

*Do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but
be filled with the **Spirit**, addressing one another in
psalms and hymns and Spirit-songs,
singing and making melody with your heart **to the Lord**,
always giving thanks for everything **to God the Father** in
the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and be subject to **one another** in the fear of Christ*

Ephesians 5:18-21

Experiencing the Trinity: biography & theology

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Conclusion

**By Paul Hartwig
Rooiels, 2021**

Autobiography

*That I may know him.*¹

The following meditation unfolds the inside story of my life. For about 30 years now my heart and mind have pondered the way Father, Son and Spirit are spoken about in the New Testament and how these distinctions relate to my walk with God. Over this period the foremost commandment in the Bible has fuelled this quest to know the Trinity: *“you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind”*. Just as growing up entails endeavouring to know things and persons *on their own terms* and not merely on ours, so growing up spiritually has entailed a similar process of discovery for me. *Loving* anyone must include getting to know them as they reveal themselves to us, listening for whom they themselves are. Similarly I knew that my highest calling as a Christian was to know God in keeping with what He had revealed about Himself in the Scriptures, and that to try and know God in any other way than in terms of that revelation of who He actually is, would be a grave disrespect and only result in a caricature of Him. For many years now this desire to *know God* in the light of *who He really is* has been a vital component in my relationship to God. This meditation is a biographical record of my personal quest to have a devotional life that is shaped by the revelation of God in Scripture. If you also seek to know God for who He really is, then I pray that this meditation will help you know Him and love Him more truly.

I was spiritually nurtured in a Baptist church in Rondebosch (Cape Town) that was characterised by a unique mixture of biblical teaching and the present reality of the Holy Spirit. Love for God’s Son, His Word, His people and His precious Holy Spirit was the atmosphere at Living Hope Baptist Church. Pastor Lloyd Thomas often taught on the plurality of God, the authority of God the Father on the Throne, the loving condescension of the Son and the nature of the Holy Spirit’s ministry. My spiritual DNA has consequently had

1. Philippians 3:10.

a strong experiential and doctrinal gene, for which I am deeply grateful to God.

Love and service to the blessed Lord Jesus who had ‘laid hold of me’ in March 1983 was a transforming and determining reality in my life. Christ became the point of departure and the point of return in all my life, thought and aspirations. All the years to come have been in one real sense a footnote to that time of ‘first love’ for the Lord Jesus Christ. He gloriously filled my heart and his² Word began to dominate the horizon of my mind and fuel the affections of my heart. I began to share the apostle Paul’s passion as expressed in his words: “*I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me*”³. Paul’s autobiographical passage in Philippians 3 soon became biographical for me. I wanted to join Paul and consider all else worthless compared to the knowledge of Christ, endeavouring to live solely for the Person and cause of my Lord. The relationship became so determining that I desired to set myself apart and give more to the Bible and the things of Christ. I entered the Cape Town Baptist Seminary in 1988. In 1989 I chose ‘knowing Christ’ as the text for my first official sermon at Beacon Valley Baptist Church, Mitchells Plain. In the library at the Seminary, books by James A Stewart (*A Man in Christ*), J. Sidlow Baxter (*Going Deeper*) and Lewis B Smedes (*Union with Christ*) played a crucial part in riveting my heart and mind passionately on my Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

With the opportunities afforded by being a full-time Bible student, I spent more and more time in the Scriptures. As I began to discover more of the wonders of the Word I started noticing many things relating to Jesus and the Trinity. I read that Jesus was not only God himself, but he also *had a God*, his Father, to whom he told us to pray. I noted that the Son was sent by the Father and that Christ

2. I will be using a lower case pronoun for Christ to distinguish him from the Father. This is only for grammatical ease and is in no way a theological statement.

3. Galatians 2:20.

came to do the Father's will. I also saw that most of the prayers and thanksgivings in the apostolic Scriptures were not primarily directed to Jesus himself but were predominantly directed to his God and Father. I read that the Holy Spirit brings Jesus' own *Abba* prayer into our heart and onto our lips, and observed that in prayer we have the unspeakable privilege of access before the Throne of the universe *through* Jesus Christ. In other words, while I was deeply taken with being 'in Christ', looking into the face of my beloved Lord, I became more and more aware that there was *another* relationship that Jesus himself invited me into – a relationship to his God and Father. Thus the question of a distinction between Jesus and his Father in my devotion towards God presented itself to me. 'Loving Jesus' alongside 'knowing the Father' became a conscious distinction and a personal issue for me *because of Scripture*. Questions arose. Were these relationships just one and the same reality differently named or was there a devotional relating to the Father that meant that we were not at that time directly relating to Jesus? Through my concentration on Jesus Christ I realized I was being introduced into all the new, immense and glorious realities that were all comprised in him.

The questions grew and still remain. As my heart continued to grow in this new dual-devotion I also came to see that my Saviour himself lived (and lives!) in a continual love-relationship to his Father. His Father was his passion and reason for everything. I then saw that if I was *really* getting to know Jesus, the Son, then it would be necessary for me to also be taken up with the focus of *his* life, namely, his Father. Therefore I felt that to know and think about Jesus in isolation from his Father was not to rightly honour him. This conclusion seemed inescapable. To know Jesus had to include knowing his Father in some crucial way that was not identical to knowing Jesus himself. An emerging conviction grew that just as we could never understand the apostle Paul without reference to Christ, *so we cannot understand Jesus without reference to his Father*. There is Someone other than Jesus whom we can know – whom we must know and do know in Christ!

Sometime in the early 1990's I noticed a book on the shelf at a Living Hope elder's home in Pinelands. The book was titled *The Forgotten Father* by Thomas Smail. Steve Walsh, the elder concerned, had purchased the book thinking it dealt with parenting issues, yet – fortunately for me - it was of a more trinitarian and doctrinal nature. I was piqued by the title and he kindly lent me the book. I soon became a miner who had struck a rich vein of gold! This book by Tom Smail became, and remains, one of the most formative books I have read. It was such a timely book and spoke directly into the issues I was wrestling with at the time. It is a richly theological, discerningly trinitarian and spiritually edifying book. Its theme concerned the person and place of God the Father in the Trinity, the gospel and the Christian life. I finally found someone asking the same questions I was asking! Although Smail did not answer all my questions, he was looking at what I was looking at and became a conversational companion in my quest to experience the whole Trinity of God. In his *Forgotten Father*, Smail's driving conviction revolved around the primacy of the Father. He contended that:

*The gospel...is basically a Father movement. It is not first a Jesuology (a doctrine about Jesus) or a pneumatology (a doctrine about the Spirit) but it is a theology or even a patriology – a doctrine about God the Father... Just as the Father is the source of everything both in creation and redemption, so He is the goal of everything and the mission of the Son and the Spirit is to advance His glory and let Him be all in all.*⁴

The Father! - the source of all things and the end of all things. Was this true? As a good Berean I searched the Scriptures to see if this was so. I could not disagree with Smail. I started to see how the Father was the focus and direction of Christ and his work. Christ was *the way* to the Father. Also, it came into clearer view that Christ was fully God-defined and not autonomously self-defined in his Person

4. pg 20-21 in *The Forgotten Father*, Hodder & Stoughton: London 1980.

and work. Jesus was exalted *by* the Father to Lordship *to the glory of God the Father* and will himself hand over all things *back to the Father* at the end of history! I started to see that in my relationship to Jesus I had only gone half way. God the Father was the person Jesus had died to make known and to bring us into His Presence and live there forever. More than that, he died so that the Spirit of Sonship that he experienced in calling God *Abba* might also be given to us. Salvation now not only involved my coming *to* Jesus but also my coming *to* God the Father *through* Jesus. I remembered Campus Crusade's little diagrams in their 'four spiritual laws' of Christ's cross bridging the chasm between God and man. Christ was not the end but the means. He was the *Way to God*. He was the Mediator and divine Agent who came not to eclipse the Father but to reveal Him for all who He is. I had found the bridge but not crossed over! I had come to the High Priest but had not pressed on into the Holy Place. *The Forgotten Father* helped me to know more fully the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I can still remember singing the chorus 'Father in Heaven how we love You' at the University of Cape Town student group I was involved with at the time. I now sang that song with a new and deeper reality of knowing the Father personally in my life. I was knowing *Abba*, Father, *directly* and *distinctly*.

Yet in spite of this realisation, I became disorientated. I lost what I can only call my 'devotional equilibrium'. At times it felt as if I had a 'trinity-paralysis'! My 'Father-renaissance' brought its own problems. How was I to hold my experientially and biblically directed love and focus on Jesus together with my new experiential and biblical reality of the person of the Father? At times I fell back into a 'Christomonism' ('it's all about Jesus') where Christ was central, eclipsing all the other Persons of the Godhead. This was far simpler for me. No paralysis. No confusion. No Trinity in devotion, just Jesus only. This exclusive devotional concentration on Christ in my experience of God seemed to solve my paralysis but I now knew it was not true to the Bible. I knew that when I read the Father-ward focus of the Sermon on the Mount or Ephesians 1-3 or 1 Peter or Hebrews I could not personally echo this Father-orientated theology and prayer, having solely a Christ-horizon. My Christ-only devotional practice was simply not in keeping with the trinitarian structure of

devotion that was in the Bible. *I realised that I could not spiritually feed on the whole Bible with only a direct focus on Christ.* There was the Son *and* the Father – and of course the Holy Spirit! I began to want a *trinitarian* faith and devotion, not a Unitarian faith or a ‘Christological modalism’ (more on that term later). I was not going to collapse my relationship to God into knowing one Person only, whether Father, Son or Holy Spirit. I wanted a biblical faith in my head and in my heart. I pressed on looking for answers.

A few years later (1994) I came into a deeper experiential and biblical realization of the particular personality and place of the Holy Spirit’s ministry in the Christian life. I saw that the apostolic church had a far deeper awareness of the Presence of God in and with them. The entire manner of their speaking of the Spirit was more vivid, concrete and distinctly real than is commonly experienced or understood today. This new Spirit-awareness in my life brought with it a new consciousness of God-in-us, God-on-site, together with a refreshing vitality. I found A.W. Tozer’s book on the Holy Spirit (*When He is Come*) most faithful to the biblical sentiment I was re-discovering. However, as much as this distinct awareness was personally rewarding and theologically expanding, there was a need to integrate and orientate myself around the Father *and* Son *and* Spirit in a biblically directed manner. Yet I could not find any book that integrated a healthy apostolic relationship to the Spirit into the relationship with the Father and the Son in a balanced manner. I felt that there was a lack of teaching and writing on what I came to call *full-trinitarian-orientation*.

I came to realise that the answer for all these questions lay not in an either/or solution but a both/and solution. The following Scriptures pointed me in that direction:

“Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”

“believe in God, believe also in me”⁵

“this is eternal life, that they may know You the only true God and the One whom You sent, Jesus Christ”⁶

“our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ”⁷

“Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you”⁸

“It is God who establishes us with you into Christ and has anointed us”⁹

“the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”,¹⁰

“From Him who was and is and is to come, and from the seven Spirits before His Throne and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth”.¹¹

How important the little conjunction ‘and’ became! How much it implied!

After all this I put aside time to do further studies on these matters. No doubt I was a gnat trying to swallow the ocean! I attempted to co-ordinate God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ and

5. John 14:1.

6. John 17:3.

7. 1 John 1:3.

⁸. 1 Thessalonians 3:11.

⁹. 2 Corinthians 1:21

10. 2 Corinthians 13:14.

11. Revelation 1:4-5.

the Spirit's Presence in Christian devotion according to Scripture. It was through what *The Forgotten Father* did not say that I was driven to write a thesis for academic accreditation¹². I titled my thesis *The Trinity and the Christian Life: Issues of Integration and Orientation*. I wanted to go beyond Tom Smail's book and unpack the nature of the Christian's relationship to the *whole* Trinity, each Person, in a biblically shaped manner. During this research period I came across two other writers who were dealing with similar issues, John Owen and James B Torrance. John Owen, the 17th century Congregationalist, wrote an entire book for me: *Of communion with God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each person distinctly in love, grace and consolation*. This book title convinced me that my quest was not a misdirected preoccupation of an eccentric Baptist! Thank you so much Dr Owen! James Torrance, a Scottish theologian and friend of Thomas Smail, gave me much needed assistance in understanding how prayer, worship and ministry should be trinitarian. During this time a good friend of mine, Jeremy Stefano, was studying at Regent College in Vancouver. On discovering the subject of my Master's Thesis he sent me the audio tapes from a Regent seminar conducted by James Houston, Edwin Hui and James B Torrance entitled *Experiencing the Trinity: The Focus of Christian Spirituality*. I was overjoyed! It was through Professor Torrance's material that I was introduced to the helpful diagrams of his 'trinitarian grammar'. I found his lectures and articles on *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ* speaking right into the issues which were on my heart. Torrance believed that the Trinity was "the very grammar of the Christian Gospel essential for our understanding of the place of Jesus Christ and the Spirit both in the Bible and in the worship and mission of the church" (1991:3). All these writers (John Owen, Thomas Smail, James B Torrance) did not merely write about the Trinity – they helped me in my quest to devotionally get involved

¹² In his last book *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in our Humanity* Smail does provide a helpful integration of the Triune relationships relative to our humanity. It was unfortunately 10 years too late for my thesis!

with and participate in the Trinity. They helped me practice the Trinity through good sound theology!

As time wore on the importance of these matters did not wear off. Strangely, though my ongoing need to be appropriately orientated around the Persons of the Godhead did not seem to be an issue of importance amongst many with whom I worshipped and served at the time. I continually felt the uncomfortable gap between Christian truth and Christian practice. It was particularly in the area of prayer that this gap stood out for me. I noted that in the New Testament there was little or no prayer to the Holy Spirit, some to Jesus but most to the Father. There we are directed to pray predominantly to the Father and live a life of thanksgiving toward Him. Instances of prayer to Jesus Christ are present, yes, but marginal. The Father was the Person the early Christians prayed to because Jesus instructed them to pray in that way. The apostolic pattern for prayer was: *To* the Father, *through* Christ and *in* the Holy Spirit. Surprisingly, what was a marginal practice in the New Testament had become a mainstream prayer practice amongst many of my fellow Christians. The emphasis had been reversed. Praying *to* Jesus was now more dominant (certainly in my Christian circles at the time). Being brought up with the continual quest to 'get back to the Bible', I was not happy with this *status quo*. Praying 'our Lord Jesus who art in heaven' rather than 'our Father who art in heaven' was an important matter to me. Again, the same can be said for the term *God* in the New Testament. In the New Testament the Father is nearly always the subject referred to as *God*. By comparison to the Father, the New Testament very infrequently calls Jesus 'God' and prefers to refer to his deity in other ways. Yet in our time it is common to find things the other way around. All these differences of emphasis in devotion between the apostolic church and the contemporary church pointed toward the need for trinitarian integration in the area of Christian experience.

I then came to the conclusion that, unlike the apostolic church, many contemporary Christians were *theoretical trinitarians* yet *practical modalists*: Christian in their theology, but sub-Christian in their practice. Allow me to explain. A *modalist* is a person who

does not see God as actually existing simultaneously as three distinct Persons but only as one Person who manifests Himself in three different ways. For modalists there are not three divine 'I's but one divine 'I' repeated three times. One Person but three facets, faces or modes. God is a Father and a Son and a Spirit. One Person manifesting Himself differently at different times. His different names, Father, Son and Spirit are different manifestations of the same singularity of the One Person God. Most of our popular Trinity-analogies are actually modalist: as I am one person having different relationships (husband, pastor, son-in-law) so is God both one and three; as water exists in three states (solid, liquid, gas), so is God both one yet three. This theory of what Trinity means makes rational sense but not biblical sense. Modalism cannot account for the fact that Jesus prays to the Father, or that the Spirit is 'another Comforter' sent by the Father. Modalists cannot answer these questions in terms of biblical revelation. The Scripture which says that 'Christ offered himself without blemish through the eternal Spirit to God'¹³ is the nail in the modalist coffin. Brought before biblical muster, modalism is shown to be an impoverished and sub-Christian explanation of God.

In light of the above we must confess that *although we may recognise modalism as clearly wrong, we often pray and commune with God as modalists!* We easily substitute Jesus for the Father and the Father for Jesus. Though some are simply content to practise a Christ-modalism yet confess the Trinity, I have never been happy with that. The practise of Christian faith should be congruent with its Subject! We should believe and practise the very real distinctions within the Trinity. We have not been formally taught to pray: 'Our Jesus who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name'! The Father *did not* die on the Cross, Jesus did. We *do not* come before the Spirit in prayer and worship but before the Father and the Son. The Father *is not* in submission to the Son. Most of us will agree that *there is an order amongst the Persons that cannot be treated indifferently*. The roles of each Person of the Godhead are not interchangeable. The

13. Hebrews 9:14.

Father sent the Son. We do not pray to the Son in the Name of the Father but to the Father in the Name of the Son, etc. I am sure you agree. Now, if we hold to these distinctions in theory I believe it is wise for us to be in relationship to God in harmony with His real personal distinctions. This is the end towards which this biblical meditation will be directed.

However, let me say that it is certainly not essential for genuine faith that we all understand the Trinity and the distinctions in the Godhead (though denying the Trinity is another story). Our faith is not merely about ‘theology’ but a relationship with God in Christ. Just as we can get a message across and communicate with very poor grammar and spelling, so we can hold deep communion with God without necessarily getting it all right. But if we truly love God and want to know Him *as He really is in Himself*, we cannot but press on to know Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Surely this is an important part of what the Biblical imperative to ‘increase in the knowledge of God’ means¹⁴. God is irreducible Trinity. I believe that we should all seek to become more self-consciously trinitarian in faith and practice through meditation on the Word and the guidance of the Spirit of truth. Our devotion should be deeper, wider and yet also sensitive, in which we do not, as the famous Athanasian Creed said “divide the Substance nor confound the Persons”. We need to take the biblical Trinity-distinctions as seriously as the New Testament does. But as we do this we must always remember that we cannot reduce or contract the glorious reality of the three Persons within the narrow confines of our redeemed soul’s experience. This cannot happen. We will never be able to fully ‘experience the Trinity’. Rather, we will always be in a personally broadening experience that continues to open up to the never ending wonders of the glory of God Himself.

Will you join me in this quest to be intimately related to each Person in the Godhead in a way that is appropriate to each of them? Will you pursue the pleasures of a trinitarian faith and fight against

¹⁴ Colossians 1:10

the impoverishing tendencies of a modalistic faith? As we take this 'road less travelled' let us be aware that this path is flanked by precipices on either side: Modalism and Tri-Theism (3-Gods). We can keep our feet safely on this path, as the apostles did, if we keep our trust in the Great Pioneer who laid down the path and went on before us, and our eyes on the Map Book that is written to point out the way for us to travel. May the following thoughts bring not only light to your head but also heat to your heart as you journey with me on the path that lies before us. In the first section, we need to just attentively listen to the story of Christ's relationships. Following that you are invited to participate with me in those relationships of Christ, and lastly to sing gratefully to the Son and the Father in the Spirit. In all, may we experience in great depth all the full trinitarian dimensions of the apostle's words addressed to common Christian congregations:

*Do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but
be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in
psalms and hymns and Spirit-songs,
singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord,
always giving thanks for everything to God the Father in
the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ
(Ephesians 5:18-21)*

Christ's Relationships

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and suddenly the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove and come to rest on him; and look, a Voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased". Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.¹⁵

We begin our journey into the fullness of God with Jesus Christ! He is the beginning of all things, the Alpha and Omega in our lives as Christians. We start with Christ. We do not begin with ourselves or with introspective Trinity problems, however pressing they seem. We also do not begin with abstract theories about the Trinity but with Jesus himself. We remain anchored and grounded in him, our foundation.¹⁶ Our participation into this large world of the Trinity begins with Jesus. To know Christ is to have the key that will unlock the secrets of the Trinity.

The Lord Jesus Christ is at present seated at the right hand of God in heaven. He lives in a glorified human body. He is *Incarinated*. This is a very important word for understanding Jesus Christ. It is a compound word derived from the Latin *'in'* and *'carno'*, literally, 'in-flesh'. 'Embodied' is a good translation. Christ exists in an embodied state. He received a transfigured and metamorphasised body after his gruelling crucifixion and death. In this new body he appeared to his disciples and was taken up bodily into Heaven. He will one day return in this same embodied state. Having a human body means that he is localised in a place, the place we call Heaven. Heaven is the place from which God's authority issues forth into the universe and where humanity's representative Man stands in for us before the Majesty on High.¹⁷

15. Matthew 3:16-4:1.

16. 1 Corinthians 3:11.

17. 1 Timothy 2:5.

The Christian faith centres around an embodied God who is the centre, content and shape of the Gospel that saves us. Jesus – God’s human name- has a body that is real, limited and localised yet also spiritual and glorified. He was and is a very historical figure, God entering history, God on and within the human horizon, God as a participant of history. Starting here reminds us that when we speak of *Jesus* we are underscoring his very real human identity - and thus at the same time relating him closely to ourselves. Yet in becoming a man the Lord did not cease being divine at the same time! He has a dual personal identity: a human identity and a divine identity. Since the Incarnation, he always mutually and simultaneously exists as *one person in two natures*. He is the unique God-man, or in Greek, the *Theanthropos*. We dare not eclipse nor minimise either nature. He is the *Man from Heaven!*¹⁸ He came in our eyes, our hands and our feet. He came in our shoes! He is one of us - and one of us is God! He is the down-to-earth-God, the Incarnate Son. As the apostle Paul famously said, “in him dwells the fullness of the deity *bodily*”.¹⁹ There is some truth that in the Trinity we have:

God above us, God as us, and God in us.

This human nature of God the Son distinguishes him from his Father and brings the Trinity into distinct focus. Since the incarnation was a historical event *only* in the life of the Son and did not happen to the Father or the Spirit, this reality introduces us to the distinctions among the Persons of the Godhead and affects how we relate to each of the them.

By now you may be thinking why all this is relevant with regard to the Trinity. I believe that Jesus’ bodily mode-of-existence as the last Adam is the place to begin in knowing about the Trinity.²⁰ From the time of the Incarnation the Trinity was brought into focus

18. 1 Corinthians 15:47.

19. Colossians 2:9.

20. 1 Corinthians 15:45.

for us. This is made very clear at Jesus' Jordan baptism. At his baptism we have Jesus, God-Incarnate. Here we have the embodied God on earth praying to disembodied God in heaven! Here we have the God of heaven speaking to Jesus and giving him the Holy Spirit as a gift. Here we have the Holy Spirit personally leading Jesus, *leading God!* All from the Incarnation! In all our thinking about the Father, the Spirit and the Son, remembering Incarnation keeps our feet on the ground and anchors God-in-Christ to our creational identity as human beings. Christians believe and follow One who now eternally participates in our human identity, One who men saw with their own eyes, touched with their own hands and heard with their own ears. He is the Word become flesh, Yahweh incarnate.

Scripture tells us that having ascended to the Throne room, the very human Jesus was crowned *Lord* by God the Father over all of created reality.²¹ His reign has begun. Jesus of Nazareth the long awaited Messiah has now been crowned king. He is Lord of *all*.²² As Joseph the prisoner was exalted to Prime Minister of Egypt, so Jesus was also suddenly exalted to a place of sovereignty over all. The Name above every name (Lord, *Adonai*) has been bestowed upon him. In the same way that Pharaoh declared that all the Egyptians were to bow before Joseph, so God the Father now declares that every knee should bow to His exalted Son Jesus Christ.²³ As obedient and glorified Adam, Christ thus superlatively fulfils the destiny that Adam lost. He regained Paradise and restored Adam's lost authority.²⁴

Thus the basic God-given relationship which Jesus sustains to all things is one of lordship. God the Father is presently conforming all reality to His Son's Investiture as Lord. He calls all nations to 'kiss

21. Acts 2:36; Colossians 2:10; 1 Peter 3:22; Hebrews 10:12-13.

22. Acts 10:36.

23. Genesis 41:37-45. 1 Corinthians 15:27. Philippians 2:9-10.

24. Psalm 8.

the Son' and to submit to him.²⁵ Once all things are brought into direct submission to this reality of Christ's lordship, and all his enemies are made a footstool for his feet, then the end and fulfilment of all things will come, the *Telos*.²⁶ Once this End has come, Christ will himself place all things under the direct and unmediated authority of God the Father. Then Jesus' mediatorial lordship will make way for the Father's direct and unmediated rule over all things.²⁷ But for now, Jesus is waiting until that time when all things are made ready for his return.

Our Incarnate Lord is also *a person-in-relation*. He transacts with divine and human reality, to all supernatural and natural beings, to uncreated and created existence, to both visible and invisible creation. He is now the most important Person in terms of this complex inter-relatedness of all things. He himself participates in and determines all things. He is the fulcrum and axis of the great wheel and web of the universe. *All things converge and ultimately harmonize in the Incarnate Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.*²⁸ This is no less true for our knowledge and experience of the Trinity.

In summarised form we will now look at three of the most important relationships that Christ now enjoys and determines for us: his relationship to his Father, his relationship to the Holy Spirit and his relationship to his church. Once we know what is actually converging in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be in a position to appreciate more of what our experience of the Trinity entails. Only in Christ do we find our experiential and theological orientation towards the Trinity.

25. Psalm 2.

26. Psalm 110; Hebrews 10:13.

27. 1 Corinthians 15: 25-28.

28. Colossians 1:15-21; Ephesians 1:10

1. His relationship to his Father

*For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has Himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak.*²⁹

Firstly, Christ has a God! This may sound strange to our ears, yet it was a truth not only mentioned in the New Testament but even shown in the Old Testament.³⁰ Frequently the phrase “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is used in the New Testament. In the last book of biblical revelation, this truth is clearly seen in the post-resurrection words of Jesus to his churches. Jesus speaks to his churches and frequently speaks of ‘my God’, that is, the Father.³¹ So, ‘the God of Jesus Christ’.

In the relationship of Christ to his God, there is a First and there is a Second. Christ has his centre in his Father, he lives to do not his own will but his Father’s will, and he is in submission to his Father’s authority³². As Paul says regarding Jesus’ post resurrection mode of life, ‘he lives to God’³³. ‘*God is the head of Christ*’ says the apostle further, and Jesus asserts that ‘*the Father is greater than I*’.³⁴ If this last statement of Christ was true *only* during his days on earth, it would be no comfort to the disciples that Jesus was departing to the One who was no longer greater than he was. As a father is greater than his son, so is the Father to Jesus. This is a ‘greater’ in relationship and not in being. This is also seen in the truth that the Incarnation was not assumed by the Son at his own initiative. He

29. John 12:49.

30. Psalm 45:6-7.

31. Revelation 3:2, 12.

³² Luke 7:8; John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38

³³ Romans 6:10

34. 1 Corinthians 11:3, John 14:28.

was *sent* by the Father and came, as he said, in his Father's name.³⁵ Even in the book of Revelation we see this relational ordering of the Son under the Father. The entire vision of the Revelation was given by God to Jesus. It came from the One sitting on the Throne, being mediated by Jesus through an angel to John for the seven churches.³⁶

This relationship that Christ has with his God is expressed in his name *Son of God*. Scripture makes it clear that by the time Jesus was 13 years old he already had a core sense of belonging to the God of Israel in a way that was unique. His 'coming of age' lay in his relationship to his heavenly Father rather than in the rite Joseph and Mary carried out for him. The Father was everything to the teenager Jesus. According to Luke, Jesus' first recorded words and his last recorded words during his time on this earth all had to do with his Father: "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's things?", he said to his parents; and having completed his work on the Cross, Jesus cried out, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit".³⁷ This Son-identity was awakened in Jesus in personal prayer and in his meditation on the Holy Scriptures. Right from the dawn of Jesus' moral awareness as a child to his last breath on the Cross, he had unbroken and attentive communion with God his Father. He used a more intimate word for God in his prayers, calling God *Abba*, 'dear Father'. This was an informal and unprecedented word to use in prayer and expressed for Jesus his own emerging identity and mission. He knew the Father in prayer.

However it was at the Jordan River that this Son-awareness of Jesus came to full fruition. There words from his Father reinforced his identity as Son and his mission as Servant-Messiah. Together with these audible words of affirmation and vocation, the Son was given the first down payment of his inheritance, the gift of the Holy

35. John 5:43; 8:42.

36. Revelation 1: 1.

37. Luke 2:49 and 23:46.

Spirit. Through this love-gift of the Father Jesus received direct and unprecedented authority from God, expressed in the term *Kingdom of God*.³⁸ Following this baptism, his 40 day fast proved that he held his Sonship and Spirit-given authority only in context of obedience to his Father. The way he was the Son was his glory and not merely that he was Son. He was son, *the* Son, in a humble human dependent relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He learned obedience.³⁹ He did not, like God's other sons Adam and Israel, hold his privileges autonomously. This Son rightly held his authority in direct and continuous submission to an authority centre outside of himself. He knew that he was a *sent* Son with no self-originating mission. He was under the authorization of his Father in heaven. His authority was derivative. It is in this free and self-less love toward the Father that the distinctive glory of the Son is revealed. The Incarnate Son displays his particular glory by emptying himself and giving up the right he had to himself as God. He did not put himself forward but rather obeyed and glorified his Father. The truth of Christ's Father-focus reveals the insufficiency of a Christ-only emphasis or focus. If we think about Jesus in isolation from the Father, we ignore Jesus' own emphasis and self-understanding and understand him superficially.

We commonly say, "like father, like son". So it is with the Son of God. He is the personal reflection of the Father's nature and purpose. He is the Revealer of God, the Word of God. Jesus summarised his entire ministry by saying, "*I have made Your name known to them*".⁴⁰ His mission was to bring glory to his God, to 'hallow' his Father's name, for he came to deal with the fundamental God-human problem and sinful distortions and not the problem that people had with himself. He was overjoyed at the end of his earthly ministry when the disciples finally got in on the plot line of his ministry and realised that everything about Jesus was

38. Matthew 12:28.

39. Hebrews 5:8.

40. John 17: 6.

from the Father. 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' said Jesus.⁴¹ He was and is the stained-glass window through which the invisible and pure white light of the Father's nature is reflected and refracted in this world. Only in his light do we see the Father. The Word has made God known.⁴² He is God's 'inside' revealed 'outside', the invisible made visible.

So, when we are contemplating Jesus Christ, now glorified in heaven, we see him in a vital and real God-ward relationship. The Father was, and remains the centre of Jesus' life and existence, even as he dwells in the bosom of the Father.⁴³ This is his glory as the second Person of the Trinity. He lives in a love-relationship with God his Father. His final work in human history will be to intentionally step aside as the exclusive mediator of God's between the Father and all created things and to usher in an eternal state in which God can be directly 'all and in all'.⁴⁴ Therefore, if the keynote of the mind and life of Jesus Christ centres on the Father, we must conclude that knowing Jesus must entail a participation in and sympathy with his Father-ward life and devotion. We must see that Jesus is himself the Door and the Way into another relationship. He is the way to the Father.

2. His relationship to the Holy Spirit

*And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him; the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and valour; the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD*⁴⁵

41. John 14:9.

42. John 1:18; 1 John 5:20.

43. John 1:18.

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:28.

⁴⁵ Isaiah 11:2

Secondly, Jesus Christ has a personal relationship to the Holy Spirit, the Father's Gift to him. Within his Father-Son communion, Jesus knew the distinct reality and experience of the Person and power of the Holy Spirit Himself. When Jesus was baptised in the Jordan at the hands of John, the Spirit descended and rested on his body. Relative to the Trinity, the Jordan waters witness to a wonderful picture of the revelation of Trinity. We see the Anointer, the Anointed and the Anointing. By virtue of the Anointing, Jesus is equipped for his ministry. From this time on, he entered the dimension of the Holy Spirit as incarnate man. He was now under the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit, *the* Gift from his Father. That Gift was the active and personal agency of the Father in being personally and comprehensively present in and with His Son. For this reason Jesus is called *Christ*, which means 'the anointed one'.

After his baptism Jesus was immediately compelled by the Spirit to withdraw into the wilderness. Then in the lonely Judean desert he was continually led here and there by the Spirit, being disciplined into this new relationship inaugurated at his baptism: the immediacy of the present personal Spirit. He was the unique and archetypical Spirit-filled man. The Old Testament Cloud-by-day and Fire-by-night dwelling over the tent-tabernacle and the sea-water baptized Israelites is a type of the Anointing of the Spirit leading and initiating the Jordan-baptized Christ.⁴⁶ The words in Luke that give the most detailed biography of Jesus' new relationship with the Spirit clearly imply that the anointing on Jesus was not one of impersonal force but one of personal agency. The Spirit was not an impersonal instrument nor simply the extension of God's power on Jesus' side of the relationship. He was a unique divine Person abiding in and over Jesus through the duration of his ministry, the personal active agent working through Jesus in his embodied life. After the forty days of fasting and the three temptations, Jesus then returned to the towns and cities, not in his own purpose and power, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. Subsequently Jesus prayed, lived,

46. Exodus 40:34-38; Numbers 9:15-23.

spoke, healed, exorcised, died, was raised and now lives under and in the Spirit of God.⁴⁷

Peter in his famous sermon on the day of Pentecost declared that the miracles Jesus did were accomplished by God through him.⁴⁸ The witness of the New Testament regarding the miracles shows that these signs were not performed by Jesus in a 'Clark Kent' superman manner. The miracles were not in themselves signs of his Deity, for many of them had already been performed by Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament (multiplying loaves, raising the dead, etc.). Rather, the miracles were acts performed by God the Holy Spirit as signs of the unique and uninhibited presence of the Kingdom of God in the (sinless) Jesus of Nazareth. Once again, there is no autonomous Christ. He did not do these things in the power of his own eternal identity but in the gift given power of the Spirit on his obedient humanity. Blessed be His Name!

In the book of Revelation Jesus' relationship to the Spirit is vividly symbolised for us. After John was taken up to see the Throne Room, he is shown a seven-horned and seven-eyed Lamb standing near the Throne. Then – thankfully - we are told what this symbolises: they are 'the Seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth'. The Lamb is anointed with the Spirit, that Spirit who is before the Father's Throne. This plenitude of Spirit-Anointing upon the Lamb universalises and 'democratises' his presence. Although localised at the Throne in a physical body, through the Spirit he is omnipresent and with his people everywhere in the universe. This is the manner and means by which the lordly Lamb fills and rules all things.⁴⁹

In this section I have highlighted the important and often neglected relationship that Jesus holds with the Spirit of God. The more we

47. Isaiah 11:2; Luke 3:21-22; 4:1,14; 4:18; 5:17; 10:21; 11:20; John 3:34; 6:63; Hebrews 9:15; Romans 6:4; 8:11; Acts 1:2; Revelation 1-3.

48. Acts 2:22; 10:38

49. Ephesians 4:10 and Revelation 1:5.

rightly see and appreciate the humanity of Jesus, the more we can appreciate the role of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. All these realities are contained for us in his name as *Christ* - 'the anointed One'. When we join the human name *Jesus* with his vocational title *Christ* we couple two realities which are so important for understanding our own relationship with the Triune God. But more about that later.

3. His relationship to his church

*his body, which is the church*⁵⁰

Outside of Jesus' relationships to the other persons of the Godhead, his relationship with his church is of primary importance. The New Testament reveals the truth that Christ not only has a temporal physical body but he also a spiritual body. This Body of his is comprised of living persons. Scripture tells us that Christ is a corporate Person, a Person *in whom* are other persons. The Church *is* Christ's body so concretely that Paul can even indirectly say that the Church *is* Christ, it is his fullness.⁵¹ Each believer is a sharer and partaker in the common life of the resurrected Christ. Except for his deity, all that Christ is the Church is, and all that Christ has the Church has. Listen to Christ saying to his bride:

*All that I am I give to you,
all that I have I share with you,
within the love of Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

It is a profound and great mystery that the Church is 'one flesh' and 'one spirit' with Christ.⁵² She is 'bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh' - a union more real than most are aware of, in as much as the spiritual is more real than the physical. We are Christ's. We were taken, Eve-like, out of the wounded side of our Adam and fashioned by the

50. Colossians 1:24.

51. 1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 1:24.

52. 1 Corinthians 6:17 and Ephesians 5:31-32.

Father into a fitting companion and help-meet who corresponds to him. What wonders lie for us in the doctrine of our union with Christ!

The images and metaphors which the Scriptures use to convey the nature of Christ's relationship to his people are of an incorporative and organic nature. This intimate union is fittingly captured for us in Scripture in its *vine, body, marriage, building* imagery. Though Christ is the superior in these metaphors (as *stem, head, husband* and *cornerstone*), they speak of an essential unity of persons and a mutual inclusivity amongst equals that is the ground of the relationship. There is a shared common identity albeit within a diversity of function.

A true kinship and companionship exists here. Christ is our life.⁵³ Christ and his people are paired and inseparably intertwined. The most intimate expression of this is in the wedded, conjugal image. Oh the glory of our spiritual union and communion with Christ! Christ is Adam and the Church is Eve.⁵⁴ The Church is wedded to Christ! We are to submissively abide in his husbandly and self-sacrificial love toward us, and bear within us the life of His Spirit imparted solidarity. We are now joined to Christ our new Companion and husband. We are *one* with him.⁵⁵

Once again, it is particularly through incarnation-affinity that we can begin to appreciate and approach our true relationship with Christ. Christ's Adam-orientated incarnation speaks of the earthly and human dimensions of his life. Here in the Incarnation humanity is incorporated into God Himself by the action of the Holy Spirit. In Christ we have 'the life of man in the soul of God'. Thus Christ is always understood as God-with-us, God-for-us, and God-as-one-of-us. His distinct and distinguishing Glory is particularly in terms of his

53. Colossians 3:1-4.

54. 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33.

55. Romans 7:4.

obedient and Spirit filled humanity. This is the Son of God's mode-of-existence, unlike that of the Father and the Spirit. Being incarnated, as his brothers and sisters are, he is able to be in organic and familial relationship with them. In this way he qualifies to be our sympathetic High Priest, our Kinsman-Redeemer and Elder Brother.⁵⁶ What a glorious gospel we have heard!

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said:

"I thank You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do⁵⁷"

56. Hebrews 2; Matthew 28:10; Romans 8: 29.

⁵⁷ Luke 10:21

Our Relationships

All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the person to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

Come to me, all of you who are weary and loaded down with burdens, and I will give you rest. Place my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest for your souls, because my yoke is pleasant, and my burden is light.⁵⁸

In coming to a biblically informed understanding and practise of the Trinity, we need to do three things. We have done the first: see what is there in Christ, apart from ourselves and prior to our experience. Next, we must see that those who are drawn by the Father into Christ are graciously invited to participate in this very Trinity which is known in Jesus Christ our Lord. Believers are placed by grace into the centre of the Trinity-relationships that converge for us in Christ Jesus, for all that Christ is and holds for us. Then lastly, we need to respond in whole-hearted faith and loving desire to the call and initiative of God. We need to personally appropriate and commune with the Trinity along the paths which are already laid down for us in Christ. When we do this we will begin to discover the glory that there is for the pilgrim in solidarity with his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

I nearly called this section 'Christ Incorporated'. It expressed for me the truth of our identity as sharers in Christ who partake in him and with him, and He with us. We are rooted not somewhere generally but specifically in the embodied Christ. The Latin roots of the word 'incorporated' have to do with '*in-the-body*'. I like that. However, my overarching theme of *relationships* tethered me to my course!

When the risen Christ summarised what his disciples were to do, he stated that they were to make disciples and then baptise

58. Matthew 11:27-30

them into the name of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His followers were to have a baptised trinitarian identity.⁵⁹ When we have faith in Christ, we are taken up into him and the entire network of relations that subsist in him. It may take an entire life-time to unpack and appropriate all the dimensions and depths of these 'in-Christ' relationships. This discovery will not be of abstract truths but a knowing of persons. We are called to know a *personal* God *personally*. This is our greatest treasure and gift. Salvation and eternal life is thus defined in the Bible as a relationship with God and Jesus Christ. It is a *knowing* of two Persons: Father and Son.⁶⁰ Salvation is not a great idea or objective legal transaction (though it is no less than that!), rather, it is an incorporation into that communication of love that was going on in God from eternity past. These relationships are there and available to be appropriated by faith in the truth and by the leading of the Spirit himself.

What we need to consider now is our incorporation *into* Christ and the subsequent Christ-identity we have toward God, His people and the world. Christian salvation and baptismal identity speaks of *initiation into all that is in Christ*. Salvation is a participation into the matrix of Christ. There are two identity expressing acts in which the Christian participates when believing in Christ. Firstly, there is *baptism*, the bodily act of identification, incorporation and grafting into the Christ-life. This is a once-off initiatory act inaugurating a lifetime of Trinity relationships in Jesus' Name. Then there is the ongoing expression of this loving union with Christ as Head, namely *the Lord's Supper*. Here we are explicitly reminded of the pivotal act which constituted us as his people (the Cross). Here we share in his blood and body and are formed into a life of ongoing union and communion with the Lord. Both these ordinances are explicitly Christ-centred and root our identity and life in him who is the source of salvation. In baptism we put on Christ, in the Lord's Supper we feed on Christ. These are all done 'in the Name

59. Matthew 28:19.

60. John 1:1-2; John 17:3; 1 John 1:1-4.

of Jesus Christ'. These two sacraments express the nature of our salvation. They express how we are fitted into that pattern of existence that Christ established for us, modelled for us and held for us. We are to live '*in Jesus' Name*' and to be contextualized into Christ. We are to put on the greater Joseph's cloak and enjoy his benefits, particularly his relationship with the Spirit and with his Father. In this way we have – and must! – put on Christ.⁶¹

As Christ's disciples, we enjoy a common privilege in access to his whole network of Adam-restored relationships. The Church and believer sustain at least *five fundamental relationships in Christ*: three relating to the Trinity, one to Christ's body, and another to Christ's creation. In Christ we share (1) an *incarnational* relationship with himself. Then we also share in (2) his *Abba* relationship to his Father, (3) in his Anointing in the Holy Spirit, (4) in a very personal relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and lastly, we share (5) in his rule over creation. For the sake of the emphasis of this writing I will only look at the first four. These relationships are all gifts of grace which are the inheritance of everyone who is in Christ; they are never ours by nature. They are there outside of us, independent of us and are in Christ before they are in us.

At the core of these gifts of grace are the 'Trinity realities', expressing the 'Trinity-shape' of our salvation, prepared by God through the historical Incarnation-Golgotha-Resurrection-Pentecost's works of the Father, Son and Spirit. These relationships are all gifts in Christ flowing from his Cross. They are always firstly held by Jesus and are his before they are ours. We only get in on them when we become incorporated into Christ. "Out of his fullness we have all received", says the beloved disciple.⁶² This is why in this meditation the chapter on Christ's Relationships' preceded the chapter on 'Our Relationships'. He holds them prior to our faith, being the objective ground for all our subjective experiences. Only

61. Romans 13:14.

62. John 1:16.

as we are through faith re-contextualised into Christ can we experience the salvation God intended for us.

So, we need to live in Jesus' Name, in his present Person and relationships. This is the mystery of the Christian life. Praise God for being clothed with Christ and having a real union with him! Praise God for being called to gain the glory that is in Jesus Christ our Lord. In summarised form we will now look at this inheritance. We will focus our attention primarily on the first three relationships due to our emphasis on the Trinity, but mention the others because of their importance.

1. Our relationship to Christ

*Abide in me.*⁶³

Faith in the Son of God is the root from which our experience of the Trinity grows. It is the foundation and context for all that our inheritance entails. Without the Son, we do not have the Father or the Spirit. He who has the Son has the Father and the Spirit.⁶⁴ No-one can come to know the Father except through the Son of God himself.⁶⁵ The apostle Paul, with all the depth of revelation he received, was fundamentally Christ-centred in his thought. At his Damascus road conversion he received a revelation from God of Jesus Christ. His Christian life began with Jesus on the Damascus Road. Jesus Christ was the centre-piece of Paul's gospel and his life's *raison d'être* – as Philippians is testimony to. Paul lived by faith in the Son of God, who as the Lord's Anointed became the very breath of his nostrils.⁶⁶ As the apostle to the Gentiles, and as one who did not experience Jesus during his earthly ministry, Paul is prototypical for us today in his knowledge of Trinity. We thus see that faith, love and

63. John 15:4.

64. 1 John 2:23; Romans 8:9.

65. Matthew 11:25-27; John 14:6.

66. Galatians 1:12, 16; Romans 1:3; Galatians 2:20 and Lamentations 4:20.

obedience toward Christ determines ones standing relative to God and all created reality. Everything pivots on the Lord. The roots of our being as Christians are in Christ.

In Christ's incarnated experience of life and Adam-redeeming-identity, we are introduced into a particular and distinct relationship with him that is different from that of the Father or the Spirit. He is our nearest relation. We have an acquaintance and kinship with him, our tangible God.⁶⁷ Jesus is 'God-on-the-human-level', the earthly human God who is therefore related to us – or us to him! We meet a fellow human in Jesus who is at the same time God! What a wonderful mystery and what communion we can hold with him! We look into his face 'as one of us' in his solidarity with our humanity, in a way we cannot do with the Father whom no man has seen or can see. We behold the glory of God in the *face* of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶⁸ We will briefly consider the nature of our relationship to Christ within the person-to-person, face-to-face relation of our Lord, Lover and Brother.

To the believer Christ is firstly the *Lord*. The characteristic status that Christ has to the believer is as his or her Lord, the One in absolute authority. To her Lord the Church submits.⁶⁹ He *is* Lord, and the truth of his beneficent lordship and God-given position over all things is recognised in true obedience by the believer and in their status as belonging to him as his slaves. So much so, that in the New Testament Christ is distinctively and predominantly called Lord, whilst the Father is more often referred to as God.⁷⁰ This reminds us that at present God's plan for the universe is to bring all things into actual obedience to His Son.⁷¹ The Christian is thus an anachronistic

67. I John 1:1-3.

68. 2 Corinthians 4:6.

69. Romans 14:1-9; Ephesians 5:24.

70. 1 Corinthians 8:6; Jude 1:4.

71. Ephesians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; 2 Corinthians 10:5.

phenomenon, a person ahead of the times doing now, Jehoida-like, what every knee will do at a later future stage.⁷² Thus there is a continual call for all of God's people to set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts and lives prior to his public manifestation.⁷³ Jesus is Lord, so let all the nations be wise and kiss God's Son! How can we not agree with John Newton who said that '*every thought in which he has not a place or rule is treason*'.

Yet Christ is more than Lord to his people; he is also a *Lover*. This bridal image is revealed to be most intimate and real. This relationship is not sustained toward the Father nor the Spirit but specifically toward the Incarnate Son. It is particularly Christ-directed. The Church is the Bride of the Lamb according to The Revelation. Of Christ distinctly we say, "my Beloved is mine and I am his". Our soul is knit to Christ – the friend who sticks closer than a brother! The soul of the Christian reposes like the apostle John in the 'bosom of Jesus', as Jesus reposes in 'the bosom of the Father'.⁷⁴ We can joyfully sing in the words of Norman J Clayton:

*Now I belong to Jesus,
Jesus belongs to me;
not for the years of time alone
but for eternity.*

There is so much more to say about these 'wonderful exchanges' (Owen) between the soul and her Lover. What deep and fulfilling worship we enjoy within the intimacy of a blood-bought soul with her Saviour. What infinite pleasures and eternal dominion does the Bride share with her Royal Beloved who is Lord of lords and King of kings!

Lastly - and in anticipation of the next section - Christ is our *Elder Brother*, the first-born in the family of God. In this relationship

72. 2 Kings 11; Philippians 2:10.

73. 1 Peter 3:15.

74. John 13:23; John 1:18

we do not bow at his feet as Lord, nor spouse-like love him, but stand *with* him as he is our worship-leader before God. We must not forget that in Christ there is always a two-fold direction and movement, for he does not only bring God to man but he at the same time brings man to God. In Jesus we not only have God-on-the-human-level, the earthly God, but we also have Man-on-the-divine-level, the heavenly Man, our elder brother! Jesus is the elder son in the family of God. He stands within the circle of his brothers, praising our mutual Father.⁷⁵ He is the Living Way and we follow him as his brotherly disciples – to his Father!

So, this relationship we distinctly sustain with Jesus Christ is nuptialy intimate, gratefully submissive and commonly familial. Let us then abide in him and let the music and rhythm of his Name so abide in us that we will dance for joy (or at least want to) all our days!

2. Our relationship to Christ's Father

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba Father!*⁷⁶

Considering Christ's fraternity with us brings us into our next most important relationship: knowing 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. In this relationship we move from believing *in* Christ to believe *with* Christ. Our fraternal relationship with Jesus introduces us into the fraternal relationship with his Father. In the previous section we looked at the truth that 'our life is hidden with *Christ*'; now we go on to see that it is also 'hidden *with* Christ in *God*'. As much as Christ is God-with-man, he is simultaneously man-with-God and into this man-God relationship of Christ we are called. Here we realise that Christ is the mediator between God and man, he is the

75. Hebrews 2:9-18.

76. Galatians 4:4-6.

Way to a Home, the Word of a Speaker, the Stream of a Spring and the Beam of a Sun. In Christianity we not only have a relationship with an embodied God revealed in time and space, but through that historical Person we also have a relationship with a unseen disembodied God who dwells outside of time and space.

Many Christians rightly thank the Father for giving us the Son, but few thank the Son for giving us the Father. Yet this is the greatest gift from Christ us-ward. Christ died with the explicit purpose of bringing us to the Father.⁷⁷ Just as the Father draws us to Christ and reveals him to us, so Christ the Son in turn brings us to the Father and reveals Him to us. Christ is the Light by which we know the Father, typified for us in the candlestick of the Old Testament Tabernacle, which was the only light in the Holy Place. As that light illumined the Holy Place, so Christ's Light shines both on us and on the way to the Father. In one real sense the aim of Christ throughout his ministry, cross and post-cross work was and is to bring people into a knowledge of God as Father analogous, though not identical, to his own relationship with God.⁷⁸ To believers in Jesus is given the very same prayer-language and intimacy to the Father that Jesus had. The Son himself through his Spirit cries out within us *Abba* Father!⁷⁹ The Spirit of Jesus' own prayer life and his Father-orientation breathes in his body, the church, the corporate Son. In the family of God there are many sons, one being son by nature (Jesus) and the others being sons by grace, the grace of adoption. In the Son-Priest we are now caught up into that Son-to-Father and Father-to-Son quality of life. Believers now participate in an overwhelmingly positive relationship with God, knowing God predominantly not as *Yahweh* nor as the God-of-Israel nor as the Most High: Jesus revealed Him as *our Father*! This is the Christian name for God. This reality cannot be overemphasised.

77. 1 Peter 3:18.

78. Matthew 11:27; John 17:2-3.

79. Galatians 4:6.

When we observe that after the Crucifixion Jesus called the disciples his *brothers*, a staggering reality is disclosed for us. Something phenomenally glorious was opened up for men and women in God through the work of His Son! Once the Cross-work was finished, Jesus declared that his God was now *our* God, his Father now *our* Father, and that he was now our *brother*. We are now fellow-heirs with Christ of God; we put on Christ's sonship and enjoy the status he has with the Father. For this reason theologian J I Packer rightly calls justification the foundational blessing of the Gospel and adoption the highest blessing of the Gospel. We stand alongside our elder brother serving as priests our mutual Father and God.⁸⁰ For this reason Jesus said to Mary on that first day of resurrection:

*"go and tell my brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God"*⁸¹

We are now sons of the Most High – our sonship being derived, shaped and imaged after the Son of God himself.⁸² We are sons by grace but Christ is Son by nature. How amazing to find that God the Father has loved those who love His Son as much as He loves His Son - the most amazing thing we can know!⁸³ Here we experience that the Father *Himself* loves us.⁸⁴ In the Lord's prayer (John 17) Jesus as our elder brother prays and bequeaths to us his glory, that is, his experience and knowledge of the Father's love, the love he had so eloquently made known in his ministry. So we see

80. Matthew 28:10; Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:26-28; Hebrews 2:11; 1 John 5:18; Revelation 1:6.

81. John 20:17

82. Romans 8:29.

83. John 17:23.

84. John 16:27.

that Christ is not shielding us from an implacable God. Rather, the Father gave up His Son out of His great love for us!⁸⁵

In the Godhead the Father is the ‘prime mover’ of all things and is supreme in authority. He is the fountain head of all things. As the Son has a delegated and derivative authority, the Father has the original and generative authority; as the Son has the supremacy over all creation, so the Father has supremacy in the Godhead. He is the fountain from which all comes and the ocean to which all will return. One early confession - a Christian adaptation of the Jewish *Shema* - concisely sums up this truth of God the Father being the source of all in creation and redemption:

*Yet for us there is one God, the Father,
from whom are all things and we exist for Him;
and one Lord, Jesus Christ,
by whom are all things and we exist through him.*⁸⁶

Being in Christ therefore grants us the unspeakable privilege of coming into the Father’s presence through Jesus Christ. The status and access in Christ before the Throne of the Universe that Christians enjoy is staggering in its nature!⁸⁷ This emphasis on Christ being our Mediator to bring us into the presence and love of the Father reveals that the act of redemption was a trinitarian act in which Christ offered himself *up to the Father* through the Holy Spirit. Thus without an understanding of the Trinity and the holiness of God the Father, we cannot have an adequate understanding of the Cross. Moreover, in prayer and worship we come *to* the Father *through* Christ and *in* the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸ As all our salvation cascades down *from* the Father *through* the Son and *in* the Holy Spirit, so in our worship we reverse the flow and move *in* the Holy Spirit *through*

85. Romans 8:32.

86. 1 Corinthians 8:6.

87. John 17:23.

88. Ephesians 2:18.

the Son *to* the Father. The circle is complete: from the Father to the Father. We come directly to the ultimate Authority of all and worship and pray, calling Him our own Father. We are His sons and He our Father. This is the final goal of all.

Before His Throne of grace we minister as *priests*. This priestly metaphor is a relationship distinctly directed toward God the Father. Christ has made us priests in himself, our great High Priest. Christ is the New Temple in whom we worship God and through whom we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God.⁸⁹ He shed his blood to free us from our sins and made us priests to his God and Father⁹⁰. We offer up spiritual sacrifices and prayers and enjoy the awesome privilege of worship before the Throne. The Father seeks such worship of Himself through Christ.⁹¹

So, Christ is the Way, not only *from* God but also *to* God. If we truly love the Son of God, we cannot but want to know more of the One who is foremost in the his own affections. As we can run up a ray of the sun to the sun itself, so through the incarnate Son we come to the One who no man has seen or can see, who alone lives in unapproachable light.⁹² When our Spirit-illuminated heart knows this glorious reality, we can then sing with Catesby Paget,

*So near, so very near to God,
I cannot nearer be;
For in the person of His Son
I am as near as he.*

*So dear, so very dear to God,
More dear I cannot be;*

89. John 1:51; 2:21; Ephesians 2:18-22; 1 Peter 2:4-5.

⁹⁰ Revelation 1:6.

91. Acts 4:24; Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-22; John 4:21-24.

92. 1 Timothy 6:16.

*The love wherewith He loves the Son
Such is His love to me*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who embraces the Head and his members with the same affection!

3. Our relationship to Christ's Spirit

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled faces, looking at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit⁹³.

In Christ Jesus we discover and know the Spirit of Life, the Holy Spirit of God.⁹⁴ In coming thirsty to Jesus and for his embodied salvation, we receive the gift of God's life-giving water, the Spirit.⁹⁵ Besides knowing Jesus *Himself*, and the Father *Himself*, we also know the Spirit *Himself*⁹⁶. There is such a thing as knowing the Holy Spirit in a way that is not identical with knowing the Father and the Son. This is the reason for the title of this booklet: *Experiencing the Trinity*. This is the next relationship-dimension that is there for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That Jesus came to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit to his people is seen right in the beginning of our New Testament. John the Baptist proclaimed three Messianic works. The Messiah would be the slain Lamb, he would baptise righteous Israel in the Holy Spirit and he would baptise ungodly Israel in the fires of judgement. Cross, Spirit, Judgment. Messiah would be the sin-bearer and the life-giver!

⁹³ 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

⁹⁴ Romans 8:2.

⁹⁵ John 4:10, 14; 7:37-39.

⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:28; John 16:27; Romans 8:26

He on whom John saw the Spirit rest and remain without measure would be the One who would induct Israel into a similar Spirit-experience. This certainly happened at Pentecost!⁹⁷ If we hold Luke and Acts in parallel, we see that as the Jordan experience had inaugurated Jesus' ministry, so the Pentecost experience inaugurated his disciples' ministry. The Messiah and his people shared in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The anointing on the Head overflowed onto the members of the Body. Elijah's mantle had now fallen – with greater works! – upon his servant Elisha! The authority seen in Jesus was to be continued in his body.⁹⁸ To be in Christ is to be baptised into the Holy Spirit, to receive the Promise of the Father.⁹⁹ In Christ we encounter God-our-contemporary, God living and breathing, God the Holy Spirit. The Christian has not only received access by faith into the grace of knowing the Father, we have also received by faith our access into a *new quality of life* in the indwelling Spirit. All this is because of that double-donation of the Father, who has sent forth both His Son and who has sent forth His Spirit for the heirs of adoption¹⁰⁰. Like His Son, the Father also calls us to live by the Holy Spirit, directly and distinctly.¹⁰¹

There is one Body and there is one Anointing on that Body.¹⁰² One Anointing of the Head 'democratised' to each member as the love of the common Father poured out into our hearts. One Fire but singular tongues on each head. This Spirit on Christ's Body animates, directs, reveals and inspires the Body. The Spirit is our Anointing in which we as the Body are to harmoniously function. We do not function by our ability and power but by the Spirit on Christ. The

97. Acts 1:33.

98. Luke 9:1; 10:18.

99. Acts 1:8.

¹⁰⁰ Galatians 4:4-6

101. Galatians 6:8; Romans 8.

102. Ephesians 4:4-5.

Spirit is the Giving Gift who gives us powers and abilities to serve in Christ's kingdom. He is the executive member of the Godhead whose distinct work is to get the Father's decisions done on earth. New Covenant service and ministry is to be God-initiated, God-empowered and God-orchestrated. All of our service in Christ's name is to be ministry in the Person of God the Holy Spirit, who is God-in-the-present-tense, God on site and at work within us as at the beginning to work and to will for His good pleasure.¹⁰³ God began the good work by His Spirit and will complete the work in the same manner. It cannot be completed by the arm of the flesh. This is the wonderful doctrine of the Real Presence of God, the Spirit who makes real to us all that we see in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our relationship to the Holy Spirit is particularly a *bodily relationship*. The presence of God the Spirit is a Christian reality that is given to us within our bodily and physical existence. *Our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit* and it is the members of our body (eyes, hands, feet, etc.) that He wants to fill.¹⁰⁴ The Christian is to have no autonomous body but rather a Spirit-led and Spirit-filled body. As the temples of old existed as physical and local points of contact between the divine invisible world and the human visible realm, so are literal human bodies in Christ to be. In the totality of our being we are to live, love, pray and serve within the atmosphere of the Presence of God. Our bodies are to live and 'walk' in a new element and power:

*As the wind is to the sails
As the fire to the wood
As the ocean to the swimmer
As the ice to the skater,
so is the Spirit to be to the believer.*

The Spirit Himself bears witness to us personally that we are sons of God. He is the Spirit of adoption. Through Him we are

103. Genesis 1:2; 2 Corinthians 3; Philippians 2:13.

104. 1 Corinthians 6:19; Romans 8:11, 13; 12:1; Ephesians 5:18-21.

bonded to and incorporated into the reality of Christ's Sonship. Though Christ is uniquely Son, yet our sonship is similar in kind. The Spirit Himself takes the relationships of the Son and baptises us into them - including Christ's relationship to the Father.¹⁰⁵ He reveals all of these relationships in Christ to us and brings their reality into our lives. Specifically, He brings our lives into direct access before the Throne, flooding our hearts with Abba's love.¹⁰⁶ What divine realities we have experiential access to through the Person of the indwelling Spirit. Blessed be God for His marvellous gift!

Above all, the Spirit draws us into actual and experiential participation with the Father and the Son. It is the Spirit's distinct work (*proprium*) to bring our lives into immediate and delightful contact with all the realities of the New Covenant.¹⁰⁷ Foremost in his work is to engender the blood-purchased fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸ The Spirit's work is to lead us past Himself into the Father-Son relationships – and to keep us there! Though He is deeply personal He does not bring us into direct personal relationship with Himself as we do have with the Son and the Father. He is, 'the Person without a face' (Smail). Rather, He writes the names of the Father and the Son on our forehead.¹⁰⁹ The Father and Son relationship he creates is expressed in two confessions, or rather one confession and one doxological adoration: "Jesus is Lord!" and "Abba, Father!" The personal experience of Christ as Lord and God as Father are brought dynamically within our own personal horizon of consciousness by the Holy Spirit Himself. The Spirit enables us to experience the Son in terms of the Father's relationship to him and we experience the Father in terms of the

105. John 16:13-15.

106. Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 12:22; Romans 5:5.

107. 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

108. 1 John 1:3.

109. Revelation 14:1.

Son's relationship to Him. This is the greatest work of the Spirit as He facelessly introduces us to Father and Son.

So, this relationship with the Spirit brings an experience and communication of the fraternal love of Christ and the paternal love of the Father right over the threshold into our very lives. The Spirit floods our hearts with the love of God.¹¹⁰ He is God on our side of the relationship enabling us to live 'beyond ourselves' (Catherine Marshall). We hold a personally *inspirational* relation to the Spirit, in the truest sense of the word. The Spirit, 'breathes into' (the root meaning for *inspire*) our bodily existence in Christ all the divine communications that the Head sends to his Body and the Father to His son-priests. He brings the Trinity into contemporary experience in all its *paternal, fraternal, and inspirational* realities. So don't settle for anything less than these relationships and live daily and directly on this glorious God of the Bible!

4. Our relationship to Christ's people.

*Let each of us please his neighbour for his own good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself... May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*¹¹¹

As we have seen, Christ's people are his body. We can therefore no more expect a solitary Christian life than a solitary arm or toe. A solitary marriage is a contradiction in terms. Rather, in Christ Jesus we find we have eternal relationships with all the others who are in Christ. We find in Christ that we are members of one another.¹¹²

110. Romans 5:5.

111. Romans 15:2-3, 5-6.

112. 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

How we treat each other is how we treat Christ, for his people are his body, are Christ!¹¹³.

As God is a 'divine society', a plurality within a unity, so is the Church. Indeed, we cannot truly know God as Trinity unless we are in loving reciprocal relationship with one-another and thus reflecting something of the Trinity between ourselves. Reflecting the Trinity is achieved through a right relationship to the Head and a humble and servant mind-set toward each other.¹¹⁴ Only then will the Body of Christ harmonise in a unity-in-diversity integration as it works toward fullness of stature and fruition in love.¹¹⁵ Arrogant individualism will subvert the essential unity and bring a division that retards the goal of the maturity of the Body of Christ. Loving unity-in-diversity where all members are suffused with the attitude of the Head, will build up the Body in love, enhance the revelation of Christ, and ultimately reflect the unity within the Godhead itself.¹¹⁶ Our mission is to 'practise the Trinity' before a watching world: each member of the body living out the love of the Head in its relationship to all the other members. By obedience to the new commandment will all people know that we are the disciples of Christ and that he was indeed sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world¹¹⁷.

So, let this mind be in you that is in Christ Jesus, for God intends to bring *many* sons to glory!

113. Matthew 25:40; Acts 9:4. Ephesians 5:29-31.

114. Colossians 2:19; Philippians 2:1-11.

115. Ephesians 4:1-16.

116. Philippians 2:1ff; Ephesians 4:16; John 17.

¹¹⁷ Jn 13:34-35; 17:20-26

Story & Song

And Simeon came into the temple in the Spirit, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God¹¹⁸.

Before concluding our meditation, we will enjoy two stories from the Bible and two hymns. One story is from the fields of Moab, the other from the desert of Sinai. They will metaphorically and pictorially sum up this writing as I have sought to understand the Christian's relationship with the Trinity. They will act as a parable inviting you into the Father, Son, Spirit relationships that are ours in Christ .

Theology is better experienced in worship than in explanation. The Trinity is certainly better grasped in direct communion than in detached mental contemplation. Theology also comes to fruition not simply when rightly grasped but often when lovingly sung. 'Sometimes a light surprises a Christian when he sings' said the poet Cowper. *Pectus facit theologum* – it is the heart which makes the theologian. Trinity-theology can only truly be grasped by communing with the Godhead and not in speculative abstraction. In the quest to be attentive to the Trinity, I have found hymns to be of great worth and assistance. I incorporate here two hymns that bring to mind this glorious inheritance that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a hymn by the sweet psalmist of Germany, Paulus Gerhard, which beautifully draws us into the story of Ruth. I have also included a hymn (simply ascribed to W.R.) that captures for us the life of Aaron and the message of Hebrews. May these stories and songs help you sing like Simeon sang!

¹¹⁸ Luke 2:27-28.

1. The Story of Ruth

The book of Ruth contains a warm, personal and adventurous story of a young widow who chooses to forsake her homeland and culture for the sake of a mother-in-law who had nothing to offer. The love and devotion of Moabite Ruth first for Naomi and then for Boaz is the heart of the book. Through her loyalty, she ultimately ends up as a great grandmother matriarch of Jesus the Messiah. Her marriage to Boaz (the Davidic kinsman redeemer) is a clear type of Christ and his church and the wonderful love between them.

Yet it is the few words spoken in reply to Naomi's request for her to go back to her people of Moab that attract our attention. Clinging to Naomi Ruth says:

“Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”¹¹⁹

These words of Ruth are echoed in the New Testament in terms of Mary and Jesus. At dawn on the morning of Jesus' resurrection, Mary Magdalene is left alone. Jesus suddenly appears to her. When she realises that the man is not the gardener but Jesus, Mary, Ruth-like, clings to Jesus. He then tells her:

“Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”¹²⁰

The parallel in situation and dialogue with Ruth and Naomi is striking. Naomi and Jesus are both departing for their homeland in light of recent death. Both conversations take places at the point of

119. Ruth 1:16-17.

120. John 20:17.

a possible parting. Both Ruth and Mary cling as they protest the situation. In both there is an entering into and sharing of the faith in God held by another. Ruth vows, Jesus declares. A new relationship to an outsider has been opened up. Ruth comes to live with Naomi and worship her God although she was a Moabite. Mary likewise comes to worship Jesus' God as her own God and Father, although formerly a prostitute. Both then follow further on, Ruth visibly, Mary invisibly.

This story thus speaks to us of how Christians who were once alienated and without God in the world have now become family of God. Jesus was sent from heaven, calling us into a relationship with his own God. He shares with us what was his own. His own God is our God, his Father our Father. We follow him back to Heaven where he has prepared a place for us in his Father's house. Ruth's story is wonderful, but ours is better!

May the picture of Ruth remind you of your marriage to the Lord Jesus Christ! Let her act of forsaking all to follow Naomi engender similar devotion in you for Jesus Christ. And, lastly, may Ruth's new relationship with Naomi's God remind you of the gift you enjoy in Jesus Christ, the gift of knowing the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**A homeless Stranger amongst us came
To this land of death and mourning;
He walked in a path of sorrow and shame,
Through insult, and hate, and scorning.**

**A Man of sorrows, of toil and tears,
An outcast Man and a lonely;
But He looked on me, and through endless years
Him must I love—Him only.**

**Then from this sad and sorrowful land,
From this land of tears He departed;
But the light of His eyes and the touch of His hand
Had left me broken-hearted.**

**And I clave to Him as He turned His face
From the land that was mine no longer—
The land I had loved in the ancient days,
Ere I knew the love that was stronger.**

**And I would abide where He abode,
And follow His steps for ever;
His people my people, His God my God,
In the land beyond the river.**

**And where He died would I also die,
Far dearer a grave beside Him
Than a kingly place amongst living men,
The place which they denied Him.**

**Then afar and afar did I follow Him on,
To the land where He was going—
To the depths of glory beyond the sun,
Where the golden fields were glowing—**

**The golden harvest of endless joy,
The joy He had sown in weeping;
How can I tell the blest employ,
The songs of that glorious reaping!**

**The recompense sweet, the full reward,
Which the lord His God has given;
At rest beneath the wings of the Lord,
At home in the courts of heaven.**

(trans. Emma Frances Bevan)

2. The Story of Aaron

I want to draw your attention to a God-revealed model that contains a wonderful pattern for relating to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It

is the tabernacle model found in the Old Testament book of Exodus and interpreted for us in the New Covenant book of Hebrews. It is a divinely given pattern for our worship of the Trinity in the Trinity.

The Tabernacle was a place, firstly, for God to dwell amongst His people, and secondly for the people of God to worship Him. In the wilderness camp of Israel it was the focus of attention both spiritually and geographically. Each tent entrance was to face the earthly dwelling place of the God of Israel. There God manifested His presence and there He dwelt and tabernacled with them. Because of the moral and spiritual contamination of God's people, a detailed system of priestly mediators and representatives was instituted. In this way God bridged the gap between His holiness and His unholy people. God then set Aaron aside to be the people's priest to serve in the Tabernacle. In this place Aaron served God in divinely prescribed ceremony. Aaron was the High Priest. God made it clear that the Tabernacle was to have strict rules of access: only Aaron could enter the Holy of Holies. In the Holy Place, only priestly descendants of Aaron could serve and lay out the special bread, tend the seven stick menorah and offer up the holy incense. Only priests could serve at the bronze altar and use the bronze water laver. With reference to the Holy of Holies, the Holy One of Israel was present and only the man of His calling (Aaron) could enter into that Presence. The High Priest's position divinely ordained him to inclusively represent the Israelites before God. On one day a year, *Yom Kippur*, Aaron was allowed to enter twice into the Holy Place through the thick veil-curtain, to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat, first for himself and then for the nation. It was the most important day of the year for him – and the only day on which he was to minister in the ordinary white linen garments of a priest.

The writer of the book of Hebrews points out that this Exodus tabernacle was an earthly scale model of the heavenly uncreated Tabernacle in which Jesus now serves as High Priest. In contradistinction, the heavenly tabernacle was not pitched by any man. The Lord Himself set it up. In this Tabernacle, Jesus is our Aaron, the High Priest. Our Aaron began his ministry by having offered up his own blood on the earthly Cross. He then entered into

the heavenly tabernacle by means of this blood, his very body being the veil of access into the presence of God. Dressed, as it were, in both the humble priestly garments of our humanity and in the glorious garments of Aaron - carrying the names of the people whom he represents over his chest and on his shoulders - he now sits at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Unlike the Old Covenant priests, he *sits* for his work is complete and he has finished the work of atonement.

The book of Hebrews also presents us with a Christian interpretation of the earthly (and heavenly) Tabernacle: the Holy of Holies is God the Father's Throne Room, the sacrificial bronze altar is the earthly Golgotha, the High Priest's own body being the torn veil as he enters the Holy of Holies to sprinkle his blood on the mercy seat, etc. Having pointed out this typological significance, the writer of Hebrews then says to us:

*“since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near...”*¹²¹

He invites us to draw near to worship God through Christ our High Priest, and come with confidence into the Holy Place.

What is important for our theme is for us to notice that there is an *order of worship* here. We come firstly to our sympathetic Priest, who was made like us in all things. He can identify with us for he is one of us. His blood was shed for our cleansing. We draw near to Jesus our Priest with confidence. From him we receive grace and help in our time of need. We come to the altar-Cross in the outer court and have our sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb; we receive cleansing from the gospel and the word of God as water from the laver. With our High Priest we enter into the holy places with bare-feet, anchored to local earth yet reaching universal heaven. There in the Holy Places we sustain ourselves on Christ the

121. Hebrews 10:19-22.

Living Bread; we are illumined by the Light-Lamp that shines from the face of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then through and with our High Priest, we serve at the incense altar of prayer, intercession and praise. Only in the blood sprinkled path that our Priest has pioneered and cut open for us do we then come into the Holy of Holies to worship and adore the living God Himself, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the torn veil of Christ's body we worship our God and Father in the very Holy of Holies itself.

You may wonder where the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace is in all this. Well, He is not the object of our worship. In our New Covenant tabernacle worship He is the One who personally connects us to our High Priest and our Holy God. He is the One in whom we can directly and presently *come* to Mount Zion, to God and to the city of heavenly Jerusalem. As our pioneer elder brother opened up a way for us into the Holy Places, so the Spirit of God invites us and transports us on that way so that in Him and by faith we can come to Jesus and the Father. The Spirit of grace connects us to the Throne room and contempories that world for our world. He is, as it were, the spatial mediator in the book of Hebrews. We thus dare not grieve Him, for He is the only point of actual contact we have, now, with the Throne of Grace. Rather, we should humbly come to Christ our sympathetic brother in faith and there begin to receive this wonderful ministry of the Holy Spirit as He escorts us into the Holy Places.

Will you not draw near now with full assurance of faith? Don't shrink back. Come to your sympathetic High Priest. Let him sprinkle your conscience clean and wash your body with pure water, making you fit (sanctified) inside and out. Let him take you with him into the Holy Places and restore your soul with his own bread and light. Then come within the veil and worship his own God at the Holy Incense altar in the Most Holy Place, with deep reverence and awe. The way has been made open.

**No more veil! God bids me enter
By the new and living way—
Not in trembling hope I venture,**

**Boldly I His call obey;
There, with Him, my God, I meet
God upon the mercy-seat!**

**In the robes of spotless whiteness,
With the Blood of priceless worth,
He has gone into that brightness,
Christ rejected from the earth—
Christ accepted there on high,
And in Him do I draw nigh.**

**Oh the welcome I have found there,
God in all His love made known!
Oh the glory that surrounds there
Those accepted in His Son!
Who can tell the depths of bliss
Spoken by the Father's kiss?**

**All His joy told out unhindered,
Nought but Christ His eye can see;
Christ into His joy has entered,
And in Christ He welcomes me.
Would I know how dear to God?
Priceless, as Christ's precious blood.**

**One with Him, O Lord, before Thee,
There I live, and yet not I;
Christ it is who there adores Thee;
Who more dear, or who more nigh?
All the Father's heart mine own—
Mine—and yet His Son's alone.**

**As within His Temple olden,
Was there seen no costly stone,
Nought but cedar, carved and golden,
Nought but Christ, and Christ alone—
So the stones so dearly bought,
God in heaven beholds them not.**

**All the worth I have before Him
Is the value of the Blood;
I present when I adore Him,
Christ, the First-fruits, unto God.
Him with joy doth God behold,
Thus is my acceptance told.**

Conclusion

*And he took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them*¹²²

A famous theologian once said that 'to know Christ is to know his benefits' (Melanchthon). How true that is! In this meditation we have seen that to *know Christ is to know his relationships!* My key note has been a call for believers to know Christ in the fullness of his wonderful Person and relationships as Lord, Lover, Priest and Brother - within the context of his Body. We have seen that Christ's own experience is the matrix for our experience of the Trinity. Since my beginning quest for trinitarian integration as narrated in the introduction, I have come to the conviction that the integration of Father, Son and Spirit is given for us only in Christ Jesus. It is in and through Christ that we orientate and participate in the Trinity. When we understand *his* relationships, only then do we begin to understand *our* relationships with God in Christ. Our relationship with the Trinity is derivative and grounded in Christ's embodied relationships. In this way I have found that I can be devotionally faithful to the revelation of God as Trinity as found in the Holy Scriptures. So my conclusion thus far in my quest for knowing the Trinity comes to be radically Christ-centred, and all that I have written can be expressed in the following words:

Christian experience is an experience of Christ and of his relationship to the Father and of his relationship to the Holy Spirit.

This is I believe another way of stating what the apostle Paul said in Galatians: "*God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba! Father'.*"¹²³ Christ is within us through the God-sent Holy Spirit crying out to his Father through our lips! This is the very Trinity expressing inter-trinitarian love and relationship *within the heart of a Christian!* This is the entire compass of New Testament

¹²² Luke 24:30

123. Galatians 4:6.

Christian experience. It is staggering in magnitude and too deep for words.

My statement above of our experience of the Trinity seeks to keep an experiential *unity* (Christ) and Trinitarian *diversity* (Father and Spirit). Understanding our knowledge of the Trinity in this way is exclusively Christ-determined but inclusively Trinitarian. This is my conclusion at present for the dilemma I wrote about in the beginning of this meditation. As mentioned in that introductory biographical chapter, the path I have personally travelled on in my pilgrimage to biblically experience the Trinity has been to seek to *echo and replicate the early apostolic trinitarian experience in my own Christian experience*. I have wanted to make much of the Father, and Son and make much of the Holy Spirit *in the way that the New Testament does*. The 12 disciples experienced the Trinity: they were with the *Incarnate Son*, at Pentecost they bodily received the *Spirit's Indwelling*, and they, together with Jesus, lived and prayed to *God the Father* in heaven. God with them, God above them and God within them. That structure contains within it all that goes on in New Testament apostolic faith. This is how the apostles encountered God of Israel in three Persons – and how we should also. We should know Christ the Incarnate, the Holy Spirit the Indweller and our Father in heaven. We should understand New Covenant realities in terms of their God-rooted, Christ-incarnate and Spirit-enlivened shape. We should share with them one gospel of the triune God with Jesus as the *content* of the gospel, the Father as the *source* of the gospel and the Spirit as the *gift* of the gospel. May we know and preach the same glorious 'good news' of the *Abba* Father, of our brother God incarnate and of the Spirit in us.

Finally, let me ask you: are you neglecting any Person in the Godhead? Is there a *forgotten Father* or a *forgotten Son* or a *forgotten Spirit* in your life? Has any Person been eclipsed by Another or merged into Another? Have you personally tuned into the three distinct wave-lengths of the one God? Do you know the distinctive glory of the Father, the distinctive glory of the Son and the distinctive glory of the Spirit? And in the famous words of the old Athanasian Creed, have you mistakenly 'divided the substance or

confounded the Persons'? My call is for you to know and appropriate all the dimensions of the Trinity that are there for you in Christ. Seek the threefold relationship. Don't confuse the Persons or the distinctions, but don't divide the Godhead either! Know the Three in One and the One in Three. Seek to know the one God Yahweh in the fullness of His three-fold plurality as revealed in Scripture. Make it a personal life-quest to know the full reality of the ministries of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - our God for all eternity! Practise the doctrine of God the Father. Practise the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit. Practise the doctrine of God the Son. In short, *practise the Trinity*.

As we come to understand these real personal distinctions within the One God, so we will be able to know God better *as He really is at this moment*. I hope that you will begin to appreciate and practise the differences between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When you can see that toward Christ we have a more *in-Carnational* relationship, toward the Father a more *Generational* relationship and toward the Spirit a more *in-Spirational* relationship, you will come to know God better in terms of who He really is. You will understand the Scriptures better, you will receive treasures that come from this knowledge, and, above all, you will walk with God with a truer and firmer devotion.

Ultimately we must move beyond the words of Scripture into God Himself, for words are only the shadows cast by their realities. God is the Reality. Lines on a map are not the landscape. God Himself is the landscape and His written words lead us faithfully to Him. Through prayer and faith enter into the staggering Reality of the Magnificent Trinity! As you do, may you be taken deeper into the reality of the communion that we have with the Father and His Son in the Holy Spirit. May you be filled with all the fullness of God: founded in Christ Jesus, favoured by the Father, and filled with the Holy Spirit! So,

Come! as a bride to her Groom, as a member to his Head, as a branch to his Vine.

Come! as a son to his Father, as a creature to his Creator, as a child to his Benefactor.

Come! as a body to his Breath, as a blind man to his Leading, as a sail to his Wind.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.¹²⁴*

A Few Literary Friends of the Trinity

Over the years I have discovered some writers on the Trinity who have helped me in my quest to know and experience Father, Son and Spirit. I list them below as pointers for those who want to read more about these matters.

Communion with the Triune God by John Owen

Faber's Hymns by F W Faber

Knowing God by J I Packer (chapter 19 Sons of God)

Like Father, Like Son by Tom Smail

The Christian Life by Karl Barth (section 76)

The Deep Things of God by Fred Sanders

The Doctrine of the Trinity by Leonard Hodgson

124. 2 Corinthians 13:14.

The Forgotten Father by Tom Smail

The Good God by Michael Reeves

The Transforming Power of Prayer by James Houston

With Christ in the School of Prayer by Andrew Murray

Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace by James Torrance

Worshipping Trinity by Robin Parry

Thank you my friends.

If, in view of the difficulties of the subject and its elusiveness, we are likely to feel that at the end of our study we are still standing only on the threshold, we may find our comfort in the conviction that it is better to stand at the threshold of the house of our God than to penetrate anywhere else.

H Wheeler Robinson