


Perkins School of Theology
Southern Methodist University

**Credo:
Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love**



Submitted to William J. Abraham and Bruce Marshall
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Course:
Interpretation of the Christian Message
ST6302

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April 11, 2008
Word count: 9076 

*Come, O thou Traveler unknown,
whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone
and I am left alone with thee;
with thee all night I mean to stay
and wrestle till the break of day.*

Charles Wesley, *Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown*



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Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love

Prolegomena

*I fall, and yet by faith I stand;
I stand and will not let thee go.*

Exhausted, bruised and probably hobbled for life, I keep on wrestling. The fight is far from over and it will continue until I go on to perfection. What follows is the tenuous grip I have on my opponent. That is not to say that everything that follows is provisional. This is hard earned. I hope to show that through my weakness I have learned much about who it is that I am wrestling.


One of my philosophy professors, Pete Y. A. Gunter, was fond of saying “beware of categorical sclerosis.” Nowhere does this pithy dictum apply more than in the task at hand. The network of concepts that form Christianity is so tightly woven that there is no easy way to break in. The epistemic move I will make shortly depends upon a christology that will be explicated much later. One could charge me with circularity or say that my entire position is just a grand experiment in question-begging. With Alston, I contend that all the epistemologies I have studied suffer from some degree of circularity. The effort it would take to adequately defend this statement is well beyond the scope of this paper; I direct the curious reader to Alston’s book in the bibliography for a treatment I would be unable to match. I do not see well-reasoned epistemic circularity as a defect that must be overcome.

The Order of Saint Luke’s vesper liturgy has a simple line that reads, “together, let us proclaim the faith of our baptism.” The entire congregation then recites the Apostle’s creed. It is through this creed that I was baptized into the Church. I hold that both the Apostle’s creed and the Nicene-Constantinople creed are the authoritative statements given by the Holy Spirit to the Ecumenical Church, prayerfully discerned by the patriarchs and lovingly handed down



by the Church. All theological claims and scriptural interpretations must be seen through the lens of these two creeds. The role of the Holy Spirit and the Church in the development of this hermeneutic key and epistemic trump will be spelled out below.

The canon of Christian scripture, a product of the Holy Spirit through the various authors and the ecumenical councils of the Church, is **the normative source of the content** of the faith and **contains all things necessary for salvation**. Just as the scriptures depend on apostolic teaching and the councils for their existence, the councils depended on the scripture in forming their decisions. Human reason, properly checked against apostolic teaching and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was never excluded from the councils. As Paul's arguments illustrate, reason permeates scripture. If scripture is any one thing, it is a recounting of diverse experiences had by people standing in relationship to God. The experiences of ecumenical council, in and of the Holy Spirit, led to the formation of the creeds and the selection of the texts that were canonized as scripture. Albert Outler articulated the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" of scripture, tradition, reason and experience in which each source of authority hangs on all the others. This framework stands in contrast to both the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation as laid out by Luther and the Tridentine position of scripture and tradition as co-equal authorities. With the canonical theism movement, I claim that the quadrilateral needs many more sides, such as the liturgies, icons, the canon of saints and (most importantly) the creeds. The **authority** of the entire framework is **received by grace through** the work of the Holy Spirit.

My thesis is that all these sources depend on a single claim: *God is self-revealing*. God desires to be known and acts in ways to be known. If there is a single thread to grasp onto from outside this network of concepts, this is the one that I see. The Church claims that Jesus is the



icon of God. God is fully and completely revealed through the entire life of Jesus. Only a God who wanted to be known and stand in relationship with creation would undertake such an act. Our theological task is to understand and articulate God's self-revelation.

The self-revealing God is made known to us **in ways fitting to us.** The heavens proclaim the glory of God (Psalm 19) and the stones cry out (Luke 19:40). All creation bears the imprint of the signet of the Creator. Paul asserts that God's imprint on creation is so clear that we have **no excuse for not seeing it** (Rom. 1:19-20). We hear only as we are able. The history of the nation of Israel is part of God's self-revelation. This history is especially revealing since we read it in our language much more clearly than we are able to hear the stars and stones. However, many people have come to knowledge of God independently of the revelation present in the history of Israel or Jesus Christ. It is possible to 'sit naked on a rock' and arrive at the existence of Ogden's **"one all inclusive whole of reality,"** Anselm's "being than that which a greater cannot be conceived," or even St. Thomas' *causa sui*. If the heavens proclaim the glory of God and we are at all able to hear, we can have knowledge of the existence of the Creator. Luther insisted that unassisted reason was insufficient for adequate knowledge of God, but went too far by insisting that reason is completely corrupt and useless for the task. Barth **and the neo-orthodox movement were wrong in denying that natural theology** has any worth. Unassisted reason is sufficient for *some* knowledge of God.

Through the grace of revelation we know much more about God than is possible through unassisted reason contemplating the world. Knowledge of salvation cannot be found in natural theology. The God of the philosophers is the same God revealed in Christ, but seen dimly as if through a veil. God's self-revelation makes salvation possible. This is not to say that we know God perfectly or in his essence. We know God as is fitting to us and our abilities. Only

when we go on to perfection can we behold God in his essence and even then only through our limited ability.



My position is not fideism. I do not have faith in spite of evidence to the contrary or in the absence of any evidence. Here I separate myself from the standard readings of Kierkegaard and Barth. I hold that natural theology is insufficient for knowledge of salvation but not entirely devoid of value. Within Christianity, sources of evidence exist that have been excluded from science, such as mystical experiences of God. With Abraham, Alston and Mitchell, I hold that these sources of evidence are admissible and subject to evaluative criteria. Finally, I view all this through the rule of life of the Order of Saint Luke which has guided me in my journey. I would be unable to extract the lived faith that I know through the order from the knowledge gained in the classroom. Ultimately this credo is not *credo quia absurdum* but *fides quaerens intellectum*. I wrestle only because I am given the strength of grace to continue.

Doctrine of God

*Through faith I see the face to face,
I see thee face to face, and live!
In vain I have not wept and strove.*



Through natural theology and philosophy one can come to some dim understanding of God. Philosophers have repeatedly affirmed the oneness, necessity and actuality of God. What we are able to hear from observing and contemplating the world is that this God is one, eternal and everlasting, free, unsurpassable in power, everywhere, beautiful, just and worthy of worship. Plato and Aristotle affirm some of these attributes. Contemporary non-Christian philosophers, such as Hartshorne and Whitehead, produced similar lists. Natural theology can give us precious little, but what little it can give is precious indeed.



Through God's self-revelation we are able to go beyond this precious little. By this grace we know that God is triune—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Standing in eternal relationship to each other, each person of the trinity exists as it relates to the others. The ecumenical language is that God is three persons of one substance. Without the Son there would be no Father and without the Father there would be no Son. The relationship between the Father and Son is the Father eternally begetting the Son—any other kind of relationship would not be that of a father and a son. **The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father** and is co-eternal with the Father and the Son. While the doctrine of the trinity does not appear in scripture, minds illuminated by Christ and aided by the Holy Spirit have come to this conclusion and it has been reaffirmed many times; it is the faith into which we are baptized.



Contrary to Kant, we can say some positive things about this three-one God without confining the infinite to the limitations of our reason. God is just (Ps 145:17). God makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good (Matt. 5:44-45). God shows no unjust favoritism. The



setting apart of the nation of Israel to be a blessing to all the world does not make them exceedingly blessed, but defines a role that they are in covenant to perform (Gen 12:2). Israel is not favored because of who they are, but any apparent favoritism they are shown is due to the covenant God made with them (Is 42:6-7).

God is not outside of time but is working in history to redeem all creation, as the history of Israel and the incarnation show. The doctrine that God is outside of time has surfaced frequently in Christian thought, especially the areas and epochs influenced by neo-platonic thought. It fails to take the incarnation and God's active role in history seriously. This doctrine is usually argued from God's immutability since time implies change. Being everlasting implies that time is real for God—a God outside of time would not know time as a reality. A thing outside of time may very well always exist, but it would not be eternal in any meaningful sense of the term. I contend that immutability, rightly understood, does not need this protection.



God is omniscient; God knows all that is able to be known *as it is able to be known*. God knows all necessarily true propositions necessarily and contingently true propositions as they are true. Since God is in time, propositions change in truth-value. For example, 'I am currently writing my credo' is a true proposition now, but will not be true in May. At the present moment God knows that I am writing my credo. In May God will know that I am no longer doing so and that I was doing so in March. Indexical propositions are contingent on when and how they are phrased. Since God is inside time, such indexical propositions have truth value.



God is immutable in essence. Christian Theologians, including many who otherwise rejected natural theology like Luther, have followed the Greek philosophers in holding that a perfect being could not change since any change would be a change away from perfection. As a



consequence, theologians have asserted that God can either know only necessarily true propositions or that contingent propositions are not strictly true propositions as a result of God's immutability. **I assert that God knows all propositions as they exist to be known.** Change in the world does really change what God knows but this does not constitute a change in God's essence. The change is only in God's knowledge of and relationship to the contingent world. The immutable Trinity exists in ever-changing relationship to the contingent world. God can come to know facts that were not previously true without diminishing the reality of omniscience. The relationship between God and creation can change without changing God's essence. Immutability in essence is not a contradiction with omniscience that includes contingent truths and relational states. Justice and love require responses to external events, a God who did not respond to changing relationships would diminish and increase in justice and love.

God is unsurpassable in power. God can do everything that is logically possible to be done by an omniscient, omnipresent, free, eternal and everlasting, unsurpassably powerful agent. Gale contends that statements such as this are hollow, e.g. a tin can can do whatever is possible for a tin can to do. This criticism misses the point that the One God is uniquely in a position to be a factor in *every* event. Hartshorne's formulation of God being partly determinative of every event keeps omnipotence as a meaningful attribute. No other being is partly determinative of *every* event. I am partly determinative of very few events. Barron's concept of coinherence seems to be aiming at the same problem, but his reformulation of God's working through secondary causes returns to the same problem of causal determinacy. God works within creation to redeem and sustain it. God does not coerce or compete with creation. Barron and I agree that God is not competitive over-against creaturely freedom, but

we have different ways of understanding God's non-competitive omnipotence. Instead of secondary causes, I argue that God presents maximally loving possibilities in each and every event and lures (or nudges) creation towards these possibilities.


God is omnibenevolent. As seen in Christ, God is all loving and self-giving: God the Father gave his only Son, obedient to the point of a horrible death for crimes he did not commit. Not only is God all loving, God is love (1 John 4:8). God's love for the world is not passionless, but real self-involving love that is willing to suffer and die for the object of his love (Phil 2:6-8). This love transcends our failures and sin (Rom 5:8). As Charles Wesley perfectly stated it, "Thy nature and thy name is love!"


God is good and the absolute authority on what is good. That is not to say that things are good simply because God so decrees. God's omniscience means God has perfect knowledge of consequences as they exist to be known. God's love means that God will always choose a maximally loving course of actions. God is free to choose between loving actions when there are multiple equally maximal loving acts. God's omnipotence means that God will not finally fail to bring about the maximally loving and good states.


God is trustworthy and faithful to God's covenants (Ps. 145:13). But, that is only praiseworthy because God is free to break them. A covenant which cannot be broken by either party is not worthy of the title. For example, making a covenant to keep breathing the rest of my life is a hollow covenant. God's faithfulness arises out of his goodness and love.

Doctrine of Creation


*What though my shrinking flesh complain
and murmur to contend so long?*

As expressed in the creeds, the first two chapters of Genesis, Job and the Psalms, God is the maker of heaven and earth. Given that God is omniscient and omnibenevolent, anything God does will be perfectly good. In the Genesis 1 account of creation, God blesses nearly every aspect of creation as it is created after determining that they are good. Upon observing the results of God's efforts, on the sixth day God blesses the entirety of creation and judges the entirety to be very good. To be a creature is to be valued and loved by God. 

The vast majority of the Western Christian tradition, following **Augustine's reasoning**, has affirmed that God's act of creation was *ex nihilo*—out of nothing. Those who affirm *ex nihilo* claim that it is the only way to ensure the sharp distinction between God and not God. It is important for this line of thought for God to be 'wholly other' from creation. *Ex nihilo* is not the only doctrine of creation. In the first half of the third century Origen, taking his line of thinking from Plato, argued that matter was pre-existent and God's act of creation was to impose order and form upon this matter. Sally McFague and other contemporary panentheist theologians use an analogy of the world being God's body and the various individuals of creation are like cells in that body; God unites and enriches the universe. A different view of  **panenthism** is found in the Eastern Church. In this view God is in, yet transcendent of, all creation, and that indwelling of God in everything sustains creation. God's love will never withdraw from creation since that would result in the destruction of the object of God's love. It is this view of panenthism that I find convincing. Panentheists of both stripes are quick to point out Paul's speech in Athens, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28); itself an appeal by Paul to Greek natural theology. Scripture—as Augustine said in book 12 of

his *Confessions*—is open to many true interpretations, therefore I will continue to work with this version of panentheism until I can no longer reconcile it with the faith of my baptism. I appeal to Augustine’s dictum from the same book, “Amid this diversity of true opinions, let truth itself beget concord.” 


Creation is good, all of it. Christian theologians have univocally rejected the dualism that the ‘worldly’ is evil and the ‘spiritual’ is good. This dualism appears frequently in folk versions of Christianity, but it goes directly against the teaching of the Church. Matter, a creation of God, has an innate goodness. This goodness of the world is even more strongly affirmed by God’s becoming man and Christ’s ascension.


Real evil exists in the world as a result of sin. There is a distinction between moral evil, evil that is caused by free agents making moral decisions, and natural evil which exists independently of a moral agent. An earthquake would be an example of natural evil. Moral and natural evil exist because freedom exists—creaturely freedom runs bottom to top. **Everything has some degree of freedom, from hydrogen atoms in deep space all the way up through humans.**  The freedom appropriate to hydrogen atoms is very limited. The freedom available to humans is far greater. Freedom combined with rationality yields moral agency.

Moral evil arose due to an exercise of freedom that was contrary to the will of God. Freedom, as a creation of God, is good. In Genesis 2, God gave Adam the duty to freely name the animals. Creativity is a mandate from God. Creativity and freedom exist within and aligned with God’s will. It is only when freedom is used in ways that are not aligned with God’s will that sin appears in the world. Once sin was unleashed into the world, there was no creaturely way to undo its effects. God does not turn his back on creation due to sin but continues to love, sustain and work with creation to redeem it.

Theological Anthropology

*I need not tell thee who I am,
my misery and sin declare;
thyself hast called me by my name.*

 Humankind was created with the goodness that runs through all of God's very good creation. Humans are agents. They have freedom to make decisions within a horizon of choice—decisions with real meaning, value and moral standing. As stewards of creation, humans have a causal influence, within their power, to change the world in real ways. The decisions available vary based on myriad factors, but no person is completely determined and devoid of choice. Humans are rational. They can think, reason and come to conclusions which are true. They can imagine possibilities, reason out the consequences and work to make their imagination come true. Humans are moral agents, they have the ability to discern between good and evil and act upon that discernment.

 Humans are embodied, they possess a physical body that grows, changes and dies. Many Christian theologians have held that physical death is the result of sin. Physical death is an important part of being embodied. My interpretation of the Genesis texts is the death caused by sin is a spiritual death and isolation from God. There is no evidence in scripture or the creeds to indicate that humankind was originally intended to live bodily forever. St. Gregory Palamas argues that the death brought about by the fall was spiritual: "And death, properly speaking, is this: for the soul to be unharnessed from divine grace and to be yoked to sin. [...]" He who is frightened of this death and has preserved himself from it will not be alarmed by the oncoming death of the body, for in him true life dwells, and bodily death, so far from taking true life away, renders it inalienable."¹

1. St. Gregory Palamas, "To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia," in *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4 ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Phillip Sherrard, Kallistos (Timothy) Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 269-270.

Humanity, unlike the rest of creation, is created in the *imago Dei*—the image of God.

Many different theories exist about what exactly the *imago Dei* is. Rationality or wisdom, the



ability to think and reason critically is normally high on the list. However there is little about

Jesus that was abnormally rational. The Church magnifies Christ's love long before Christ's

wisdom. That is not to say that Christ was not perfectly wise and did not do many wise things.

Those wise actions were done out of love and self-sacrifice. The tradition has rightly focused



on Christ's love and self-giving as that which made him fully God and fully human. Since these

properties are intrinsic to humanity and God and uniquely exemplified in Christ, they seem to

be the best candidate for identifying the *imago Dei*. Humanity's deepest desire is to live into this

capacity and truly love God and neighbor.

Due to a human choice that was against the will of God, sin entered creation. Sin,

broadly defined, is anything separated from God or not aligned with God's will. Since God is

existence, sin is anything tending toward non-existence or death. Humanity was not created

sinful, nor is sin a part of human nature. Due to God's desire for relationship with other free

creatures, God took the risk that humankind would become sinful. The presence of sin distorts

humanity in several ways. The primary distortion is to our loves and affections, rather than



loving God first, we love ourselves first. The horizon of choice open to people shrinks, we can no

longer choose to align ourselves with God's will since we are blind to those possibilities. Sin is

not blindness, blindness is a result of sin. We are still free to make choices, but those that

would bring us back to God are hidden from us. Our rational mind is distorted as a result of sin.

Paul said he did not understand his own actions and did the very things he hated (Rom

7:15). The sin-sick mind becomes curved inward upon itself, seeks to solve self-involved

problems and discards ideas that tend toward the benefit of others. Our moral senses become

confused, good and evil become nebulous concepts, or inventions of a system designed to impose upon us. Our spiritual senses are seriously degraded or removed, an intuition Wesley strongly defended in “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God.” Sin spreads into the world and distorts the rest of creation in subtle ways. We pollute the environment so that the air and water we need to sustain us become poisons to us. In extreme cases, we lose the ability to even identify our deepest desire—we forget that we long to be in a deep and loving relationship with our creator. When afflicted by sin, self-giving love is changed into self-absorbed love.

Like a beautiful silver spoon directly from the mold, humanity is a thing of wonderful beauty. The first time the spoon is touched it begins to tarnish. The tarnish distorts the spoon and hides its true beauty, but the tarnish is never part of the spoon’s nature. The spoon is helpless to polish itself, it does not even know that it is tarnished. The longer the spoon goes without being polished the deeper and blacker the tarnish becomes. Eventually the tarnish will etch into the silver and permanently distort the spoon. It is never impossible to polish the spoon back to a full luster even if the surface is etched. No matter how thick the tarnish, the beauty of the spoon is always there waiting to be restored.

Humanity is perfectly incapable of turning to God in love without assistance. They cannot know that the option exists, desire to exercise the option or cause it to come to be without God’s grace. Wesley’s famous line is that we are perfectly incapable of doing good without grace—fortunately, grace abounds.

Christology

I know thee, Savior, who thou art.

The second person of the trinity is known by a host of names: the Christ; the Word of God; the Son of God; wisdom; the *logos*. Eternally begotten by the father, there has not been a time when the Son did not exist. The Father and the Son exist in a perfectly loving and self-giving relationship with each other, in the union of the Holy Spirit—which is love. The first chapter of the Gospel of John beautifully spells out this eternal relationship, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:2). Through the divine *logos* God created all things.

The eternal Son of God who became incarnate in the human person of Jesus of Nazareth. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary conceived a child who is God. The ancient *kenosis* hymn is the best description of the incarnation, “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil 2:6-7). The ancient church struggled with exactly how Jesus was Christ. Was Jesus the son of God by adoption? The Gospel of Mark and many of Paul’s letters can be read in this way. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they quickly decided that this was not the truth. The Church came to the conclusion that Jesus Christ had two natures, fully human and fully divine. These natures are not mixed, but are both fully present in the person of Jesus; Jesus is fully God and fully human at the same time. The human nature is not absorbed or lost in the divine nature. The two natures are not in conflict and do not compete. Jesus had a body and was a real person who experienced hunger, pain, sadness and temptation. Unlike every other human who has existed, Jesus never succumbed to sin. But Jesus was more than a sinless man, *Jesus is God incarnate*. The matter was



settled at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 when it decided that Mary was rightly called *theotokos*, the mother of God. By calling Mary the *theotokos*, Jesus' full divinity was affirmed and adoptionism was rejected.





Jesus Christ is the icon of God. **Whatever can be known about God can be known through Christ's nativity, life, passion and resurrection.** When Philip asks to see the Father, Jesus simply responds, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:9). Through Christ, the Word of God spoken to all creation in love, we have the potential to know God as perfectly as we are able. This knowledge culminates in a glimpse of God's very nature: the self-giving love revealed on the cross. Icons require a hermeneutic key for understanding what is depicted. The key to understanding Christ's act in the world is given through the Holy Spirit and the apostolic tradition of the Church as recorded in the scriptures and the life of the Church. Jesus does things that only God can do; forgive sins, raise the dead, and restores sight to the blind. Unlike earthly rulers, Jesus is rightly called Lord because Jesus is Son of God and, as part of the Trinity, is God.



Jesus was a teacher. As a child he astounded the learned with his knowledge and interpretative ability (Luke 2:41-47). As an adult, he instructed thousands of people. His teaching was often in contrast to the conventional wisdom and the accepted scriptural interpretations of his day. His message was one of love, forgiveness and hope. Instead of hating your enemy, the appropriate way of relating to all humankind is through love, as the Father in heaven loves everyone (Matt 5:43-45). Jesus' hermeneutical key for all of scripture is love of God and love of neighbor that arises from God's perfectly just love (Matt 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28). Jesus' ministry also consisted of healing and prophetic acts. The gospels tell of many

healings, exorcisms and even the resurrection of Lazarus. The life of Christ was foretold by the Israelite prophets and in the Psalms. Many events in Jesus' life match or surpass events that took place in the lives of the various prophets.

 It seems strange that the creeds skip most of the life of Jesus, going directly from being born to suffering under Pilate. One can conclude that the healing miracles and signs performed by Jesus are of secondary importance to his death and resurrection. Jesus really died on the cross, his body gave up the spirit and quit breathing. Since Christ Jesus is God, it is appropriate to say that God died. His corpse laid in the tomb for three days. The creed says that “he descended to the dead” (*infernē* in latin being inferior or below, not fire, just as *κατωτέρω* is lower in Greek). This line was included in the creeds to make it clear that he was really dead. Some theologians, both ancient and modern, interpret this as Christ going to hell to offer salvation to those who were there, or to experience isolation from the life of the trinity—to truly know death.² According to Calvin “he paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man.”³ It seems surprising that the defense of this view comes from those who most strongly insist on divine immutability.  Christ's death cannot have disrupted the trinity. I cannot see a way to hold to the immutability of the trinity while holding that the death of Jesus isolated the Son from the Father. While it is fitting to say that God died, this death was physical and not spiritual.

Christ Jesus rose from the dead. In bodily form he talked with the apostles and offered to let Thomas feel his wounds (John 20:27). He ate with them and taught them. There seems to be something strange about the resurrected Jesus, even those closest to him had a hard time

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2. Celia Kitchens O.S.L, my Greek consultant, had some wonderful insight into Christ going to Sheol or “the pit” where one cannot praise God (Ps. 30:3,9). Ps 139:7 affirms that even in Sheol God is present.
 3. John Calvin in Donald K. Kim, ed. *Calvin's Institutes, Abridged Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 2001), 60.

recognizing him some of the time (Luke 24). He seemed to be able to walk through walls (John 20:19). During his time on earth after the resurrection, Jesus taught the meaning of the resurrection and explained to the disciples what they had been unable to understand. After this was completed, Christ ascended into Heaven, bodily, to sit at the right hand of the Father. The bodily ascension is yet another reminder that being embodied is not intrinsically sinful.

Christ's decisive act in the world, a once-for-all act that made possible the reconciliation of humanity to God, was the cross (Romans 6). It is this act which takes away the sin of the world. The self-giving nature of Christ on the cross perfectly depicts the self-giving love in the trinity. It is this incorporation of humanity, through Christ, into the loving essence of the trinity that makes salvation possible. Through the incarnation, Christ became the sacrament of the presence of God in the world.



Pneumatology

*on thee alone for strength depend;
nor have I power from thee to move.*

The Holy Spirit is the divine breath that inspired the prophets of Israel, was poured out on Jesus at his baptism and breathed life into the Church at Pentecost. She is the bond of self-giving love between the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the breath of love of the Father for the Son. She is not an accidental by-product of the love between the Father and the Son, but rather is the mysterious, uncreated union between the Father and the Son; the Spirit makes possible the real diversity in the Godhead without destroying the unity of the three persons sharing one essence. “The Son wants to love the Father with a perfect mutual love just as the Father loves him. [...] To share this mutual love there is need of a loved one that is loved equally as the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. This is the Holy Spirit.”⁴

In the Western tradition, the Holy Spirit is often called a mystery. The Eastern church is more willing to discuss the Holy Spirit and how she relates to the Trinity and the world, as seen in the preceding quote. She is most easily understood by what she does and how she relates to creation. In the west, the Spirit has been neglected in most theological discussions and in the life of the Church, except in the recent rise in Pentecostalism. In the Eastern church, the Spirit is seen as the source of life in the Church. In the East it is impossible to avoid discussing her presence in the life of the Church. I hinted in the prolegomena at her role in the way we know about God. Christ’s entire life and work depended intimately upon the Spirit. The doctrine of Spirit is woven through all the other doctrines in this credo. If the Holy Spirit is the



4. George A. Maloney, *Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh: An Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality* (New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1997), 148. This entire chapter changed my understanding of the Trinity in a radical and wonderful way. While I still consider it to be a mystery, it is a mystery that stands on God’s very nature and essence being love. Truly “Thy nature and thy name is love.”

love of the Father and the Son for each other and, as Charles Wesley rightly asserted, “thy nature and thy name is love,” then this entire credo is a doctrine of the Holy Spirit looked at in various lights. As little as we can directly say about her without risking blasphemy, much can be said about how we experience the Spirit in creation. It is in and with the Holy Spirit that I have been wrestling.



The gospels affirm that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Later, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon him at baptism. It is through the Spirit that he brought the Gospel (Luke 4:18). Pinnock makes Christ’s mission in the world primarily a mission of the Spirit through Jesus. I do not think this position is adequate to either the Christology or Pneumatology I have been developing so far. Pinnock is right in saying that it is through the Spirit that Jesus was “conceived, anointed, empowered, commissioned, directed and raised up.”⁵ But, if following the Eastern Fathers, the Spirit is the love that arises between the Father and the Son, then the Son cannot be the servant of the spirit or be wholly dependent upon her.



The union of the incarnate Son and the Spirit is much deeper than I think Pinnock makes it to be; neither is in service of the other. Both are working together with the Father to bring about the healing of the world.

Just as Christ is the icon of the Father, so the Holy Spirit is the icon of Christ. Through the workings of the Holy Spirit in and through the early Church, the ecumenical councils decided matters of faith including the liturgies of the Church, the creeds, the canon of scripture, the status of Mary and the role of icons. She guided the early Church in making these decisions, through the direct teachings of the Apostles who received their knowledge

5. Clark H. Pinnock, *The Flame of Love* (Donera Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 82-83.

from Christ and the Holy Spirit. Our ongoing knowledge of salvation and God's work in the world comes through her.


A Christian is given the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism. The Spirit is further poured out into the lives of the believers at chrismation or confirmation and ordination. Just as Christ initially gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples gathered shortly after the resurrection (John 19:22), a fuller gift of the Spirit was given at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). As shown in Jesus' life above, there is no reason to assume that God gives a full measure of the Holy Spirit to anyone all at once. That is not to say that the only means by which one can gain the Holy Spirit is through the rites of the Church. The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the life of the individual Christian. "The Holy Spirit comes to us and creates us with our free cooperation into divinized beings, permeated by the divine trinitarian energies working and loving within us."⁶ To be a Christian is to live life in the Holy Spirit through the life of the Spirit lived by the Church.



6. Maloney, 66.

Ecclesiology

*Speak to my heart, in blessing speak,
be conquered by my instant prayer*

There are dozens of metaphors for the Church: the Body of Christ; the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:31-32); the living temple of God and many more. Taken together, these metaphors reveal a close union between God and the Church. It is the Holy Spirit that constitutes and enlivens the Church. Christ Jesus gave his body for the Church and the Holy Spirit breathed life into the Church. Through the ascension of Jesus into heaven and the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church came into being. In the time between Christ's ascension and Pentecost the apostles and those around them did the most important duty of the Church—they waited. Actively waiting in hope defines the Church. Acts 2:42-46 clearly outlines the nature and mission of the Church. We are called to devote ourselves to the teaching of the apostles, table fellowship, common prayer, service and corporate worship. Understanding the  Church in this way makes it impossible to be a Christian in isolation.

The creed says that the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. A quick drive down any street in Texas reveals a dizzying array of logos and names on the various places of worship. Clearly the Church is not one. Headlines about awful deeds performed by clergy seem to reveal how unholy the Church is. The catholicity and apostolicity of the Church can be disputed as well. The reformers, especially the Anabaptists read these attributes as marks used to discern the one true church. According to Letty M. Russell, these creedal marks of the Church are to be seen as promises Christ made to the Church. I prefer to see them as goals and a mission statement. Bruce Marshall has asserted that the obvious disunity of the Church could be read as punishment for our collective unwillingness to repent of the sins that led to and preserve the great schism and the reformation; I agree. Unity in the Church will only come

when the Holy Spirit wills it and then only as a result of real repentance. Holiness comes from the Church being set apart, not being pure. Things that are ritually impure (e.g. sacrificial blood) are often called holy in the Levitical laws. Holiness, understood scripturally, is being set apart for the service of God. This is not an excuse for the abhorrent behavior on the part of those in the Church, but a reminder that we need our behavior to reflect our true calling to holiness—being set apart for the service of God. The Church is catholic in its mandate to spread to every corner of the world. Catholicity is the nature of the Church’s missional role in the world. The apostolic goal of the Church is two fold. First it is to follow and uphold the teachings of the apostles and to affirm the apostolic hope for the redemption of the world. Secondly, it is to follow in the footsteps of the apostles in service and mission to the world. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox understanding of ‘apostolic’ requiring direct laying on of hands to form an unbroken line of succession of bishops is beautiful and has a place within the tradition, but is not the true apostolic nature of the Church—as witnessed to by the Holy Spirit being present and active in the lives of denominations that make no claims to direct apostolic succession. By living into the goal of being one, holy, catholic and apostolic, the Church becomes a sacrament to the world.

A sacrament is a physical sign of a spiritual grace. It is a tangible way of sensing something beyond what is being sensed. There are two sacraments of the Gospel, ordained by Christ and recognized by the Church: baptism, the rite by which one is initiated into the Church, cleansed of sin and given the gift of the Holy Spirit; and the Lord’s Supper by which one is fed in the faith and given strength to endure, a small foretaste of the heavenly banquet. There are countless other sacramental acts that convey God’s presence in the world to us in sensible ways. The Roman Catholic church, since the council of Trent, has enumerated five

that hold special meaning (ordination, matrimony, reconciliation, unction, confirmation). Augustine held that there was a large number of sacraments. The Protestants, following Luther, reduced the number to the two sacraments of the Gospel. I hold that God's love and grace can be known through countless physical signs but the two sacraments of the Gospel are uniquely powerful means of conveying that grace to us. Since the two sacraments of the Gospel were ordained by Christ, we can be assured of their effectiveness in ways that transcend the effectiveness of other sacramental acts. The liturgies of the Church, especially the daily offices and the Lord's Day service, are powerful ways of encountering God's grace and act in a sacramental way. It is confounding that many contemporary Protestants treat preaching and music as sacraments (to the detriment of the Lord's Supper) even though they do not acknowledge them as such.

Beyond service and mission, the Church is called to worship. As the Order of Saint Luke Rule of Life and Service says "We believe that the corporate worship of the Church is liturgy—the work of the people on behalf of all creation—is our response to the revelation of God's grace." In the face of the superabundant grace God gives to the world, the only fitting response is constant praise and thanksgiving as we await the day of our hope.

Soteriology

*withered my nature's strength; from thee
my soul its life and succor brings*

Sin and death entered the world through the sin of Adam. Sin and death were overcome and destroyed by Christ Jesus, the new Adam (1 Cor. 15:22). Not only did Jesus become the new Adam by living and dying obediently, thereby restoring what was lost in the fall, he opened up the possibility that humankind could become what the original Adam was intended to become. Through the cross, redemption became an ontological and epistemological reality. All of the effects of sin can be wiped away from the world. The scales fall from our eyes and the veil is lifted—we can see what has been effected. The Western church has focused on the forgiveness of sins. While this is an aspect of the atonement, it is not the primary result (sins were forgiven before the cross, c.f. Ps 65:3; Ps 79:9; Luke 3:3). Not only is the forgiveness of sins made manifest to all, but the ability to be freed from sin was made possible. It became possible to love God completely—we are able to see our true purpose and deepest desire once again. Our moral and spiritual sense are restored and perfected. The spiritual death caused by Adam dies. As Plantinga puts it, the cross cures both the cognitive disfunction and the affective madness.

God's gracious acts in the world go beyond the cross, but always work to the *telos* of leading people to the cross for their redemption. Wesley analyzed the various aspects of grace and articulated prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. I would extend this model to include revelation as Grace, as St. Thomas Aquinas seems to, and the very fact that there is a creation is grace. God's gracious activity will always be dwarfed by any analysis. The concept of prevenient grace is present in Augustine's conversion story presented in *The Confessions* as the voice that tells him to take and read. Prevenient grace is available to everyone and acts to call

them to the full measure of grace through unpredictable means. Justifying grace is the grace given to a person when she accepts Christ's atoning work—I am very reluctant to make our salvation contingent on our cognitive faculties and do not think “understanding” is an apt term for what I am striving for here. Justifying grace affects the ontological and epistemological reality of the forgiveness of sins—through it we come to know that we are forgiven and actually are forgiven; knowledge is not prior to forgiveness. Sanctifying grace takes a person beyond the forgiveness of their sins towards being made free from sin—through the process of sanctification one comes to love God so fully that sinning ceases to be a live option. That is not to say that they lose their freedom. The blessed can choose between decisions appropriate to their beatitude—it is wrong to assume that the will of God has no room for choice between equally maximally good possibilities. God created humans with real freedom and creativity even in their blessedness. Being perfected is not a straitjacket that prevents one from sinning, rather it is perfect freedom that does not desire anything that would lead them away from of God. It is possible to become sanctified before one dies and one can persist in sanctity for long periods of time.



The Church has not canonized a doctrine of atonement. There has been disagreement about exactly what Christ's saving act was since the very beginning. Origen and St. Gregory of Nyssa thought that the cross was a sacrifice offered to the devil. The church quickly rejected this notion. St. Symeon the New Theologian claims that the Father honored the sacrifice and could not leave it in the hands of death—annihilating the sentence of death on the world. St. Anselm articulated a line that would dominate the west by arguing that the holiness of God demanded a perfectly holy sacrifice. St. Gregory the Theologian strongly asserted that the Father neither demanded or needed the sacrifice, and that applying human conceptions of





honor was unworthy of God. I follow the fathers in rejecting that the cross was a substitutionary sacrifice. My own speculation is that Christ's death could not be a punishment for sin since he was sinless, therefore it was unjust and the Father, recognizing the injustice, overturned it. Everyone who is willing to share in Christ's death through baptism and discipleship is entitled, as an adopted child is entitled to the full inheritance, to share in the fullness of the resurrection.

Eschatology

*I leap for joy, pursue my way,
and as a bounding hart fly home,
through all eternity to prove,
thy nature and thy name is Love.*

The burning questions for many people in the world concern what happens to us after we die and what the future awaits the world. The faith of the Church has some answers for these questions, but it is far from univocal in its understanding. The Apostle's creed confirms that Christ will come at the end of the age "to judge the living and the dead" and the "resurrection of the body." If the materialistic view is taken, then the dead are not there to be judged. Even a dualistic view that follows Aristotle closely would conclude that the soul is destroyed when the body dies. Luther held that upon the death of the body, the soul "slept" until the body is resurrected. The majority view has been that some part of the person remains active, isolated from the body, in heaven, hell or purgatory. I cannot simply reject all the testimony given by otherwise trustworthy people that they have had some encounter with those who are dead. I have felt the presence of loved ones who have been dead for many years. The practice of praying to and with the saints has no meaning if they are simply asleep until the resurrection. I am convinced of the reality of some people continuing to be experienced and having real influence in the world after their body has died. My experience coincides with the claims of the Church throughout the ages. With Ratzinger I affirm that the geographic descriptions of Heaven and Hell are at best useful metaphors for union with the Godhead. I am cautiously hopeful that God's eternal patience and love will find a way to reconcile all souls into himself, but I cannot rule out that given the depth of real freedom that exists, that some will justly be left apart from God for all eternity.

But a person is not fully a person unless they have a body. According to St. Symeon the New Theologian, the soul and body are so closely linked “that one cannot stand without the other.”⁷ At the end of the age there will be a resurrection of all people. The scriptures and tradition claim that this resurrected body will be immortal and imperishable (1 Peter 1:22-23). Paul’s own ontology was overwhelmed by this claim, but he persisted in it. Some theologians have argued that in the resurrection our bodies will have numerical identity with who we are in life. With Hartshorne, I find this claim unnecessary and absurd. Numerical identity means the exact same bits of stuff that composed my body now will compose my body then; what makes this absurd is that the atoms that form my body are constantly changing. In a few years, nothing that composes my body now will be numerically identical with who I am today. While the body is crucial to being fully human, I am not my atoms. Numeric identity with any particular moment in my life is not necessary to my standing in a loving relationship with the Godhead. Indeed, the idea of becoming incorruptible seems to deny numeric identity.

Judgment, as the creeds affirm, is somehow involved in the end of the age. The judgement is for the living and the dead. I find the millennialism debates to be questionable readings of the most obtuse and impenetrable passages of scripture. These readings have little-to-no basis in the traditions of the Church. In my judgment, the entire debate is somewhere between demon inspired and negligent reader error. With the Church fathers, I affirm a coming judgement, the triumphant arrival of Christ and an unending reign of God within creation. The details of how this will happen have not been disclosed to us in a way we can understand with any degree of clarity. If even the time (Mark 13:32) has not been disclosed to

7. St. Symeon the New Theologian, “Three Methods of Prayer,” in *The Philokalia*, Vol. 4 ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Phillip Sherrard, Kallistos (Timothy) Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 67.

the Son, assuming the time or the method has been disclosed to us is sinful. I find nothing hopeful or loving in speculating how people are going to suffer horrible tribulation, as outlined in popular books like the “Left Behind” series and Scofield’s dispensationalism.

The Kingdom of God is both within us and impending. The Kingdom has broken into time and yet is not fully realized. The kingdom is both a present, lived reality and the object of our greatest hope. By seeking God’s will in our own lives we live into the kingdom and faithfully bring about what it is we pray for when we say “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.” As seen in the lives of the saints and the Church in its best moments, the Kingdom is a lived reality. It is also, as the Order of Saint Luke’s rule of life so wonderfully states, the apostolic hope in which we wait.

Postlude

*with thee all night I mean to stay
and wrestle till the break of day.*

Jacob was unable to wrest the name of his opponent, but instead received a blessing and a wound (Gen 32:24ff). In Christ we learn the very nature of the one with whom we strive. In the struggle we are able to look into the face of God and live. The struggle itself is a blessing, but it is a dangerous blessing that can leave you with a limp and a radically new identity. Unlike Jacob, it is not against God that we struggle, but with God through Christ. When we look God in the face we see that his nature and name is love. If we respond in love we have no choice but to become the love that loves us so. We have no choice but to take up our cross and follow.



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