirit-iless’ at the fall for he died—died to God—yet Gen. 6:3 shows he was not abandoned by the Spirit for fallen man lives and moves and has his being in God (Acts 17:28), and the Spirit was the life of the creation. Even so, there was a break in the Spirit being the *spiritual* life of Man. He was the Spirit in the patriarchs (cf. Gal. 4:29ff.) and of Joseph (Gen. 41:38), of Moses, and of the seventy elders of Israel including Joshua and Caleb. He was the Spirit in Bezaleel, certain kings, priests and prophets. It was he who led Israel through the desert (Isa. 63:10), and who, indeed was always in Israel (Hag. 2:5). The Spirit was the spirit of glory, sonship and worship in the O.T. (Cf. Rom. 9:4).

The Spirit never worked alone for he was ‘the Spirit of the LORD’, ‘the Spirit of the Lord’, ‘the Spirit of God’ and he worked with the Father and the Son in all things. Especially

in the O.T. he was the Spirit of prophecy (cf. I Pet. 1:10–12; II Pet. 1:20–21). He was preparing Israel—and the nations—for the great event of the coming of Christ. In fact, he was doing more: he was making salvation history to move from beginning to end, helping to fulfil ‘the plan of the mystery’—God’s intention for his people.

### *The Spirit Always Working in the New Testament*

Luke’s Gospel has many mentions of the work of the Spirit to prepare for the birth of Jesus and to assure readers—and the people of the time—that Jesus was conceived and born of the Spirit. John the Baptist pointed to him as the one not only baptised in the Spirit, but the only one who could—and would—baptise men and women in or by the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Jesus as a child was aided by the Spirit to grow (Luke 1:80: cf. 2:52). He was baptised in or by the Spirit (Matt. 3:17; Luke 4:18), led by the Spirit to be tempted in the wilderness (Luke 4:1), returned in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14); ministered in and through the Spirit (Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:18f.; Acts 10:38), offered himself by the Spirit (Heb. 9:14), was raised from the dead by the Spirit (Rom. 1:4–5; cf. 8:9–11; 6:4), and ascended and was seated at the right hand of God by the Spirit (Ephes. 1:19ff.).

### *The Coming of the Spirit at Pentecost Was the Purpose of the Father.*

The Spirit was called ‘the promise of my Father’.(Luke 24:49: cf. Acts 1:4; Ephes. 1:13–14). John chapters 14–16 make it clear that the Spirit came primarily from the Father through the prayers of the Son and that the Son sent the Spirit from the Father. From the point of Pentecost the work of the Spirit<sup>2</sup> was,

- (i) To usher in the new age of the prophetic community, the church, which was given birth to by the Spirit. Acts 1:4–8; 2:4–21.
- (ii) To bring men and women by the conviction of sin to the salvation of God by means of (a) convicting of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:7–11), (b) showing the Father and the Son (John 16:12–15), (c) showing the grace of God in the forgiveness of sins, cleansing from sins, justification and sanctification (Acts 10:44f.; 11:18; 15:10–11; I Cor. 6:9–11; II Thess. 2:12–13; cf. I Pet. 1:2).
- (iii) To empower God’s servants to be able to deliver this gospel-proclamation (Acts 1:8; cf. I Cor. 2:1–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12; Heb. 2:1–2).
- (iv) To bring men and women to new birth (John 3:3–6: cf. I John 3:9: 4:7; 5:18; etc.), giving them new life (Rom. 8:1-3, 9–11; II Cor 3:6).
- (v) To bring men and women into adoption, ie. to become sons of the Father. Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:14–17; Ephesians 1:5ff.

<sup>1</sup> The prepositions used in the New Testament regarding persons being baptised in regard to the Spirit can be translated as ‘by’, ‘in’ and ‘through’; hence the various views of what has come to be called ‘the baptism of the Spirit’ although no such term exists in the New Testament.

<sup>2</sup> A reading of John chapters 14–16 will show that Jesus said certain actions would happen in the lives of the Apostles by the coming of the Spirit. They were (i) the Spirit would bring all things into their remembrance which Jesus had said to them, (ii) he would teach them all things, (iii) he would lead them into all the truth, (iv) he would show them things to come, (v) he would glorify the Son and so glorify the Father, (vi) he would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. The reality is that without the coming of the Spirit both the Father and the Son would not be known to humanity. The six elements we have written here came immediately into play and the gospel was thus in action, and continues to be.

- (vi) To cause the Son to indwell hearts by faith (Eph. 4:16: cf. Rom. 8:9–11), and personally to indwell with the Father and the Son, and so for believers to live in the Father, Son and the Spirit.
- (vii) To be the Spirit of hope for the church so that ultimately all might come into resurrection, glorification, and ‘the liberty of the glory of the children of God Rom. 8:17–38). Liberating and living in liberation are present works of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1–3; II Cor. 3:17; II Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:1–6; Gal. 4:4–7) with a view to their teleological climax.
- (viii) To be within the church the source of love, unity, fellowship, worship, prayer, charismatic fruits, and all that goes for the internal life of the church, especially in the light of ‘(iii)’ above—ie as the church is strong within it proclaims the gospel to those outside.
- (ix) To be the eschatological Spirit of judgement (John 16:7–11; Isa. 11:4;, 4:4; II Thess. 2:8; Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15; Eph. 6:18; cf. Rev. 4; 5; 5:6). That is, he is also the Spirit of the hope of the inheritance, the new heavens and the new earth. Hence it is the Spirit who with the Bride says, ‘Come!’.

### **Conclusion to the Works of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

- (i) The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in the unity of the Godhead.
- (ii) They desire Man to participate in the Divine nature, ie have full fellowship with the Triune God.
- (iii) All three Persons do this work—the *opere ad extra*—that (a) God be vindicated as ‘a faithful Creator’ (I Pet. 4:19), (b) that through redemption the creation be made anew—both heavens and the earth—and (iii) that all the elect come into their inheritance, share the glorious inheritance, and become a kingdom of priests under their God, and live with the Triune God forever.

# *The Trinity and Relationships*

## **Introduction and Plan of the Study**

This closing chapter of our book has been extracted and abridged firstly from an unpublished these of mine titled *The Glory of God and Human Relationships*, and an Essay given to a Pastors' Study Group in March 1991 titled as here, above, 'The Trinity and Relationships'.<sup>1</sup> The thesis was written on the idea that the relationships which exist in the Trinity are the same relationships intended for Man to live out on the Human level. In terms of some things we have written this would mean that the Divine perichoresis flows out into the body of humanity, continually, thus creating and sustaining a human perichoresis. This would effect relationships at the purest and most dynamic level, and would change the whole order of human existence. We could almost speak of an ontological unity and an economic outbreak of creative works. Thus the aim of this study is to examine the relationships that exist between the Members of the Triune Godhead, as they are biblically revealed, and to enquire whether such relationship are not, in fact, those which are intended to obtain between members of the human race as they are in true relationship with God. Also to see true Man<sup>2</sup> as a creature who is not only ontological, but who is, at the same time, teleological, so that ultimately he is not only admitted into the mystery of the Godhead but is, himself, one in fellowship with the Triune God, and participates in the Divine nature.

If Man was in the image of God and fell, yet the truth of God's grace is that He has not only rescued Man from his fallen plight but has remade him in Christ, restoring him, in effect, to his original created condition. If this is so, then Man, in Christ, can again fully reflect the Being of His Creator. In the New Testament we have the teaching of the new or second Adam, the last Adam, Christ. Man's being recreated in the image of God is accomplished only by Man now being *in* Christ.<sup>3</sup> He is never, in himself, the image of Christ, but he is the image of God *in* Christ. This calls for the doctrine of the Members of the Trinity living in Man and Man in them. It involves dependency upon God, the work of God energising Man within as seen in Philippians 2:12–13.

The plan of the Essay is as follows,

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<sup>1</sup> A part apology is in order here thought 'part apology' is no apology. I simple mean that the tone and tenor of the book changes at this point. We are now on theology that seeks to be both biblical and historical. The nature of a thesis demands this approach, but I believe it is valid and I trust readers will plow their way through it, with some hope of a reward!

<sup>2</sup> The use of the term 'Man' in this essay should not be seen as discriminatory or part of exclusivist language. Just as God is One, and has one centre of consciousness although composed of Three Persons, so is Man who is in the image of God—Man has one centre of consciousness. Man is a male-female entity according to Genesis 1:27 and 5:1–2 and whilst each male person and each female person may be spoken of with particularity, just as members of the Godhead can be spoken of with particularity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) yet God is One. So, then, made in His image, Man is one. Even the word 'humanity' conveys the thought of a multiplicity of human beings, rather than one male-female entity.

<sup>3</sup> This is brought out most powerfully in I Corinthians 15:20–56; II Corinthians 3:18 *passim*; Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:9–11. The renewal of redeemed man in the second Adam, Christ, is also a transformation into his very image (II Cor. 3:18). It is this transformed Man who walks according to the will of God in love and holy living.

### *1. The Relationships of the Triune God,*

- (i) as biblically revealed, and as worked through in historical theology,
- (ii) the form of these relationships.
- 2. Man in the Image of God is a Relational Creature
- 3. The Present Relationships God Has With Redeemed Humanity, and Redeemed Humanity Has With the Triune God.
- 5. The present relationships redeemed humanity has within its own community.
- 7. The ultimate mutual relationships of God and redeemed humanity.

## **The Relationships of the Triune God**

### *(i) The Scriptures the Way to Comprehending the Triune God*

We must affirm the unity of God as set out in passages such as Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 6:4, and assert that His Being is immutable (Mal. 3:6; Num. 23:19; James 1:17), and ineffable (Isa. 40:18, 25; 44:6–7; 46:5, 9). It is obvious that, apart from the Scriptures, we can have no knowledge of God that constitutes a revelation. The so-called ‘general revelation of God’ is only known to exist because the Scripture describes it (cf. Rom. 1:19ff.; Ps. 19:1ff.). Again the *vestigia trinitatis*, which Barth acknowledges does exist, but which he does not see to be a revelation, or even a way to revelation, do not directly aid us. Within the Scriptures there are statements regarding God’s unity and ineffability, posited mainly on the basis that knowledge of God is impossible without His self-revelation, especially as there is no point of comparison with Him. Since He has created all things He cannot be compared with them (‘I am God, and there is none like me’; cf. Isa. 40:18, 25; 44:6–7; 46:5, 9). In addition to this is the impediment to true human knowledge of God, i.e. Man’s rejection of his original knowledge of God (Rom. 1:19f.) and his continuing refusal to know God (Rom. 1:25, 28; 3:11; Ps. 14:1).

Within the Scriptures it is axiomatic that God reveals Himself and does so by many media such as creation, His word, theophanies, His covenant, His law, prophets, works signs and wonders, by His Spirit, His Son and by the people of God—in whom He has always dwelled and manifested His presence<sup>1</sup>. For our purposes it is God’s self-revelation as Father by the Son and the Spirit of Himself, as also of the Son and the Spirit which concerns us. It is helpful in this respect to examine what O Kirn says<sup>2</sup> in which he leads us to the important point that ‘the immanent Trinity must never be isolated from the revealed’.

If it is the nature of faith to conceive the mundane in the supermundane, the historical in the eternal, then the religious realisation of the history of redemption is only practicable as the eternal self-revelation and self-communication of God are perceived in the person of the Redeemer and the possession of the Holy Spirit by the Church. The same Christ who, as the founder of a new religious life, belongs to mankind and to history, belongs at the same time to the eternal life of God, of whom he is the full revelation. The Spirit by whom man calls God Father and is transformed into the likeness of Christ, belongs both to the temporal life of the Christian and to the self-manifestation of God, who desires to fill his personal creatures with his presence. If in the historic revelation of salvation the eternal activity of God be

<sup>1</sup> No matter how fine this revelation is, it is not necessarily received, i.e. is not always seen and heard. The hearers have to have an ear to hear or they will remain deaf—hearing being a matter not primarily of the intellect, but of the will (cf. Luke 8:7).

<sup>2</sup> Article, ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity’, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1977), Volume 12, pp. 18–23.

recognised, every other self-revelation of God must be connected with the historic Redeemer, and every other self-communication of God with the Holy Spirit. Without this self-evidencing of God, no spiritual existence is conceivable to be complete. In this not only is the thought resumed which Origen associated with the idea of the eternal generation of the Son, but the idea of Paul (Col. i. 15 sqq.) is applied anew to the present world-conception. What, however, stands out clearly in a temporal process in the course of which the religious, moral, personal life takes shape, is, when considered as divine act, not a becoming but an eternal presence, the expression of his unchangeable being. In this sense, Son and Spirit are to be assumed as eternally existent in God. This is the final statement possible for thought. But the *how* of the immanent Trinity is inscrutable for want of categories of temporal thought to conceive the eternal or for want of analogies in human experience. To speak of three persons in one Godhead is to use an inadequate symbol. The ancient conception of person was elastic enough to admit a recoalescence after the distinction, but the modern idea of personality as a distinctly self-conscious, self-determining psychical unity would yield only a collective unity as well as extinguish the human self-consciousness of Christ or ascribe to him a double personality. Better is it to speak of three elements, or a threefold eternal determination of the divine being. No theory must impair the personality of the exalted Christ for Christian piety. In him divine grace takes human shape in history, and in unison with the Father he remains the head of the Church. Likewise, God's holiness, transforming the earthly, obtains its historical form in the community of redemption, which joined in the Spirit with God through Christ participates in eternal life. To avoid empty schemata and the barren field of mystical contemplation, in the interest of vital reality, *the immanent Trinity must never be isolated from the revealed. The religious value of the doctrine of the Trinity consists alone in expounding the history of revelation as the self-disclosure of the eternal God.* Thus the order ever remains from the triad of revelation to unity and not *vice versa*, and the doctrine of the immanent Trinity can be no more than a limiting concept.

### **A Theology of Trinitarian Relationships**

One of the problems of Trinitarian theology has been in examining as separate entities—so to speak—the immanent (ontological) and economic (revealed) trinities. They are of course the one, but it is not easy to coalesce them into one. In the quote above, O. Kirn is saying that what we can know of the Godhead in our situation as human beings is only that which has been revealed through the self-revelation and self-communication of God. The nexus for us as humans is the incarnation, so that ‘the same Christ who, as the founder of a new religious life, belongs to mankind and to history, belongs at the same time to the eternal life of God, of whom he is the full revelation’. Likewise the Holy Spirit mediates the Persons and the experience of them to us—‘The Spirit by whom man calls God Father and is transformed into the likeness of Christ, belongs both to the temporal life of the Christian and to the self-manifestation of God, who desires to fill his personal creatures with his presence’. Both the Spirit and the Son bring to us—through the grace of the Father—our experience and knowledge of the three Persons. Thus what we know of God, and especially as Father, Son and Holy Spirit—along with their relational unity—comes to us out of the incarnation, the revealing Son and the revealing Spirit via the revealing word. We thus know what we know by these means<sup>1</sup>. In practice this means we can draw upon the resources of the sacred text to discover the relationships of the Trinity both *in extra* and *ad extra*. By this we will also know the works *in extra* and *ad extra* and so have the pattern of true relationships in the context of being indwelt by the Persons.

What we must say regarding Trinitarian relationships as they are revealed by the Son and the Spirit—through the initiative of the Father—is that God is essentially Father, the Son essentially Son, and the Spirit is essentially the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son.

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<sup>1</sup> We have no need to know more, for ‘the things revealed belong to us’ (Deut. 29:29) and we never need to go beyond them. ‘All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ are ‘hid in Christ’, but we need only those which will redeem, sanctify and glorify us to be revealed to us, since it is these—and only these—which fit us for the ultimate ‘liberty of the glory of the children of God’.

Thus there is unity in sociality or there is sociality in the unity. We see from Scripture that in the work of creation the Father, Son and Spirit work together<sup>1</sup> so that whilst they have ontological unity—unity of being—they also have economic unity—unity of doing<sup>2</sup>. This unity is again shown in their co-operative work of redemption and the renewal of the heavens and the earth—the eschatological rehabilitation of all things when all things are unified by the Father in His Son, i.e. when they reconciled, and all that is lacking in them is ‘filled up’<sup>3</sup>. It is their indivisible unity which is the basis of all relationships<sup>4</sup>, since Man is created in the image and likeness of God—the Godhead, the Unity of the Three Persons—so that Man is social being. We can then—in this sense—speak loosely of ‘the Sociality’<sup>5</sup>, ‘the Household’, ‘the Community or Family of God’,<sup>6</sup> but we must define what we mean. We cannot build precisely upon it unless the relationships of the three Persons cannot be rationalised by the principle of ‘the Divine Family’, if indeed the Godhead is not just that.

The social unity is shown by the relationships the three Persons have, one with the other. If we commence with the Word of God who was in the beginning, and by whom all things were made, we find (John 1:1) ‘the Word was with God [“face-to-face with God”]; *pros*

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1:1–2; Ps. 104:29–30; Job 33:4; John 1:1–3; Heb. 1:1–3; Col. 1:15–17.

<sup>2</sup> For some theologians the work of redemption is not an *opere ad extra* but an *opere in extra*..

<sup>3</sup> See Ephesians 1:9–11; Colossians 1:19–21; Ephesians 4:7; cf. Colossians 3:14. The unifying (heading up), the ‘filling up’, i.e., of that which is ‘empty’ (cf. Rom. 8:20; Eccles.1:2;2:1,11, etc. ), the reconciling of all things made disparate by sin, and the harmonising of the disharmonic situation brought about by angelic and human rebellion are virtually all the one work. God is One, and His creation must be one, .i.e. a unity which comports with His unity.

<sup>4</sup> It is here the whole question of the Unity of the Trinity is raised. Jurgen Moltmann in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* has given an excellent history of the development of ideas regarding the unity of the Trinity. Under ‘2. The Life of the Trinity’ pp. 171–176 he traces the *hypostatic* union posited by Bothius, who spoke of nature being composed of substance and accident; the *relational* understanding of the unity introduced by Augustine—‘There are three relations in the Trinity; fatherhood, sonship, the breathing of the Spirit (*paternitas, filatio, spiratio*). The inner being of the persons is moulded by these relationships in accordance with the relational difference.’ He then describes the doctrine of the Trinity of love which has obtained from the time of Augustine to the present, and propounded by Richard of St. Victor that ‘being a person does not merely mean subsisting; nor does it mean subsisting-in-relation. It means *ex-isting*.’ St. Victor says, ‘A divine Person is a non-interchangeable existence of the divine nature’ so that (Moltmann concludes), ‘every divine Person ex-ists in the light of the other and in the other. By virtue of the love they have for one another they ex-ist totally in the other: the Father ex-ists by virtue of his love, as himself entirely in the Son: the Son by virtue of his self-surrender, ex-ists as himself, totally in the Father; and so on’. Moltmann shows that Hegel further developed this idea, ‘It is the nature of the person to give himself entirely to a counterpart, and to find himself in the other most of all. The person only comes to himself by expressing and appending himself in others.’ Finally Moltmann describes the nature of the eternal *perichoresis* or *circumincessio* with which we deal elsewhere.

<sup>5</sup> Royce Gordon Gruenler in an interesting exposition of John 17:20–26 (*Interpretation*, April,1990) states, ‘All of creation, but especially its highest human level appears designed of God to serve other levels and members of the larger family of creation, and it be interdependent in some way that is analogous to the pattern which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are interdependent and are at one another’s disposal in the most original Household, the Triune Family.’

This article is virtually an abstract of the Preface to Gruenler’s book *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, (Baker House, Grand Rapids, 1986, pp. vii to xxi). Gruenler’s argument is that the social unity of the Trinity—he speaks of ‘the Triune Community’ and ‘the Triune Family’ and ‘the most original Household, the Divine Family’, ‘the divine Society’ and ‘the highest community’—is familial on the divine level, and therefore its relationships and unity are valid for the human level, the human family thus being an analogue of the divine. He speaks of ‘mutual and voluntary subordination among the persons of the Triune Family’ and stresses that ‘Jesus’ claims to equality with the Father (10:30; 17:11) should make it clear that his subordination as the incarnate Son is voluntarily assumed for the work of redemption, and that this voluntary sense may be extrapolated to the equally subordinate role of the Holy Spirit in the redemptive process.’ Whatever this case may be, Gruenler has given an excellent basis for Divine and human relationships as they obtain in the Triune Family. How valid theologically his claims are must be measured by the quality of his theology of John’s Gospel. It is quite a leap from the precise theological formulations of the Ante-Nicenes, the Nicenes, and the later Western Trinitarianism.

<sup>6</sup> There is in Leonard Hodgson’s *The Doctrine of the Trinity* a development of the idea of the Social Being of the Trinity. He is concerned with the unity of the Trinity in its nature, in history, in the revelation of God by Jesus Christ, and in its implicates for philosophy, religion and psychology. He outlines the three classical expositions of the Trinity by Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin by way of comparison with his own theology of sociality.

*ton theon*] and the Word was God'. John adds, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory as the only Son from the Father.' Here, as in other places, we are pointed to the pre-incarnational being of the Son. He always was the Son, as the Father always was the Father. His incarnation did not and does not alter the nature of that pre-incarnational relationship in the immanent sense, although new elements must have been introduced in the economic sense. When Paul speaks of God being 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', he is not only saying that God has fathered the incarnation<sup>1</sup>, but that the one who came to be called 'our Lord Jesus Christ' was always His Son.<sup>2</sup>

This being so—and other Scriptures attest to this fact—we go back to our saying that the Father was always the Father, and the Son was always the Son. It may well be that we can speak of God as the archetypal Father<sup>3</sup>, but—archetype or no archetype—He is Father! The Son for his part is Son! Together these Two have a relationship which is essentially so and is thus ontological,<sup>4</sup> yet we should be wary of reading *human* fatherhood and sonship and *human* masculinity back into the Godhead.<sup>5</sup> This is the problem which we have with analogies. The Two are not to be thought of apart from the Holy Spirit, who—as we have said, and will further see—is the very Spirit of the Father and the very Spirit of the Son. So then we have the essential Trinity, the indivisible relationships of the three Persons communicated to us via the incarnation, via the works of the Three linked with that incarnation.

### The Relationships, ie. the Interrelationships of the Three

In looking at these Divine relationships we cannot move beyond the material of the sacred text. We do not have a metaphysic of the relationships other than what may be contained in the text—if any be contained in it! We naturally look at the material as exegetes with the hermeneutic tools available, but—as always—we will most personally look at it from the point of view of the linguistics we have to hand.<sup>6</sup> We will view it out of our own context of relationships and living with the terms we now use.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Fathered the incarnation' must be understood in the light of Luke 1:35 where 'the power of the Most High will overshadow is almost certainly referring to the *shekinah* glory of God, out of which the child can be authentically called—indeed must be called—'the Son of God'. The mystery of the birth and so of the incarnation lies in the work of the Most High and the Holy Spirit. Only the *effects* are observable from the *event*.

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 1:13–20 makes it clear that it was 'his beloved Son' who is the subject of that passage. In Hebrews 1:1–3 it is again 'a Son' 'through whom also he created the world'. It is to be noted in Colossians 1:16 that all things were created through him and *unto* him (*eis auton ekstistai*), ie. he is the goal or *telos* of 'all things'.

<sup>3</sup> Thus the statement of J. Armitage Robinson on Ephesians 3:14–15 (*Commentary on Ephesians*), 'According to this notable utterance of St. Paul, God is not only the universal Father, but the archetypal Father, the Father of whom all other fathers are derivatives and types. So far from regarding the Divine fatherhood as a mode of speech in reference to the Godhead, derived by analogy from our conceptions of human fatherhood, the Apostle maintains that the very idea of fatherhood exists primarily in the Divine nature, and only by derivation is every other form of fatherhood, whether earthly or heavenly.'

<sup>4</sup> The Athanasian Creed speaks of 'The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate,' and, 'The Father eternal, the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal.' I am aware that the category 'ontological' is not favoured by all theologians, especially those who pursue 'process-theology', but it seems to me that the immutability of God (Mal. 3:6) demands 'the fixed order' (Psa. 148:6; Jer. 31:35–36) but the immutable order does not mean that God is not dynamic, or that His 'fixed order' is not vitalistic within itself. That God is the living God means He is not bound by a fixed order but works within it to effect His will by the principle that He 'gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that are not' (Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3). God is neither locked into, nor locked out, of His creation: He is its Creator.

<sup>5</sup> It is at this point that the masculinist-feminist debate is on dangerous grounds. Whilst God is referred to in the masculine gender, it does not mean that human gender necessarily has much to do with what we may choose to call 'Divine gender'. We do not know what *that* is, and this should make us wary of the use of human analogues. See O Kirn on p.2 (above) regarding ancient and modern ideas of personality.

<sup>6</sup> I mean by this, that the meanings of words change within history, eg. the more psychological meaning of 'person' as against the theological development of it in early Christology, particularly in its development through the Cappadocian



Jesus' statement, 'I am in the Father, and the Father is in me' (John 14:10), gives us the key to all true relationships, ie mutual indwelling, or, if we may coin a phrase, 'the mutual inter-dwelling', ie the interpersonal concentratedness. In John 10:38 likewise he said, 'the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' This is the equivalent of John 10:30, 'I and the Father are one.'<sup>1</sup> The *locus classicus* of indwelling is, of course, John 17:20–23. Is there then a mutual inter-dwelling of the Father and the Spirit, and the Son and the Spirit? The answer to this lies in the fact that the Spirit is always 'the Spirit of . . .', ie. the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Jesus, and even the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of Love; and so on.<sup>2</sup>

When we ask what 'mutual indwelling' is, then we must answer in terms of personal union—persons in union—but to some extent we are limited in knowing what this is since true, pure love—ie. Divine love—is the constraint for such union and indeed the very essence of it. We have a partial analogy of it in marriage where the *two* become *one* flesh, one being.<sup>3</sup> To some degree it is present in a child–parent relationship in child-to-child relationships, especially where it is in family. There is more than a rumour of it in the David–Jonathan union, which was not homosexual but was of love.<sup>4</sup> The possibilities of such mutual indwelling are splendid now in the human race, since they will be wholly so in the *telos*. All mutual indwelling—or 'interdwelling'—depends on the wills of the partners, and their operations depend upon the states of the persons before God Who chooses to indwell Man. Human mutual indwelling ought to follow from human relationships with God, since such human relationships—ie. human-interdwelling—are via God—their Source.<sup>5</sup> It appears that there can be no direct authentic interpersonal relationship amongst humans which does not arise from antecedent interpersonal relationship with God. This can be seen from the quotation immediately below, ie. John 17:20–26—part of our Lord's great high-priestly prayer. In it we have the further and fuller statement about the Divine mutual indwelling:

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fathers. For modern understanding of 'person' see Alan Torrance's *Persons in Communion* (T & T Clark, 1996) and John D. Zizioulas's *Being as Communion* (SVS Press, 1985).

<sup>1</sup> We recognise that Jesus is speaking as a man to a human audience, and this audience for the most part hostile. In the Synoptic Gospels being the Son of God is much the same as being the Messiah (cf. Matt. 16:16; 26:63), and it is doubtful whether Jews would have thought of the Messiah as the Son of God in the sense that he is portrayed in John's Gospel, and certainly not in the more metaphysical rationalisations which have developed in historical theology. Incidentally, his own explanation of men being gods (10:34–36: cf. Ps. 82:1–7) is useful in understanding the high level of human creation by God.

<sup>2</sup> This brings us again to the doctrine of *perichoresis* or *circumincessio* which is that there is a circulation of the Three Persons through one another—a mutual sharing of the gifts of Fatherhood, Sonship, Spirithood, etc. We note that *circumincessio* emphasises the abiding reality of the Trinity—its subsistent being, whilst *perichoresis* is its interpenetrative, giving–receiving movement. As Persons they are discrete, and have their own personal characteristics, but as the Triune God they are one, yet in the circulation of the Divine life they give to one another so that their unity is out of the differentiations and not in spite of them. It means that whilst they retain their own discreteness they cannot be other than One together, and so the Spirit must be as much in the Father and the Son as each of them in him—the Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Genesis 2:18–24. Again the principle 'I in her and she in me: I in him and he in me' is the true union. The fall and the 'fall-out' of the man and the woman militates against this true union, cf. Genesis 3:12 ff. See my *The Profound Mystery* (NCPI, 1995) for the nature of the primal and eschatological ideas of marriage.

<sup>4</sup> We need to observe here that if a man can be in a woman and she in him—marriage—then there must be room for a man being in a man without this relationship have to be homosexual. The statement concerning David and Jonathan was, 'the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.' In the New Testament brotherly love is a powerful and caring relationship. This opens a wide door into researching man-to-man and woman-to-woman relationships. The works of the Australian psychologist Ronald Conway—*The Great Australian Stupor, Land of the Long Week-end* and *The End of Stupor?* (all Sun Books, Melbourne, and published 1971 to 1985)—discuss 'the great Australian male mateship' which was not homosexual, but in the Boer War, the two World Wars and the wars in Korea and Vietnam demonstrated itself as a remarkable interrelational male affection.

<sup>5</sup> I John 4:7 states simply that 'love is of God. Verse 11 speaks of the obligation to love one another—'Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another,' whilst verse 19 says that 'we love because he first loved us'. Source, obligation and inspiration presuppose not only the possibility of loving but the impossibility of not loving, for loving is deontological.

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.

In this passage Jesus is showing the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son. For people to share the Divine unity they must first dwell in the Father and the Son as the Father and the Son must dwell in them, for this is the way of true unity. We note in passing that the Father gave His Son glory—in His love for him—before the foundation of the world, and that Jesus told the Father that he—in turn—had given this glory to his disciples so that they might become one,<sup>1</sup> ie. will have true unity by it. Jesus desires his disciples to see this given glory so that (i) they realise it is the source and basis of unity, and (ii) that ‘the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them’. No stronger or richer word can be spoken of relationships and oneness within those relationships.

What we have to realise in the matter of mutual indwelling is that each Person of the Godhead is ‘other-person centred’.<sup>2</sup> The principle which Paul enunciated in Philippians 2:1–5,

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves [or ‘in you’], which is yours in Christ Jesus . . .

is the principle innate in the Godhead.<sup>3</sup> For fallen humanity to think primarily in terms of others is not natural, but is the very heart of the Divine relationships. I think the term ‘other-person centred’ is bettered by the phrase ‘other person *concentred*’. ‘Other-person centred’ may imply turning out to others, being concerned for them, and even assisting them in love and yet having something egotistical in it. ‘Concentred’ carries the idea of being primarily concerned for another, and being involved in that person, even at core—in short, interdwelling. A human being who has come to God’s regeneration and turns himself outwards to others discovers a thrilling freedom—something new to him who has been ‘concentred all in self’.<sup>4</sup> This freedom, arising from ‘other-person concentratedness’, has to do

<sup>1</sup> In John 17:22 the glory which Christ has received from the Father (cf. 17:5, 24) is what Christ gives to his disciples and by which they are made one. What is that glory? The fact that this glory was given before time and Jesus’ incarnation tells us that it was the glory shared with his Father, making him one with Him. In fact this would be the glory of the whole Godhead—the very nature of God—and this, being worked out in the incarnation of the Son—along with its redemptive working—could be available through the humanity of Christ to his people. The glory related to his works which were witness to and revelation of the Father (eg. John 1:18; 17:4; 18:37). Seeing the Father and the Son would make them one in relationship and in fellowship (I John 1:3)—by the Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> I take the phrase ‘other-person centred’ from the book *The Everlasting God* by D. Broughton Knox (Evangelical Press, 1982), although it has become common usage in books of relational theology. This work is an examination of the interpersonal relationships of the Trinity, and has been the stimulus for much that I am saying in this present chapter. It is of course set out in Hodgson’s work: ‘We have found this to be a doctrine of God according to which there is an eternal life of personal communion, Father and Son eternally giving themselves in responsive love to one another through the Spirit.’ (p. 192). Some would debate that their love-*perichoresis* is *through* the Spirit, preferring to see the Three sharing mutually.

<sup>3</sup> This is borne out by the statement of Paul, ‘Have this mind among you which is yours in Christ Jesus.’ It was primarily Christ’s mind, and so became theirs. It was Christ’s mind *before* incarnation, ie. the mind within the Godhead.

<sup>4</sup> This is brought out in II Corinthians 5:14–15, ‘And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.’ To be free of the bondage to oneself is to be free in God, and so to be free to all others. A corollary to this is Romans 14:8, ‘If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s’, and the Anglican collect which says ‘whose service is

with servanthood—the heart of the Christian gospel—and it is to be found in the Divine interrelationships. As we will see, it has four expressions—each giving to the other, receiving from the other, honouring the other and serving the other. The Father gives to, honours and serves the Son; the Son does likewise to the Father, the Spirit does likewise to both as both the Father and Son do to the Spirit. Because sin is a self-serving thing and we are sinners through the fall, we find it difficult to understand the truly selfless serving of love. We can, perhaps, grasp the concept, but the reality evades in practice. That is why we cannot comprehend the unity of the Divine Community.<sup>1</sup> All things relational demand the voluntary exercise of our wills in mutuality, such as we find in the Godhead. Jesus' words, 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me', must be the clue to all relationships, for it is the true matter of mutual concentratedness.

Having seen this inter-dwelling of the Persons, we have the pattern or paradigm for human interrelationships, but as we have seen and must see, the outworking of these depends upon indwelling the Godhead, and the Godhead indwelling us—a matter we have yet to fully explore.

### **The Form of Divine Relationships**

There are three elements discernible in the Scriptures, and especially in the New Testament which show the form or modes of relationship, namely (i) the Persons glorify one another, (ii) the Persons give to one another, (iii) the Persons receive from one another, and (iv) the Persons serve one another. We will look at these elements under the two following heads,

#### ***(i) The Mutual Glorification of the Three Persons***

One of the ways of the Three Persons being 'other-person centred' or 'concentred' is their glorification of one another. The source of glory is the Father—'the father of glory' (Eph. 1:17; Rom. 6:4), whilst the Son glorifies the Father (John 17:1–5), and the Holy Spirit is 'the Spirit of glory' (I Pet. 4:14) and glorifies both Father and Son. This mutual glorification one of the others is the expression of the Divine love.

#### ***The Glorification of the Son by the Father***

What do we mean by 'glorifying'? In the case of the Son, the work of glorifying the Father would be to reveal the nature of the Father, and this by his own explicating word, and by his actions which reveal the Father. When he said to Pilate, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come I into the world, to bear witness to the truth,' he was virtually saying he had come into the world to glorify God. In all the doxologies of Scripture certain elements are *ascribed* to God—eg. power, wisdom, might, honour, glory—but nothing is *given* to Him. Glorification of God, then, is simply the ascribing to Him what is His nature,

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perfect freedom.' Of course, if we can talk of a human *perichoresis*—and I think we can—then the circulatory movement of human personalities is one of the richest elements of the new relational freedom, provided we see it within the *perichoresis* of the Triune Family, and based upon it. Moltmann, whom we have already quoted (*The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 178) says, 'To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.' It is also the meaning of personal freedom.

<sup>1</sup> Jesus' talk to Nicodemus relates to the Kingdom of God (John 2:23–314). No man can *see* that Kingdom, let alone enter into it, unless he has been begotten from above. I Corinthians 2:14 says something similar. The loss of relational knowledge and experience is a result of the Fall, as Paul points out in Romans 1:19–32. We are reminded of Barth's statement regarding the knowledge of God that we must speak 'of God', ie. *from* God, rather than *about* God. This must mean God has moved in grace to give us revelation, and then we can speak *from* God *in* the knowledge of Him.

so that the ascription is what is His due. Thus, when the Father glorifies the Son He does not add something to the nature of the Son, but reveals that nature itself: again, this is by attestation as at the baptism and the transfiguration, explication of the prophetic word, and the works and actions which He initiates in the Son (cf. John 5:36–37; 14:10).

### *The Father Gives to the Son, and Glorifies Him*

If we may speak of ‘inter-serving’, we can start at John 17:22 and 24 where Jesus speaks of the Father in His love giving him glory before the foundation of the world. We recognise the difficulty our minds have in grasping and expressing the ‘eternal generation’ of the Son, primarily because it is a relational matter and not wholly a matter of metaphysics. Whilst confessing that it is a difficult matter in John’s Gospel—when Jesus speaks of himself as ‘the Son’—to understand at times whether he is referring to his being as Son in his pre-incarnational or his incarnational states<sup>1</sup>, yet it would seem Jesus can refer to both within the relationship he has—at the point of time of speaking—with God. For example, in 5:22 Jesus says, ‘The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son.’ When was that given—before or after the incarnation? It seems both situations obtain here—he was always given that authority of judgement because he always was the Son of God (vv. 25–26), but it also came to him in his humanity where he was conscious of his function as judge.<sup>2</sup> Certainly he has been given both life and the authority of judgement ‘because he is the Son of man’ (5:27), but what is pertinent to our discussion is the fact that *the Father gives all things to the Son*—John 3:35; 5:26–27; 13:3; 17:2, 4, 6–8, 11–12; Matthew 11:27.

These references tell us what God has given,<sup>3</sup> and it all has to do with authority and ability to carry out His will, but with them is another set of references speaking of the Father glorifying the Son, the first of which are the straight statements in John 17:5, 22 and 24 that the Father had given him glory—ie. glorified him—before the foundation of the world, this being when he was not yet incarnate. In 17:1 he asks the Father for glorification in the hour of the Cross. A short time previously on that same night he had stated, ‘Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified’ (John 13:31). Of course, it is the Father who glorifies him. The much discussed verse Hebrews 2:9—‘But we see Jesus who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one’—can be interpreted as saying either that Jesus was crowned with honour and glory ‘because of the suffering of death’, ie. as a result of his death, or ‘for the suffering of death’, ie. as a preparation for his death, but the principle is clear—he was glorified by the Father, and this surely in response to his prayer of John 17:1, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee.’ When Jesus said (John 17:4) ‘I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do,’ he is surely saying that he himself is glorified in the doing of that work. John records that the disciples saw Christ’s glory in the miracle of Cana in Galilee and

<sup>1</sup> There appear to be two streams of thinking about the Sonship of Christ, the one in the Synoptics referring to his Messianic Kingship, as linked with Psalms 2, 89 and 110 and related to his baptism, transfiguration, Peter’s confession (Matt. 16:15) and the questioning accusation of the high priest (Matt. 26:63), whilst in John the Sonship is the reflection of a relationship with God the Father, so that Sonship is innately transcendental though worked out incarnationally through the humanity of Christ (John 1:1–14).

<sup>2</sup> Peter tells the Gentiles at Caesarea (Acts 10:42; cf. 3:20; 17:30), ‘And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge.’ W. Neil (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 140) thinks Jesus, being the Son of man, was appointed by God according to Daniel 7:13ff. John 5:27 seems to confirm this.

<sup>3</sup> It is of interest in John 17—that chapter which explicates the relationships of the Father and the Son, and the relationships consequent to the Cross of the elect with God and the elect with one another—that 17 times in this chapter is the verb ‘to give’ used. It is used almost exclusively of what the Father gives to the Son and only once of what the Son gives, and then it is not to the Father, but to the new community of believers.

believed on him. Doubtless every work he did displayed and affirmed his glory, even if mostly to sightless eyes.

In the Synoptics, at the baptism of Jesus there is a glorifying of him by the Father when He announces, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased,' the saying undoubtedly being a conflation of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, but the glorification proceeds through all Jesus' ministry. Certainly Peter sees the transfiguration not merely as a miraculous visual glorification of the earthly Jesus but as moral glorification of the Son who does the will of God, for the commentary on that event of II Peter 1:16–19 defines this, 'For when he received honour and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory'.

The glory of the Session in heaven is described by Christ himself (Matt. 19:28), 'in the new world when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne,' and the *Parousia* likewise has links with the Ascension (Matt. 26:64), 'you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.'<sup>1</sup>

When Paul says that Jesus was 'raised from the dead by the glory of the Father' (Rom. 6:4), this parallels Romans 1:4, 'designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead'. Resurrection is glorification, as is also his being 'taken up in glory' (I Tim. 3:16), an event which the apostles witnessed and which was evidently an ascending in the cloud of glory—the *shekinah*—(Acts 1:9).

In all these ways then, the Father glorified the Son, and will further glorify him when he comes in that *Parousia*.

### ***The Son Glorifies the Father***

We have already seen that the Son's glorification of the Father is really his witness to him (John 18:37), this being by his words and his works, eg. the miracle of the marriage in Cana of Galilee where the disciples see his glory. In other places—especially in the Synoptics—people are led to glorify God for what Christ does as the Son of man, eg. as in the case of the healing of the paralysed man, 'When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men' (Matt. 9:8; cf. 15:31).

In John's Gospel Jesus speaks of his conscious glorification of the Father, stated in the principle of John 17:4, 'I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do.' This is underlined in 14:13 when Jesus tells the disciples, 'Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.' The same principle obtains for the disciples as they abide in him, 'By this shall my Father be glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.' Again, the manner of Peter's death was to glorify God (21:19). In the manner of Peter's confession of Matthew 16:16 Nathanael glorifies Christ—'Rabbi!, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'—and so, doubtless, glorifies God through him.

Jesus did not seek to glorify himself but waited on the Father's glorification (8:34; 12:23; 13:31–32; 16:14), knowing that the Father's glorification of him would be his glorification of the Father (cf. John 17:1–5). This is brought out strongly in 13:31–32, 'Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.' In this respect 11:4 is interesting, 'This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.' The Son cannot be glorified unless first the Father is glorified. Later in this incident of Lazarus being raised from the dead, Jesus tells Martha, 'Did I not tell you that if

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the occasions of Jesus' baptism, transfiguration, death, resurrection, ascension and ultimate victory over the powers of evil are all linked with Psalm 2, which is the primary reference to his coronation as the Son-Messiah-King and as such acclaimed (designated) Son of God, ie. Son of the Father (Ps. 2:7; cf. Matt. 3:17; 5; II Pet. 1:17–18; Acts 4:25f.; 13:32–33; Rev. 2:26–27; 12:5; 29:15).

you would believe you would see the glory of God?’<sup>1</sup> Also interesting in 11:4 is the fact that it is the Son of God who is glorified, whereas in 12:23 and 13:31 it is the Son of man who is glorified.

### ***The Holy Spirit Glorifies the Father and the Son***

Whilst there are not many explicit references to this glorifying work of the Spirit, yet such glorifying action is inherent in all that the Spirit does, since he is called ‘the Spirit of the Lord’, ‘the Spirit of God’, ‘the Spirit of your Father’, ‘the Spirit of Christ’, ‘the Spirit of Jesus’ and ‘the Spirit of the Son’, meaning his ministry and desire is to do the will of the Father and the Son. Hence as ‘the Spirit of his Son’ he cries, ‘Abba! Father!’ (Gal. 4:6; cf. Rom. 8:15), thus revealing God as Father, but also his relationship with the Father. I Peter 4:14 speaks of him as ‘the Spirit of glory and of God’.

It is in John chapters 14 to 16 that the Spirit is spoken of as Teacher, Remembrancer, Counsellor, Convicter and Glorifier. All of these works pertain to the Father and the Son. In 16:14–15 the glorification of the Son and the Father is explicitly stated, ‘He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.’

Without him we would not know the things of the Son and of the Father, just as we would not know the Son except the Father taught us of him and drew us to him (John 6:45–46, 65), and we would not know the things of the Father unless the Son were to declare Him (Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; 14:6).

### ***The Father and the Son Glorify the Holy Spirit***

The Nicene Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit as ‘the Lord, the giver of life,’ and this is consonant with Old Testament statements (Psa. 104:29–30; Job 33:4; cf. Ezek. 37:1–14). He is portrayed in the New Testament as ‘the Lord who is the Spirit’ (II Cor. 3:17–18), and is the giver of life (cf. John 3:1–6; Rom. 7:6; 8:2, 6, 11; II Cor. 3:6; Titus 3:5). The Son—as man—gave great honour to the Spirit, being led by him in all things, and through him accomplishing all things (Acts 10:38; cf. Matt. 12:28). So great a gift will the Spirit be to man that Jesus spends much time in John chapters 14 to 16 speaking of him as Teacher, Remembrancer, Convicter, Advocate and Glorifier of the Father and the Son. The Father will send the Spirit, the Son will pray to the Father and the Father will send him, and then he—the Son—will send him. It is from this high Source that the Spirit is sent forth (John 14:15–16; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). In Acts 2:32 he is ‘poured out’ from the throne via the Lordship of the risen ascended Christ, and in Galatians 4:6 it is God who sends him *out* from Himself (*exapostello*) into the hearts of the new children of the Father. Indeed in Galatians 3:14 he is the prized gift—‘the promise of the Father’ (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; cf. Luke 11:13; Eph. 1:13)

Much, then, is said of the Spirit in the Acts, Epistles, and Revelation, and whilst little is said explicitly by the Father and the Son in honour of the Spirit, this sense is not lacking. To grieve, vex, or quench the Spirit is a dangerous matter (Isa. 63:10) and the Pauline warning comes to the church to hold the Spirit in reverence (Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19), but it is Jesus in the Synoptics who warns against sinning against the Holy Spirit:

Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven; either in this age or the age to come.

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that in John 2:11, ‘Jesus . . . manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.’ This was not an arresting miracle of sight, but a domestic miracle of love for the whole wedding family, and the disciples discerned the glory of it. Some signs are dynamic to sight and hearing, but signs are intended to lead past themselves to the reality, i.e. the glory, and primarily the glory of the Kingdom.

To this, of course, must be added the warnings against having ‘become partakers of the Holy Spirit’ and then apostatising (Heb. 4:4) and ‘outraging the Spirit of grace’ (Heb. 10:29).

More solemn or more honouring words can scarcely be given, but perhaps it was Jesus’ positive statements that nothing would happen until the Spirit came, following his—Jesus’—entrance into glory that glorified the Spirit (cf. Matt. 3:11; Luke 11:13) Acts 1:4–5, 8; John 7:37–39; Luke 24:47). The whole of this age becomes ‘the age of the Spirit’, so much so that it is the Spirit who gives to John the revelation of Jesus Christ, by taking John up in himself on several occasions and showing him remarkable things. In the seven letters to the church in chapters two and three, the letters are what the Spirit is saying to the church, even though they are written by Christ. The sevenfold Spirit in the Revelation is shown as being before the throne—along with the Father and the Lamb. He is also shown as the eyes and the horns of the Lamb—all elements which reveal him as of high dignity and great in function. It is not only in this age that the Spirit leads (cf. Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25–27), but the powers of the age to come are in his control (‘and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come’, Heb. 6:5).

All in all, then, we see that the Three Persons of the Triune Godhead are ‘other Person-centred’ or ‘other Person-concentred’. All of this pertains to Divine love, and hence we have the key to the Sociality, Unity and Family of the Godhead.

### ***(ii) The Mutual Giving of the Three Persons***

We have said that the relationships of the three Persons are expressed in three elements—their mutual glorification, giving and serving. We have noted in John 17 that seventeen times the verb ‘to give’ is used, sixteen of them referring to the Father’s giving. Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus mentions eleven more times things which the Father has given him, such as the Spirit, all things, judgement, authority, the elect sheep, and the cup of death. In Matthew 11:27—the equivalent of John 3:35—all things are delivered to the Son. In Matthew 28:19 all authority is given by the Father to the Son. The Son is not spoken of as giving anything to the Father, but in fact he does what is the will of the Father via the gifts given to him. In that sense he has given everything to the Father. Doubtless the giving of glory to the Father both by the Spirit and the Son is their *form* of giving. It is also their *form* of serving, and we need not expand our enquiry.

Honouring man by his redemptive ministry, giving to man the many gifts he distributed, and giving himself up to death for the human race are evidences of Christ’s manward ministry. The Spirit likewise gave power to Christ to effect his ministry in the days of his flesh, honoured him by revealing his glory, and served him so that he himself could effect serving. For the rest—the Father, the Son and the Spirit incessantly give to their creation, and especially to the human race until it is ‘grace upon grace’, ‘abundant grace’ and ‘great grace’.

The purpose, then, of this section where we seek to understand the relationships of the three Persons by their interrelating, their mutual glorifying and serving of each other, and their giving to each other, is so that we can understand the reality of these relationships and works—in *extra* and *ad extra*—with a view to our own present relationships, and those at the end of the age—in the new age.

### ***(iii) The Mutual Receiving of the Three Persons***

It is quite clear that the giving of the Three Persons must mean the receiving by Them. What does the Father give? We can easily answer that by saying, ‘Everything!’ We noted that in John chapter 17 there are seventeen mentions of the verb to give. The Son really has nothing

but what the Father has given him and the Father has given him ‘all things’ (cf. John 3:35; 5:26–27; 13:3; !7: 2, 4, 6–8, 11, 12; Matt. 11:27). This means that the Son receives all things. Receiving can be a difficult matter. On some occasions it can be humbling and even humiliating. ‘Grace’ (*charis*) is not a popular word in ordinary parlance, but it is a sign of the closest relationship. The Father received the worship of the Son, and—as we shall see—his worship. Finally the Son prayed that the father might receive him as he gave himself into the Father’s hands. The receiving from the Father by the Son was the sign of his humility and dependence, but he received in order to give. We have seen that the fact of the mutual giving of glory of the Three Persons. Now we see that they received that giving. Whilst it may be more blessed to give than to receive yet receiving in the proof of trust and participation in fellowship.

#### *(iv) The Mutual Serving of the Three Persons*

Glorifying is really worshipping and worshipping is serving. To ‘serve the living God’ is to worship Him, and in both Old and New Testaments there are verbs which are one and contain the two ideas of worshipping and serving. So far as the Trinity is concerned there is interserving by the Three Persons. Often the Son calls upon the Father to serve him, whilst he, all the time by his obedience is serving the Father. The Holy Spirit serves Christ in every aspect of Christ’s work, from conception to enthronement at the right hand of God. Likewise in all that he does in Christ and for the Father, the Holy Spirit serves the Father. If we return to the section on the mutual glorification of the Three Persons we will see that their honouring was a great worship of one another. What we might easily miss is the fact that the love of each of the Persons, we must understand their adoration is sheer love, far beyond what we can imagine, and so the glorifying, giving, receiving and serving are down out of that love. That is something we must keep in mind when we realise that such action is for us to carry out on the human level with our fellow human creatures. The Divine relationships are not only paradigms of true relationships, but the very *source* of them.

#### *A Note on the Perichoresis and Circumincession<sup>1</sup>*

This brings us again to the doctrine of *perichoresis* or *circumincessio* which is vital for our understanding of the Trinity, and so for human relationships. The two terms generally cover the idea of the coinherence of the Three Persons, ie. ‘the Persons do not only subsist in the common divine substance; they also exist in their relations to the other Persons’ (Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 174). The *perichoresis* of John of Damascus spoke not only of the interpenetration of the members of the Godhead but of a circulatory giving–receiving movement. As Persons they are discrete<sup>2</sup>, and have their own

<sup>1</sup> Historical theology shows us that the term *circumincessio* was used by St. Bonaventure to translate the *perichoresis* of John of Damascus. The Council of Florence had chosen to use the term *circuminsession* and later than John of Damascus Thomas Aquinas preferred *circumincession*. The differences in meaning of the words is discussed briefly in the article ‘Circumincession’ in *Trinitas, a Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity* by Michael O’Carroll (Michael Glazier, Wilmington, 1987), pp. 68–70. He writes, ‘The word denotes the immanence of the three divine persons, their reciprocal interiority, their ceaseless vital presence to each other, interpenetration. Circumincession emphasises the abiding reality; circumincession the dynamic circulation of Trinitarian life from each to the others. The first appeals more to the Latin mind which thinks first of the divine essence, the second to the Greek which begins from the persons, borne to each other eternally, irresistibly, by their identity as subsistent relations. It is infinitely more than community or participation as understood in human existence’. See also *The Christian Trinity in History* by B. de Margeria (St. Bede’s Petersham, Massachusetts, 1982), pages 178–186, Jurgen Moltmann’s *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (SCM, London, 1981), pages 174–176, and other works on the Trinity.

<sup>2</sup> Provided, of course, that the use of ‘discrete’ here does not suggest three centres of consciousness—tritheism—instead of one centre—personal monotheism.



personal characteristics, but as the Triune God they are one, yet in the circulation of the Divine life they give to one another so that their unity is out of the differentiations and not in spite of them. The differentiations when given create the complementarity required for true relationships and true works both *in extra* and *ad extra*. It means that whilst the Persons retain their own discreteness they cannot be other than One together, and so the Spirit must be as much in the Father and the Son as each of them in him—the Spirit.

Relationally *perichoresis* is highly significant in that it substantiates the ‘other-Person concentratedness’ of the Three Persons, and points to Philippians 2:1–9. Moltmann (p.178–179) has this to say,

But in respect to the Trinity’s inner life the three Persons themselves form their unity, by virtue of their relation to one another and in the eternal perichoresis of their love. They are concentrated around the eternal Son. This is the perichoretic unity of the Trinity. . . The perichoretic unity of the triune God is perceived in salvation history and reflected in salvation history. . . *To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.* (My emphasis).

We can see how significant is this doctrine of the perichoresis-circumincessio for human relations. Moltmann’s stunning conclusion needs to be thought through and then pondered, time and again. When man is taken up into the divine unity by adoption he shares this *perichoresis*, so that we can say that the command to love one another simple means to enact the *perichoresis* in the human scene by the grace of the divinely communicated *perichoresis*. Significant indeed!

### **3. The Present Relationships God Has With Redeemed Humanity and Humanity With the Triune God**

That God is love is axiomatic throughout the Scriptures. He loves His world (John 3:16)—the world of creation and of humanity—revealing His love to all and redeeming His elect people (I John 3:16; 4:9–10). The love that the Three persons have mutually is the love that planned redemption (Ephes. 1:4–7; I Pet. 1:18–20; II Tim. 1:9; etc.) and effected it, so bringing about the reconciliation of God and man (II Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:13ff.; Col. 1:19–21), thus bringing Man into adoption, righteousness by justification (Rom. 3:21–24; 5:1) and sanctification (I Cor. 1:2; 31; 6:9–11; Titus 2:14), and so giving him access to God (Rom. 5:1–2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Heb. 10:19–22). Reconciliation with God is no minor thing. It is indeed all that is required to bring him to unity with God, and to unity as the human race.. It is not only that Man is restored (regenerated) to what he was through new birth, but that the teleological thrust is freshly operative.<sup>1</sup> Through this Divine love Man is to go on to glories far exceeding his experience as primal Man.

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<sup>1</sup> It may be argued that the ontological reality of Man is contained in Genesis 1:26–31; cf. Psalm 8:3–8; Ecclesiastes 3:11; cf. Genesis 9:1–7, and this is surely so. However God’s plan for Man from before time was glorification (I Cor. 2:6–10; cf. Eph. 1:3–14), informs us that man is to be understood as a teleological creature. In one sense he has always been becoming what he will be. Salvation ensures that the telos will be accomplished.

## Man One With God—The Power of Adoption<sup>1</sup>

If we have understood the relationship of the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and Son, then we have understood something of the relationships of the Triune God as they have been revealed to us. Christ's prayer in John 17:21—'that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us . . . '—is in the Father–Son, Son–Father genre as the full text of the chapter shows. The Pauline teaching of adoption has often been interpreted in a legal sense or in a figurative understanding<sup>2</sup>. The passages of Galactians 4:4–7 and Romans 8:14–17 go beyond these interpretations to show us *they are meant in a wholly relational sense*. The Spirit has come to give us filial conviction, and familial liberty. The involuntary cry 'Abba! Father!' is a direct relational utterance without any recourse to the figurative. We have been adopted into the Godhead, by grace, to be sons of God<sup>3</sup>. Ronald Wallace says, 'Calvin brings the Trinity into the centre of his discussion on the nature of God, since *revelation admits us into the heart of the divine Being himself*.'<sup>4</sup> G.L. Bray says similarly,

But Calvin, following Anselm, who had stressed the fact that the atonement was a work of God inside the Trinity (*ad intra*) were undivided, said that the Christians are admitted through the Holy Spirit, *to participation in the inner life of the Godhead*. We are sons of God, not as Christ was, by nature, but *by the grace of adoption*. As a result of this, the Reformed tradition witnessed an explosion of works dealing with the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, in a depth which had previously been unknown.<sup>5</sup>

Setting aside for the moment the over-arching matter of adoption we see that the New Testament speaks clearly of our new relationship to God. We are *in* Christ, *in* the Father, *in* the Spirit; the Father is *in* us, the Son is *in* us, and the Holy Spirit is *in* us. Our lives are hid *with* Christ *in* God. We have been 'called into the fellowship of His Son', and, indeed, 'our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ'. Then we have 'become partakers of the divine nature'. None of this can be called figurative. By grace it is relationally actual, and is the answer to the Son's prayer 'that they also may be *in* us'. Here the *locational* is the *relational*.

To be 'partakers of the divine nature' takes us immediately to *theopoiesis* or *theosis*—the Greek view of the divinisation of Man.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the limited nature of this study I have refrained from fully expounding adoption or 'the sonship'. Modern exegesis has tended to place adoption as a natural step beyond justification but some of the quotes above will show its significance in Greek theology—especially in Athanasius—and in Reformed theology—especially in Calvin. For Calvin the whole nature of salvation was under the heading and cover of adoption. whereas in Lutheran doctrine it is just one element in the *ordo salutis*.

<sup>2</sup> By this we mean firstly, that legally God has made us His sons which ensures we shall receive our inheritance (Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:17; Rev. 21:7; cf. Rom. 4:13), and secondly that we are not actual sons, but are metaphorically so. I have never been able to understand the latter statement, but can understand that because humanity is not consubstantial with the Godhead there can be no natural or consubstantial sonship, but since the sonship is through grace, it does not mean that the elect cannot be true sons. Grace ensures they can, and grace ensures that all the elect will be 'conformed to the image of his Son', so how much more could any be a son of God? Of course, those adopted are sons within the Sonship of Christ, and it is this which Sp[irit] both teaches redeemed Man and affirms it to him.

<sup>3</sup> I am conscious that in these days of inclusivist language the term 'sons' seems out of place. II Corinthians 6:18 quotes from Hosea 1:10 'You shall be my sons and daughters', and this certainly obtains for the present temporal state. Teleologically and eschatologically we are all sons by adoption, 'sons' here having no gender connotation, and corresponding to the Divine Fatherhood into which we will have been admitted in the *telos*.

<sup>4</sup> Article 'Calvin' in New Dictionary Theology (IVP, 1988) p.122.

<sup>5</sup> Article 'Trinity' in New Dictionary Theology (IVP, 1988) p. 694.

### *Adoption (huiiothesia) and Divinisation (theopoiesis)*

In the light of Romans 8:22 which speaks of the teleological-eschatological ‘glorious liberty of the children of God’, I doubt whether we can separate sonship (adoption) and participation in the Divine nature (*theopoiesis*). T. F. Torrance in his book *The Trinitarian Faith* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1988) develops the Greek concept of *theopoiesis* or *theosis*, and in particular at this point, the argument of Athanasius (p. 139),

Jesus Christ is in his incarnate person the unique act of God whereby we are saved and made new, but in the nature of the case we are not we are not saved or renewed by the activity of Christ without being united to him and partaking of him. In developing their concept of *theopoiesis*, the Nicene theologians took their cue from the statement of our Lord that the Scripture ‘called them gods (*theoi*) to whom the Word of God came’. They understood this to refer to those who, while created, became partakers of the Word through the creative impact upon them. Christ alone is *Theos*, true God of true God, he alone is properly (*kurios*) Son of the Father, but through his divine activity (*theopoiesis*) we are adopted and made sons of God in him, and in that respect, as those who through union with Christ receive the grace and light of his Spirit, are said to be *theoi*.

We must be confident then, not only of our *access* to God, but of our *participation* in Him. From this, then all true relationships must follow. Being in the image of God, and being renewed in that image, we are now free to enact our relationships with the community of Christ, and indeed, with all humanity. The divine interrelationships within the Triune Godhead are not only a paradigmatic for us, but they are the only (ontological) way of relationships for the children of God.

### **The Present Relationships of Redeemed Humanity Within its Own Community and to the Community of Humankind**

The purpose of this paper has simply been to argue that the relationships redeemed human beings have with God and with their fellow creatures are those which obtain within the mutuality and sociality of the Three Persons. Reviewing some of the elements of the Divine relationships, ie. those within the Godhead<sup>1</sup>, we have noted that all unity, mutuality, and sociality is from and the expression of, Divine love. God is love: hence the relationships. The relationships are ‘other-Persons centred’, and operate on the principle of honouring One another, giving to One another, and serving One another.

These are precisely the relationships which are ontological to Man who is created in the image of God, and they obtain<sup>2</sup> within the community which is *in* God—in the Father and *in* the Son and *in* the Spirit—the community whose life ‘is hid with Christ in God’, which has ‘fellowship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ’, and in which all are ‘partakers of the divine nature’, since all are children of God the Father.

It is not our intention in this paper to formulate the modes of love. These are already revealed in the Divine relations of the Triune Godhead. How they apply in all human life is the happy subject, and also the paranaesis—the exhortation—of the Scriptures. Such

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<sup>1</sup> In this atusdywe have only partially discussed the difference of *opere in extra* and *opere ad extra* and so have not completely covered the relationships *in extra* and *ad extra*. It is enough, here, to say these are the works first of the ontological Trinity and secondly of the economic Trinity.

<sup>2</sup> I have sought to evade stressing what Helmut Thielicke calls ‘ontological necessity’, ie. the ‘oughtness’ which comes from our ontological being. We are not exhorting the community of Christ to come to these relationships which parallel the Divine ones. Rather, we are saying they ‘obtain’, that is the they *are*, and so *can* be in the living Community of Christ—the Church. Likewise they can affect the whole body of humanity. In addition, we have seen that Man is teleological. He is not caught in an iron cage of immutable ontology, but moves forward to the desired and promised *telos*—true perfection and fulfilment.

relationships are on the basis of the Divine love (*agape*) which comes to us from the Father (I John 4:7) in Christ (I John 4:9–10) and through the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). ‘We love because he first loved us’ is the key to true relationships. The love that comes *to* us is the love that works *through* us. We can only truly love with the Divine love that floods us (Rom. 5:5). We can only ‘walk in love’ (Eph. 5:2), and ‘do all things in love’ (I Cor. 16:14) when that love is His, in us. It is then the Divine relationships—so to speak—are recapitulated in us. As in heaven, so on earth the Divine *perichoresis* of love has its expression in interpenetrative relationships and the honouring-giving-receiving-serving relationships that flow from it, and have their true being in it.

## *Bringing Everything Together*

### **Theology and Us**

#### *All Human Beings Are Theologians*

For theologians theology is fascinating. Most of us have a reluctance to read or discuss theology: we think it is difficult and even pointless. In fact everybody is, at heart, a theologian because all of us are interested in thinking about God, humanity and creation. Atheists often seem more obsessed with the idea of God than do ordinary theists. By ‘theists’ we mean people who accept the fact that there is a god, no matter what the faith or religion to which he belongs. So the world is composed of theists and atheists and all, in some way or another ponder the idea of God. They have a lot invested in their theological thinking, because of what we might call a moral sense or a sense of law. Universally we find the idea of natural law, though not all religions and cultures—as is to be expected—have the same ideas of morality.

#### *The Importance of Knowing God*

One of the severest things Jesus ever uttered was in the Sermon on the Mount when he said regarding the Day of Judgement, ‘Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’<sup>1</sup>

What he said must have come as a shock to quite zealous Jews. No less shocked were the Jews who sought to kill him when he told them, ‘You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.’ Paul was speaking of the Jews who believed they knew God when he wrote, ‘Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified.’

We must ask ourselves whether we really know God, or whether it is that we just know *about* Him. One Jewish theologian who really believed that Jesus had come from God was

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<sup>1</sup> The references in these two paragraphs are Matthew 7:21–23; John 8:44–45; Romans 10:2–3.

told plainly, 'Except a person be born from above, he cannot *see* the Kingdom, of God.' That means that he had never really seen the God who was King of the Kingdom!

### *The Simplicity of Coming to Know God*

Coming to the matter of this present book readers might wonder how to make sense of it. Originally written to give readers the primary idea that God is always on mission, it was hoped that a living theology might motivate some readers to be with God on mission. He loves His world and has a great and life-transforming message and invitation for it. It may seem that in this present book we have become immersed in many ideas and in them the simplicity of the nature of God may have been lost, and I think that could be called fair comment. There are things which are simple, and things which are simplistic. By 'simple' we mean uncomplicated and easy to be set forth and understood. By 'simplistic' we mean so reducing something which is deep, profound and of great dimensions—and even quite complicated—to what is regarded as simple, when in fact it is not. We can call this oversimplification in which case the reality of the matter is underestimated and even lost.

Whatever may be the mind of the reader, we seek in this chapter, to see somehow that coming to know God is quite simple, although God himself is profound beyond human description. Obviously we can never know all of God. Also there are certain requirements God makes of a person who desires to know Him. Indeed 'desires to know Him' is the primary requirement. Jeremiah 9:23–24 says,

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the LORD."

These words need no explanation: a person must desire to know God above all other things and that person must attribute to God just what He says He is. Likewise Hebrews 11:6 says, 'And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.' Here 'exists' does not mean God has existence, but that He is what He is and as such always is. This means He is 'the living God', 'living' meaning that He does not simply have existence but that He is the fountain of life, of living waters. He is the life-giving one, and needs not to receive life from anyone. At the same time 'living God' means He is active, doing deeds which are significant and indispensable to His plan for His creation. 'It is He that has made us and not we ourselves'. We have physical life by His grace and love but He receives life from no one.

Jesus was known as 'the Son of the living God', and that meant that he had life in himself—something we do not have—and, as he claimed, 'I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly'. He did not come to give us created life, but life which would not end in physical death. That is what God has always offered to give those who believe in Him and who seek fullness of life and the light of truth from him. Truth cannot be known apart from Him, nor can the gift of eternal life come from any but Him.

Israel, being the people of God, had a special privilege in living in what was called 'a living, covenantal relationship with the living God'. For this to be full and authentic they had to worship only Him as their God, to believe in Him as the only One they would trust and obey. They had bad experiences of reverting from the pure worship of God to worship of idols. The prophets called this 'lack of knowing the true God'. Some Old Testament passages are quite dynamic on the point. Hosea was a prophet taught by God on this matter and he said, 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge'. He related the terrible times in Israel to the

lack of knowledge of God, ‘There is no knowledge of God in the land: there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery: they break all bounds and murder follows murder...’ Israel had a special covenant relationship with God and professed to know him. To know God is to love Him and to love Him is to desire to do His will and part of that will is righteous living. In Romans 1:18–32 we have the graphic picture of Man at the beginning, in Eden, deciding to take his own way in life. Even when he did that God did not desert him. A Greek poet once wrote of God, ‘In Him we live and move and have our being’. The same poet wrote of humanity, ‘We are His children’.

We can say, then, that there must be an urge in us to know God, even if there is a contrary urge to keep away from Him. Some of us like to learn *about* God but we shy away from knowing Him directly. To know Him is to have a relationship with Him. It is to be in communion with Him, something Adam had rejected as he sought to know good and evil by his own discernment, and to order his life accordingly. If we take the Romans 1:18–32 to somehow fit with Romans 5:12–21 then we can see that the fall was a loss of communion with God and a coming into communion with the personal ego and with the idols which were intended to fulfil the work of a god.

By contrast Jesus said, ‘This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.’ Life eternal springs from the immortality which by nature God alone possesses or *is*. Eternal life is a gift of God. John the Apostle wrote ‘And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, to know Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.’ So the passage we saw in Jeremiah 9:23-24 finds its way of fulfilment—to know God—in knowing Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Christ and the Holy Spirit Show Us God and Bring Us to Know Him***

In the Old Testament God’s ways of communicating Himself were many. He often appeared through angels, the form of humans, by the prophets, and what they spoke. He was always the God of action and His actions show Him so that human beings can know Him but it takes a revelation for us to read those actions and understand His words. The very creation, we are told, tells out the fact and nature of God, but who hears what it says? The claim of the Christian faith is that God came to earth in and as the man, Jesus. The truth of God which had become hidden because of Man’s rejecting the knowledge of God now stared us in the face. Who, however, would believe a Galilean carpenter of humble origins and social situation was really God in the flesh? Of course no one would believe it, but he claimed that fact, and in part it led to his death.

Without discussing the ins and outs of this remarkable deposition, we are bound to say on the heels of our last chapter that if we will we can come to know God—Who he is and what He is like, and how He acts, and what is His plan for His universe. If we see that the Man Jesus was—and is—really the Son of God and the Holy Spirit is really the Spirit of God, then we can at least surmise that the love of God which is the very nature of the Trinity must be a powerful thing, and, rightly known, could alter all our relationships in this world.

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<sup>1</sup> The references in this passage are John 17:3; I Timothy 6:15–16; John 5:14 with Romans 6:23; I John 5:20.

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