

A Discourse on Method

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The Communion of the Holy Trinity as the Basis and Logic of Christian Theology

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Over against Schleiermacher, who sought to penetrate the logic of his deep inner feelings and build his doctrine of God and his theology by working out the implications of those inner feelings, and over against the logicians and philosophers who seek to build a vision of God by making deductions from what they perceive to be the irrefutable truths of reason, a proper Christian theology refuses to be limited to mere human feelings and mental processes, and looks instead to Jesus Christ, submitting itself to the rationality inherent in *his* very being as the Son of God incarnate. Over against those who accept the plausibility structure of a given tribe or culture and build a vision of God consistent with its norms, a proper Christian theology takes its stand on Christ alone, in faith that here we meet God of God and thus the one true light illuminating all things. Over against the Pharisees, who neither know nor honor the distinction between the living Word and the words, between Jesus Christ himself and the text of the scriptures, and thus build their vision of God by organizing statements about God, a proper Christian theology listens to the one Word of God addressing us in the words and seeks to bring its mind (its thinking and reasoning) into conformity with the very logic of God revealed in the living person of Christ.

It is not our deep inner feelings, profound as they may be, which should set the agenda for our thoughts about God. It is not what makes sense to us or seems right to our natural minds which should guide our theologizing. It is not mere statements, with their dictionary definitions of words, which should shape our thinking about God; nor should the spirit of the age or the political correctness of our value system or the implicit axioms of our world-view determine what must or must not be true about God. Authentic Christian thinking about God follows the logic, the order, the rationality implicit in the very name and being and presence of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God incarnate.

As science proceeds on the assumption, indeed on the faith, that the world of its exploration—whether fishes or animals, subatomic particles or planetary orbits—is real, knowable and rational, proper Christian theology proceeds on the assumption and faith that Jesus Christ is real, that he is knowable and that he is the supreme expression of rationality. Indeed, Christian theology proceeds on the assumption that in Jesus Christ we find the very logic of *God*. Here in Jesus Christ we meet God Himself—not a part of God, not a mere dimension of God, not a revelation of God, but *the* revelation of the very being and character and will of God. And therefore in Jesus Christ we meet the logic that predates the universe, the one rhyme and reason behind it all, the one Word, the *Logos*, written into the marrow of the cosmos and of human existence within it.

Over against Sir Isaac Newton and his closed system, we remember the words of St. Athanasius against the Arians: "The Arians are not only engrossed in themselves but, like the Sadducees, they think that there is nothing greater or beyond themselves. Hence, when

they hear that the Son is the Wisdom, Radiance and Word of the Father, they are accustomed to rejoin, 'How can this be?' as though nothing can be unless they understand it." [2] We do not begin with faith in the closed system and transform God into a deistic engineer who created the universe and sat down to watch from a distance. We begin with the reality of the incarnation and transform our vision of the universe in the light of the fact that God has come to us. And we proceed in confidence that as we do so, the sheer light that comes forth will illuminate the mysteries that have left Newtonian science speechless.

Christian theology proceeds in the quiet and joyous confidence that following the logic and rationality inherent in Jesus Christ will yield immeasurable fruit and untold blessing for the cosmos—from our marriages to our economics, from our play to our explorations of light and the secrets of the universe, from the deepest longing of the human heart to our fight for world peace. For Jesus Christ is no mere prophet who tells us truths about God. Jesus Christ is *homoousios to Patri* (of the same being as the Father), and thus here in Jesus Christ, God has crossed the seas of the universe to meet with us, to disclose nothing less than the divine being and character and heart to us. Standing before Jesus Christ, we stand before God as God truly is, as God always has been, and as God always will be, and thus we stand not only before the dawn of time, but before the character and heart and being that called forth the universe and humanity within it. Here in Jesus Christ, we meet the logic of the Creator God, the *Logos*, and thus here, we meet the rationale of human existence, the rationale of marriage and relationships, the rationale of music and baseball, of stars and seas and fishes. Here, we are face to face with the hidden harmony and order, the latent joy which eternally defines beauty and wholeness and human happiness. Here in Jesus Christ, we stand before the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, and therefore before the light of life which casts its rays upon our *raison d'être*, illuminating at once the inconsolable desire of every human heart, and the diversity and unity of the nations of the earth. For here, we are allowed to peer into the very being of God and into *the* mind, and *the* logic, and *the* heart, and indeed into the one dream which birthed and ordered and directs the cosmos.

Implicit in what I am saying are two critical points which are distinct but inseparable. On the one hand, Christian theology can never be detached from the person of Jesus Christ. It is a theology of communion, of living dialog with another who speaks across the divide, who penetrates our darkness and engages our minds and hearts and wills, and summons us to think, to wrestle, to conceive, to know. Christian theology is human thought about God born in fellowship with God Himself, thought about God which is anchored in unspeakable or languageless, yet supremely rational, communion with the Almighty. The instant our thoughts about God cease to be the fruit of living encounter with Jesus Christ is the instant they become nothing more than human ramblings and die the death of empty symbols. On the other hand, Christian theology is stamped with a thoroughgoing Christo-logic. Jesus is *the* revelation of God, and therefore we think our thoughts about God in the light of Christ and work out the implications of this Christological vision of God for the whole range of theology. At every point, whether we are speaking of sin or of the baptism of the Spirit, of the nature of faith or of the mission of the Church, of the doctrine of election or of eschatology, the light shining in Jesus Christ (the wordless Word of God addressing us in Jesus) is to be our sole point of reference, our one and only logic.

The Ground of Theology

Professor J. B. Torrance coined the phrase "the ground and the grammar of theology" in his Aberdeen lectures [3] to explain these twin features of Christian thought. The ground of

theology—the basis, the origin, the possibility—of human thought about God is Jesus Christ himself. Here the emphasis is upon the fact that what we meet in the bible, in preaching, in the sacraments, in the fellowship of believers is not simply human ideas or words, or merely bread and wine, or only brothers and sisters, but Jesus Christ himself—the incarnate, crucified, risen Christ. Christian theology exists because of a miracle, because Jesus Christ crosses the chasm between himself and us in our darkness and encounters us in person. In, with and through the network of people and ideas and words and things that he has established as his witnesses, he makes *himself* known to us.

Behind this miracle of real encounter between Christ himself and us, lies an even deeper miracle which stands as the ultimate ground and only possibility of human knowledge of God. The miracle of all miracles is the incarnation, the fact that the eternal Son of the Father, the one who eternally dwells in the bosom of the Father and shares all things with Him in the fellowship of the Spirit, became human. And in becoming human, the Father's Son earthed his own relationship with God the Father almighty. When the Son of God crossed the chasm between the Creator and the creature, when he entered into the world of humanity, he did not leave his Father behind, nor did he step outside of the fellowship of the Spirit. The incarnation means that the very life of the Trinity—the inner knowing and fellowship, the mutual delight and love of the Father, Son and Spirit—has now set up shop on earth. The Son has forever lived in fellowship and oneness with his Father in the communion of the Spirit; the incarnation means that now this Son has become *human*, entered into our world, and taken upon himself a *human* mind and heart and will.

The deepest miracle of Christian theology is that the relationship, the mutual knowing of Father, Son and Spirit themselves—and nothing less—has set up shop inside our human existence. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of the Father, knowing his Father as he has always known him, loving Him with all of his being as he has always loved him, living in the fellowship of the Spirit as he has always lived, but now he does so as a human being, inside our human existence, with a human mind and heart and will. The very life and mutual knowing of the Triune God has crossed over into the relationship between God and Adam, God and Israel, God and humanity. The eternal divine life of the Holy Trinity is no longer only divine; it is now divine and human. That is the stunning miracle of the incarnation. The unimaginable chasm between the Creator and the creature has been crossed by God. The infinite gulf, which separates the mind and thoughts of God from the mind and thoughts of humanity, has been bridged in Jesus Christ. At this very hour, inside the circle of everything that it means to be God, inside the circle of the Holy Trinity, inside the languageless communion of the Triune God, sits a man. "He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Father," as the Creed says.

In the first instance, the possibility of human discourse upon God, its ground and origin, is the fact that the eternal Son of the Father became what we are and now lives as the *incarnate* Son in face-to-face fellowship with his Father in the Spirit. Proper Christian theology is grounded in the reality of Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of the Father. He lives. He sits now at the Father's right hand. He knows the Father, and dwells in His bosom, sharing all things with Him in the fellowship of the Spirit. There is now and forever a *human* being, the *incarnate* Son of God, seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. Therefore there is now a real possibility that human beings can escape the great darkness and know the true God and share in the divine life.

Christian theology is grounded in the fact that in Jesus Christ the mutual knowing of the Father, Son and Spirit has now become human. The very existence of Jesus Christ himself constitutes the possibility of our knowing God and thus of Christian talk about God. But that is only the first layer of the possibility of our human knowledge of God. The second layer is that this Jesus gives *himself* to us. It is one thing to understand that a human being now sits at the Father's side; it is quite another to know the man himself. The possibility of our knowing the Father hinges on the capability of Jesus Christ to penetrate our darkness and encounter us in person. If he is not able to meet us in person and share his own mind and heart and Spirit with us, the door of heaven remains locked before us. We are left outside with a book about God. It may be an accurate book; it may be filled with inerrant statements about God. But a book is not a person, information is not communion. Without Jesus Christ and his miraculous ability to encounter us in person, there is no possibility of our communion with God, and thus of real knowledge of God at all.

But Jesus Christ knows the Father, and Jesus Christ can and does come to us. He not only wills to meet us; he has already embraced us and united himself with us, and he is already sharing himself and all he has and knows with us. The ground of Christian theology is the sheer miracle that Jesus Christ comes to us in person. In, with and through his creation; in, with and through the words of the apostles; in, with and through the sacraments; in, with and through the preaching of the gospel and the fellowship of the Church, Jesus Christ himself encounters us. This is what the apostles understood, and this is why they wrote their gospels and their letters. They wrote so that we—in, with and through their insights; in, with and through their words and ideas and concepts and accurate information—could see and encounter and know the person they saw and encountered and knew, and partake of his mind, and heart, and life in the fellowship of the Spirit.

The writers of the New Testament, and every preacher of the gospel worth his or her salt would consider their ministry a singular failure if all their audiences took away from their writing or preaching was accurate, even inerrant, information *about* Jesus Christ. For the apostles knew that salvation was bound up in the person of Christ and could not possibly be detached from him, any more than he could be detached from his Father. They knew that the life we seek as human beings, the hope, the wholeness and joy, the relationship and fellowship with God the Father almighty, these realities come to us *in* Jesus, not merely *through* him or even on the basis of what he has done for us. As St. John said: "God has given us eternal life, and this life is *in* His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1JN 5:11-12). As John Calvin emphasized: "We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else."^[4]

Christianity is, first and foremost, about *Jesus Christ*, about the fact that here in this man the eternal communion of the Father, Son and Spirit has penetrated human existence. And thus Christianity is about the shocking and stunning news that we now have access to God's own knowledge of Himself. The one who knows the Father and shares all things with Him in the fellowship of the Spirit, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the one who partakes of everything divine, and the one who is *homoousios to Patri*, this one came to earth and became what we are in order to share all that he is and has and knows with us. The eternal Son came to be the mediator, the one in and through whom nothing less than the very life and wordless communion of the Triune God intersect the human mind and heart and will, and the one in whom human existence is taken up into the life of the Holy Trinity.

The gift that Jesus Christ gives to us is not *impersonal*. It is not like a shirt which can be separated from the person who wears it. The communion of the Father and the Son is not reducible to mere information which could be written down and handed on without Jesus' presence. The life, the communion, the face-to-face fellowship between God and humanity resides in Jesus Christ alone. For he is the only man who truly knows the Father, and thus he is now and forever the one place in the universe where God and humanity truly meet. There is no other place; there is no other person in heaven or on earth where the life of God and human existence are in fact together, nor will there ever be. There is no other place where God is known by human beings. Jesus alone among the sons of men partakes of the life of God and dwells in the communion of the Holy Trinity. He is therefore the abiding center, the basis of a real relationship between God and humanity, and thus between God and all human thoughts about God. It is Jesus himself who has the life of God (and the knowledge of God) for us.

It would have never crossed the apostles' minds that people would cling to their writings as a substitute for an encounter with Jesus. Or perhaps they understood this temptation all too well, and thus they strove to make it crystal clear that Jesus alone has the life of God for us. Think, for example, of the famous "I AM" statements of John's gospel, or of Paul's breathtaking statement in Colossians: "For in him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (COL 2:9). The apostles wrote so that we could know *Jesus* and share in his life:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1JN 1:1-3).

The entire orientation of the Church, from its songs to its sacraments, from its scriptures to its preaching and teaching, from its prayers to its praise, originates in Jesus Christ and points to him as the center and life of it all. Indeed, the very idea of Christian communion with God makes no sense at all without reference to the living and present and self-giving Jesus, who knows the Father. The paper and ink, the words and pages of holy scripture, in and of themselves, are dead. They do not know the Father. They are not alive with the life of the Trinity. They do not contain or confer, in and of themselves, the communion of the Father, Son and Spirit. They may be accurate, but without Jesus Christ they have no power, no life, no communion with God to give to us. But in the presence and activity of Jesus Christ, the scriptures serve his self-communication to us, and they serve our perception of the Lord who is encountering us. The same is true of the sacraments and the fellowship of the Church. In and of themselves, they are but empty vessels—mere bread and wine, mere social occasions. But in the presence and activity of Jesus Christ, they are a place of meeting between us in our darkness and Jesus himself in his fellowship with his Father in the Spirit.

Because Jesus Christ lives, because he knows the Father, and because he is competent to give himself to us, there is now the possibility for us of authentic human knowledge of God. The relationship of Jesus Christ with the Father is the point of contact between heaven and earth, the place where the mutual knowing of the Father, Son and Spirit intersects our human knowing. And his capacity to encounter us in person, to give himself to us through the words,

the sacraments and the fellowship of the Church constitutes the miraculous ground of Christian theology.

The Grammar of Theology

In contrast with the ground of theology, the grammar of theology has to do with the rules of discourse, with the inner logic of theological language and thought, with its rationale and order. If I were to say to you, "You is a nice persons," you would know immediately that I had violated the rules of English grammar. Language follows an order, a logic, an implicit set of rules. The logic may be unstated or spelled out clearly, but it is always present and always demanding to be followed. The same is true with an encounter with Jesus Christ, and even more so. One can speak volumes without ever saying a word.

Jesus does not come to us as a vague mystical force, or as a mere intuition that if discernable at all is largely meaningless. He does not come to us as a ghostly person whose presence carries such little weight that it is hardly noticeable without great effort on our parts. Jesus Christ encounters us as a person whose presence speaks volumes. He comes to us clothed with his character and substance and heart, and clothed with the sheer weight and reality and intelligibility of his communion with his Father in the Spirit. And the reality of his presence—packed with the weight and substance and character of his heart, packed with the intelligibility and beauty and rationality of his fellowship with his Father in the Spirit—establishes the inner logic of our thought about God. The reality of the presence of Jesus Christ with us—clothed with his joy, clothed with his oneness with the Father, clothed with his baptism in the Holy Spirit and his oneness with the human race—establishes the unstated rules of proper thinking about God, and indeed ultimately of all things.

Schleiermacher was very close when he said, "Christian doctrines are accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech."^[5] But he was looking into the wrong soul. It is not *our* deep inner feelings that are the objects of our reflection; it is the deep inner feelings of *Jesus Christ*. He shares himself with us—his heart, his mind, his wordless communion with the Father in the Spirit. Christian theology is the attempt to bring Jesus' communion with the Father to expression in human language. Christian theology begins in the communion of the Holy Trinity in the soul of Jesus Christ, and moves from his soul to ours through his self-communication to us in the Spirit. And his communion with his Father in us presses upon our minds for conception and articulation, for verbal expression.

Here we have a window into the deep inner truth of Christianity. The life of the Holy Trinity—the relationship and beauty, the passion, the creative and joyous and abounding fellowship of the Father, Son and Spirit, the love of the Triune God—is given to us in Jesus Christ, shared with our innermost beings. And this Trinitarian life—this relationship, this creative and joyous fellowship, this passion and love and beauty—shared with us presses for personal embodiment in us; it presses for living expression in our minds and hearts and wills, in our marriages and relationships, in our work and play, in our politics and international relations. Such is the kingdom of God and the very meaning of salvation. And such is the very heart of Christian knowledge of God.

Our thoughts, our words, our statements about God are ordered by the logic which exists in Jesus and in his communion with his Father in the Spirit. Christian theology originates in Jesus Christ's soul, and in his willingness and freedom to share himself with us, and it is ordered by the sheer rationality of his life and being with his Father in the communion of the

Spirit. Christian thought about God is organized from beyond itself with a logic and intelligibility and beauty that proceeds out of the very being of the Triune God and encounters us in Jesus Christ.

When Descartes retreated into his own mind to find the necessary truths of reason on which to build his thought, he unwittingly assumed that the presence of Jesus Christ did not speak volumes, *rational* volumes, and that there is no logic inherent in *Jesus'* mind and being. It was necessary therefore, in Descartes' mind, to find a logic, an order, a set of rules outside of Jesus Christ which could serve as a basis of ordered, rational talk about God. Such a move, however noble in intent, was a disaster, for it detached the ordering principle of human thought about God from Jesus himself. But as surely as the smile of a daughter carries a definite, though unspoken message, the encounter of Jesus Christ with us carries a definite logic. He comes to us clothed with his rationality, and the rationality of his presence engages our minds and summons us to obedient and objective and scientific and rational thinking about God.

The conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees centered upon this point of unstated logic. The Pharisees could not perceive the real rules of theological discourse—or would not see them—and they consistently tried to trap Jesus in their little linguistic nets. Jesus, on the other hand, spoke and reasoned out of the logic of the Spirit, out of the rationality of his communion with his Father. Thus, while they used the same words, Jesus and the Pharisees spoke a different language altogether. "Why do you not understand what I am saying (*lalia*)? It is because you cannot hear my word (*logos*)" (JN 8:43). The Pharisees listened to what Jesus *said*, but paid no attention to what he *meant*, for the meaning of his audible words flowed out of the life he shares with his Father, which they resisted. This is why Jesus said, "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life," (JN 6:63) for his words had their origin in and pointed to the communion of the Spirit.

Whereas the ground of theology focuses on the reality of Christ's presence with us, the grammar of theology focuses on the fact that his presence carries a set of rules for our thinking about God. Christian theology finds its basis, its origin and possibility in Jesus Christ. It finds its inner logic in Jesus also. It finds its rationality, its organizing and ordering principle beyond itself in the person of Jesus Christ.

The one fixed point, the object of faith, the scope of Holy Scripture, or of the truth in which we believe, is Jesus Christ himself. It is in and through God's unique self-revelation in him, that faith becomes firmly grounded in the truth of God's own being and provided with the normative control it needs in its correlation with what transcends the capacity of human comprehension. It is faith of this kind that precedes and guides all theological inquiry and explanation, for it constitutes the sound cognitive base which gives force to all right argument. [6]

Why should we bow to the assumption that Jesus Christ is not real? Why should we assume that he is not beautiful, not compelling, not filled with an intrinsic intelligibility? Why should we assume with Descartes and the logicians that the presence of Jesus Christ carries no weight and is irrational?

The answer to antinomianism is not the law, but to stand a person before the sheer beauty and life of Jesus Christ. For it is not fear of judgment that wins a person's heart for

Christ and keeps that person coming back to him. It is the beauty of Jesus, his glory, the simple fact that he alone has the *life* for which we all long with all our hearts. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" asked Peter. "You have the words of eternal life" (JN 6:68). To throw a person upon the law or upon fear as the basis of his or her allegiance to Jesus Christ is to confess that you yourself have never met Jesus, or that the Jesus that you have met is not beautiful, not compelling, not incomparable, and thus not capable of winning a person's allegiance. The answer to Descartes and the logicians is the same, except here we focus not so much on the beauty and incomparable life of Christ, as we do on his intrinsic rationality. Is Jesus mute? Is he dumb? Does his presence carry no weight? Does his beauty, his life, his being have no order? Does his presence not speak volumes?

Instead of bowing to the Descartes of the world and their subjective intellectualism, the Christian Church should earnestly pray for them. For to retreat into one's own mind is an unstated confession that you have never met the *Logos* of God. Far from bowing to the dictates of the logicians, the Christian community should proceed in confidence that following the logic inherent in Jesus Christ will produce light on the cosmos and on the nature and destiny of humanity that utterly outclasses the insights of independent reason and exposes their ineptitude. "Dare to know! Have the courage to use your own understanding." Such may have been the cry of the Enlightenment, but the cry of the Christian Church is, "Dare to know, *in Christ!* Have the courage to follow Christ, the *Logos* of God, with your minds."

How do we go about talking about God? What is to control, direct and guide our thought about God? What logic, what rationale are we to follow in speaking about the being and character of God? What are the unstated rules of discourse on God? The answer to both the question of the possibility of knowing God and the question of theological reasoning is Jesus Christ himself.

We are not to reason about God by borrowing an alien logic from philosophy or science or from what seems right to the natural mind. Such an approach is pure mythology, for it inevitably projects human rationale onto God's face and creates a legendary or mythological god in accordance with human imagination. We are to proceed by following the logic that is inherent in Jesus Christ, the unstated set of rules of thought that proceed out of his communion with his Father as he shares himself with us. We are to reason in the Spirit of Christ, following the *Logos* of God, obediently listening and expanding our thoughts until they are worthy of the theme, as St. Hilary put it, proceeding by way of repentance,^[7] seeking at every point to have our own "rationality" *rationalized* by the rationality of Jesus Christ, so that our thinking reposes upon and conforms to the very reality of God's being.

The new faculties of the regenerate intellect are needed; each must have his understanding enlightened by the heavenly gift imparted to the soul. First he must take his stand upon the sure ground of God, as holy Jeremiah says, that since he is to hear about that nature he may expand his thoughts till they are worthy of the theme, not fixing some arbitrary standard for himself, but judging as of infinity. And again, though he be aware that he is a partaker of the Divine nature, as holy apostle Peter says in his second Epistle, yet he must not measure the divine nature by the limitations of his own, but gauge God's assertions concerning Himself by the scale of His own glorious self-revelation. For he is the best student who does not read his thoughts into the book, but lets it reveal its own; who draws from it its sense, and does not import his own into

it, nor force upon its words a meaning which he had determined was the right one before he opened its pages. Since then we are to discourse on the things of God, let us assume that God has full knowledge of Himself, and bow with humble reverence to his words. For He whom we can only know through His own utterances is the fitting witness concerning Himself.[8]

As Christian theology, and indeed the whole existence of the Church, hinges on the reality of Jesus Christ's presence and self-giving to us, Christian thought about God hinges on its faithfulness to the implicit rules of discourse that come in encounter with Jesus Christ—rules which proceed out of the communion of the Holy Trinity. Jesus is not a revelation of God, not one among many words from God. He is *the* revelation of God, the *Logos* who was with and in the Father before the dawn of time. To meet him, therefore, is to meet the unutterable logic of God's very being, and thus the unstated logic of all divine ways and activities, the very rationality which birthed the universe. To meet Jesus Christ is to meet the rules of spiritual discourse that are predestined to unlock the mysteries of the cosmos and of human existence within it.

When we finally penetrate the veil of Western legalism; when we break through the Enlightenment's vision of God as the mechanistic spectator who engineered the universe and sat down to watch from a distance; when we muster the nerve to follow Jesus Christ into the Trinitarian life of God, the kaleidoscope of human knowledge will then turn, and all things will become new. The universe is wired in perichoresis. For the God who created all things is the God who exists as Father, Son and Spirit in a perichoretic relationship of love. This pattern of divine existence, this living perichoresis revealed to us in Jesus Christ, is the womb of the universe, and it is the pattern of existence running through the cosmos, from the tiniest to the grandest of all things, from human relationships to the nature of light, from the harmony of music to the mystery of space and time.

The question of all questions in Christian theology is the question of Saul on the Damascus road: "Who art Thou, Lord?" We begin with Jesus Christ encountering us and seek to know him as he is in himself. The Christian theological enterprise is thus one of encounter and faith, prayer and repentance. In, with and through the witness of the apostles; in, with and through the sacraments and the fellowship of brothers and sisters—the great cloud of witnesses, past and present—we seek to understand Jesus Christ as he encounters us in person, and we seek to conform our thinking to the inner logic inherent in his very being as the eternal Son of God incarnate.

We can scarcely take the question of Saul of Tarsus two steps into the New Testament without seeing that Jesus Christ is the Father's beloved and faithful Son incarnate. And we can scarcely take a third step without seeing that as the Father's beloved and faithful Son incarnate, he is the Lord of the human race, the one in and through and by whom all things were created, and the one in whom the whole human race is mysteriously and eternally bound.

Christian theology falls at the first hurdle if it does not realize that in the very identity of Jesus Christ, something is being revealed to us about God, on the one hand, and about the human race on the other, and indeed about their relationship together. To say the name of Jesus is to say "Holy Trinity," and it is to say "humanity," and it is to say "Holy Trinity and humanity are together." Herein lies the very heart of the rules of Christian discourse. In Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father incarnate, we are face to face with the reality of

God as Holy Trinity, on the one side, and we are face to face with the union of the Holy Trinity with us, on the other.

Is Jesus Christ an afterthought? Is the revelation of God as Father, Son and Spirit that confronts us in Jesus Christ a mere form that the hidden and unknown and real God assumed for a moment in time, or is this the revelation of the eternal being of God? Is the union between the Father, Son and Spirit and the human race that was accomplished in the very person of Jesus a new idea that God dreamed up after Adam's fall into sin, or is this union between the Holy Trinity and humanity the eternal Word of God which predates the creation of the world?

Christian theology begins with Jesus Christ, and beginning with him means that we move immediately into his relationship with his Father in the fellowship of the Spirit. As St. Athanasius said: "Therefore it is more pious and more accurate to signify God from the Son and call Him Father, than to name Him from His works and call Him Unoriginate." [9] And as St. Hilary said: "My soul has been burning to answer these insane attacks. I call to mind that the very centre of a saving faith is the belief not merely in God, but in God as a Father; not merely in Christ, but in Christ as the Son of God; in Him, not as a creature, but as God the Creator, born of God." [10]

To begin with Jesus Christ leads our minds by the hand, as it were, to understand that God is Holy Trinity from all eternity. For it is not simply "God" that we meet in Jesus Christ; it is the "Son of God," the Son who has a Father and who shares all things with Him in the communion of the Spirit. And this Trinitarian relationship is not a mere form that God assumed for a moment in time, it is the way God is, and always has been, and always will be. Once we see that God *is* Father, Son and Spirit, we are confronted with the inner logic that predates creation itself and thus with the rhyme and reason behind all things, and with the true order which holds the universe together. As Christian theology appeals to the presence of Jesus Christ as its ground, its basis and origin and possibility, it is locked into to the Holy Trinity as its grammar, its set of rules for rational discourse.

We move from encounter with Jesus Christ to his relationship with his Father in the communion of the Spirit. And we move from the Trinity to a Trinitarian interpretation of creation and of election behind it, into a Trinitarian interpretation of Adam and Israel, of the work of Christ and Pentecost, of salvation and church, of word and sacrament, of faith and repentance, and heaven and hell. And we do so in the confidence that the light and life and love discovered will not only capture the heart of humanity, but will speak volumes to all human spheres of knowledge. [11]

Such is the command of the Triune God upon the Church at the dawn of the third Christian millennium.

[1] This lecture was originally delivered at The Institute for the Study of Trinitarian Theology, Jackson, MS as part of the first series of lectures entitled "The Big Picture: From the Trinity to Our Adoption in Christ." For more information about this series of lectures and ISTT visit the web site (www.trinitarianlife.org).

[2] Athanasius, *Ad Serapionem*, 2.1.

[3] Cf. Thomas. F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980).

[4] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.XVI.19.

[5] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928, §15, p.76)

[6] T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988, p. 25.

[7] Note T. F. Torrance's comment: "Objectivity in theological science, like objectivity in every true science, is achieved through rigorous correlation of thought with its proper object and the self-renunciation, repentance and change of mind that it involves" ("Theological Rationality," in *God and Rationality*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 10). And also his comment in the same essay: "The scientist does not doubt the object of his inquiry, for he is committed to a profound belief in its intelligibility, otherwise he would not be involved in its investigation. What he does subject to doubt are his own assumptions about the object, and so he allows attachment to the object to help him detach himself from his own presuppositions" (p. 8).

[8] Hilary, *De Trinitate*, I.18.

[9] Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, I.8.34.

[10] Hilary, *De Trinitate*, I.17.

[11] Note William Dembski's comment: "My thesis is that all disciplines find their completion in Christ and cannot be properly understood apart from Christ" (*Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology*, Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), p. 206.