

The Processed and Consummated Triune God

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In the last issue of *Affirmation & Critique* we presented some basic implications which can be derived from the terms *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* (see “Axioms of the Trinity” in Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 6-11). These implications dealt with the Divine Trinity primarily in His eternal existence, what theology has called the immanent or essential Trinity. However, what God is in His immanent aspect He most certainly is in His economical forthcoming, what theology has called the economic Trinity. In this article, which we intend as a continuation of what we said in the last issue, we wish to demonstrate how God in His immanent being is applied in His economy. There we contributed two notions to the traditional understanding of the immanent Trinity: that God is, above all, an organic being, and that as an organic being He is in Himself an eternal dispensing. Hopefully, we have adequately demonstrated these axioms. Here we wish to examine these axioms as they are applied to the New Testament believers, who enjoy God’s full salvation. In making the application, we will speak of the Triune God as being both processed and consummated. But prior to presenting Him as such, we should consider some of the implications in saying that God is organic and that He is a dispensing.

An Intimate God

In applying these notions of God as organic and of God as a dispensing, we are actually describing two distinct matters. First, in saying that God is organic, we make the claim that God’s intended relationship with man is one not of distance and separation but of intimacy and union. Further, we characterize that relationship as one not merely judicial in nature but rather initiated and sustained by the divine life of God. While we accept and appreciate the judicial side of God’s salvation, we maintain that salvation is primarily organic in nature because, as we have seen in the last issue, such a salvation best accords with what God is in His own being—an organic God. Second, in saying that God is in Himself a dispensing, we make the claim that God intends to save man not through mere forensic procedures but through the impartation of His organic being into the believers. This

bespeaks the way in which God relates to man and thereby saves man. Thus, we suggest that God’s full salvation goes beyond the imputation of God’s justification and transcends into the application of God’s essence to the believers.

Necessarily the conception of God as organic and of God as a dispensing far transcends the conception of God held by many today. Perhaps the best depiction of God as He is viewed by many today is that of a Judge, who benevolently imputes Christ as righteousness to the believers. As such, God is merely the object of our faith, an objective God to whom we direct our distant respect and worship. However, when we speak of God as organic and as a dispensing, we conceive of God as a person to whom we are to be related in a way that is intimate and subjective, in a way that brings God into man, that joins God to man, and that even allows God to live through man.

We believe that God desires to be related to man in a way so intimate that it even surpasses all possible human relationships. This, we suggest, is the point of the many images used in the Bible to describe God’s relationship to man in His full salvation. While Reformed and Evangelical teachers typically take the images of God as our Father (Rom. 1:7; 2 Thes. 2:16), God as our Husband (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2), God as our life (2 Cor. 4:10-11; Col. 3:4), and God as our person (2 Cor. 2:10; 1 Cor. 2:16) to be metaphors which should not be understood with the full force of their meanings, the view of an organic and dispensing God certainly permits and indeed warrants a full meaning of these biblical appellatives. Indeed, human fathers, human husbands, human life, and human personhood merely shadow the intimacy between God and man in God’s salvation. God is more a Father to us than even our human fathers; He is more a Husband to us than even our earthly spouses; He is more our life than even our human life; He is more our person than even our own persons.

We should detail at least one of these images in order to show the intrinsic worth of viewing God both as organic

and as a dispensing. The New Testament frequently speaks of God as the Father of the believers (e.g., John 20:17; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 3:1). Whether this is mere metaphor or indicates a genuine organic relationship depends on how God is Father to the believers. Typically, Reformed and Evangelical theologies appeal to the notion of adoption and thus see God's Fatherhood as a judicial matter. While we do not deny that there is a judicial side to our becoming the children of God (for indeed we have been justified before God through the imputation of Christ as righteousness), we cannot ignore the biblical fact that the believers are born of God and hence have an organic relationship with Him. John tells us that we "were begotten... of God," not of anything less (John 1:13). Peter reminds the believers that they have been "regenerated not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). The corruptible seed of our fathers only poorly illustrates how God dispenses Himself into us through His eternal word in order to regenerate us and make us His children. Because something of God's very essence has been dispensed into us through regeneration, we enjoy an organic identification with the Father and begin to manifest His virtue, as earthly sons manifest the attributes of their earthly fathers. So John writes: "Everyone who has been begotten of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God" (1 John 3:9). These verses show that something more than judicial declarations is in operation in God's salvation. More deeply, God dispenses the divine life into the believers to make them sons not just judicially but organically, intrinsically, and naturally. Because of this, God is in every sense of the word a Father to us, that is, not merely an adoptive Father but more truly a Father in life and nature. In that His Fatherhood is based upon His eternal divine life, He is in fact more of a Father than our earthly fathers, whose fatherhood is as effective—or as failing—as human life. If we deny God a genuine, organic Fatherhood, we insult the potency of His divine life and declare Him impotent in begetting children. This is certainly not the picture of God we find in the Bible.

Some objection may be made—by Reformed thinkers more than any others—that such an organic Fatherhood destroys the complete otherness of God, that in asserting that we are genuinely born of God we either make God a mere creature or make man God. But the great chasm between God and

His creation has already been closed by the incarnation. There cannot be a more intimate relationship between God and man than that of the incarnated Christ. He was in the womb of the virgin for nine months and was born just as all humans are. He had a very human identity, His human lineage being traceable all the way back to Adam. Living a human life, He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51), studied the Scriptures (Luke 2:46-47), and learned a trade (Mark 6:3). Then, He died, even as it is determined that all humans must die. So intimate is the relationship of God and man in Christ that the history of doctrine teaches us that we can safely attribute to His humanity the virtues of

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His divinity and to His divinity the characteristics of His humanity. We can safely declare that a man is Lord of all and can peacefully sing the words of Charles Wesley's hymn, "Amazing love! how can it be / That Thou,

my God, shouldst die for me?" If we even casually consider the wonder of the incarnation, we can never deny the degree of intimacy that God wished to have with man. It would be ridiculous to suppose that after such a union of God and man has taken place, God would desire to be distant from man, that the chasm once dividing us from Him now separates us again. And yet at the base of much modern theological thought this is the premise.

In trying to safeguard the majesty of God (as though He would or could need our assistance in doing so!), many Christian teachers annul the utmost intimacy with man that God has gone to such great pains to create. And it is not in Jesus Christ alone that God desires the divine and the human to relate so intimately. Paul speaks passionately of the intimate relationship between God and the believers that he perceives: "My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). Certainly Christ is not born in the believers in the same way that He was born in the womb of His human mother, but the image should not be so weakened that it loses its proper force. Contrary to the notion of a distant, objective, external God, something intimate, subjective, and within the believers is suggested. Contrary to the notion of a merely judicial and ethical relationship with God, something of an organic and coactive living is portrayed.

The Application of God through His Trinity

Once we accept the notion of God as an organic Being and recognize His intention to be related to man in such

an intimate and subjective way, we should turn our attention to the way by which God effects this organic relationship with man. Just as God's organic relationship with the believers is founded upon His being an organic God eternally, so also His way to effect that relationship is founded upon His eternal being, upon His being in Himself an eternal dispensing. That He is an eternal dispensing was the second notion we contributed to the traditional understanding of the immanent Trinity in the last issue. (Elsewhere in this issue, we examine the biblical basis for God's dispensing of Himself into the believers.)

We wish to suggest that God's dispensing is effected through His Trinity. What this means is that God offers to man nothing other than Himself. He Himself, not anything external to Him, is the full compass of benefit to man for man's salvation. Rather than viewing man as an ethical creature who stands independent of God and whose behavior relative to God and His laws determines his destiny, we see man as created to be in union with God and to draw from God's being all virtue, all meaning, and all purpose for existence. What saves man is what is drawn from God's person, not merely the fulfillment of a judicial requirement (though this is the basis for this fuller salvation by essence). Further, the benefit of that union comes through the Trinity of God. Thus, God achieves this organic relationship with His believers, whereby His essence becomes our virtue, through the application of His triune being.

Generally, theology has thought of the economy of salvation as merely God's exercise of His beneficence in relation to His creation. From certain aspects of His existence this is certainly true. Relative to His eternal existence, God does not need to come to man and save him; thus, the fact that He desires to do so indicates grand beneficence. But the anterior question is this: Why did God create in the first place? We cannot hope to fully understand this, but we may at least suspect that in His eternal being there is the certain desire to manifest Himself, for whatever reason, and that creation has sprung into existence to that end. Creation then serves God's desire to manifest who He is and places upon Him the constraint to utilize this vehicle for His expression. Theologians are squeamish about assigning constraints to God, for God is eternally unconstrained. But in time and space, relative to His intention with creation, He has certainly put Himself under the constraint of fulfilling His purpose for

manifesting Himself through His creation. Because the economy of salvation is the focal point of God's activity in expressing Himself through creation, it becomes more than a beneficent act on God's part—it becomes the necessary and sufficient act that fulfills His desire. In other words, from the perspective of man's situation and need, God's economy is beneficence, but from the perspective of God's desire and intention, His economy is a necessity. How God fulfills His desire to express Himself through His economy and how man's basic needs are met in salvation coincide in the application of God's triune being to man. In other words, the salvation of man expresses the Trinity of God. As we have said, God has nothing else to offer man but Himself (need there be more?), and God offers Himself through Himself, that is, through His being triune.

When we speak of the application of God's triune being, we invite a few questions: Of what actual benefit is the eternal essence of God to a temporal creature like man, and how can the needs of man, caused by the sinfulness of his condition, be met by the holy otherness of the transcendent God? These concerns perhaps motivate the purely judicial view of salvation that pervades Protestant Christianity. A salvation that seeks to preserve the great chasm between God and man will necessarily disallow the holy God to enter into union with His believers, and they can hope, at best, only to be brought into an ethical relationship with God. According to such a view, the union of God and man is limited at most to the person of Christ, whose two natures provide what is necessary for a perfect redemption. In Him we perceive the function of His humanity and the benefit

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of His divinity in the accomplishment of man's redemption: His humanity provides a genuine and perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins (Col. 1:14), while His divinity lends an eternal effectiveness to that sacrifice and thus to our redemption (Heb.

9:12-14). As the history of theology shows, any Christology that denies either the full humanity or the full divinity of Christ undermines the redemption He accomplished. Unfortunately, however, a judicial salvation limits the benefits of the union of God and man to the person of Christ. The organic salvation that we are suggesting here, however, allows and even depends on the application of God's being to the believers, that is, on the believers being what Peter terms "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4).

An organic salvation views man's condition as requiring

both a human solution and a divine solution. The man created by God is, because of the fall, far short of his original design. Physically man is weak, suffers illness, succumbs to accident and disease, and finally dies. The soul of man is corrupted, fulfilling, in Augustine's terms, a love of self (*amor sui*) rather than a love of God (*amor dei*). Spiritually, man is dead in sins and offenses against God and man and, apart from God's mercy, lacks even an inclination toward God (Eph. 2:1-5). As the prime being in God's physical creation, man, who was meant to depend on God and serve Him, has become alienated from God and perversely rebellious against Him. The law given by God fully makes manifest how far man has fallen from his intended estate. Only in Christ can man's human condition be repaired. Christ not only fulfills the law, but ends it. Coming as a man, Christ learned obedience for all our race and recovered

man's privileged status as servant of God. He lived on earth fully dependent on God: "I live because of the Father" (John 6:57a). The human solution repairs man's broken condition, but the divine solution uplifts man to the higher plane intended by God for man. Man was not placed in the garden merely to obey God but to live by Him, as evidenced by the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22). God's full salvation not only restores man's condition but also fulfills God's desire for man to bear His image and to be like Him (Gen. 1:26) and to have the divine life and nature in order to express Him. Only in Christ can this divine intention be fulfilled. In His own words, He came "that they may have life" (John 10:10), and through His incarnation, death, and resurrection, He opened the way for the believers to live by God—"so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me" (John 6:57b). The benefit of Christ's divinity in man's salvation is that the believers become not merely obedient creatures but also genuine sons of God. According to the language of the New Testament, the believers are transformed from what they are in the old creation to what they are to be in the new creation.

Thus, in His organic salvation God offers to man not only what Christ is as God eternally but also what He is as man in incarnation. The benefit of the full divinity and humanity of Christ is not limited to the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross but even more so is applied to the believers in their experiences of regeneration, transformation, conformation, and glorification. Because of this, all

that Christ is, both as to His divinity and to His humanity, must be made available to and become the experience of the believers, and this is the function of the Spirit. The Spirit makes real, that is, applies, all that Christ is, to the believers; hence, He is called the Spirit of reality, who is to guide all the believers into the reality of Christ (John 16:13). Thus, the Trinity is fully applied to the believers in God's organic salvation.

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The Processed Triune God

Because both the divinity and the humanity of Christ are applied to man in God's full, organic salvation, both must be made available through the Spirit, whose function in salvation is the application of Christ's person and work to the believers. We suggest, then, that the Triune God goes through a process whereby the humanity of Christ, with all its attainments and obtainments, is compounded with

His divinity and made available to man through the Spirit. In this sense, we will speak of the *processed and consummated Triune God*.¹ In presenting this view of the Trinity, we will look first at the process and then at the consummation of the Trinity in His economy.

A clarification is perhaps in order, particularly as regards the term *process*. What we are advancing here is not akin to process theology, which views God as intrinsically in process and thus eternally undergoing change; rather, we affirm that God is immutable in His eternal, triune essence. Yet according to the revelation in the Bible, God has undergone a process insofar as He has become a man, lived a human life, died a human death, resurrected with a human body, and ascended to heaven as a glorified man. This is basic to our Christian faith. But for some reason this process of God, this humanizing of God, so to speak, is held conceptually as being separate from God's identity, as though the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the God-man is distinct from God's being. Christian faith, however, demands that we identify Christ's humanity with His divinity and see Him as at once both God and man. Until the incarnation God was truly distant from man, and man could only stand afar in awe and in fear. The picture of the people of Israel at the base of the mountain of God in Exodus 19 best portrays the situation before the incarnation. The writer of Hebrews, in recounting that situation, tells of the people coming

to a mountain which could be touched and which was set

on fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the sound of a trumpet and to the voice of words, because of which those who heard entreated that no further word be spoken to them; for they could not bear that which was being commanded: "If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned." And so fearful was the sight, Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." (12:18-21)

In incarnation, however, God suddenly became approachable. For the first time in the history of our relationship with God since the fall of man, we and God, as members of the same race, could walk together, talk together, share a meal, rejoice at the wedding of a common friend, agonize in common trials, and even march into death. It is difficult

universal qualities that He enjoys as God. Hence, His humanity today, charged with the ubiquity of His Godhead, is much more effective in communicating God to us. Formerly He was among His disciples; now He can be within us. Formerly He was limited to a small perimeter in Palestine; now He can be found in the believers throughout the earth. Formerly one could only hope to be in His presence for mere decades at most; now we can dwell with Him for eternity. This intensification of His availability and of our enjoyment of Him is based on that which made Him first available and enjoyable to man, His humanity.

The process of which we speak, then, is not merely the series of historical events that our Lord passed through. Surely these were genuine, but the value of them is not merely historical. Rather, these events have been processed into Christ, so that today His ministry to the believers is the application not only of His divine attributes but also of His human virtues, experiences, attainments, and obtainments. What He experienced in being

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to overemphasize the marvel of the incarnate God. He is no less God than He has been eternally, yet He is as fully man as any of us. So much a man was He that some men, who were His own creatures, far from recognizing that He was God, found Him contemptible. This intimacy and availability was possible only because of His humanity. Because He is genuinely man, man can genuinely enjoy that He is God.

This is basic. On a deeper level, however, we must see that after Christ's death and resurrection the availability and enjoyment of God still rest squarely on His humanity. When Christ ascended into heaven, He did so in full possession of humanity and with full intention to continue His status as man. It is easy to think that Christ returned to the Father and took up where He left off as the glorious God, only now with His humanity as some sort of appendage. But this is far from the truth. From the aspect of the essential Trinity, God the Son never had to take up where He left off. From the aspect of the economical Trinity, however, the Son in incarnation has been perfectly joined to humanity and in resurrection has brought humanity into the Trinity. Stephen confessed the glorious vision of the ascended Christ, who is surely God but openly man: "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). Today Christ's humanity functions in principle as it did when He walked among us on the earth: It communicates God to us and leads us into fellowship with Him. Yet through His resurrection His divinity has uplifted His humanity and given it the eternal and

conceived in the womb of Mary, in learning in the temple, in living as a lowly carpenter, in being tempted by the devil, in thirsting at the well, in sleeping in the boat, in weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, in being praised outside Jerusalem, in being betrayed by His companion, in being pressed at Gethsemane, in being examined by Jew and Gentile, in being scourged and mocked, in faltering under His cross, in cringing at the blows on His hands and feet, in hanging accursed in open shame, in crying out to His God, in gasping for His last breath, in breathing out His soul and commending His spirit to God, indeed, in dying because all men must die—all this has been added to Him and has been universalized by His divinity, so that now all this becomes as much the grace that we may enjoy as His very divinity is. The process is not merely historical; a genuine product has resulted: the all-inclusive Christ, divine in His basic identity but also enriched with a fully-experienced humanity.

In examining the experiences of the God-man, it is customary to single out the Son as the participant in these many events. But the Scriptures do not separate the three persons of God from the experiences of the God-man so discretely. Rather, at every turn, the experiences of Christ are seen to involve the entire Trinity, even though indeed the Son is the subject of each experience. This accords with the basic tenet concerning the Trinity that every action of God is the operation of all three, that there are no independent actions of the Father, nor of the Son, nor of the Spirit, even

though within every one action of God there is certainly a distinction between how the Father operates, how the Son operates, and how the Spirit operates. What we must be wary of is the notion that the Son was alone in His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection, as though separate from the Father and the Spirit. Unfortunately, it seems that many Christians view Christ this way, understanding the Trinity to be three separate persons and thus holding to at least a latent form of tritheism.

What we are speaking of, then, is not merely the processed Christ but the processed Triune God. While the centrality of this process is the all-inclusive Christ, the application of this Christ, as we shall see in the next section, is the life-giving Spirit. Further, the source of both the all-inclusive Christ and the life-giving Spirit is the divine Father. Hence, the process involves not only the Son but also the Father and the Spirit, and so we say that what the believers enjoy in their salvation is the processed Triune God. In light of this, our next task should be to examine the involvement of the Trinity in this wonderful process.

When the Son was incarnated, the Father and the Spirit were intimately involved. The apostle Paul tells us that “when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). Concerning the Father sending Him, the Lord Jesus Himself testified, “He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone” (John 8:29). In the incarnation the Father sent forth the Son, but the Son was in no wise separated from the Father. The Father was always with the Son. Abundant evidence is given in the New Testament for this fact, but perhaps the clearest can be found in John 14:8-10a:

Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us. Jesus said to him, Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how is it that you say, Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?

Contrary to the common concept, the Son was not separate from the Father, but intimately dwelling within and being indwelt by the Father. Frequently, verses are presented that appear (to some) to prove that while the Lord was on the earth, the three were separate. For example, in Matthew 3:16-17, the Son is said to be standing in the water, the Spirit is said to be descending upon Him in the air,

and the Father is said to be speaking from the heavens. Were verses like these the only ones we had to consider, we might be tempted to say that we have three separate Gods. But such verses, which show that the three are genuinely distinct, are balanced by verses like John 14:8-11, which indicate that the three are never separate. If anything, Matthew 3:16-17 shows that in the baptism of Christ the entire Trinity was involved.

In announcing the incarnation to Mary, the angel Gabriel clearly spoke of the operation of the entire Trinity: “The angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is

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born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). When the Son was born as a human child, the Father and the Spirit actively participated. The announcement to Joseph, whose commission would be to protect and nurture the God-man, further indicates that the Spirit was involved essentially in the incarnation of the Son: “That which has been begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20). We can only declare the mystery: The Son became flesh, but in His incarnation the Father was ever with Him, and He was of the Holy Spirit. Our firm conviction is that today’s common view of the incarnation as the Son’s embodiment in human form apart from the Father and apart from the Spirit bespeaks a pervasive, latent tritheism that is contrary to the truth of Scripture.

In Christ’s human living and work, the three of the Trinity were again actively involved. We have already seen from John 8:29 that the Father who sent Him was always with Him. John 14:10b-11 further shows us that in Christ’s working the Father was working as well: “The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” The God-man’s actions on the earth were not the independent actions of the Son; rather, they were the single operation of the Father and the Son. The Lord affirmed this in John 5: “Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing, for whatever that One does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (v. 19), and “I

can do nothing from Myself; as I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me” (v. 30). Naturally, some might think that the Son sees and hears the Father from a distance, from the earth looking off into heaven, but because we know that the Son and the Father mutually indwell each other (what theology terms coinherence or perichoresis), we know that the Son sees and hears the Father within Himself, by virtue of His inseparable oneness with the Father.

The Spirit was also active in the God-man’s living and work. Luke tells us that “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1). After His temptation in the wilderness, “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (v. 14) and taught in the synagogues of the Jews. In Nazareth He declared, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me” (v. 18). The relationship between the Spirit and the God-man should not be understood as the same as that enjoyed by the Old Testament saints. Whereas the Old Testament saints enjoyed the Spirit as a gift and power bestowed on them by God, Christ’s relationship to the Spirit is trinitarian and depends as much on coinherence as does His relationship with the Father. During His ministry the Lord always acted by the Spirit. For example, in Matthew 12:28 He told the Pharisees that He cast out demons by the Spirit of God. After His resurrection the apostles testified that the Lord Jesus had been anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and that thus God was with Him (Acts 10:38). In the living and work of Christ, then, it can be said, and it should be said, that the entire Trinity lived and worked.

Certainly in the crucifixion it was the Son of God who passed through death, but He was not the sole participant. Again, the Scripture tells us that both the Father and the Spirit were involved. While Christ was dying on the cross, the Father was active in wiping out the ordinances that divided mankind and in stripping away the opposing angelic powers that dominated mankind (Col. 2:14-15). The writer of Hebrews views the death of Christ as a full triune endeavor: “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (9:14). The Son, with His humanity as the sacrifice, offered Himself to God the Father through the eternal Spirit, from whom He can never be separated. Because of the eternal Spirit the effectiveness of Christ’s death has been universalized: The objective requirement that all must die (9:27) has been met (2:9), and the subjective experience of having all the negative elements of our fallen being terminated has been made possible (Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:10-12). We shall see more concerning the application of Christ’s death to the believers in the next section.

The Scriptures also speak of a triune operation in the

resurrection of Christ. Generally, the New Testament refers to the Father, or simply God, as the chief agent who resurrected Christ’s crucified humanity. There are numerous verses to that effect, but a particularly enlightening one is 1 Thessalonians 1:10: “Await His Son from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus.” This verse not only shows that the Father acts to raise Christ from the dead but also that the resurrection of Christ’s humanity is identified with His divinity by the communication of attributes from one of His natures to the other (*communicatio idiomatum*). Acts 3:15 presents us another fine testimony of the Father’s agency in the Son’s resurrection: “The Author [Gk. *Archēgos*] of life you killed, whom God has raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.” But while the New Testament more frequently mentions the Father as the agent of Christ’s resurrection, the Son declares that He Himself acts in His rising from the dead. In John 2, the Lord told the Jews, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.... But He spoke of the temple of His body” (vv. 19, 21). Also, in John and again to the Jews who questioned who He was, He spoke of His active role in rising from the dead:

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This commandment I received from My Father. (10:17-18)

On the one hand, the Father raised Christ from the dead, but on the other hand, the Son, by virtue of His divinity, vivified His dead humanity, raising it from the dead. The Spirit, too, was very much involved in Christ’s resurrection. Paul tells us that Christ’s humanity was designated the Son of God by His resurrection and that His resurrection was according to the Spirit (Rom. 1:3-4). Later in the same Epistle Paul speaks of the single action of the Father and the Spirit in raising Christ from the dead: “And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also

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If there is the greater organic aspect of God's salvation, the steps of His process need to be applied to the believers. This application is the goal of Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension. It is the application not only of Christ and His work but of the Trinity and His process. The application of the processed Triune God is the consummation of the economical aspect of His triune being.

give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you" (8:11).

In ascension Christ abides again in the glory of the Trinity that He possessed prior to His incarnation (John 17:5). Yet now He has brought humanity into the Trinity, insofar as His economical aspect is concerned. Acts 1:11 and 1 Peter 3:21-22 speak of the man Jesus ascending into heaven and taking His position at the right hand of God. In these passages, which clearly speak of the Trinity in economical and not essential terms, humanity is seen to be brought perfectly into God. Philippians 2:9-11 makes it clear that as a man Christ has assumed His lordship in the heavens over all the universe.

Throughout the steps of this process, the Son experienced a human existence with the Father and by the Spirit. Too often we see indications in Christian teaching today that the Son's sojourn on earth was a mission separate from the Father and the Spirit. But this contradicts the very triune being of God. It also contradicts the record of the New Testament. God's becoming man, while finding its subject in the Son of God, is as much an activity of the Father and of the Spirit as it is of the Son. The process that the Son went through—His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension—is not merely the historical experiences of the once incarnate Son of God for our judicial redemption but even more the human elements of the now processed Triune God for our organic salvation. Again, we stress that this notion of a processed Triune God can only be allowed if we accept an economical aspect of the Trinity. If we do, we can also consider that through this process the human experiences of Christ have been compounded into the Triune God. If we deny an economical view of the Trinity, we must also deny the very incarnation of God, the chief evidence that God exists not only in His essential apartness but also in His economical union with man.

The Consummated Triune God

Were the incarnation merely to effect our judicial redemption, there would be no need to understand Christ's human experiences as anything but mere historical events that fulfilled the righteous demands of God. Further, we could say that the operation of the Trinity with respect to His union

with man ended with Christ's ascension. The goal of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection would have been met by His ascension to heaven and His resting with the Father in glory. If, however, there is the greater organic aspect of God's salvation, the historical events, which indeed have served to effect our judicial redemption, become the steps of a process that need to be applied to the believers. This application, then, becomes the goal of Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension. Again, it is the application not only of Christ and His work but also of the Trinity and His process. The application of the processed Triune God is the consummation of the economical aspect of His triune being. We suggest that while the Son is the focal person in the processed Triune God, who provided the elements to be applied to the believers for their judicial and organic salvation, the Spirit is the focal person in the consummated Triune God, who actually applies those elements, that is, the processed Triune God, to the believers for their full salvation. Thus, we shall speak of the *consummated Triune God*, referring to the Spirit, who applies the processed Triune God to the believers.

Again, in speaking of the consummated Triune God, we must underscore the distinction between the essential and economical aspects of the Trinity. In the essential Trinity there is no need to speak of a process and thus no reason to refer to a consummation. In His eternal being, the Triune God is complete and thus without process. But in His economy of salvation, in time the Triune God undergoes a process and has a consummation. What is pivotal here is that the consummation is not Christ in glory but the Spirit applying all that the glorified Christ is and has to the believers. In this sense, the Spirit, after Christ's resurrection and ascension, is the consummation of the processed Triune God.

Here we should pause and consider the Spirit's relationship to Christ. The basic principle of this relationship is the coherence of the Spirit with the Son, a basic principle of the Triune God in His three hypostases. We can never sever the Spirit from the Son, just as we can never sever the Son from the Father. In Acts and in the Epistles, where the Spirit is prominent in the experience of the believers, we should understand that He is not separate from the Son as some mere representative but bears and communicates the Son to the believers as the reality of the Son.

The Gospel of John has some very particular statements concerning the Spirit's relationship to the Son. First, the Lord told the disciples that the coming Spirit would bring to their mind all that He had said to them while He was with them: "But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and remind you of all the things which I have said to you" (John 14:26). The Spirit functions to bring the Lord's speaking to the believers, particularly the words of His direct teaching to the apostles immediately after His glorification, and generally His inner speaking to the common believers throughout all the successive generations. The Spirit's speaking is not His own but that of the Son. In John 16 this is well described. In verse 13, after saying that before His resurrection the disciples were not able to bear all that He could say to them, the Lord spoke of the Spirit coming to guide them into this deeper reality: "But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality; for He will not speak from Himself, but what He hears He will speak; and He will declare to you the things that are coming." The reality that the Spirit guides the believers into is the Son as the reality of God. The Spirit does not offer testimony concerning Himself but guides the believers into the reality of Christ the Son. Thus, the Lord goes on: "He will glorify Me, for He will receive of Mine and will declare it to you" (v. 14). What the Spirit brings to the believers is not something that He possesses uniquely but rather what the Son is and has. The Son, in turn, possesses the Father fully and fully testifies of the Father, as He declares in the next verse: "All that the Father has is Mine; for this reason I have said that He receives of Mine and will declare it to you" (v. 15). Hence, the Spirit brings God the Father in Christ the Son to the believers. Further support to this is offered in John 15:26: "But when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of reality, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify concerning Me." Again, the one action of the Trinity is seen in the Spirit's work in the believers: The Spirit comes, but He is sent by the Son; the Son sends the Spirit, but He does so from the Father; the Spirit is sent by the Son, but He proceeds from the Father; the Spirit testifies, but it is of the Son that He testifies. In this one single

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verse the coinherence of the three of the Trinity is overwhelming. Combining John 15:26 with 14:26, we get an even fuller impression of the triadic fellowship involved in the Spirit's mission. On the one hand, the Son sends the Spirit (15:26); on the other, the Father sends Him (14:26). On the one hand, the Spirit is sent from the Father (15:26); on the other, He is sent in the Son's name (14:26). Apart from the immense controversy that these verses have stirred in the history of doctrine (i.e., the double or twofold procession of the Spirit), we can safely say that the Spirit has nothing other to communicate than the Son's attainments and obtainments, which include what the Son has from the Father and what He has accomplished in His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Spirit has no separate gift to bestow, nothing that derives from His own unique hypostasis; rather, He only brings to the believers what Christ as the expression of the Father is. For this reason, He is called the Spirit of the Son (Gal. 4:6) and the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20) and, most simply, the Spirit of God (e.g., 1 John 4:2). Furthermore, in the economy of the Trinity, the Son has no way to bestow the virtues of His divinity and the experiences of His humanity to the believers except through the Spirit.

Because the Spirit serves to bear the Son to us, He is not infrequently identified with the Son in the New Testament. Again, the Gospel of John provides a few of the examples of this. John 7:38-39 has caused quite a bit of anxiety to Bible students because of its stark pronouncements concerning the Spirit, but it need not if we allow that the Spirit is spoken of here in His economical function of bearing the Son to the believers. The Lord declares that out of the innermost being of whoever believes into Him rivers of living water will flow (v. 38). "But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (v. 39). The problem arises with the clause "the Spirit was not yet." Many translations have helped this difficult reading by adding in the word *given* at the end of the clause ("the Spirit was not yet *given*"), but there is really no need to do so. The Spirit exists eternally (Heb. 9:14); thus, this verse is not referring to the Spirit coming into existence.

Rather, it refers to the Spirit coming into His economical function of conveying the glorified Christ into the believers for their full and overflowing satisfaction. In this particular function, the Spirit could not yet be, until Jesus was glorified, until the process that Christ was undergoing had been completed at His resurrection. Just as the Son became flesh and, as regards economy, changed His form, so also the Spirit, again as regards economy, became something that was not yet, until Jesus had been glorified. Certainly the incarnation causes no change in the eternal, essential existence of the Son, and just as certainly the resurrection causes no change in the eternal, essential existence of the Spirit. But in the great undertaking of the Trinity, whereby He manifests Himself in the aspect of economy, the Spirit becomes the Son's other "transformation," whereby the Son's attainments and obtainments are communicated to the believers. The distinction between Son and Spirit is never lost, but there is close identification of the Spirit with the Son.

In John 14:16-20 the same identification can be found:

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of reality, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. Yet a little while and the world beholds Me no longer, but you behold Me; because I live, you also shall live. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

The Son is to pray to the Father, who will send the Spirit as another Comforter. Previously, the Son in the midst of the disciples had been their Comforter, but after Christ's death and resurrection, the Spirit would be sent to be a Comforter within them. The Spirit abides with them and will be in them. Then the Lord says that He (the Lord) will not leave the disciples orphans because He is coming to them. The Lord's coming here could only be understood as the Spirit's coming as the other Comforter (not as His second coming at the end of the age!). The Lord is about to leave the disciples physically, but He will not leave them orphans because He is coming to them pneumatically. While the world around will no longer see Him once He dies and resurrects, the disciples will behold the Lord always because the Spirit will come to them bearing the resurrected Lord to them. Further, because the Spirit will come to them and bring with Him the Lord's resurrected person, the Lord's vitality in resurrection will be imparted to them, and because He lives, they also will live. The Spirit's mission is accomplished when the disciples are brought fully into

union with the Triune God and come to realize that union: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20). Through this economy of God, the believers enter into and enjoy a coinherence with the Trinity. Just as God introduced Himself into humanity through incarnation, so through Christ's resurrection man is introduced into God by the Spirit.

After His resurrection, Christ appeared to His disciples pneumatically. In the account of one of those appearances, this identification of the Spirit with the resurrected Son is again found. While the disciples cowered in Jerusalem in a sealed room, the Lord appeared in their midst and spoke peace to them. "And when He had said this, He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). What issued from Christ's resurrected person was the Spirit whom He had promised and of whom He had spoken prior to His death. The etymological subtleties of the text here are very meaningful. The lexical coherence between *breathed* and *Spirit* should not be overlooked. We commonly admit that the Son is the Word (Logos) of the Father, accepting that the Son is the expression of the Father and that, though distinct from the Father, He is one with the Father. In like manner, we should understand that the Spirit is the vital essence of the Son and that, though distinct from the Son, He is one with the Son. The Father is expressed by the Son, and the Son breathes forth the Spirit. The Spirit, in the aspect of economy, is the Son transmitted into the believers.

*The
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Paul also quite plainly identifies the Spirit with the Son. In speaking of the transforming work of the ministry of the Spirit, Paul declares that the hindrance to our being glorified, the veil, is being done away with in Christ (2 Cor. 3:14). Hence, whenever the heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away (v. 16). The Lord here is the Christ in whom the veil is done away. In verse 17 Paul goes on to declare the practicality of this Christ: "And the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Paul tells us that the Christ to whom we must turn our hearts is the Spirit who brings us the needed freedom from the law. In so saying, he indicates that the Spirit is both the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord, preserving both the Spirit's distinctiveness and His identification with the Son. Paul concludes his thought with a glorious description of how the Spirit transforms the believers into the image of the Son: "But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit" (v. 18). The image that we take on is that of the Son, as

image is solely His distinctive, but we are transformed into that image from the operation of the Spirit, to whom Paul now assigns an appellation that so clearly defines the identity of the Spirit with the Son—the Lord Spirit.

Given this close identity of the Spirit with the Son in the economy of the Trinity elsewhere in the New Testament, it is not difficult to see it also in 1 Corinthians 15:45b: “The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.” Elsewhere we have discussed the implications of this verse (see “Some Biblical Trinitarian Conundrums” in *A&C*, Vol I, No. 1, pp. 46-49). Here it may be sufficient to say that Paul is again referring to Christ’s pneumatic state in resurrection, in which all that Christ is, is borne into the believers by the Spirit. It is difficult to imagine that Paul means to say that Christ in resurrection is another life-giving Spirit parallel to the Spirit that gives life (John 6:63). Such a notion annuls the unitary action of the Triune God. Rather, we should expect that Paul means that the resurrected Christ is now pneumatic, that now He comes to us not as flesh but as the Spirit. As the Son could say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), so whoever receives the Spirit, receives the Son. In this sense, the New Testament speaks of the Son being the Spirit. Unfortunately, many cringe at these declarations in the Bible, fearing that the distinctions of the three will be lost. But the New Testament nevertheless speaks of the three in these close terms.

Understanding the biblical declarations concerning the relationship of the Spirit to the Son, we can now examine some texts that point to the Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God. Paul writes to the Galatians: “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” (4:6). We the believers are the sons of God because the sonship of Christ is communicated to us by the Spirit of the Son. Of course, we are not sons of God in the same sense that Christ is the Son of God in the eternal Godhead. But we are nevertheless genuine sons in life and nature, and this is actuated by the Spirit who bears the Son into our hearts and makes genuine the cry in our hearts, “Abba, Father!” We should not think that the Spirit is acting as a mere separate representative of the Son here, for that would mean that the Spirit, in addressing God as Father, is either separately a Son of God or disingenuous in His invocation; rather, *the Spirit of His Son* should be understood as referring to the Spirit bearing Christ into the believers and, by virtue of the Son’s particular identity as the Son, making them sons.

In Romans 8 Paul writes concerning the proper fulfilling of the righteous demands of God, who can never be pleased by those who are in the flesh. He tells his readers: “But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you” (v. 9a). The Spirit’s indwelling makes us spiritual persons and uplifts us from being merely fleshly persons. As spiritual persons, we have the capacity to fulfill the demands of God and thus please

A Biblical Illustration of the Consummated Spirit

You also take for yourself the finest spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred shekels, and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred fifty shekels, and of fragrant calamus two hundred fifty shekels, and of cassia five hundred shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. And you shall make it a holy anointing oil, a perfume compounded according to the perfumer’s art; it shall be a holy anointing oil. (Exo. 30:23-25, Recovery Version)

In the Bible one of the Spirit’s chief functions is to anoint those who participate in God’s service (1 Sam. 16:13; Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). The anointing oil, described in Exodus 30:23-25, provides an excellent typological illustration of the Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God. The one hin of olive oil represents the one and only God. To this one element, four spices are added. In the Bible the number four is often used to signify God’s creation, as in the four quarters of heaven and the four winds (Jer. 49:36), the four corners of the earth (Rev. 7:1), and the four living creatures (Ezek. 1:5; Rev. 4:6-8). The four spices form three units of 500 shekels each, pointing to the Triune God; and the second 500-shekel unit is split into two units of 250 shekels, intimating the second of the Trinity and His crucifixion. The four spices are themselves very significant. The first, myrrh, was used in the ancient world to anoint the bodies of those who had died (John 19:39); thus, myrrh points to the precious death of our Lord Savior. Cinnamon, with its strong aroma, was used as both a food flavoring and a perfume and functioned to cover unpleasant odors. It typifies the effectiveness of Christ’s death, which overpowers all the negative things of our fallen nature. Calamus, as a reed that grows upright in marshes, typifies the resurrection of Christ. Cassia, like cinnamon, is strongly aromatic and was used as a repellent against insects and snakes; hence, it signifies the effective power of Christ’s resurrection, which repels all negative forces, including the devil’s. The compounding of these spices into the pure olive oil represents the compounding of the humanity of Christ into the Spirit for the application of all that God is in Christ the God-man to the believers for their full and organic salvation.

Him. Paul continues: "Yet if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness" (vv. 9b-10). In one breath Paul speaks of the Spirit of Christ being in us, and in the next, of Christ Himself being in us. This again shows how identical Paul considers Christ and the Spirit. The Spirit within the believers, called as it were the Spirit of Christ, bears the real presence of Christ to them; the Spirit's relationship to Christ is not vicarial. Because the Spirit communicates to the believers what Christ is, what He is in resurrection particularly is applied to the believers and makes them acceptable to God. The thought here is very fine. In verse 5 Paul says that those who are according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh, and in verse 6 that the mind set on the flesh is simply death. In verses 7 and 8 he goes on to explain that the mind set on the flesh is enmity against God because, being fully deadened, it cannot be subject to the law of God. Then he assures his readers that they are not in the flesh but in the spirit if the Spirit of Christ is in them (v. 9). Because the Spirit of Christ is in them, Christ is in them through the Spirit, and the experiences of Christ in being raised from the dead can be applied to them. Thus, the believers can be made genuinely alive, though their bodies are dead because of sin (v. 10). The resurrection of Christ now being applied to them by the Spirit, the believers are freed from the realm of the flesh of death and no longer need to try to please God according to it (v. 12). In these verses *the Spirit of Christ* refers particularly to the application of Christ in His resurrection to the believers.

In Acts 16:7 we meet the title *the Spirit of Jesus*. The term is particular but again adheres to the principle set forth above, that the Spirit bears the person of Christ to the believers for their experience. In the book of Acts the apostles continued in much the same existence that the Lord Jesus experienced while He sojourned in Palestine. Although they traveled across a larger domain, the apostles took the same way that the Lord did of visiting people with the gospel town by town and village by village. As they moved they were sensitive to the Lord's leading through the Spirit. When they came

to Mysia, a province along the northeastern shore of the Aegean Sea, they intended to remain in Asia Minor and proceed northeasterly into Bithynia. But Jesus was otherwise minded, and His disapproval was communicated to them through the Spirit. The term *the Spirit of Jesus*, focusing on the Lord's

human living with all His earthly suffering, demonstrates uniquely the Spirit's application of the Lord's humanity to the living and working of the apostles for their continuation of the Lord's work in fulfilling God's economy.

A compound appellation, bringing together the terms *Jesus* and *Christ*, is found in Philippians 1:19: "For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Here the Spirit is referred to as bringing Christ in both the experiences of His humanity and the richness of His divinity to Paul. Paul was not seeking merely to be freed from prison. His higher aim was to magnify Christ, as he makes clear in the next verse: "According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death" (v. 20). His need, as a prisoner under Roman guard, was the full humanity of Christ as well as His triumphant resurrection and ascendancy. The mere model of Christ's life, culled from stories handed down from even eyewitnesses, was not enough here; rather, the very person of the God-man who died and rose needed to be communicated to Paul that he might actually live Him. For Paul, staying alive in a Roman prison had to be Christ Himself: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (v. 21). Such a deep and genuine identification with Christ could be possible only if the Spirit was able to bring Christ genuinely, not vicarially, to Paul. There is perhaps no better description in the New Testament of the Spirit as the consummation of the processed Triune God. Paul, suffering in his endeavors to carry out the New Testament ministry, certainly needed the full strengthening of God. But the God he needed could not be only God the Transcendent; the God he needed had to be the man of sorrows acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3). Paul found himself in much the same situation that our Lord had once been in: imprisoned and in danger for the sake of God's economy. The

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worst that could happen to Paul had happened to the Lord Jesus, and the Lord's experiences had been compounded, had been processed, into the Spirit that now bore Him to Paul. For Paul victory in his situation

was not being freed from his bonds or even dying in his sufferings; for Paul victory was alone living the Christ who was bountifully supplied to him by the Spirit. This was the salvation he confidently affirmed to be soon his. It was an organic salvation not from the punishment of

eternal perdition but into the reward of expressing the all-glorious Christ. The long process that the Triune God had undergone in the Son's incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension now came to Paul consummated as the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ so that he might fulfill his function as a human being, to bear God's image and likeness and exercise dominion for God on earth (Gen. 1:26).

The writers of the New Testament, in dealing with the many issues that faced them in their day and which have now proved to be ones that face us even today, offered nothing less than the Triune God as the full solution to every problem. It is so frequent in their writings to see the Trinity being applied to the needs of the saints in the churches. For the apostles the Christian life was one absolutely wrapped up with the Triune God. The texts that illustrate this abound, but only a few can be cited here with the hope that a future opportunity will arise for a more full demonstration. Paul, perhaps more than all the rest, applied the Triune God to the churches for which he cared. Consider his prayer for the saints in Ephesians 3:14-19:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.

Paul earnestly desired nothing less than that the Father would grant the saints to be so strengthened that Christ might make His home in their hearts. This strengthening and Christ making His home in their hearts are through the Spirit's operation. Again, we see the Spirit bearing into the believers the Christ who has gone through a marvelous process, and this is all from the Father's hand. Paul's prayer is for the very essence of our Christian existence, essentially an existence in and with the Triune God.

Peter also appreciated the fact that we believers are intimately related to the Trinity for our Christian existence. He reminds us that we were "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2). The Father has selected us from among His creatures to be set apart through the Spirit's operation unto obedience to the person and work of Christ.

The apostle John, who of all the apostles was the keenest regarding the relationship among the three of the Trinity, testified of our being interwoven into the Triune God and

thus enjoying His full salvation. To the disciples he wrote: "In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, that He has given to us of His Spirit. And we have beheld and testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:13-14). We abide in the Father who loves us and He abides in us. This reality is ours because the Spirit who has been given to us communicates it to us. Further, because the Father abides in us and we in Him through the Spirit given to us, we also have experienced and can personally testify that the Son is our Savior and indeed the Savior of the world. Our salvation is not merely to be rescued from perdition but to be brought out of our fallen condition and led into the Father by the Son through the Spirit. As Paul elsewhere declares, through Christ the Son we have access in one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:18). Our salvation is to enjoy the three of the Trinity in this way.

We cannot offer as an ending to what we say here anything more appropriate to our topic than what Paul said in closing his Epistles to the Corinthians. The journey in his relationship with the saints he dearly loved had been long, arduous, fraught with suspicions on every side, and intensely emotional though highly spiritual. His final exhortation is the whole of the New Testament ministry: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). The words must not be denied their fullest meaning, for only their fullest meaning matches Paul's deep burden for the saints. Grammatically we should view each of the phrases as appositions and identify the Triune God Himself in His triune existence as the ultimate blessing upon the saints: The Lord Jesus Christ as grace and God as love and the Holy Spirit as the fellowship be with you all. The Son who became a man and lived, died, rose, and was exalted as a man has now become our grace. We could not have as grace for our Christian and church life anything less than Him with all His experiences. The Father, who is not just loving but is the reality of love, has now become our love, by which we love God and one another. These most precious possessions, Christ as grace and God as love, are communicated to us by the Spirit as the fellowship of the Trinity. The grand economy of God, which began as love in God the Father and manifested itself through the process of the Son's incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension, has consummated in the Spirit, who now makes us partakers, fellowshippers, of the Divine Trinity (2 Pet. 1:4). ✠

Notes

¹I draw and depend heavily in these next two sections on the ministry of Witness Lee, who suggests these notions in several of his publications, but see particularly *The Spirit with Our Spirit*, Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1993 and *The Issue of the Union of the Consummated Spirit of the Triune God and the Regenerated Spirit of the Believers*, Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1995.