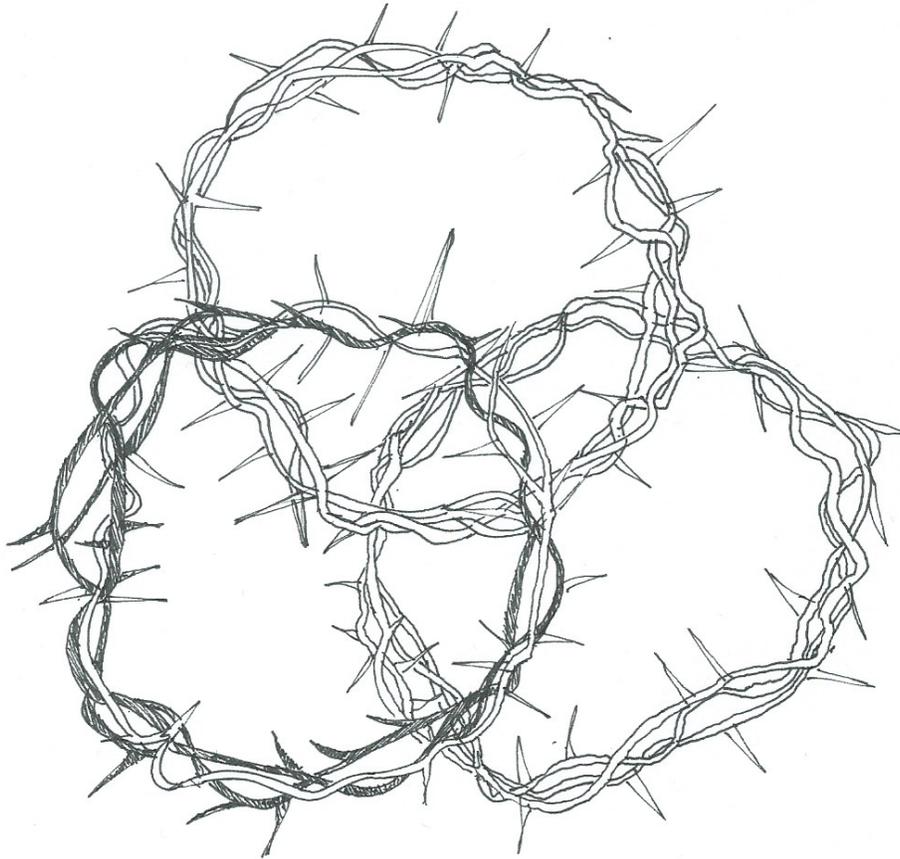


The Mediation of Jesus Christ



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*This Essay is Dedicated to my Friend,
Dr. Bruce Wauchope*

Artwork by Grace Golf

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“In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”
—Jesus, John 14:20

To speak the name of Jesus Christ biblically, in the tradition of the apostles and the early Church, is to say, “Father’s eternal Son,” and it is to say, “the One anointed in the Holy Spirit,” and it is to say, “the Creator and Sustainer of all things—incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and ascended.” Thus, to speak the name of Jesus Christ is to say, “The blessed Trinity, and fallen humanity, and broken creation, are not separated but together in relationship.” Jesus is himself the relationship.

Jesus Christ: The Mediator of Creation

When most of us hear the name of Jesus we think of an individual man who lived, died on a cross, and rose again. According to our tradition Jesus was and is a real man. He did live and die and rise again and ascend to the Father. What I call our great blind spot in the West is not so much here, but in the fact that we do not see any real *connection* or *relationship* between Jesus and ourselves, and between what happened to him in his life, death, resurrection and ascension, *and us*. Although we readily assume that the whole race of humanity fell in Adam, we see Jesus’ death only as an act of God *for* us, but not as an act that *involved* us—all of us, and all of creation. His death and resurrection were things that happened *to him*, not to us. To be sure, they were intended for our benefit, but humanity was a spectator to these events and is in no sense connected or related to him in his death and resurrection—until we do something to bring Jesus into our lives today.

This *assumption of separation* between Jesus and us is, in my opinion, one of the fundamental failures of Western Christianity. The blind spot of separation begets and perpetuates a multitude of ‘us-them’ divisions, including and especially religious divisions, that are destroying our lives and the planet. Moreover, this assumption necessarily makes our faith a work we do that relates us to an absent Jesus, rather than a mind-boggling, liberating, hope-begetting discovery of the *reality* of his union with us and with all creation.

Such a Jesus may make perfect sense to us in our individualistic mindset, but I contend that it betrays the Jesus of the apostles and of the early church. The apostolic Jesus is the Father’s eternal Son, *and* the One anointed in the Spirit, *and* he is the One in and through and by whom all things were created and are constantly sustained. These three fundamental truths about Jesus Christ have rarely been held together with the incarnation. And failure here has fueled the oppressive racial, relational, sexual, ecological, environmental, religious, and political and social hell we find ourselves in today.

When these three realities—that Jesus is the Father’s eternal Son, *and* the One anointed in the Spirit, *and* the One in and through and by whom all things were created and are constantly sustained—are seen together and taken seriously in the *incarnate* Son, we suddenly find ourselves standing before a Jesus who is far larger than we have dared to dream. This Jesus is the fountain of all life, the mediator of all existence, the center of the whole cosmos, “the Light of the world” (John 8:12), “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev

22:13). This Jesus Christ is “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16).

To speak of this Jesus is to say something about the being of God, about all creation, about the human race—the whole human race—and about their relationship to each other. In this incarnate Son, the life of the triune God and of creation and of all humanity are not separated, but bound together in relationship, indeed in union. Jesus is himself the one in whom these relationships originate and are sustained. He *is* the union.

Behind this stunning truth stand two realities that we must take time to note with great care. First, Jesus Christ is the eternal, beloved Son of the Father, who shares all things with Him in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius, in his treatise *Against the Arians*, quotes the Presbyter Arius’ book *Thalia* saying that “God was not always Father. He was God alone and solitary, before He was the Father, and afterwards He became a Father.”¹ The implications of such a conception are staggering and multi-dimensional. In 325 AD the Council of Nicaea was convened to address this question directly, and concluded that the relationship of the Father and the Son is not created but divine and eternal. Jesus Christ is not a creature, but “Light from Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, of the same being as the Father” (*homoousios to Patri*). This critical phrase is enshrined in the heart of the Nicene Creed. For Athanasius there was never a time when the Father was without His Son and Spirit,² existing alone as an abstract, non-relational, single-person deity, simply god and not Father. As he stated bluntly: “The Holy Trinity is no created being.”³ And as Hilary of Poitiers declared:

I call to mind that the very centre of a saving faith is the belief not merely in God, but in God as 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.⁴

Here we stand before the beautiful mystery of the very being of God. Three divine persons completely dwelling in one another in indivisible oneness without loss of distinct personhood—*perichoresis*.⁵ There is no dimension of divine being deeper than or beyond or before the communion of the blessed Three, who live forever in indivisible oneness and love. This relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit is not new, not a mere form that the hidden and unknowable God assumed during the incarnation; it did not begin on Christmas morning. This is who God is and always has been and always will be. And this divine relationship forms the womb of creation.

Second, every act of God is therefore a trinitarian act, arising out of and involving the relationship, the indivisible oneness, of the Father, Son, and Spirit. All things, therefore, as the apostles perceived and testified, have their origin and existence not simply through God, but in

¹ Cited in *The Orations of St. Athanasius Against the Arians* (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh, n.d.), I.5. See also Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 116ff.

² *Ibid.*, I.11, 17; cf. II.34. See also John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, I.VIII, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. IX, second series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

³ *Ibid.*, I.18.

⁴ St. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, I.17, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, IX (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

⁵ For more on perichoresis see my lectures, “The Light of the World: From Jesus Christ to Perichoresis and the Logic of the Cosmos,” in the series “The Light of the Cosmos” available at our website, www.perichoresis.org. See also Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 168-202, and Jürgen Moltman, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 174ff.

and through and by the Father's Son, Jesus Christ. For it is impossible for the Father to act in isolation from the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian life is one of *indivisible* love and action.

Here let us pause and take note of the apostolic witness to the astonishing reality of Jesus Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of all things—the Mediator of Creation. First from the great Apostle Paul:

Col 1:15-17. And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

1Cor 8:6. ...yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

And now from the author of Hebrews and the great apostle John:

Heb 1:1-3. God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the Word of His power.

Jn 1:1-4. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.

All things “without exception,”⁶ in John Painter's simple phrase, whether visible or invisible, in the heavens and on earth, came into being and continue to exist—to be held together, sustained, given life, preserved—in Jesus Christ, the Father's eternal Son and Anointed One. It seems to me of critical importance to recognize that confessing the eternal Trinity and Jesus Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of all things—the Mediator of Creation—means that prior to the incarnation there is a relationship between the Father's Son, Jesus Christ, and all creation, including the whole human race. To put this in another, though lesser way, this means that prior to our faith and repentance, or our baptism and our participation in the Eucharist, Jesus Christ has a vital relationship with us.

Jesus is not like a child blowing soap bubbles into the air. Once the bubbles come into being they detach from the wand and from the child; she could go back into the house and watch a cartoon on TV, and the soap bubbles she created would float off independently of her. There would no longer be any real connection between the child and the bubbles she created. This is not the apostolic vision of Jesus Christ as Creator, for he continues to uphold us and give life to all. Without him the soap bubbles would disappear from existence.

We should note here a few comments from Athanasius, whose entire understanding of the gospel revolves around the relationship between the eternal Word of God and creation.⁷

⁶ John Painter, “The Death of Jesus in John: A Discussion of the Tradition, History, and Theology of John,” in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, edited by G. Van Belle (Leuven: University Press, 2007), 350. See also his “Theology, Eschatology and the Prologue of John,” *SJT* 46.1 (1993), 32.

⁷ See the careful study by Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

The holy Word of the Father, then, almighty and all-perfect, uniting with the universe and having everywhere unfolded His own powers, and having illumined all, both things seen and things invisible, holds them together and binds them to Himself, having left nothing void of His own power, but on the contrary quickening and sustaining all things everywhere... And not to spend time in the enumeration of particulars, where the truth is obvious, there is nothing that is and takes place but has been made and stands by Him and through Him...⁸

The Father is as the Fountain of existence, and the Son is the Life which flows from that Fountain, and by which all creatures have their principle of life, and their preservation in it.⁹

And we should note a few declarations from John Calvin, the first of which comes from his commentary on John 1:4:

So far, he has taught us that all things were created by the Word of God. He now likewise attributes to Him the preservation of what had been created; as if he were saying that in the creation of the world His power did not simply suddenly appear only to pass away, but that it is visible in the permanence of the stable and settled order of nature—just as Heb. 1.3 says that He upholds all things by the Word or command of His power... the Word of God was not only the fount of life to all creation, so that those which had not yet existed began to be, but that His life-giving power makes them remain in their state. For did not His continued inspiration quicken the world, whatsoever flourishes would without doubt immediately decay or be reduced to nothing. In short, what Paul ascribes to God, that in Him we have our being and move and live (Acts 17.28), John declares to be accomplished by the blessing of the Word. It is God, therefore, who gives us life; but He does so by the eternal Word.¹⁰

The same point is made in his sermon on John 1:1-5.

There are two things we must properly consider. One, that we have beginning and life through this Word. The other, that we are sustained through Him—and not only we, but all the world.¹¹

...and we can behold Him in all creatures, because he sustains all things...¹²

⁸ St. Athanasius, *Against the Heathens*, §42, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); see also §41, and *On the Incarnation of the Word*, §3.

⁹ *Orations of St. Athanasius*, III.1.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *The Gospel According to John*, translated by T. H. L. Parker, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 10-11. For more on Calvin's view of Christ as mediator of Creation, see Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 53ff, and Peter Wyatt, *Jesus Christ and Creation in the Theology of John Calvin* (Eugene: Pickwick, 1996), 55ff. Note also Calvin's comment on Acts 17:28: "Now, we see that all those who know not God know not themselves; because they have God present with them not only in the excellent gifts of the mind, but in their very essence; because it belongeth to God alone to be, all other things have their being in him. Also, we learn out of this place that God did not so create the world once that he did afterward depart from his work; but that it standeth by his power..." In *Commentary from the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprinted 1981), 168-169.

¹¹ Cited in Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder*, 59.

¹² Cited in Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder*, 71. Note Calvin's passing comment on Hebrews 11:3: "Now the faithful, to whom he has given eyes, see sparks of his glory, as it were, glittering in every created thing. The

And note the following from his commentary on Genesis:

Previously, direct communication with God was the source of life to Adam; but, from the moment in which he became alienated from God, it was necessary that he should recover life by the death of Christ, by whose life he then lived.¹³

Following the apostles and early leaders like Athanasius, Calvin is at pains to point out that the creation *and* the continued existence of all things flow from Jesus Christ. This is not a novel insight, but part of the bedrock of the perennial tradition. Jesus *is* the Mediator of Creation, not merely *was* once long ago.

Likewise the Trappist monk and mystic Thomas Merton comments: “All creatures, spiritual and material, are created in, through, and by Christ, the Word of God... it is He Who sustains them in being. In Him they ‘hold together.’ Without Him they would fall apart.”¹⁴ And Professor Colin Gunton writes: “There is already and always a relationship between the Son of God and the world and it now, uniquely, takes the form of personal presence.”¹⁵ And Karl Barth: “Man never at all exists in himself... Man exists in Jesus Christ and in Him alone.”¹⁶

Even this small collection of quotations about Jesus as the Creator and Sustainer of all things—the Mediator of Creation—exposes our disastrous assumption of separation. Part of the blame here may in fact fall on Calvin who seems to contradict his own thought in his famous beginning to Book Three of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

In Book Two Calvin sets out his vision of the finished work of Christ, summarizing it beautifully: “We see that the whole of our salvation in all its parts is comprehended in Christ [Acts 4:12]. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else.”¹⁷ Then he immediately opens Book Three with this statement:

How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son—not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.¹⁸

world was no doubt made, that it might be the theatre of the divine glory.” In *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint, 1981).

¹³ John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint, 1981), 3:22. Note also, “Yet I am not dissatisfied with what has been handed down by some of the fathers, as Augustine and Eucherius, that the tree of life was a figure of Christ, inasmuch as he is the Eternal Word: it could not indeed be otherwise a symbol of life, than by representing him in figure. For we must maintain what is declared in the first chapter of John, that the life of all things was included in the Word, but especially the life of men, which is conjoined with reason and intelligence. Wherefore, by this sign, Adam was admonished, that he could claim nothing for himself as if it were his own, in order that he might depend wholly upon the Son of God, and might not seek life anywhere but in him.” In *Commentary on Genesis*, 2:9.

¹⁴ Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1961), 137.

¹⁵ Colin Gunton, *The Christian Faith* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 98.

¹⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, reprint, 1985), II/1, 149. See also III/2, 132ff.

¹⁷ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill and translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), II.XVI.19.

¹⁸ *Institutes*, III.I.1; see also III.XIV.6. But note here Louis Berkhof’s careful statement; “Lutherans generally treat the doctrine of the mystical union *anthropologically*, and therefore conceive of it as established by faith... Reformed theology, on the other hand, deals with union of believers with Christ

Here is not the place for a full discussion of what Calvin may or may not be saying in the total picture of his theology.¹⁹ But taking this statement at face value brings two questions into sharp focus. First, are we to think of Jesus as an isolated “container” of sorts, in whom all his divine life and salvation are housed in disconnection from us and his creation? How could this be if Jesus *is*, not simply *was*, the Mediator of creation so that all things continuously derive their existence and life from him? Second, is it possible for the Holy Spirit to be split off from Jesus, to go or be anywhere that Jesus is not? Calvin seems to suggest, here at least, that there is a *divisible* relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, such that the Holy Spirit can come *to us*, and work *in us*, perhaps on the basis of what Jesus did in his “separation from us,” and lead us to faith in Jesus—and only then are we united with Christ.²⁰

But the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, as we will see later, and indeed as we can already see, is an indivisible relationship. Thus instead of thinking of the Holy Spirit crossing some divide that Jesus has not crossed in his incarnate journey, namely into our darkness, and then giving us faith to believe—apart from Jesus—so we can then be united to Christ and receive his benefits, I contend the opposite: that the Holy Spirit *accompanied* Jesus into our great delusion, and thus from inside the darkness and indeed from inside our own souls, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits to the reality of our union with Jesus the Mediator of Creation—so that we may then believe in this Jesus and experience his life.

Behind these questions are more foundational ones. Did the eternal Son and Anointed One break his relationship with his Father and the Holy Spirit when he became a human being, in some sort of divine divorce, as if he no longer lived in indivisible union with them? Is it biblical and apostolic to think of Jesus Christ in such isolation from the Father and the Holy Spirit? And did he dissolve his relationship with the human race and all creation in his incarnation, such that the One in whom all things were created and are continually upheld suddenly abdicated that aspect of his being? Do the passages that we have looked at briefly give any ground for thinking that creation actually exists and continues to be without the Creator Son? And thus the question, What does the incarnate life, death, resurrection, and ascension of this Mediator of Creation therefore mean, if not that the relationship he has with all creation (which from our vantage point was weakened and threatened by the fall of Adam) is now healed, restored, renewed, recreated, and made eternally secure in him?

If Jesus were not the Father’s eternal Son, in and through and by whom all things are created and constantly sustained, it would be sensible to see him as a mere individual, even a repository of grace, and to see ourselves disconnected from him and unrelated to what happened to him. But given that he is the Mediator of Creation, given that his relationship with his Father and the Holy

theologically, and as such does far greater justice to this important subject. In doing so it employs the term ‘mystical union’ in a broad sense as the designation not only of the subjective union of Christ and believers, but also of the union that lies back of it, that is basic to it, and of which it is only the culminating expression, namely the federal union of Christ and those who are His in the counsel of redemption, the mystical union ideally established in that eternal counsel, and the union as it is objectively effected in the incarnation and the redemptive work of Christ.” In *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint, 1979), p. 447.

¹⁹ For more here see Julie Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder*; and Peter Wyatt, *Jesus Christ and Creation in the Theology of John Calvin*. And see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957) II.2, pp. 34-76. This section of Barth is on the foundation of the doctrine of election, but it is most relevant to the question of the mediation of Jesus Christ in Calvin’s thought, especially the small print sections.

²⁰ Note here Louis Berkhof’s comment, “...it is quite evident that it is not correct to say that the mystical union is the fruit of man’s believing acceptance of Christ, as if faith were not one of the blessings of the covenant which flow unto us from the fulness of Christ, but a condition which man must meet partly or wholly in his own strength, in order to enter into living relationship with Jesus Christ. Faith is first of all a gift of God, and as such a part of the treasures that are hidden in Christ.” In *Systematic Theology*, 449.

Spirit is unbroken, and given that he continues to uphold creation, then what happens to him has dramatic implications for everything from the being of God to every atom, the entire human race, and the whole cosmos.

If we were created in and are enlivened through and sustained by this Creator Son, then, for good or ill, what happens to him in his incarnate life, death, resurrection, and ascension necessarily involves us. How could it be otherwise? How could the death and resurrection of this Creator Son incarnate be a single hair less momentous and cosmic and universal than the event of creation which he called into being? Note here Thomas F. Torrance's comment:

Since he is the eternal Word of God by whom and through whom all things that are made are made, and in whom the whole universe of visible and invisible realities coheres and hangs together, and since in him divine and human natures are inseparably united, then the secret of every man, whether he believes or not, is bound up with Jesus for it is in him that human contingent existence has been grounded and secured.²¹

As the apostles testify, this Son's death was not only the death of an individual man, but also the death of the One in whom all things were created and are held together. What is the meaning of this Son's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, if not that in him *we* were crucified, dead, and buried, and *we* were raised again to new life and exalted to the Father's embrace, and creation itself was recreated in him? How could the human race and creation be excluded from what happened to this Mediator of Creation? How could we possibly be mere spectators to the incarnate journey of this Creator Son into our darkness and sin? How could we conceive of him as simply an individual man?

Note carefully the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:13-18:

If we are out of our minds in a blissful, divine ecstasy, it is for God, but if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. For it is Christ's love that fuels our passion and motivates us, because we are absolutely convinced that he has given his life for all of us. This means all died with him, so that those who live should no longer live self-absorbed lives but lives that are poured out for him—the one who died for us and now lives again. So then, from now on, we have a new perspective that refuses to evaluate people merely by their outward appearances. For that is how we once viewed the Anointed One, but no longer do we see him with a limited human insight. Now, if anyone is enfolded into Christ, he has become an entirely new person. All that is related to the old order has vanished. Behold, everything is fresh and new (*The Passion Translation*).²²

On this passage Paul Minear puts the momentous insight of the apostle succinctly:

In the context of this statement [2 Corinthians 5:17] Paul located this transition from the old to the new at a single point: the death of all men in Christ's death for all, and the living of all men for him who was raised for all. To the apostle, what happened in Christ simultaneously transformed not only the status of creation but also the vantage point from which this creation must be viewed.²³

²¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 183. See "Professor Thomas F. Torrance on Union with Christ: Excerpts from *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church*" (London: James Clarke & Co., 1959) at www.perichoresis.org.

²² On this passage see also Francois du Toit, *Mirror Study Bible* (Mirror Word Pub., 2012).

²³ Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1961), 111. Note also Herman Ridderbos' comment on this passage: "[T]he unmistakable fact is passed over that in Paul dying, being buried, etc., with Christ does not have its ultimate ground in the ceremony of incorporation into the Christian church, but rather in already having been included in the historical death and resurrection

And read carefully the words from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, 2:4-7:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come he might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

And this single, stunning statement from Colossians 3:3:

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

And from Romans 6:6:

...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

And from the apostle Peter's first epistle, 1:3:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

Because the apostles see that Jesus is the divine Son and Creator and Sustainer of all things—the Mediator of Creation—they envisage the incarnate Son not only as a real human, but as The Human, The Last Adam²⁴ in whom all the race of Adam and creation are gathered. For the humanity of the Creator Son incarnate is inherently an “all-inclusive vicarious humanity.”²⁵

Decades ago, back in the eighties when I was studying theology with Prof. James Torrance, I sat in the Aberdeen airport waiting for my brother who was coming to visit us from the States and play some golf.²⁶ I was reading the newspaper when I happened to notice a dark-haired young man in his mid-to-late thirties. He was nervous, walking back and forth between the terminal door and the Arrivals monitor every five minutes or so. At length he smiled, let out a sigh of relief, and relaxed, positioning himself thirty feet in front of the terminal doors in the middle of a group of others.

As I put the paper down to watch, the doors flew open and a few folks hustled through. Then there was a steady stream of people, some all but running to catch a flight, some not sure which way to go next, some smiling, obviously thrilled to be back home in Scotland. The crowd began

of Christ himself. Of particular significance is the pronouncement of 2 Corinthians 5:14ff., where a clear transition becomes perceptible from the “Christ for us” to the “we with [or in] Christ.” ...From this it is to be concluded that “having died,” “being in Christ,” “being new creation,” the fact that his own are no longer judged and “known according the flesh” (namely, according to the worldly mode of existence), has been given and effected with the death of Christ himself.” In *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 59-60.

²⁴ See Rom 5:12ff; 1Cor 15:20ff and 45-49.

²⁵ J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 52.

²⁶ This story is published in C. Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited* (New York: Faith Words, 2012), 142-144.

to disappear, and the dad began to look anxious. *Then it happened.* A brown-haired little boy of about eleven appeared by himself in the doorway.

Standing perfectly still, the boy scanned the crowd like an alarmed deer. I heard his dad shout something, probably his son's name, but I couldn't tell for sure. But the boy heard his father's voice and started running across the airport. To me it seemed like everything in the airport went into slow motion, and I had the perfect seat to watch it. The little boy's eyes were full of delight as he ran. His dad just stood there with a huge smile on his face. No parent or grandparent could have watched without tears.

In one motion the boy dropped his bag and jumped as his dad embraced him. They kissed each other and cried. They laughed. But mostly they just held each other. It was a simple, beautiful embrace. Watching through tears in my own eyes, I heard these words whispered to me: "Baxter, Baxter, there is the gospel. There is the resurrection and ascension of My Son coming home from the far country. There is our embrace. And the good news is, he is not alone, *he has you and the whole world with him.*"

I knew instantly that I had seriously underestimated Jesus. As a typical American, I was an individualist. I had always believed that Jesus was the Son of God and that he became a human being, but I thought of him as an individual who did something for us. I had not seen—even though Professor Torrance was telling us so fifty times a day, in his great phrase "the vicarious humanity of Christ"²⁷—that in Jesus something happened not only *for* us, but *to* us and *with* us.²⁸

One of the first times I told this story was in 1997 in Adelaide, Australia. As I finished the lecture I took a seat on the front row and then heard a young girl crying, "Mr. Kruger, Mr. Kruger," as she ran down the aisle. As she called my name, my heart sank, for I assumed I had said something that had upset her. She sat beside me in tears. As I hugged her, I asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing is *wrong*, Mr. Kruger."

"Why are you crying?" I asked.

"When you told your story of the little boy in the airport, the Lord gave me a vision."

"What did you see?"

"I saw God on a throne, and there were steps everywhere leading up to him. And there were heaps of people all over the steps. We were all trying to get to God, but none of us could make it; we were all bruised and cut, our knees were bloody, and we were all exhausted and sad and crying because we could not make it to God."

"That is sad," I said. "Did you see anything else?"

"Then I saw Jesus."

"And what did Jesus do?"

"Jesus walked over to us, gathered us all into his arms, and walked up the steps and sat down in his Father's lap."

We sat silent for a moment in the beauty of that vision. I gave her a kiss on the cheek and whispered, "that is the gospel."²⁹

²⁷ See his essay, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ," in *The Incarnation*, edited by Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), 127ff, and *Worship*, pp50ff.

²⁸ Note Thomas F. Torrance's statement that Jesus "was so one with us that when he died we died, for he did not die for himself but for us, and he did not die alone, but we died in him as those whom he had bound to himself inseparably by his incarnation. Therefore when he rose again we rose in him and with him, and when he presented himself before the face of the Father, he presented us also before God, so that we are already accepted of God in him once and for all." In *Atonement: The Person and Work of Jesus Christ* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 152.

²⁹ Note this comment from C. S. Lewis "...He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under

If Jesus were the Lone Ranger or perhaps the Marlboro Man, he could ride into the sunset and not much more than a little dust would be disturbed. But he is the Creator and the Sustainer of his creation. What becomes of him is not of peripheral significance for his creation—to say nothing yet of what it means to the Father and the Holy Spirit, with whom Jesus is indivisible. If *he* rides into the sunset, he takes the dust and the ground, the earth and sky, the sun and moon, and all the soap bubbles with him. If the human race fell in a mere man named Adam, what happened to us in the life and death of the incarnate Creator and Son of the Father?³⁰ If the Creator dies, the creation has no way of continuing to be; if he goes down, we go down. And that is the astonishing truth the disciples of Jesus are trying to tell us.

The incarnate Mediator of Creation died, and we died with him.³¹ He rose, we rose. He ascended, we ascended—Adam, all of us, and all of creation were lifted up in renewed union with the Father and the Holy Spirit.³² Herein lies hope for all of us who are broken and know that if it is up to us to secure a relationship with Jesus Christ we are doomed. But Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son and Anointed One, the Mediator of Creation does not do abandonment. He has taken responsibility for his creation and for all our destructive blindness.³³

The Mediator of Creation as the Lamb of God

For Athanasius the fall of Adam is understood as Adam’s direct rejection of the Word of God (in his indivisible oneness with his Father and the Holy Spirit) and thus of life in him. There are, of course, a myriad of consequences of such rejection, but the main point is that in turning from

the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders.” In *Miracles* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 148. I am grateful to Roger Newell for this reference. See Roger J. Newell, *The Feeling Intellect: Reading the Bible with C. S. Lewis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010) 33.

³⁰ See Rom 12ff. F. J. Huegel puts these words into Jesus’ mouth: “The old man is crucified; I take him with me to the tomb and, as I rise, it is you who rise in me. As I ascend to the Throne it is you who ascend with me. You are a new creation. Henceforth your life shall flow *from me and from my Throne*.” In *The Enthroned Christian* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, n.d.), 59.

³¹ Note Karl Barth’s comment: “...He has made an end of us as sinners and therefore of sin itself by going to death as the One who took our place as sinners. In His person He has delivered up us sinners and sin itself to destruction. He has removed us sinners and sin, negated us, cancelled us out: ourselves, our sin, and the accusation, condemnation and perdition which has overtaken us... The man of sin, the first Adam, the cosmos alienated from God, the ‘present evil world’ (Gal 1:4) was taken and killed and buried in and with Him on the cross.” In *Church Dogmatics*, translated by G. W. Bromley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), V/1, 253-54.

³² “With the birth and resurrection of Jesus, with Jesus himself, the relation of the world to God has been drastically altered, for everything has been placed on an entirely new basis, the unconditional grace of God.” In Thomas, F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1976) 34. Note also James B. Torrance, “When Jesus was born for us at Bethlehem, was baptized by the Spirit in the river Jordan, suffered under Pontius Pilate, rose again and ascended, our humanity was born again, baptized by the Spirit, suffered, died, rose again and ascended in him, in his representative vicarious humanity.” In *Worship*, 49-50.

³³ Note here Jesus’ astonishing declaration moments before he turns toward the cross: “And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known; that the love wherewith You love Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26).

the Son of God, Adam inevitably began to lapse back into the non-existence out of which he was called into being by the eternal Word.³⁴ This forms part of the divine dilemma for Athanasius.

As, then, the creatures whom He had created reasonable, like the Word, were in fact perishing, and such noble works were on the road to ruin, what then was God, being Good, to do? Was He to let corruption and death have their way with them? ...It was impossible, therefore, that God should leave man to be carried off by corruption, because it would be unfitting and unworthy of Himself.³⁵

The solution, of course, as we have seen, was the incarnation of the Creator Son himself. Khaled Anatolios describes Athanasius' thought simply and beautifully: "The definitive response of God to humanity's accumulating fall is the sinless 'fall' of God himself, through the incarnation and human death of the Word."³⁶

But if the goal is the healing and reconstitution of our union with the Word, more is to be said about Jesus' death. And two specific questions are helpful here. First, in all that we have said so far about our death, resurrection, and ascension in Jesus the incarnate Creator, are we not in danger of positing a strange, anti-relational, legal, and external divine act of abstract sovereignty? Gregory Nazianzen argued that 'the unassumed is the unhealed.'³⁷ Therefore the Son must take to himself our complete humanity—mind, body, and soul—and indeed all of our *fallen* humanity, otherwise parts of our broken humanity are untouched and left out of his salvation. But what about our wills? I do not mean to question whether or not Jesus had a human will; that has been decided. I mean that without our vote, without our willing response to Jesus, can we speak of union or even of real relationship? Without our participation, in what sense are we really included in Jesus? Are we not in danger of falling again into the tired old legal fiction of Protestantism, and of backing such a notion to the early church?

Second, why was the *cross* necessary? I don't mean the death of Jesus, but the cross. Why the anger and rage, the beating and scoffing and spitting? Why the hoisting up of the Son with such enmity and vitriol? It would seem that what is really critical, for Athanasius' thought, is that the incarnate Creator die and be buried, and then rise again and ascend to the Father in the Spirit. And in the context of the Hebrew Day of Atonement, what was critical is that the High Priest slaughter the goat and sprinkle its blood on the mercy seat (Lev 16:15). But the Scriptures paint a different picture of the death of Jesus, a scene of terrible hatred and bitterness toward him on the part of humanity. Why is this venomous acrimony from humanity suddenly so prominent in the story?

Here we are a hairsbreadth away from an astonishing, almost unbelievable act of divine, redemptive genius. For the incarnate Son not only died; he died *at our hands*. *We killed him*. The human race did vote; we responded. In Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, in Judas and Pontius Pilate, in the Roman cohort and the Temple Police, in the cheering crowds, in Jew and Gentile together, the human race exercised its will and condemned and cursed and crucified the incarnate Creator and Son of God—committed *deicide*, the rejection and killing of God. In utter *oneness* with his

³⁴ This is one of the main and repeated points in Khaled Anatolios' book *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, but see especially pp. 30ff. See also Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 100ff.

³⁵ *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation*, translated and edited by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (London: A. R. Mowbray, reprinted 1963), §6.

³⁶ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), 52.

³⁷ "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole." In *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. VII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), Ep. CI.

Father and the Holy Spirit, and as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the Son of God became one of us, and we betrayed him with disdain and tortured him in our scoffing rage. It was not the *wrath of the Father* that was poured out on Jesus at Calvary, but the *wrath of the human race*. Jesus and the Gospels are clear and emphatic.

Matt 20:18-19. Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him up to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.

Mark 9:31. For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise again three days later.”

Luke 18:31-33. And He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered up to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.”

Jn 19:15-18. They therefore cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” And so he then delivered Him up to them to be crucified. They took Jesus therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull... There they crucified Him...³⁸

Acts 4:27. For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You did anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.

The response, the will, the vote of the human race to the presence of the Father’s Son and Creator incarnate was to damn him, and damn him with bitterness and enmity, giving him gall as his last drink. With venomous contempt *we* condemned our Creator, banishing him from our presence on Golgotha’s hill. The stunning self-surrender of the Son of God to be despised and forsaken by sinners and to endure our hostility against him (Heb 12:3) is our Creator’s personal entry into our deepest iniquity. In staggering love the Father’s eternal Son found his way into the reality that threatened his union with us, namely, our rejection of him. By giving himself into the hands of wicked men he yielded to our great darkness and rebellion, suffering them personally, thereby using our alien vision and rebellion and our will to damn him as the means of establishing his union with us *in our sin*.³⁹ Bearing the scorn of broken humanity, Jesus met us and accepted us precisely in our resistance and unwillingness to come to him, indeed in our hatred of him and

³⁸ See also Matthew 16:21; 26:45; Mark 8:31; 10:33-34; Luke 9:44; 24:6-7; John 1:10-11; 18:3-6, 12; Acts 2:23; 2:36; 3:13-15; 4:10; 4:27; Hebrews 12:1-3. See also *Stricken By God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), especially the essays by Brad Jersak, Michael Hardin, Richard Rohr, and James Alison. For my treatment of Jesus’ cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,” see my book *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam* (Jackson: Perichoresis, 2003), 58ff.

³⁹ For more on my thoughts here see “God in the Hands of Angry Sinners,” in *Trinity and Transformation: J. B. Torrance’s Vision of Worship, Mission, and Society*, edited by Todd H. Speidell (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 92-108. This essay is available in the online journal *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, Supplemental Volume 3: “A Theological Tribute to James B. Torrance,” 87-102, and at www.perichoresis.org. See also chapter 16, “The Rejection of the Anointed Son,” in my book *The Shack Revisited*, 179-195.

of his exposing light. What could possibly be more vile? Yet it is precisely here in this most vile act of violence that the Creator in everlasting love becomes “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” and, as we shall see, “the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit” (John 1:29, 33).

As Jesus bowed to be slaughtered as an innocent lamb by the human race, he brought his oneness with his Father and the Holy Spirit—and his divine but jeopardized union with the human race—into the abyss of the great delusion where Satan has his hold. In so doing Jesus Christ the Creator meets us at our twisted worst, using our bitter rejection of him to bind us in union with him forever. Thus the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected Creator Son secured his union with us by way of our unbelief, once and for all obliterating the threat of our nonexistence, rendering separation from him an eternal impossibility.

Here in the shed blood of breathtaking divine mercy and insane human treachery, unimaginable sin and unimaginable love meet in one Person.⁴⁰ As the human race lifted up⁴¹ the beaten and tortured and rejected Son on the cross, the blessed Trinity dramatically transformed our treachery and murder into the Mercy Seat, the place where the love and grace of the Triune God met, accepted, and embraced the fallen and apostate human race with everlasting mercy. Therein the blessed Trinity transfigured our act of human unfaithfulness into the new covenant, and our rejection of the Anointed Son into a new relationship: the recreated union between the Triune God and fallen humanity and creation, forever, in Jesus Christ.

By yielding to our enraged will, Jesus the Mediator of Creation became both the great exodus—the Lamb lifting away the crushing weight of our catastrophic idolatry—and heaven’s gate, the true Temple where the life of the Triune God takes up and holds the fallen human race and all creation in its brokenness. In surrendering to our brazen blindness and our will to damn and despise him to the point of brutal beating, mocking, spitting, and crucifixion, Jesus Christ the Mediator of Creation became the Mediator of Redemption. Not in a legal fiction, but by binding himself to us in love through his astonishing submission to our rejection.

Here we stand before a renewal of union with the eternal Son, made real not by our faith and repentance, but by our unbelief and treason! Such an act of redemption is so breathtaking that it is almost beyond thought, but it is the gospel itself. It is both too beautiful and too horrible for words, but so it is. For he is a merciful Creator and redeeming genius who loves the human race. Let all the earth be silent and feel the hope of his very existence, and let us with solemn hearts and mourning in our souls⁴² look upon him whom we pierced. Let us see that our corporate act of betrayal and apostasy was not a surprise to the blessed Trinity, but predestined as the heart of the great mystery of salvation (Acts 2:23; 2Tim 1:9; Eph 1:3-5).⁴³

⁴⁰ Note here Isaiah 53:3-6; cf. Hebrews 9:28 and 1 Peter 2:24.

⁴¹ See John 3:14; 8:28, and 12:32.

⁴² See Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37, and Revelation 1:7.

⁴³ Note Torrance’s amazing comment on the intensifying conflict between Israel and God in the history of Israel: “That intensification, however, is not to be regarded simply as an accidental result of the covenant but rather as something which God deliberately took into the full design of his reconciling activity, for it was the will and the way of God’s grace to effect reconciliation with man at his very worst, precisely in his state of rebellion against God. That is to say, in his marvelous wisdom and love God worked out in Israel a way of reconciliation which does not depend on the worth of men and women, but makes their very sin in rebellion against him the means by which he binds them for ever to himself and through which he reconstitutes their relations with him in such a way that their true end is fully and perfectly realised in unsullied communion with himself.” In *The Mediation of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 38; see also 42-43; and T. F. Torrance, “Israel and the Incarnation,” in *Judaica* 13 (1957), 6ff.

The Mediation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

Because Jesus is the Anointed One who shares being and life with the Holy Spirit, he is both the Lamb who lifts away the delusion and its devastation, *and* the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Is the Holy Spirit to be regarded as a spectator of Jesus' incarnate life? Is Jesus not the One anointed by the Spirit? In what sense are we to think of the Holy Spirit as absent or distant from Jesus and his sufferings at our hands? In indivisible oneness with Jesus in his incarnate sojourn into our darkness, the Holy Spirit, according to Irenaeus, "accustomed" himself "to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God"⁴⁴—and did so not as a watered-down spirit, but as the Holy Spirit, "the Lord, and giver of life."⁴⁵ T. F. Torrance picks up this theme from Irenaeus and develops it.

Hence in the union of divine and human natures in the Son the eternal Spirit of the living God has composed himself, as it were, to dwell with human nature, and human nature has been adapted and become accustomed to receive and bear that same Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

The Holy Spirit is not acting from a position as observer of Jesus' suffering and from an absence to us in our darkness, but from indivisible oneness with Jesus and his submission to our delusion. It is the Holy Spirit's determined delight to *reveal* this reality, this union, in us, inside our own blindness. The Spirit's mission is not to *create* a relationship from scratch between us and Jesus, as if that union were not already made real in creation and in our rejection of our Lord.

Is the spiritual union another union, a union in addition to our carnal union with Christ, or is it a sharing in the one and only union between God and man wrought out in Jesus Christ? That is a very important question, for if the spiritual union is an additional union, then our salvation depends not only on the finished work of Christ but upon something else as well which has later to be added on to it before it is real for us. That was in fact the idea taught by Romans [Roman Catholics] for example, in their doctrine of baptismal regeneration and *ex opere operato* sacramental incorporation into Christ, but it is the same idea that is taught also by Protestants in their doctrine of a union with Christ which is effected by faith or by conversion through which alone what Christ has done for us becomes real for us. Both these forms of the same error lead to a doctrine of man's co-operation in his own salvation; and so involve a doctrine of conditional grace.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ St. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint, 1987), III.17.1; see also III.20.2; III.18.7; III.19.1; and IV.20.4.

⁴⁵ For more of my thought here see "God in the Hands of Angry Sinners," and chapter 20, "The Spirit of Adoption," in *The Shack Revisited*, 227ff.

⁴⁶ T. F. Torrance, "Come, Creator Spirit," in *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 246; see also Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 189. Note also Torrance's statement, "He came as the Spirit who in Jesus has penetrated into a new intimacy with our human nature, for he came as the Spirit in whom Jesus lived through our human life from end to end, from birth to death, and beyond into the resurrection. And therefore he came not as isolated and naked Spirit, but as Spirit charged with all the experience of Jesus as he shared to the full our mortal nature and weakness, and endured its temptation and grief and suffering and death, and with the experience of Jesus as he struggled and prayed, and worshipped and obeyed, and poured out his life in compassion for mankind." In "Come, Creator Spirit," 246-247.

⁴⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith* (London: James Clarke, 1959), cvii.

The Holy Spirit does not come to us from the outside, as if the Spirit were only watching as the Son bowed before our hatred. The Holy Spirit was indivisibly one with Jesus as he experienced our wrath. And thus the Spirit moves not from absence to presence, but from union with us, in our darkness with and in Jesus, to the work of revealing this union in us in our fallen minds. In oneness with Jesus in his oneness with us, the Holy Spirit comes to us to reveal the truth of all truths: “In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20). And thus the Spirit of the Father and the Son comes to lead us to see and believe, to acknowledge and embrace Jesus as our Creator and Lord, as our salvation and life, the true and only source and meaning of our humanity (see John 1:3-4).

As the Spirit leads us to discover Jesus himself within us and inside the great illusion of separation, we behold the one whom we have pierced and encounter the real gospel—the limitless mercy of the Triune God—which both shocks and relieves us in our self-incarcerating pride and overwhelming anxiety. In so doing, the Spirit reveals a world for us to believe, a reality that we do not create by our faith, but are summoned to believe is real. And in believing this reality in Christ we find rest for our souls (Rom 15:13), and recognize the divine authority that wars against our guilt and shame, our fear, and our forlorn sense of worthlessness.

As we face our corporate damnation of Jesus, and the fact that this Son is indivisibly one with his Father, we see that in the very event of our shameful rejection of Jesus, the Father was *not abandoning Jesus—or us*, but was being who he is, Jesus’ faithful Father and ours. For “the God of all is good and supremely noble by nature,” Athanasius declared. “Therefore he is the lover of humanity.”⁴⁸ In this moment of all moments, as we poured out our wrath upon Jesus, our Father was not absent but in Jesus. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,” as the apostle Paul proclaimed (2Cor 5:19).⁴⁹ Together with and in his Son, our Father in his stunning mercy was meeting us as we really are in our unspeakable waywardness, loving us and enacting his forgiveness, and, no doubt through eternal tears, embracing us and affirming us as his beloved children. In this way the Father was transforming our diabolical rejection of Jesus into the renewal of his everlasting union with us. Such an act of grace is almost too good to be true. But it *is* true. Immanuel is not a theological theory; it is reality. God is with us, and we are with God in Jesus Christ. And, as we discover that the Holy Spirit was indivisibly one with Jesus as he submitted himself to us in our unbelief, we begin to see that the Holy Spirit has made our traumatized, fear-stricken souls, our self-righteous, blind, and obstinate hearts, into the very Temple where the Holy Spirit chooses to dwell in infinite grace and creative joy, in life and power, and endless gifts.

As we rose against and snuffed out the Father’s Son our Creator, we unwittingly offered—from the pit of our apostasy—that one true and faithful Son as our response to the Father. What a stunning turn in the history of creation and redemption! In our blind arrogance and self-righteous pride, in our self-assured stupidity, we with Caiaphas the high priest offered up the one, true Son. And we did it for all the wrong reasons and without knowing what we were doing. And the blessed Trinity transfigured our terrible act of darkness into our salvation, even as it had been planned in eternity (Acts 2:23).

The discovery of this Father and this Son and this Holy Spirit *in us* has the actual authority and weight to free us from our self-loathing and allow us precisely as guilt-ridden, shame-riddled, covenant-breaking prodigals to *be loved* by the Father himself. Such a Father stuns our

⁴⁸ R. W. Thomson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), §41. Note also Irenaeus’ comment, “For He is a most merciful Lord, and loves the human race,” *Against the Heresies*, III.18.6.

⁴⁹ Note here Jesus’ statement: “Behold, an hour is coming, and now has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32).

hearts with his abounding goodness. And such a Jesus inspires us with his staggering love and humility.

Now is the age of revelation and judgment and indeed of wrath. For the wrath of the Triune God is not the opposite of the love of the blessed Trinity; wrath is the fiery and passionate opposition of the Triune love to our destruction. Wrath is our salvation in Christ saving us from ourselves. Thus the age of judgment and wrath is the age of liberation in which the Holy Spirit is at work revealing Christ in us and patiently giving us eyes to see that Jesus—through our rejection of him—is now united with us *in our alienation*. His “I AM” now dwells in our “I Am Not,” and our Father is most pleased to reveal his Son *in us*—in our shame—in the joy of the Holy Spirit (see Gal 1:16).

“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27) is the deepest truth about us and is to be proclaimed as the gospel to every human being without exception. As the truth of all truths, “Christ in you” is the light that shines in the darkness, indeed within our own subjectivity, summoning us to take sides with Jesus against the way we think and see and feel and project—even while warning us that if we don’t, we doom ourselves to the misery of living in the great delusion and its fear (John 12:46; 8:24).

In his union with us in our darkness, and in the Holy Spirit, Jesus summons us to walk with him. And he promises that as we do, he will lead us to an experience of his Father in the Holy Spirit that is utterly inconceivable to us at this moment, a life not of loneliness and dread and rebellion, stuck in sadness and self-righteousness and exhausting religion, but a life of hope, of freedom to know and be known, to be delighted in, *enjoyed*. In the Spirit, Jesus meets us inside the wretched deception of the evil one and his lie of separation. Christ’s presence in our pain calls us to abide in his love (John 15:9), to accept his acceptance of us as we are, to let his Father be our Father. His presence promises that his own “I AM” will flow as a river of living water (John 7:38) from our innermost being into our shattered life of pretense.

The command to “abide in Me” and the promise “and you will bear much fruit” mean that as you take sides with Jesus against the way you see his Father, yourself, and your enemies, he will lead you into the shalom of the Triune God from the inside out. Instead of seeing his Father as the harsh judge, eagerly watching every move you make from the infinite distance of a disapproving heart, you begin to see the Son’s Father as your own true Father who is holding you in his everlasting love. And instead of seeing yourself as a loser, an apostate worthy only of disgust, or as the all-knowing competent one, you begin to see yourself as a dearly loved child whose every mistake is taken up by the Blessed Trinity and redeemed. Instead of concluding that your enemies are outside of Jesus and his love, you come to realize that they, too, are included in him.

The gospel is not the news that we can receive Jesus Christ into our lives; the gospel is the news that Jesus Christ has received us into his life.⁵⁰ And the *us* he has received into his life is not the Sunday version of us, but the blind and obstinate us, the faithless and fearful and terrified us. The revelation of *Christ in us* in the Holy Spirit thus awakens almost unbelievable hope even as it exposes and challenges our alien way of seeing. The light of union, revealed in the Holy Spirit, confronts the assumptions of our fallen minds: the assumption that we are separated from God and that he has abandoned us in justice; the assumption that we are unworthy of his care and have forfeited any right to his love; the assumption that the Holy Spirit is to be feared and avoided at all costs; and the assumption that we must find a way to cross an unknown divide so as to make things right with God before we are safe.

⁵⁰ For more here see my book, *Across All Worlds: Jesus Inside Our Darkness* (Jackson: Perichoresis Press, 2007).

The Summons of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Jesus himself—and all of us in him with his Father and the blessed Holy Spirit—constitutes a cosmic and global and human revolution that *has already happened*, and which therefore necessarily carries with it breathtaking promises and a liberating summons, as well as dire warnings. All creation and every human being exists and lives in Jesus Christ and is therefore summoned to believe in him, and to a radical *metanoia* (repentance), a fundamental change in the way we see, think, and believe.

It is here in the revelation of Jesus' union with us, and not without it, that we learn the nature of true faith and repentance and the nature of sin. Christian faith is not something *we do* out of our own masterful resources, independently of Jesus Christ, that transports us across some mythological divide to him. Faith is not a blind leap without reason, to trust in something that we hope may be true one day in the distant future. Christian faith is first and foremost the shocked and inspiring discovery of Jesus Christ.⁵¹ The revelation of Jesus in us and us in Jesus is the Holy Spirit's great joy. Faith is the fruit of this revelation; it arises in real encounter with Jesus. Faith is not an empty hope; it is believing *in Jesus*, who is revealing himself in the Spirit inside our own hearts and within our alien inner worlds of fear and self-righteousness and pretense. Our believing does not create union with Christ; faith is believing that the union is true, trusting the Jesus we are encountering within us.⁵²

But Jesus is never alone. He is always with and in his Father and the Holy Spirit. And thus what we discover and begin to believe is that in Jesus we too are with and in his Father in the Holy Spirit. But even here we must go further, or we rob Jesus and his gospel of his unearthly assurance and joy. For the *us* that faith discovers to be in Jesus Christ, with and in his Father and Holy Spirit, is the *us* as we are, in all our brokenness and sin and shame. Faith believes in this shocking, unearned Triune embrace, which Jesus made real and abiding within our darkness and unbelief, our apostasy and treachery.⁵³ As such, this faith begets hope and the freedom to know and be known, to be loved and to love.

Our acknowledgment of and trust in this Jesus Christ is our *amen* to his presence within us (2Cor 1:20). Such an amen involves baby steps, for it is an amen inside our own darkness. There are certainly moments, perhaps even seasons, where such an amen in our pain and blindness involves great risk to us, but it is never without Jesus. Stop now and ask Jesus these simple questions: Jesus, are you in me? Jesus, has your Father embraced me as I am? Jesus, am I, as I am in my brokenness, the temple where the Holy Spirit has chosen to dwell?

Living by faith in Jesus is a relationship, a journey that inevitably involves “the divine rearrangement of the furniture of our inner worlds.”⁵⁴ Repentance is not an endless attempt to make ourselves better; repentance is the radical rethinking of everything we think we know in the light of Jesus Christ. But just as we cannot hear our own accents, we do not know where our own minds are corrupt, or what needs to be rethought. Without the light of Christ we are left with a blind understanding of blindness and a sinful view of sin (see John 16:8ff). It is the light of Christ, shining in the Holy Spirit in our fallen minds, that makes us aware of what is fallen and

⁵¹ Note here John Calvin's definition of faith: “Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (*Institutes*, III.2.7).

⁵² See footnotes 18 and 20 above.

⁵³ For more here see my novel, *Patmos: Three Days, Two Men, One Extraordinary Conversation* (Jackson: Perichoresis Press, 2016).

⁵⁴ This statement is from my friend Paul Golf.

twisted. The revelation of Christ exposes our blind spots, and in such moments we are being asked by the blessed Trinity to again trust and believe. Such a reconsidering and rethinking, which is our liberation from ourselves, takes time. As Papa says to Mackenzie in *The Shack*, “Freedom is an incremental *process*.”⁵⁵

Mackenzie, the Truth shall set you free and the Truth has a name; he is over in the woodshed right now covered in sawdust. Everything is about *him*. And freedom is a process that happens inside a relationship with him. Then all that stuff you feel churnin’ about *inside* will start to work its way *out*.⁵⁶

Our “amen” to reality in Christ naturally leads into increasing freedom to experience Jesus himself and his Father in the Holy Spirit. Faith and repentance are inseparable in the process of beginning to see with Jesus’ eyes and learning to agree with him, so to share in his peace and hope and joy. Our agreements with Jesus and our willingness to change what we believe allow the life of Christ within us to form in our humanity. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (Rom 12:2). As we follow the Lamb and allow him to change what we believe, the very life of Jesus with his Father and the Holy Spirit, and nothing less, expresses itself uniquely in and through us—the kingdom of the blessed Trinity.

I was taught as a child that “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the Law of God.”⁵⁷ If we change “the Law of God” to “the person of Jesus Christ” we have a fair definition. Sin is any want of conformity to or transgression of Jesus Christ—provided that what we mean by Jesus Christ includes the union he has refashioned, the union of creation and the human race with his Father and the Holy Spirit. At its heart sin is unbelief, but not just the unbelief of ignorance. Sin involves the will in refusing to believe in this Jesus, and in what became of us in him, a willful resistance to the Holy Spirit’s revelation of Jesus in us and everyone else (John 9:40-41). It is saying no to Christ’s eyes and insisting that we are correct and he is wrong. Sin is our demand that Jesus Christ change his ways and join our ways. Sin is our summons to Jesus that he repent and believe in us and learn from us about the real world, that he take sides with us and with the way we see and perceive and feel and project—that he change the way he sees himself and his Father and the Holy Spirit, and us, and our enemies.

To be a sinner is to reject “what is” in Jesus, and choose to live in our own way and in our own worlds. As St. John said to Aidan in the *Patmos* story, “When you don’t see what is, Aidan, you create something that you *can* see—in your imagination, of course. Then you defend with a vengeance whatever you have created, because it is all you think you have.”⁵⁸ Such an existence is hell; it is a violation of our very beings and of the reality of creation in Jesus Christ. Hell is the profoundly twisted form of human existence that takes shape as we impose our blind wills upon Jesus’ union with us and his creation. And heaven is not a far-off place, but the abounding life that emerges in us as we give ourselves to participate in Jesus’ very own communion with his Father in the Holy Spirit (John 17:3).

In this Anointed Son, the Mediator of Creation who became the Lamb of God and who redeems and baptizes in the Holy Spirit, we see and hear and come to know that we are all one in Him, that “Christ is all, and in all” (Col 3:11), that we are indeed family.⁵⁹ This is not the old rhetoric of “the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man”; this is the Light of Jesus Christ’s

⁵⁵ Wm. Paul Young, *The Shack* (Newbury Park: Windblown Media, 2007), 95.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in The Book of Confessions* (Louisville: The General Assembly, 1991), Q14.

⁵⁸ *Patmos*, 92-93.

⁵⁹ See Ephesians 3:14-15; 4:6; 1 Corinthians 8:6.

very existence. In him we are all called and invited and actually freed to put aside our prejudices, mindsets, and judgments, our agendas and politics, our external religion, and our grand plans to create the kingdom of social right. Jesus in us calls us to recognize no one according to the flesh (2Cor 5:17),⁶⁰ and to give ourselves to participate, moment by moment, in Jesus' relationship with each person, to see all as he does, and love with his love.

Jesus' very existence declares to the universe: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Peter finally understood this revolution when he declared, "God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Therefore we dare not impose our judgment, our blind wills, or our silly attempts to be kings and queens upon his family and upon his creation.

In Jesus Christ we are given eyes to see through the great darkness of the assumption of separation, along with its fear and judgment, and are invited to behold the creation as a "vast, all-embracing Burning Bush"⁶¹ alive with the life and glory and goodness of the blessed Trinity. Jesus' presence in us is a standing command and invitation to bring our way of seeing to him and to learn to think with his mind (1Cor 2:16), to see with his eyes, and to look for and notice, to recognize and to honor and love and celebrate, the sacred presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in every person, moment, and place (Matt 25:35ff).

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World

Is this stunning union in Jesus Christ of the Triune God with the fallen human race and broken creation an accident, a divine afterthought, a half-time adjustment? Is Jesus Plan B, quickly implemented after the failure of Plan A in Adam? Of course not. Jesus Christ the Mediator of Creation, who in his incarnate life and death became the Mediator of Redemption, is Plan A: the one and only, the everlasting plan, the eternal foreword to all divine activity.⁶² How could it be otherwise? Read carefully the following astounding statements from the apostle Paul:

2Tim 1:8-9. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

Eph 1:3-5. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In

⁶⁰ Note Francois du Toit's translation of this verse. "Now, in light of your co-inclusion in his death and resurrection, whoever you thought you were before, in Christ you are a brand new person! The old ways of seeing yourself and everyone else are over. Acquaint yourself with the new!" In *Mirror Study Bible*.

⁶¹ Kallistos Ware, "God of the Fathers: C. S. Lewis and Eastern Christianity," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, edited by David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 62-63. Ware writes, "This is the Orthodox approach to the realm of nature. Creation is seen as a sacrament of the divine presence; the cosmos is a vast and all-embracing Burning Bush, permeated with the fire of God's eternal glory."

⁶² Note here Karl Barth's arresting comment: "Not God alone, but God and man together constitute the content of the Word of God attested in Scripture." In *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, reprint, 1980), I/2, 207; and see also his *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 3ff, 34-76, and 94ff; IV/1, 3ff; and IV/2, 31ff.

love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

In the apostle's mind, even before Jesus was the Mediator of Creation he was already the Mediator of Redemption! For he is the one *in* whom we were chosen, and *through* whom we were predestined to adoption, and *in* whom the gifts of grace and salvation were granted to us, *before* the time of the ages—before creation.

Why, and on what grounds, would we look beyond Jesus Christ—and what has happened to the human race and creation in him—to find another, higher, deeper or more secret plan of God? By what authority have we introduced another story into the one story of the eternal coming of the Anointed Son? Whence this other metanarrative that reduces the Creator Son incarnate to a footnote to Adam and his fall, to a presence that carries less weight in the cosmos than the first creature he created and sustained?

Jesus Christ is not an afterthought but the eternal foreword, and stands before us as the Light of the world (John 8:12). What does “Light” mean here? It means that to speak the name of Jesus Christ biblically, and in the tradition of the apostles and the early Church, is to say, “Father’s eternal Son,” and “the One anointed in the Holy Spirit,” and “the Creator and Sustainer of all things—incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and ascended.” Thus, to speak the name of Jesus Christ is to say, “the blessed Trinity, fallen humanity, and broken creation are not separated, but together in relationship, and Jesus is himself the relationship.” This is the Light of the world.

Jesus is the eternal gospel, the one true light shining from eternity. In Jesus’ very being we are confronted with *divine* revelation from beyond us, but now from within our delusion of separation. In his identity we meet the true canon, the rule of faithful thinking about God, creation, and humanity. He is the divine hermeneutic and the point of departure for the Christian faith from all other religious thoughts about God and creation. His oneness with his Father and the Holy Spirit, and his oneness with us in our humanity in darkness and with creation in its brokenness, form the non-negotiable reality that we ignore to our peril. Jesus’ very existence is “the ground and grammar of theology,”⁶³ both the possibility and the inner logic of authentic thought about God and divine relations with humanity. We dare not say a word to anybody anywhere that betrays this Jesus Christ and the reality established in him. Failure here is not simply a theological mistake; it is to consign ourselves to ourselves. It is to limit our hearts to try to thrive on our own speculation. And no matter how we dress it up with solemn religious words spoken in hushed tones while wearing holy vestments, speculation is speculation, always devoid of authority, vacuous of weight before the hurting soul.

To ignore the Light—and this means to ignore Jesus’ identity as the One in whom the Father, the Holy Spirit, the human race, and all creation are together in union—leaves us with a religion that is no more than our own magical conjuring. What choice do we then have but to try to solve the problems of racism and prejudice, of our social, environmental, and ecological ills, and our international crises, with nothing more than our own wisdom? We have ignored the Creator Lamb whose identity in union with us possesses the authority to call a halt to our blindness and prejudice, to reconstruct how we see every human being and our planet, and to fill us with an unending, sacrificing, other-centered divine love.

Failure to proclaim this Jesus Christ leaves us to muster a religion that has only an appearance of relevance, when we know it is merely our own voice and our own creativity writ large, and thus will inevitably at some point bore us to death; it will leave our hearts sad, even as

⁶³ Professor J. B. Torrance coined this phrase in his Edinburgh and Aberdeen lectures. See also Thomas. F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980). Note also the comment of John Zizioulas, “Christology is the sole starting point for a Christian understanding of truth. Christ’s claim to be the truth (John 14:6) constitutes a fundamental presupposition for Christian theology.” In *Being as Communion* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 67.

we rededicate ourselves again to the cause and pledge ourselves one more time to stand up for Jesus. Without the startling news of Jesus Christ, what do we have to inspire us? Are we not left with ourselves to play church, to create the kingdom through our committees? Are we not left posing, desperately trying to look the part while dying on the inside with no real hope, because all our earnest effort to believe in Jesus has left our inner worlds untouched? Who can read the New Testament and think that what we have created in the name of Jesus is the kingdom he promised? How far is our religion from the glorious “apostolic swagger,”⁶⁴ the unbridled, undiluted confidence, the *parrhesia* of the early church (Acts 4:13; Eph 3:12)?

Does not the Light shining in this Jesus Christ stare at us quizzically, asking us what we have been preaching in the Church, what we have been telling people about Jesus, about his Father and the human race, and about their relationship? Do we not feel seriously questioned here? In Jesus Christ the whole human race and all creation are bound into eternal union with his Father and the Holy Spirit; in what way has our preaching challenged the diabolical assumption of separation and delivered people from themselves and their own religious efforts to make things right by their faith and obedience? If we have not been proclaiming this Jesus who has already gathered us all into his Father’s arms, what do we actually have to say to the broken, to the poor in spirit, to those in the agony of depression, to the outcast, the downtrodden, those who have given up because they know that if it is up to them to get to Jesus they are doomed? Who among us has actually moved beyond “I do believe, help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24) and thus successfully crossed the supposed divide to Jesus? Could it be that our proclamation of “the gospel” is in actual fact an unwitting participation in the great deception—even in the name of Jesus Christ?⁶⁵ These are most serious questions.

This creation belongs to Jesus Christ, and the whole world is summoned to believe in him. And the Christian church is to be the community within creation, inside the great delusion of separation, where the light of Jesus Christ is allowed to shine and where his very existence is allowed to question every assumption, agenda, prejudice, and judgment, every mind and mindset. The Christian church is to be awake and alert to the presence of the Creator Lamb incarnate in whom the whole creation and the human race are embraced by the Father and the Holy Spirit, and to bring all our notions of God, of creation and human existence, of the fall of Adam, of election and eschatology and salvation, of faith and repentance, of atonement, and of heaven and hell to the Light of his very identity to either stand in joy or fall in embarrassment. We dare not impose our religious darkness upon his brothers and sisters.

The Christian church is called to proceed in earnest faith and joy, eagerly bringing every thought captive to Christ (2Cor 10:5). It is the church’s great privilege and calling to *think through* and *live out* the implications of the stunning reality established in Jesus Christ for every sphere and discipline of human thought and life—from theology to ecology and international relations, from sin and human brokenness to economics, education, and healing, from family to equality and social justice and fairness for all. No leaf is to be left unturned until the staggering implications of Jesus Christ’s mediation are understood and received in all joy and embodied in the concreteness of our relationships with one another and with all creation.

In this calling the Christian church bears embodied witness, before the human race and the principalities and powers (Eph 3:10), to Jesus Christ and to the truth of all of us in him, until

⁶⁴ This wonderful phrase was coined by my friend David Upshaw.

⁶⁵ Note here Barth’s scary insight: “The most cunning of all that stratagems which the resisting element in man can use in self-defence against the Word of grace is simply to immunise, to tame and harness. It is politely to take its seat in the pew, cheerfully to don the vestment and mount the pulpit, zealously to make Christian gestures and movements, soberly to produce theology, and in this way, consciously participating in the confession of Jesus Christ, radically to ensure that His prophetic work is halted, that it can do no more injury to itself, let alone to the world.” In Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, reprint 1976), IV.3.1, 259.

everyone knows that he is in his Father, we are in him, and he is in us (John 14:20) —until the darkness is no more and the knowledge of the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14).

Meanwhile we stand under the command of the Mediator, “Abide in me,” and “Abide in my love,” and under the promise that as we do so we will “bear much fruit” (John 15:1ff). And we stand under the admonition of the apostle Paul in Col 2:8-10:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.

Do not go back to the fallen mind, for it is trapped in the diabolical delusion of separation and will leave you in religious, political, and relational pretense, emptiness, and death (see John 8:24).

Nothing in heaven or on earth can undo the union that Jesus recreated with us when he became the Creator Lamb, surrendering himself to our will to destroy. But we can insist on imposing our darkness upon Jesus Christ and his world. We can fight him and disagree with his enlightening presence and love. He will never break ties with us or divorce or abandon us in our folly, yet we are free to sin, to mock him, to resist our own identity in union with him, to invent gods and goddesses, and to concoct grand religions to appease and return to them, even while we breathe Christological air and have our very being in union with Jesus Christ.

We are free to continue to see Jesus with the foreign eyes of unbelief and to experience the chaos of our own theories if we so choose. We are free to carry on living in our own worlds, the worlds of false religion and pretense, of self-generated and grandiose illusions of meaning and purpose, of self-centered pride and manipulation, of jealousy, anger, and wrath, of dread, meaninglessness, and despair, of invalidating cancellation. But we are not free to separate ourselves from the love of God in Christ Jesus, (Rom 8:38-39),⁶⁷ or from the Father’s eternal embrace of us in our wickedness, or from the Spirit’s choice to dwell with us in our confusion. And we are not free to escape the reality or revelation of *Christ in us*, or the inevitable, terrible writhing that emerges in our souls as we oppose him (and which in the grace of the Holy Spirit will, in time, be turned into the revelation of Christ in us).

Jesus will never force us to take sides with him, but by our own doing we have already drawn him into the deepest abyss of confusion in our own souls. In rejecting him we opened the door to our great wound. In crucifying the Creator Son we opened our alienation to his love and to the Father’s embrace and to the presence of the Holy Spirit inside our faithlessness. There, in the Holy Spirit, Jesus speaks as the living Word of God, the humble brother of the human race, the Light of life shining in the great darkness. There the Holy Spirit, who indivisibly accompanied the Son into the far country of our murder and rage, cries, “Abba! Father!” (Gal 4:6), bearing witness with our spirits that we are sons and daughters of the Father, “heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17), heirs of the Triune life.

The Son of God in his union with us summons us in the Spirit to believe, to trust, to weep in the hope of his presence in us, to let go of our assumptions and illusions, prejudices and

⁶⁷ “Man can certainly keep on lying (and does so); but he cannot make truth falsehood. He can certainly rebel (he does so); but he can accomplish nothing which abolishes the choice of God. He can certainly flee from God (he does so); but he cannot escape Him. He can certainly hate God and be hateful to God (he does and is so); but he cannot change into its opposite the eternal love of God which triumphs even in his hate. He can certainly give himself to isolation (he does so—he thinks, wills and behaves godlessly, and is godless); but even in his isolation he must demonstrate that which he wishes to controvert—the impossibility of playing the individual over against God. He may let go of God, but God does not let go of him.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.2, 317.

judgments, and to share life with him in the Spirit's delight and in the blessed assurance of our Father's steadfast love and affection. This is the fight of faith, a fight between the believing of Jesus Christ himself and our own believing, between his mind and ours, between the revelation of Jesus in us and our assumption of separation from him. And it is a fight that we must engage personally—not to *become* united with Jesus—but to live in and out of his union with us, in order to participate with him in dismantling our alien way of seeing. As we listen to him and change our believing, his heart and soul and mind, and his own relationship with his Father and his own anointing in the Holy Spirit, are free to have the run of the house in us and our lives and relationships.

It is an “infinitely unlikely, impossible possibility”⁶⁸ that we would finally resist Jesus encountering us in his love—his witness addressing us from the depths of our own souls in such a beautiful and quickening hope in the Spirit. But even if we do, and choose to continue to live in the illusion of separation and its cascading misery, we can never cease to be. For it is impossible that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will ever go back on the union they dreamed in eternity and made real for us in Jesus' submission to us in our alienation. And it is impossible that Jesus will ever stop loving us in our darkness, or that the Holy Spirit will ever give up on giving us eyes to see the truth. It is impossible that the Father will abandon himself and us, relinquishing his Fatherly love and withdrawing his passionate opposition to our unbelief and its hell.

And what of all the saints who become like the Creator Son and Anointed Lamb incarnate and his self-sacrificing love? Will we possibly be content to watch as our brothers and sisters languish in the great delusion? Here George MacDonald gets the last word:

St. Paul would be wretched before the throne of God, if he thought there was one man beyond the pale of His mercy, and that as much for God's glory as for the man's sake. And what shall we say of the man Christ Jesus? Who, that loves his brother, would not, upheld by the love of Christ, and with a dim hope that in the far-off time there might be some help for him, arise from the company of the blessed, and walk down into the dismal regions of despair, to sit with the last, the only unredeemed, the Judas of his race, and be himself more blessed in the pains of hell, than in the glories of heaven?⁶⁹

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⁶⁸ The phrase combines Dr. Brad Jersak's phrase “infinitely unlikely” (<https://www.clarion-journal.com/files/david-bentley-harts-that-all-will-be-saved---jersak-1.pdf>, 4) with Karl Barth's famous “impossible possibility” in *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1957), II.1.505, and III.3, 86. Hans Urs von Balthasar uses the phrase “infinitely improbable” in *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 219.

⁶⁹ George MacDonald, “Love Thy Neighbor,” in *Creation in Christ: Unspoken Sermons* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1976), 303.

Key Scriptural Passages

Christ as Light of the World

Jn 1:1-4 Jn 8:12 Col 2:8-10 Eph 1:3-5 Eph 3:11
 2Tim 1:8-9 Titus 2-3

Father-Son Relationship

Mt 3:15-17 Mt 11:27-30 Mt 16:13-18 Mt 17: 1-5 Mk 1:1, 11
 Mk 9:2-8 Lk 9:28-36 Jn 1:1-3; 18 Jn 3:35 Jn 4:34
 Jn 5:19-22, 30 Jn 8:28-29 Jn 10:30, 38 Jn 12:44 Jn 14:1-11
 Jn 14:20-30 Jn 16:15-17 Jn 17:5, 10-11, 21

Holy Spirit

Mt 3:15-17 Mk 1:8 Jn 14:16-20 Jn 16:5-15 Rom 5:1-5
 Rom 8:1-16 Gal 4:1-6 Eph 3:14-21

Christ's Union with Us

Jn 1:1-3 Jn 14:20 Acts 17:28 Heb 1:1-3 Col 1:16-20
 Col 2:9-15 Col 3:1-4, 11 1Cor 8:1-6 2Cor 5:14-21 Eph 2:1-6
 1Pet 1:3

Finished Work of Christ

Rom 5:12-21 Eph 1:3-14 2Cor 5:14-21 Jn 17:4 Heb 10:11-14

Affirmations

- Jesus is the Father's eternal Son incarnate.
- Jesus is the One Anointed in the Spirit.
- The relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit is not new, but eternal.
- God is eternally Triune.
- The Creator is the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- All things were created and are sustained in, through, and by the Son.
- The Son is the Mediator of Creation.
- The Incarnation of the Creator Son does not dissolve his relationships with the Father and the Spirit or his relationships with the human race and all creation.
- In the Creator Son's incarnate life, death, resurrection, and ascension—Jesus Christ—all things and the human race are lifted up in the Father's embrace in the Spirit.
- In Jesus, the life of the Triune God, the human race, and creation are not separated, but bound together in union.
- Jesus Christ the Mediator of Creation has become the Mediator of Redemption
- This union in the incarnate Son is not Plan B. It is the eternal plan of the Triune God, predating creation and the fall of Adam.
- Jesus is the light of the world, the truth of all truths, the divine hermeneutic.
- The church is called to take Jesus Christ seriously, rethinking everything in the light of his identity as the eternal Son and Creator incarnate in whom the Trinity, humanity, and creation are not separated, but bound together in union.