

# THE JOHANNINE JESUS as BRIDGE and MODEL for the INCORPORATION of the BELIEVERS into the DIVINE TRINITY (2)

by Kerry S. Robichaux

*In that day you will know that  
I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.  
(John 14:20)*

In this essay I wish to continue, and conclude, my study of the incorporation of the Triune God as seen in the Gospel of John, which I began in the last issue of *A&C* (“Johannine (1)” 38-51). For the many who have not had a chance to look through that article, I would like to first summarize its thesis and main points before moving on to the particular points of this conclusion.

## Incorporation and the Gospel of John

In the previous article I attempted to show that the Gospel of John stands distinctly apart from its synoptic counterparts not merely on narrative grounds but more importantly on theological grounds. While the Synoptic Gospels present Jesus from various perspectives of His existence as a human being, the Gospel of John is decidedly more interested in His existence as the divine Son of God. Certainly the Synoptic Gospels do not deny the deity of Christ, but this point is left to dawn on the reader (cf. Matt. 14:22-33) more than it is set to be affirmed. The Gospel of John, however, opens with the declaration that its narrative Subject is none other than God Himself, who became flesh and dwelt among humankind (1:1, 14). This Gospel proceeds according to that declaration throughout, but, interestingly, we see a unique quality of this God-become-man unfolding in the chapters that follow. Where we might expect to find an all-powerful Son of God living independently as a man on earth, we instead see a Son who constantly lives and moves in conjunction with the divine Father, a Son whose every action appears to be also the action of the Father with whom He fellowships in secret. Indeed, in the Gospel of John the more subtle message seems to be that this Son of God is not at all separate from the Father who sent Him but so involved with the Father that His open actions on the earth are the hidden operations

of the Father whom He manifests and expresses. In this sense, the incarnate Son incorporates the Father in His every action, and this is the more intricate message of the Gospel. The Jesus of the Gospel of John is not the incarnation of the Son of God separate from the Father and the Spirit, but the incarnation of the Son as the incorporation of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Every action of the Son in this Gospel should be understood to be the operation of the three of the Godhead. This is, of course, the affirmation of the proper view of the Trinity in the teaching of the historic Christian church, even if it is hardly known by most Christians today and may even arouse suspicions among the larger body of evangelical and “fundamental” believers and teachers.

I have used the term *incorporation*, borrowed from Witness Lee (*Issue* 21-22, 24-26, 40-42), to describe the action of any one of the three of the Godhead that manifests the operation of another one or the other two. A major intent of my previous article was to detail this incorporation in the life of the Johannine Jesus, but for the sake of review a single passage may be sufficient. John 14:10 says, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works.” Here two discrete aspects of the relationship between the Son and the Father are explicitly referred to, and one is implied. These three aspects more finely define what I wish to describe by the term *incorporation*. The implied aspect is one of mutual interdependence of existence, whereby the Son is the Son and can act as the Son because there is a Father in the Godhead, and the Father is the Father and can act as the Father because there is a Son in the Godhead.<sup>1</sup> In terms of classical (Latin) theology this mutual interdependence of existence is called *coinherence*, or *circumincession*. Explicitly, John 14:10 refers to the mutual indwelling of the Son and the Father. “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” This aspect of incorporation is more technically called *perichoresis* (Greek for

“mutual interpenetration”) in Greek theology and circum-  
incession in Latin thought. Here the point is not a mutual  
interdependence of existence but a mutual interpenetra-  
tion of hypostases and a dynamic fellowship in the divine  
life that exists among the three of the Trinity. Finally, John  
14:10 explicitly refers to the hidden mutual operation of  
the Father and the Son in the open actions of the Son on  
the earth. When the Son spoke openly on the earth, He did  
so by virtue not of His own operation solely but also of the  
operation of His heavenly Father who abides in Him. The  
Son’s action of speaking occurred because the Father oper-  
ated (“does His works”). This mutual operation of the  
three in every action of any one of the Divine Trinity is no  
doubt the most obvious aspect of incorporation to be found  
in the Gospel of John, because so much of the Gospel of  
John relates to the actions of the Son, but it should cer-  
tainly be the case that the mutual operation of the three in  
the Godhead manifests and depends on the other two  
aspects of incorporation, circumincession (coinherence)  
and circumincession (perichoresis).

In the previous article I focused on these three aspects  
of incorporation insofar as they relate to the Son as the  
incorporation of the Father  
in the Gospel of John. This  
appears to be the major mes-  
sage of this Gospel. In ret-  
telling the words and deeds of  
Jesus, it gives us a very full  
and detailed account of the  
incarnate God in action on  
the earth, with ample self-  
testimony of who He actually  
is—the Son who incorporates  
the Father and the Spirit. I believe I was able to show  
this incorporation in Jesus’ divine yet human living, in  
the divine love and in the divine life, in the divine glory,  
in the divine fellowship, in the divine expression, in the  
divine will, in the divine actions, in the divine speaking,  
and in the divine judgment. Hopefully my readers found  
the presentation of the Johannine Jesus as the incarna-  
tion of the Son who incorporates the Divine Trinity in  
His every word and deed persuasive and true.

In this second part of the essay I wish to continue my  
study of incorporation in the Gospel of John, expanding  
my scope to now include the Spirit in His activity to incor-  
porate the operations of the Son and of the Father. Of  
particular interest in this regard will be the Spirit’s actions  
to incorporate the believers into the Son and into the  
Father, thereby making them the reproduction, expansion,  
and physical continuation of the incarnate and incorporate  
Son of God and indeed the organism of the Triune God  
Himself. Hence, we will also be looking at a number of  
texts in the Gospel of John that describe the believers as  
the incorporation of the Triune God. Surprisingly, the

Gospel of John, when examined carefully, is rich in its  
expression of this profound matter.

As I did in the previous article, in the sections below I will  
adopt a catalog-and-commentary format in which I will  
present groups of verses arranged by similar theme, and  
following each group, some comments which I hope will  
bring out the qualities of this incorporation as it relates to  
the Spirit and to the believers. In each group I will arrange  
the verses thematically and not necessarily in the order in  
which they appear in the Gospel of John.

### The Spirit’s Incorporation of the Son

The Gospel of John actually has little to say about the rela-  
tionship between the Son and the Spirit in the life and  
living of the God-man on the earth, and certainly no more  
than the Synoptic Gospels do. Whereas both Matthew and  
Luke comment on the operation of the Holy Spirit in the  
begetting of the Savior (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), John  
is silent regarding His birth, except for the profound and  
sweeping declaration in 1:14: “And the Word became  
flesh.” No doubt, after establishing the fact that the subject

of the Gospel of John is God  
Himself, there is little reason  
to demonstrate divine involve-  
ment in His birth, as Matthew  
and Luke do.<sup>2</sup> Like all three  
Synoptics, John relates the  
operation of the Father and the  
Spirit in the baptism of Jesus  
(1:32-33; Matt. 3:16-17; Mark  
1:10-11; Luke 3:22). In my  
previous article I pointed out

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that these parallel passages demonstrate, according to  
Augustine, that in the manifest action of the Son all three  
of the Trinity operate inseparably, contrary to the popular  
belief that the three of the Godhead are separate and can  
act apart from each other (“Johannine (1)” 41-42). The  
Synoptics tell us that Jesus moved and worked by the Holy  
Spirit (Matt. 4:1; 12:18, 28; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1, 14, 18;  
10:21), but John is less direct in its pronouncements  
regarding the operation of the Spirit in the life and work of  
Jesus. There are at most four passages that comment on  
this, two explicitly and two metaphorically:

For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for  
He gives the Spirit not by measure. (3:34)

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the  
words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.  
(6:63)

Do you say of Him whom the Father has sanctified and  
sent into the world, You are blaspheming, because I said,  
I am the Son of God? (10:36)

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Him has the Father, even God, sealed. (6:27)

The first passage is clearly triadic, referring to the action of the Son to speak the words of God. In this action the Father clearly operates to speak His words; they are “the words of God.” Further, in this speaking the Spirit is given not by measure. It is the Son who gives the Spirit as He speaks, and in doing so He makes manifest that the words He speaks are indeed the very words of God the Father. The Spirit serves to validate the Son’s activity as an operation of the Triune God.

In the second passage a similar operation of the Spirit can be seen. The Lord speaks to the crowds about the divine life that has been offered to humankind from the Father in heaven and declares that He Himself is the very embodiment of that divine life (6:32-33). In verses 50 through 58 He makes clear that by partaking of Him we can enjoy the eternal life of God and live because of Him. But when some of His disciples are stumbled by His words—a hard word indeed, even for us today—the Lord turns them away from the physical realm, where their doubts reside, and unveils the deeper truth, in a mystical realm, concerning His being life to the world: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” Indeed, the Son is life to the world, but He is not life to the world independently. It is distinctly through the operation of the Spirit that the eternal life of the Father is communicated to the believing world. The Scriptures elsewhere affirm this (Rom. 8:2, 11; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 6:8). Hence, Christ is life to the world through the operation of the Spirit as the One who gives life. It is completely misguided to try to separate, in our understanding, the Spirit from the Son in this matter. There is no confusion of the divine hypostases here in the thought of the evangelist, as some may affirm. Nor should we be suspicious of the notion that in the one act of giving life to the world, the three of the Godhead act simultaneously. This is the very point of the triadic existence: They are not separate at all, but each incorporates the operation of the other in His distinct activity of giving life to the world. The Son is life to the world because He incorporates within Himself the life of the begetting Father and the operation of the Spirit to give this life to the world.

The last two passages above refer metaphorically to the operation of the Spirit in the life of the Son. The Son is said to be sanctified and sent into the world by the Father, and the apparent meaning is that the Father has commissioned the Son for His mission into the world. But the language is very exact, and thus there seems to be more here than simple commission, though such a sense is not to be excluded. Sanctification in the Bible involves the activity of the Holy Spirit, the sanctifying Spirit (Rom. 15:16; 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2), and by allusion

the sanctifying operation of the Spirit should probably be understood here as well. Likewise, in the Father’s sealing of the Son, the Spirit’s operation should also be understood in that in the New Testament divine sealing is typically associated with the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Admittedly, as with all metaphors, the proposed significances of these two passages are not without controversy, but these possible allusions to the operation of the Spirit should not be overlooked here where we attempt to show generously the relationship between the Son and the Spirit in the life of the Johannine Jesus.

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, however, the Gospel of John has much to say about the relationship between the Spirit and the Son after the Lord’s resurrection and ascension, in the life of the Christian church. The Synoptics are quite limited in their descriptions regarding the Spirit in the post-resurrection church, not to mention His relationship to the Son in this period. The single most prominent passage in the Synoptic Gospels on the matter is, of course, Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” But apart from this, the only other descriptions of the Spirit in His function in the Christian church are the comments regarding the Spirit supplying utterance to the believers in their coming persecutions (10:20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12) and blasphemy against the Spirit (Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10). The Gospel of John is markedly vocal about the Spirit in the post-resurrection church. This is, in fact, one of the features that distinguishes this Gospel from the Synoptics. Further, its comments about the Spirit in the life of the believers offer fascinating details regarding the Spirit’s relationship to the Son. These details are, I believe, crucial to a proper understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in the Epistles and in a theology of the New Testament as a whole. Unfortunately, many studies concerning the relationship between Christ and the Spirit fail to include the intricate foundation that is laid in the Gospel of John. I submit that many difficulties in the Epistles that involve the relationship between Christ and the Spirit—e.g., Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, to name a few—are alleviated when the view of this relationship in the Gospel of John is brought to bear on the issues. This is, of course, the object of another study, but here it is appropriate to attempt to give full expression to the relationship between Christ and the Spirit as it is presented in the Gospel of John.

Most of the passages we will be examining are from the Lord’s discourse with the disciples on the night before He was crucified (chs. 14–16). This discourse is Jesus’ intimate fellowship with His disciples concerning how they should go on after His betrayal, death, and resurrection. Textually, the narrative episode containing this discourse

begins in 13:1, and chapter 13 contains a substantial amount of dialogue between Jesus and His disciples. But the segmentation of chapter 14 from chapter 13 seems to be linguistically sound, as what follows in chapters 14 through 16 appears to be topically coherent. In these three chapters the Lord details, albeit sometimes in mystical fashion, what is about to happen to Him and how that will affect the disciples once He departs from them physically. The overarching pragmatic force of His discourse is to provide comfort to the disciples, who were no doubt deeply troubled by His enigmatic pronouncements about His betrayal by one of their number (13:21-26) and His being taken away from them (vv. 31-36). Peter had to be particularly troubled by the Lord's prediction that before the new day dawned, he would deny Jesus not once but thrice. We can easily imagine the turmoil that filled the air of Christ's last meal with His disciples, and this gives special impact to the opening words of chapter 14: "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe into God, believe also into Me" (v. 1). It is important to realize that the Lord here functions as a Comforter to the disciples, as their first Paraclete (from Greek *parakletos* for *comforter*). With that in mind, we can now consider a few passages that refer to the Spirit in relation to the Son.

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. (14:16-19)

But I tell you the truth, It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. (16:7)

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. 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. (7:37-39)

In the first passage above, Jesus speaks of "another Comforter," whom He identifies with the Spirit. In calling the Spirit "another Comforter," the Lord makes an implied reference to Himself in His activity at that

moment as the first Comforter of the disciples. But from a larger perspective Christ as the incarnate God is the great Comforter to all humankind in general and to the nation of Israel in particular. The prophecy of His coming is preceded by a solemn proclamation of comfort: "Comfort, oh, comfort My people, / Says your God" (Isa. 40:1); this then is followed by the unique announcement of the Messiah's advent. The resurrected and ascended Christ is directly referred to as the Paraclete for the believers in 1 John 2:1, where the Greek term is generally translated *Advocate*, though the basic notion of comfort is not to be ignored. The Lord speaks of "another Comforter" because He is the first Comforter, and His activity to comfort them will not cease when He soon departs from them, but will continue in that He, the Lord, will operate in the activity of the Spirit to be "another Comforter" to them. Further, this other Comforter is the Spirit of reality, literally, in Greek, the Spirit of the reality. Only a few moments before, the Lord had declared to His disciples that He is the reality (14:6). Now He tells them that the Spirit is the Spirit of the reality and that, as such, this Spirit will be another Comforter to them. The implication is that the Spirit will be able to continue what

Christ was doing among them because the Spirit is the essence of the reality that Christ was to them.

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The Lord tells His disciples that in asking the Father to give them the Spirit of reality as the other Comforter, He will not leave them as orphans. But the natural sense of this—

that the Spirit will come to take His place when He has gone from them—cannot be what He means. He goes on to say, "I am coming to you." In this context, in this juxtaposition of clauses, we should not dismiss this as a reference to His second coming. That would be extremely facile. Clearly, the Lord is declaring that the Father's giving of the Spirit is actually His (the Son's) own coming to them. (Again, the triadic operation should be noticed.) Does the Lord Himself here confuse the persons of the Trinity, or are we to bend the meaning of His words to avoid doing so ourselves? Neither possibility should be considered, for the underlying notion in the Lord's words is that the Spirit's future action in the disciples will be at the same time the Son's operation. The Spirit's coming will not be His separate activity but will depend on and even exist as the operation of the Son and of the Father. Who is this Spirit whom the world cannot receive because it does not behold Him or know Him, and whom the disciples know because He abides with them and shall be in them? He is the One whom the world, in yet a little while, would behold no longer and whom the disciples beheld at that moment, and this, because as the Lord spoke there in

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their midst, the Spirit was also there with them, operating in the Lord's actions. The world could not behold the Spirit at that time because it did not acknowledge and believe that the man before them was the very God Himself, the very God whose every action incorporates the operation of the Spirit and who thus made the Spirit available, i.e., visible and knowable, to those who believed. By the same token, when the Lord's physical presence was later removed from them, His actual presence did not cease because the Father gave the Spirit of reality to them, and this Spirit acts completely by the operation of the Son. This is not mere representation, as many would have it in order to preserve a notion of separate persons of the Godhead; the Spirit is not the delegate of the Son. Rather, this is mutual presence and operation, though admittedly the agent of the divine action, at one time the Son in the Gospels, is now the Spirit. The disciples were being encouraged to take comfort in the Lord's mystical coming to them in the activity of the Spirit and not to be troubled by His physical departure from them. He was not leaving them at all, except in the physical sense; He was indeed coming to them, but He would do so in the mystical sense of His operation in the activity of the Spirit of reality as their other Comforter.

**H**ere we should pause to consider the distinctions in agency between the Son and the Spirit that are implied in this passage. While the Son was on the earth, incarnate as a man, the operations of the three of the Trinity worked to manifest the single actions of the Son, as Augustine has helped us to understand (110). According to the wisdom of the Godhead, the Son's activity was to be among the disciples on the earth and was to include His human death and resurrection for our redemption. In doing so, the Son functioned in human form as He does eternally in the Godhead—to manifest the Father by the Spirit. In this activity God in His Trinity could be at most among human beings. Although this was indeed precious and altogether wonderful, the Son's human activity was limited to the physical realm; although He was among human beings, He was to remain apart from them. This is the constraint of the physical realm. But the Spirit, as the essence of the Divine Trinity and because He functions as the communication and the fellowship within the Godhead, is not constrained by the physical realm, and it is distinctly His role to bear and communicate the Godhead—the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—to humankind, not merely as an external power, as He did in the Old Testament dispensation, but as the inner, divine life, content, and essence of those who by faith receive Him inwardly. Again, He comes to them not separately but bearing the Father and the Son with Him, who operate continually in His every action within the regenerated believers. Lest we now confuse the distinctions of the Godhead in our understanding of the activity of the Spirit within the believers, we must

assert that the Son still functions as He does eternally, to manifest the Father by the Spirit; and that the Father still functions as He does eternally, to be the very source of the Godhead; and that the Spirit still functions as He does eternally, to be the very essence of the Trinity and to communicate the Father in the Son. Thus, in the New Testament age, when Christ has resurrected and ascended to the Father, the Spirit indwells the believers and moves and acts within them by the operation of the Son and the Father. The testimony of the New Testament writers is that the Spirit is in the believers (Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:14) and that the Son is in the believers (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27). Thus, at one moment the Lord tells His disciples that when the Spirit of reality comes, the Spirit will be in them; and in the same breath He can say that He is coming to them and that they will still behold Him. He can say that because He will live beyond death, they also will live because of Him. The Spirit will be in them, but He also will be in them; the Spirit will act within them, but He too will operate within them, in the activities of the Spirit. The Divine Triad is not sundered, nor are the distinct roles of each of the three violated or obscured.

**I**n the second passage above, the Lord speaks concerning what will benefit the disciples the most, the coming of the Comforter. After acknowledging that sorrow has filled the disciples' hearts (16:6), He declares that it is expedient for them that He go to the Father (cf. v. 7). Certainly His being in the flesh with them was of great benefit, but here He speaks of the benefit of His going back to the Father, because in doing so the Comforter will be able to come to them. The question arises: Why would the Lord's going away be necessary for the Spirit's coming? If what we have seen above is true, the Spirit was there with the disciples, operating in the Son's every action. But before the Spirit could come to the disciples and be distinctly another Comforter to them, the Lord had to depart from the disciples and return to the Father. This, of course, happened through His death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus, the important factor to note in the Spirit's coming is the relationship between it and the Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension. This relationship is specifically alluded to in the next passage above, where we are told that "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." I have devoted some space in this journal to this difficult passage ("Christ"); thus, I need not grapple again with the theological issues that underlie it. But one thing is without controversy: the Spirit's coming to infill the believers is dependent on Jesus' glorification, which followed His death, resurrection, and ascension. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the Spirit comes to the believers not merely in His role as the third of the Divine Trinity (though certainly in that role); more significantly He comes also bearing the glorified Jesus, who operates now in the actions of the Spirit not simply

as the divine second of the Trinity but also as a glorified man. In this way the Spirit who dwells in the believers can be an even greater Comforter to them than Jesus could be physically to His disciples because He not only indwells them intimately but also fully bears with Himself what it is to be human in the most proper sense and can fully identify with our condition. Paul refers to this when detailing the Spirit's work in the believers: "Moreover, in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26). This is not the comfort of a sympathetic friend, but the comfort of One who is within us as a fellow participant in our trials and tribulations and in whose actions are the operations of the tested and victorious humanity of the incarnate Son of God. Indeed, it was expedient, beneficial, and advantageous for us that Jesus return in His humanity to the Father and that as the glorified God-man He send the Spirit to us. Now the Spirit is within us not separately from the Son as some deputized representative but in all His actions fully incorporating the Son, who Himself expresses the divine Father and lives forever as a glorified and victorious man.

The next three passages speak directly of the Spirit's function to incorporate the Son in His activities within the believers.

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. (14:26)

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. (15:26)

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. He will glorify Me, for He will receive of Mine and will declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine; for this reason I have said that He receives of Mine and will declare it to you. (16:13-15)

The Spirit is said to remind the disciples of all the things that the Son had said to them, to testify concerning the Son, to glorify the Son, and to receive what is the Son's and declare it to the believers. These, we should understand, are the factors of the Spirit's incorporation of the Son within the believers. The Spirit does not come to

the believers to speak independently, that is, to speak from Himself; rather, He communicates what He hears, which are the things that the Son declares from the Father. Again, a separable view of the Trinity fails to account for this intimate internal fellowship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, which is now declared within the believers. What we see in these passages, particularly the third above, is that the Father communicates all that He possesses in the Godhead, in wisdom, and in operation, to the Son, and that these divine "goods" are as well the divine possession of the Son,<sup>3</sup> who likewise communicates in the Spirit all that He possesses. The Spirit declares, or makes fully known, these divine "goods" within the believers. Thus, what is the Spirit in the believers, except the incorporation of the Divine Trinity, not bodily before their eyes but spiritually within them? This is at least one factor (though not at all the full extent) of His distinction among the three of the Godhead, at least in the economical sense of God's full salvation. We would be far off the mark if we accepted the commonly held view that the Spirit dwells in the believers as the separate but most faithful representative of God the Father and God the Son. Nothing could be further from the truth, and nothing could be closer to base tritheism.

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Instead, as we have seen in the life of the Son as a man on the earth, when each of the three acts distinctly, He incorporates the operation of the other two. And thus it is when the Spirit indwells the believers and moves within them for God's purpose: the Father and the Son operate to make the Spirit indwell and move within the

believers. His action manifests the operations of all three of the Godhead within the believers.

### *An Interlude on the Sending of the Spirit*

As we examine the Spirit's function to incorporate the Son and the Father in His activities, we should step away a little from the immediate topic to consider the sending of the Spirit by the Father and by the Son. This is not particularly related to our topic here, the Spirit's incorporation of the Father and the Son, but it does relate to the mutual operation of the Father and the Son and thus has much to do with incorporation in the internal life of the Divine Trinity. Students of church history will recognize the issue here as that of the *filioque*, which has split the Christian church into East and West on theological grounds. For those unfamiliar with the issue, the Latin term *filioque* was an addition to the Constantinopolitan creed, first noted historically in the sixth century in Spain, though it is certain that the notion it represents is much earlier. The term is translated "and from the Son" and was inserted in the creed's statement regarding the procession of the Holy

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Spirit, yielding the Western form: “who proceeds from the Father and from the Son [*qui ex patre filioque procedit*].” The churches in the East, mainly Greek-speaking, did not accept the addition, arguing that it destroyed the distinctions between the Father and the Son in relation to the procession of the Holy Spirit. The West asserts the double-procession of the Spirit, from both the Father and the Son, while the East maintains that the Spirit proceeds only from the Father as the fount of the Divine Trinity albeit through the Son. The controversy formed and still constitutes the major theological basis for the schism between the eastern and western halves of the Christian church.

**I**t would be presumptuous to attempt to reconcile a debate that has seen no resolution in over a thousand years, but some statements can be made about the mutual operations of the Divine Trinity in the procession of the Holy Spirit. First, the Scriptures declare that both the Father and the Son send the Spirit. However, the Father is said to send the Spirit in the Son’s name (14:26), while the Son is said to send the Spirit from the Father (15:26); thus, there are clear distinctions between the Father and the Son in the sending of the Spirit. But the operation of each in the one action of sending the Spirit, while certainly distinct, is nevertheless relative to the other. In the Father’s operation of sending the Spirit, He operates in the Son’s name. This is quite mysterious, and the natural notion of the phrase—something akin to taking the Father as the deputy of the Son—can hardly be accepted. The Father is in no way sending the Spirit as some representative or delegate of the Son. *In My name* must be understood in some deeper way. I suggest that the phrase alludes to the Son’s activity to incorporate the Father’s operation in the sending of the Spirit. Thus, when the Father sends the Spirit in the Son’s name, He does so in the Son’s person and action; He operates in the Son’s distinct action to send the Spirit. On the other hand, when the Son sends the Spirit, His operation is certainly distinct, but the distinction is nevertheless relative to the Father; He sends the Spirit “from the Father.” Again, this is very mysterious, but the phrase *from the Father* implies that the Father is the source of the Spirit. Later in the same verse the same notion is expressed: “who proceeds from the Father.” This is not to say (as the Greeks say) that the Spirit proceeds solely from the Father and not from the Son. While here the text is silent on the Spirit proceeding from the Son, some can say (as the Latin West says) that such procession is implied in other passages and thus likewise true. I do not wish to defend (or oppose) either view; rather, I wish to point out that in the sending of the Spirit (1) both the Father and the Son operate, and (2) each operates in such a way as to incorporate the operation of the other. Further—and this is almost obvious—the Spirit, in His procession from the Father (and from the Son?), incorporates the operations of the Father and the Son.

Who then actually sends the Spirit—the Father, the Son, both? The simple answer is yes, yes, and yes. But upon closer examination, according to the Scripture, it appears that the Son is the agent—the One who does the action—of the sending, even though the Father can be said to operate in His action. On the day of His resurrection, the Lord appeared to His disciples and gave them the Spirit through His breathing into them.

Then Jesus said to them again, Peace be to you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you. And when He had said this, He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. (20:21-22)

In this passage the Son is clearly the agent of the sending of the Spirit, but based on all that we have seen above, we must understand that in this action the Father was operating; yet He operated in the Son’s name, that is, in the Son’s person and action. Further, we must understand that even though the Son was the agent of this sending, He sent the Spirit from the Father, and thus the Spirit can be said to proceed from the Father.

**T**his sending in the Gospel of John is one aspect of the Spirit’s coming—His coming to infill the disciples as the inner life for their living in and with the Divine Trinity. There is another aspect recorded in Acts, where some fifty days later the Spirit is poured out *on* the disciples for their empowering in the work of God’s economy. This action, according to Peter’s testimony, is also assigned to the Son: “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He has poured out this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:33). Again, although it is the Son who acts to pour out the Spirit, He most certainly does so by the Father’s operation. “The promise of the Father” is the pouring out of the Spirit, as prophesied in Joel 2:29 and quoted by Peter earlier in his speaking to the Jews (Acts 2:17). This pouring out of the Spirit was “received” by the Son and executed by Him on the day of Pentecost. Thus, the Son in pouring out the Spirit incorporated the operation of the Father, and the Father can be said to have also poured out the Spirit; only He did so in the Son’s person and action, in the Son’s name.

Finally, we should also consider Paul’s word to the Galatians concerning the sending of the Spirit: “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” (4:6). This is beautifully complex. God sends the Spirit, but the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son, and His cry is the cry of the Son. Hence, the Spirit incorporates the operation of the Son to cry out His personal relationship with the Father (cf. Mark 14:36). This cry is in our very hearts, giving us the assurance that we are God’s sons as well. Thus, His cry is not objective within us, but our own subjective cry, whereby

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our hearts cry out “Abba, Father!” to our divine Father. In doing so, we incorporate the operations of the Son and of the Spirit, and all this is part of the Father’s operation to send the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. Who acts? Who operates? Based on what we have seen here in Galatians, when the Spirit acts to enter the believers, He comes acting to manifest the operations of the Son to cry out and of the Father to do the sending; and based on what we have seen in the Gospel of John, His coming is at the same moment the action of the Son (though certainly Paul does not make this point here) to send the Spirit by the operation of the Father in His (the Son’s) person and action, and from the Father. But in a real sense, it is pleasant to simply leave the persons of the Trinity beautifully interwoven and the distinctions of their actions unresolved, and to enjoy the sweet experience of incorporation that we as believers can. Hopefully, every believer has tasted the sweet enjoyment of crying out to God as his or her dear and divine Father. When this happens, perhaps in our participation in the Lord’s table, we should realize that this deep cry is actually the incorporation of the Son’s own crying out of “Abba, Father!” through the actions of the Spirit in our hearts and that this sweet experience is nothing less than our dear Father’s sending of the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.

### **The Believers in the Incorporation of the Divine Trinity**

My previous article and what has been said thus far in this article relate to the incorporation of the three of the Divine Trinity as seen in the Gospel of John. For the most part, these observations do not relate to the believers but mainly show how each of the three incorporate the operations of the other two in every action. Hopefully, these observations have helped to dispel the false notion that the inner life and activity of the Triune God are the separate actions of three separate persons. It is important when we consider any action of God, be it the action of the Father or of the Son or of the Spirit, that we firmly and consciously hold these truths concerning their incorporation in view. Each exists in mutual interdependence on the other two. There is a Father because there is a Son and a Spirit, there is a Son because there is a Father and a Spirit, and there is a Spirit because there is a Father and a Son. Each mutually indwells the other two. The Father is in the Son and the Spirit, the Son is in the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is in the Father and the Son. And each acts by the mutual operation of the other two. The Father does everything in the Son and by the Spirit, the Son does everything with the Father and by the Spirit, and the Spirit does everything as the Son and from the Father. Certainly the Bible does not

*The Gospel of John speaks of the believers in an altogether mystical way, describing them as the very extension of the incorporation that He was when He was on the earth. The believers are to live, act, and even exist according to the operations of the Divine Trinity within them.*

explicitly relate the coinherence, perichoresis, and mutual operation of the three when it recounts every action of any one of the three. But taken as a whole, and particularly in view of the Lord’s self-testimony in the Gospel of John, the Scriptures present a very solid testimony of the incorporation of the three of the Divine Trinity. This is what we should understand regarding the life and activity of the Triune God, because it is based on the Scriptures, and we should reject what has come to Christian minds naturally, particularly in the modern era, that the three are separate, that the three act independently, and that the three at most represent the other two in Christian experience. These are notions that derive not from minds that grapple with the mystery of God based on the testimony of the Holy Scriptures but from minds that give no further attention to the mystery than they would to three revered friends whom they know only in the natural and physical realm. The tendency toward tritheism, so prevalent in the thought of many Christians today, is due not to the impenetrability of the divine mystery—that is only the excuse for many Christians—but to indolence and great disinterest. Certainly we cannot fully fathom the mystery of the Divine Trinity, but we can do much better, with the help of the Scriptures, than falling into the purely natural and simply wrong concepts that are commonly held today.

**B**ut the Gospel of John testifies not only of the incorporation of the Divine Trinity but also of the believers’ participation in, enjoyment of, and own activity by

this divine incorporation. In what follows, I wish to explore this side of the divine incorporation. My intention in doing so is to suggest a way of Christian life which is interwoven with the incorporate operations of the Divine Trinity and which thereby manifests the Divine Trinity. Like the natural and false notions regarding the Trinity that are held today, the concept of the Christian life that many believers hold to and live by presents the believer as someone who lives and acts in a purely ethical realm and who faintly represents God somehow. To many Christians this is the essence of the Christian life, and to suggest anything more than this is foreign and undesirable. But the Jesus of the Gospel of John speaks of the believers in an altogether mystical way, describing them as the very extension of the incorporation that He was when He was on the earth in the flesh. They are not independent ethical agents of God on earth, representing Him—usually poorly—to a world that is about the same as they are in demeanor and behavior. Rather, the believers are to live, act, and even exist according to the operations of the Divine Trinity within them. This is what we hope to see in the sections below.



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### *In Their Being Drawn to and Held in God's Salvation*

How human beings enter into salvation and how they are maintained in salvation have been sources of great controversy ever since Luther and Calvin, respectively, first attended to these matters in the sixteenth century. The Gospel of John provides some clues concerning God's operation in the matters, and again the operation is incorporate.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing but should raise it up in the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes into Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day...And He said, For this reason I have told you that no one can come to Me unless it has been given to him from the Father. (6:37-40, 65)

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." (6:44-45)

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. (12:32)

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be. And where I am going you know the way. Thomas said to Him, Lord, we do not know where You are going; how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me. (14:3-6)

And I give to them eternal life, and they shall by no means perish forever, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and the Father are one. (10:28-30)

According to our personal experience of accepting the Lord as our Savior (if we have the experience), it seems that we are in control of our destinies and that we ourselves make the most outstanding and singly eternal decision of our lives. But whether or not we realize or acknowledge it, the Triune God operates on us to bring us to Himself for salvation. Certainly we act to come to the Lord, but this coming is motivated by a transaction within the Divine Trinity whereby the Father gives us to the Son, and unless the Father gives us to the Son, we cannot come to Him. It may be impossible to explain

precisely what this means, but in some divine and mystical sense the Father and the Son operate jointly here to bring about our coming to the Son for salvation. And in the matter of salvation, as in all divine actions, the Son does not do His own will but the will of the divine Father, which is that the divine Son would lose nothing but would raise up each in the last day. Again, we see the incorporating action of each. The Father, who wills, wills in relation to the Son, and the Son, who comes to humankind, comes in relation to the Father. Further, the will of the Father is that everyone who beholds the Son and believes into Him would gain the saving eternal life, which life is indeed the life of the Father Himself. The Father's life is experienced only through our experience of the Son, for the Son, in bringing life to the believers, does so by the operation of the Father, who is within Him by incorporation.

The Father also operates to draw human beings to the Son, and it is not possible for anyone to come to the Son unless this drawing takes place. While one must choose to accept God's salvation, one cannot do so unless he or she is being drawn by the Father to the Son.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the believer incorporates the operation of the Father in his or her own action to come to the Son and accept Him as Savior. But there is an added wrinkle in this, because in 12:32 the Son declares that He draws all human beings to Himself. After all that has been said about the mutual operation of the Father and the Son, there should be no confusion when we read this passage. The Father draws, and this we should understand to be His distinct action. But in so acting, the Father incorporates the Son's operation, as He does in every distinct action of His, and because of this incorporation the Son can be said to draw all human beings to Himself as well. We should not view these as two separate actions of two separate persons in the Godhead; rather, this is one divine activity that incorporates the operations of both, who mutually exist and mutually indwell one another. And amazingly, in coming to the Savior, the believer actually lives out this mutual operation of the Father and the Son drawing him or her, and participates in the divine incorporation.<sup>5</sup>

The believers come to the Son, but in point of fact, He is not the actual goal of their coming. He tells His disciples that He is going away so that He might prepare a place for them, so that where He is they also may be. He is going to the Father, and His intention is to bring the believers into the Father with Him. Thus, when they come to Him, they are coming to Him not as their goal but as the way to the Father as the goal. He tells them that they know the way because they know Him. And in making it clear that He is the way to the Father, He again intimates that He is not the Son of God separably but in relation to the Father and that He incorporates the Father

and functions to bring humankind to Him. He is quite bold and, I would say, exclusive in that He claims that no one comes to the Father except through Him. As the Son of God He not only provides but actually is the only access to the Father, because He is not merely the way but also the reality and the life of the Father. He does not merely point the way to or usher the believers into the presence of the Father. He is the access to the Father because in His being He incorporates the full reality of the Father and the very life of the Father, and when the believers come to Him, He does for them what He does eternally in the Godhead, that is, manifests the full reality and life of the Father.

This aspect of the divine incorporation should be coupled with what we have seen concerning the Spirit as the incorporation of the Son and the Father in His function as the Spirit of reality and the Spirit of life. Taken together, these aspects constitute the full experience of the believers in coming to the Son, an experience that relies on and manifests the incorporation of the Divine Trinity. When human beings turn to God, they do so by the operations of the Divine Trinity—the Father in the Son drawing them through the sanctifying actions of the Spirit. When they turn to God, it is not a general turning to the Almighty but a specific coming to the Father in the Son, who is the very reality and life of the Father, and this reality and life is borne to them, not as some thought construct but as the divine reality and the divine life, by the Spirit of reality and of life. He comes not just to them but into them, into their very spirit and heart, bringing the fullness of the Godhead, in reality and life, into them. He does not represent the Father and the Son to the believers but by His inward actions bears their actual operations within them. Through this incorporation of Father, Son, and Spirit, the believers, now indwelt by the Spirit, are genuinely where the Son is now—in the Father.

Once the Son gives the believers the eternal life, He holds them securely in His hand, and in the same breath, He says that they are also held in the Father's hand. These are not two separate actions but one divine action accomplished by the operations of the Son and the Father. The Son's striking declaration that He and the Father are one refers to their economical activity specifically applied to the securing of the believers in the eternal life, but it is indicative of every action of God, as we have seen. And their economical oneness is based on the coinherence, perichoresis, and mutual operation that exist among the three of the Divine Trinity immanently.

### *In Their Apprehending, Believing, and Knowing God*

The Gospel of John is quite particular in its description of what the believers should perceive, believe, and know about the God who saves them, and it goes far beyond the simple assent that many believers hold as the contents of their faith today and which the disciples themselves declared to the Lord in the Gospel record: "And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (6:69). While this is precious enough in itself, it is only a basic affirmation of the faith. The Gospel of John leads us to see, believe, and know much more about the Son, and this greater understanding is completely related to the divine incorporation.

No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all the things which I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. (15:15)

These things I have spoken to you in parables; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in parables, but I will report to you plainly concerning the Father. (16:25)

*The Spirit does not represent the Father and the Son to the believers but by His inward actions bears their actual operations within them. Through this incorporation of Father, Son, and Spirit, the believers, now indwelt by the Spirit, are where the Son is—in the Father.*

They said then to Him, Where is Your Father? Jesus answered, You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also. (8:19)

But Jesus cried out and said, He who believes into Me does not believe into Me, but into

Him who sent Me; and he who beholds Me beholds Him who sent Me. (12:44-45)

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe into God, believe also into Me. (14:1)

If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, even if you do not believe Me, believe the works so that you may come to know and continue to know that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father. (10:37-38)

If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and henceforth you know Him and have seen Him. 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? 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

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Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe because of the works themselves. (14:7-11)

In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. (14:20)

In my previous article I attempted to show that when the Son acted on the earth, He manifested the operations of the Father within Him. There is perhaps no better verse that describes this than 14:10: “The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works.” The Son stood on the earth speaking, but the Father within Him was working, operating, so that the Son’s speaking could be manifest. Further, what the Son spoke were not His own words; rather, He spoke from the Father, and the content of His speaking was the Father’s speaking. In the first two passages above, the Lord refers to this action of speaking to the disciples from the Father. In His speaking the Father’s “voice” could be heard because He spoke what He heard from the Father. But though His speaking on the earth manifested the operation of the Father within Him, this was not apparent to the disciples apart from His testimony concerning it; thus, He spoke of a time to come when His speaking would plainly manifest the Father’s operation. This time is, of course, after His death and resurrection, when He is borne by the Spirit into His believers and through the Spirit manifests in the most intimate way the Father’s working in His own speaking within them.

**T**he Gospel of John makes it clear that if we do not know the Jesus of this Gospel in relation to the Father whom He incorporates, we do not know Him fully. In the third passage above, He told the Pharisees that they did not know Him and that they did not know the Father, because to know Him is to know the Father. This is a very striking charge, considering that the Pharisees would have viewed themselves as those who knew God best, according to their religion. But Judaism, then and now, fails to fully apprehend God in that it fails to see that God is triune, that Jesus is the Son of God, and that the Son of God incorporates God the Father. But even the Synoptic Gospels do not go as far as the Gospel of John in stressing that Jesus is not simply the Son of God but more significantly the Son who incorporates the Father, and that to know this Jesus is to know the Father. It is not that the Gospel of John blurs the distinction between the Son and the Father, as some may hastily suspect; rather, it is that this Gospel focuses on who the Son really is and how He really exists and acts. He has no separate existence and no separate action from the Father, but is the Son by virtue of the Father and acts as the Son by the operation of the Father within Him. If we wish to know the incarnate Son of God properly and as fully as we are able, we must know that the Father operates in His every action, and that because He completely incorporates the Father in His

own existence and activity, knowing Him amounts to knowing the Father. By the same token, as the fourth passage above indicates, when we believe in the Son, we are not taking just Him as the object of our faith but are believing also into the Father whom He incorporates. The fifth passage indicates the converse: if we believe in the Father, we must also believe in the Son. As the sixth passage implies, when we believe into God, we more narrowly must believe into the Son. Faith, as that unique faculty to apprehend what is not seen, allows the believers to behold in the Son not just the Son but the Father who operates in Him. Again, it is not that when the Son acts, He represents the Father and gives us an indirect view of who the Father is. When He acts, He does so by the operation of the Father, and thus when we behold Him, we behold the Father in operation. This is what we must believe concerning the Son, that He incorporates the Father, and that when we behold Him, lo, we are beholding the Father Himself.

The last three passages above are striking in that they indicate that the believers should have some realization of the divine incorporation in their understanding of who God is. All that we have been saying here could easily be dismissed as esoteric theology, and many may be inclined to think that the incorporation of the Divine Trinity is purely speculative and hardly something that the common believer should give attention to. But the Lord seems to desire that the believers would be consciously aware of this divine condition in the Godhead. Because of who He is, how He exists, and how He acts, He does not want the believers to know only about Him or only about the Father whom He expresses; He wants them to know something about the “texture” in the Divine Trinity, that is, that the Father is in Him and that He is in the Father. He expected that those to whom He ministered would recognize this divine incorporation in His actions. Even if they could not believe Him directly, He expected that His works would manifest who He was in relation to the Father. The works that He did certainly required the operation of God, and if those who witnessed His works understood this properly, they would have realized that there was more to them than His own operation. Yet at least some of His closest disciples did not realize this. Philip, who certainly knew that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah of God (1:45), failed to perceive who Jesus actually was and could only view God the Father as separate from Jesus of Nazareth. The Lord tried to correct his view, exhorting him and the others (the verbs are plural in 14:11) to know and believe that He was there among them as the incorporation of the Father, being in the Father and having the Father in Him.

**S**hortly thereafter, the Lord speaks of what believers later (including us today) should understand concerning Him and, more subjectively, what they should understand concerning themselves. *In that day* in the last

passage above refers to the period that commences from the day of His resurrection, when He came to His disciples with the Spirit (14:16-19; 20:19-22). With the Spirit indwelling them, the disciples of Christ are now able to perceive internally that Christ is in the Father. Yet something more now obtains, for with the Spirit within them the believers have now been incorporated into Christ and He into them. Through His death and resurrection, and through His coming to them in the Spirit, He has incorporated them into Himself and has introduced them into the divine incorporation that He and the Father enjoy. In this day we should know that Christ is in the Father, that we are in Christ (Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:17), and that Christ is in us (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27). Not only is the Divine Trinity an incorporation of divine being and operation, but we the believers who have been baptized into the Divine Trinity (Matt. 28:19; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) have been brought into that same incorporation through God's economic operations. Certainly, we have not become a part of the Godhead—He is uniquely and distinctly God by His own eternal self-existence and divine substance—but He invites us to participate in His existence and operation through His Spirit and His divine life, which now makes us His sons and His partners in the divine economy. While He exists and operates in the way of divine incorporation by virtue of His own self-being and through His own self-possessed divine substance, we participate in the divine incorporation not by virtue of what we are or what we do apart from Him (John 15:5) but purely by virtue of His divine triadic operation to indwell us through His Spirit, to regenerate us with His life, and to make us partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). He is an incorporation by virtue of His own self-existence, and we are brought into this incorporation by virtue of His wondrous grace.

The Lord says that in that day we will know something of the divine incorporation and of our own incorporation into Him. But in what sense can it really be said that we “know” these things? Very few Christians have even the slightest clue about the divine incorporation and about their entry into it by grace through faith. Certainly this understanding is not something that comes naturally to the Christian mind much less to the human mind. But the Lord's words, at least in the original Greek, give us some indication of how we should know these things. Here in 14:20 *know* in Greek (*ginosko*) refers to a kind of knowledge that comes in non-subjective ways. It is not knowledge that comes through one's personal intuition, as another common Greek verb for *know* (*oida*) means; it is not knowledge that “dawns” on a person inwardly and naturally. Rather, it is

knowledge that is acquired through other, non-personal means. Perhaps the distinction can be drawn by contrasting paraphrases of each verb. The Lord did not say that we would realize these things but that we would find them out. Finding them out requires means beyond our own subjective powers to intuit. These means can be physical, such as hearing or seeing, but they can also be non-physical, such as the Spirit's operation in our hearts. Although inward, the Spirit's revelatory function is non-subjective, because He is the One who reveals, not we. The Lord declares that we will know the incorporation of God and of the believers into God not as some inward realization but as something communicated to us by non-subjective means. This should be something that we come to know both through the teaching of the divine truth in the church and through the Spirit's particular function to declare these things to the believers within them (16:12-15). My honest hope is that this article itself participates in this grand operation, that through it my readers will know that Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Him, and that we are all in Him and He is in us all. I pray that the Spirit will operate to whisper inwardly in my readers and confirm this marvelous reality.

*We participate in the divine incorporation not by virtue of what we are or what we do apart from Him but purely by virtue of His divine triadic operation to indwell us through His Spirit, to regenerate us with His life, and to make us partakers of His divine nature.*

*In Their Living Because of God and Being Supplied by God*

The New Testament believers are not simply persons who hold to a system of Christian beliefs but more intrinsically persons who are regenerated with the life of God. For this

reason the New Testament more typically refers to them as sons of God or children of God rather than as believers. In the Gospel of John the believers' relationship to God is characterized as a relationship in life, and their belief in God is shown to result in their participation in the life of God. But this participation in the divine life is actually the believers' participation in the divine incorporation. The believers are said to live because of their incorporation into God, and they are supplied with the divine life on an ongoing basis because of this incorporation.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that everyone who believes into Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes into Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed into the name of the only begotten Son of God. (3:14-18)

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He who believes into the Son has eternal life. (3:36)

As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. (6:57)

Because I live, you also shall live. (14:19)

Jesus therefore said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses has not given you the bread out of heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world. They said therefore to Him, Lord, give us this bread always. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall by no means hunger, and he who believes into Me shall by no means ever thirst. (6:32-35)

But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life. (4:14)

He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. 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. (7:38-39)

The believer gains the eternal life based upon the redemptive death of Christ, and the entire process is an action of incorporation among the Divine Trinity and the believer, as the first passage above indicates. According to Christ's own testimony, the chief purpose of His death was to make the eternal life of God available to His believers. The redemptive death of Christ was certainly judicial, obtaining for us the forgiveness of our sins. But here in the Gospel of John His death is characterized in an organic way as bringing eternal life to the believers. The accomplishment of this organic action depends on the operations of the Divine Trinity and the believers. As I pointed out in my previous article, here in John the death of Christ is not viewed simply as the action of the Son but as the action of the implied Father to lift up the Son on the cross ("Johannine (1)" 49). The operations of both were needed.<sup>6</sup> But in order for the organic action of enlivening the believers to be accomplished, the believers must also operate; they must believe in order to gain the eternal life that was released through the death of Christ by the operation of the Divine Trinity. And their believing action is interwoven with the operations of the Triune God, because while they believe into the Son, it is the life of the Father that they gain, and it is the Spirit who in reality enters into them as this life, bearing God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—into them. The second passage above refers succinctly again to the incorporating operations of faith.

The first passage further characterizes the whole mission of the Son as a single organic action to bring the eternal life to the believers, and this, through the incorporating operations of the Trinity. God the Father loved the world, and His action of love is to give His only begotten Son and send Him into the world. The Son's mission is not to condemn the world but to operate so that at least some in the world may act to believe into Him and receive the life of the divine Father. Without their believing action, which, as we have seen, incorporates the drawing of the Father in the Son by the Spirit, the incorporate operations of the Trinity to bring the eternal life to them are not effective; those who do not believe are not saved by God but are condemned already, as all humankind is apart from these incorporating operations of the Divine Trinity and the believing human being. Finally, the first passage makes use of the formula *into the name of the only begotten Son of God*, and again I would like to suggest that this is not a pleonasm but a reference to the person of the Son in His operation to accomplish the giving of the Father's eternal life to the believers.

The third and fourth passages show that the believers live by the eternal life because the Son lives by the divine Father; their living by the eternal life manifests His living by the Father. Again, these are the incorporating operations of the Divine Trinity in the living of the believers. The believers live because the Son lives, and the Son lives because of the living Father, the Father who has life and lives by His own self-existence as the divine source of the Trinity. Further, the believers must act ("eat") in order to live because of the Son. Thus, their action has its divine organic effect because of the Son who operates within it to give them the divine life of the Father. How the believers "eat" the Lord has been variously interpreted across the centuries, but regardless of method, eating the Lord has its organic effect because of the Son's operation to give life through it. This action by the believers mirrors in some way what happened in the human life of Christ, who lived because of the operation of the living Father who sent Him. The text does not explicitly tell us in what way the Son lived because of the Father, but perhaps we would not be far off if we assumed, based on the parallelism of the sentence here, that He as a man "ate" the Father in some sense and, by doing so, lived because of the Father. His own declaration elsewhere concerning not just humankind in general but He Himself as a man under temptation seems to support this notion: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

The final three passages above demonstrate that in their being continually supplied with the divine life, the believers participate in the incorporating operations of the Divine Trinity. The fifth passage precedes the third one in the running narrative of the Gospel of John and is part of

the long discourse in chapter 6 on being fed by God the Father with the Son as the true bread from heaven. Israel's experience in the wilderness (Exo. 16) serves as the background to this discourse. Israel's entire physical existence depended on the mysterious bread that fell from heaven daily, and this was a figure of how the New Testament believers live daily on the supply of the divine life that comes from heaven in the person of the Son of God. He is the true bread of God, given by the Father and communicating the eternal life of the Father to the believers. This bread incorporates the life of the Father. But again the believers must act to eat this bread by coming to the Son, and in their action, they enjoy the life-giving operations of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Their action incorporates the operations of the Divine Trinity to give them life.

In the sixth passage the supply of life to the believers is likened to the flowing out of subterranean waters. The believers act by drinking of the water that the Son gives them, and this water, given by the Son and, shall we say, sourced in the Father, becomes a flow of water within the believers which has two explicit and one implied operations. The deep fountain of this divine water of life is, of course, the Father, the unseen source of the visible spring on the surface. He constantly supplies, and without His primal and continual operation there can be no surface spring and no flowing out. (It is difficult not to mix the Signified and the signifier here.) But what is manifest is the surface spring, which signifies the Son in His distinct role of manifesting the hidden Father. He springs out as the abundant water of life on the earth among humankind. These two operations are explicit in the text, but a third is implied in the preposition *into*, which points to the flowing out of the spring to produce a watered plain on the earth, a realm of life in which everything can grow. In the divine economy this flowing out is the operation of the Spirit, who as the Spirit of life makes the water of life available to the believer and brings the believer into the blessed realm of eternal life, where he or she is supplied and can grow as a divine-human plant (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6-9). But we must remember that all these marvelous operations take place within the believer; the water that the Son gives becomes "in him" this water of triadic operations. The believer as the watered plain and now a realm of eternal life incorporates these triadic operations in his or her living as a believer in the world.

The final passage above makes explicit the Spirit's operation in God's action to supply the divine life to the

believers. When a person believes into the Son, rivers of living water—living because of the life of the Father—begin to flow out of his or her innermost being. The Gospel of John pauses to explicitly identify the flowing out of this living water with the post-resurrection Spirit, who, as we have seen in a previous section, bears the glorified Jesus into the believers and makes Him as the reality of the Father real to them.

### *In Their Enjoying the Love and Joy of God*

A major factor in the believers' existence is related to love and joy. Without these inner realities, no human being can live in a meaningful way. While unbelievers fill their lives with myriads of relationships and entertainments in order to experience love and joy, the believers enjoy the unique privilege of having God as their love and joy. In the Gospel of John these blessings are shown to be further facets of the believers' incorporation of the Divine Trinity in their living.

As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. This is My commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you. (15:9-10, 12)

I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know

that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me. (17:23)

And I have made Your name known to them and will yet make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (17:26)

Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him. (14:23)

These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full. (15:11)

But now I am coming to You, and these things I speak in the world that they may have My joy made full in themselves. (17:13)

In my previous article I commented on love as a relational virtue that requires a loving one and a loved one ("Johannine (1)" 43-44). In the first passage above, this relation between the Father and the Son is mentioned and

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forms the basis for the love that the Son has for the believers. His love becomes something that operates within the believers and motivates them to do something that He does, that is, to love others. Thus, the believers love one another not as an activity that is separate from Christ the Beloved or one that mimics Him as some sort of representative testimony; rather, they love one another through the operation of the Son within them, and His operation is infused with the Father's operation of loving Him. When the believers act in this way, they incorporate the operations of the Son and the Father to love. This should be no surprise, because "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and as real love He should operate in the love that the believers have for one another. According to the Lord, the practical evidence that He abides in the Father's love is that He keeps His Father's commandments. Likewise, the practical evidence that the believers are abiding in the Son's love is that they keep His commandments, and specifically His commandment is to love one another. In the second passage above Christ speaks directly of the incorporation of the Divine persons in the believers and relates it to the Father's love. The believers incorporate the Son and the Father ("I in them, and You in Me") to be the corporate testimony on the earth that the Father loves both the Son and the believers. They incorporate the loving Father and the beloved Son, and, as the third passage shows, the love that exists between them is actually in the believers; the believers incorporate the loving activity between the Father and the Son. This is quite profound if we pause to think about it for a moment. The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the believers; thus, the Father and the Son are in the believers. Further, the Father loves the Son, and the love with which He loves the Son is in the believers. Thus, the believers have abiding within them the whole divine realm and reality of the Father and the Son in their loving operations toward One another. As we saw in my previous article, the love with which the Father loves the Son is a divine hypostatic reality in the Godhead and should be related to the Spirit of God, as Augustine and Aquinas have taught. Thus, the entire Divine Trinity dwells and operates within the believers, and they operate to enable the believers to love one another with the very same love which exists among the Divine three and with which they are loved by God. In the fourth passage, this incorporation among the Father, the Son, and the believers is again referred to, here as an abode that is made among them. We will see more about this in a later section, but here we should notice that this divine-human incorporation is related to the love that the believers have for the Son and that the Father has for the believers. This mutuality of love has its source in the Father and is manifested in the believers' love for the Son.

The last two passages above speak of the joy that the believers have because of their relationship to the Son. He tells the disciples that He has spoken to them so that His

joy may be in them and that their joy may be made full. Of course, there may be a simple meaning to this that does not rely on incorporation: what makes the Son joyful may also make the believers joyful, and because of this they share in His joy within themselves. But I hope that I have established the fact that the believers are able to incorporate the operations of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in all their activities because the Divine Trinity lives within them. That being the case, we should be able to admit a deeper meaning to the last two passages above and view the joy within the believers as the very same joy that the Son has within Himself. They are joyous because there is a joyous One within them communicating His joy into their hearts, and their joy made full, which is His joy made full in themselves, is yet another instance of the incorporation that the believers participate in with the Divine Trinity.

### *In Their Acts to Carry Out God's Economy*

In His final words to the disciples in chapters 14 through 16 of the Gospel of John, the Lord indicated that while His earthly work was about to end, the work to carry out God's economy on the earth was not over and would be continued by them after His resurrection. We know, of course, that the rest of the New Testament both narrates (Acts) and constitutes (the Epistles, including Revelation) this ongoing work. The centuries since the Lord's resurrection have witnessed the vibrant testimony of Christ's disciples acting to carry out God's economy. Certainly, we have not done a work that matches His standard, but the saints across the centuries have nevertheless enjoyed the Lord's blessing in their work, and there is a significant testimony of the Lord on the earth because of it. In His last speaking to the disciples in John 14 through 16, the Lord indicated that the acts of the disciples for the carrying out of God's economy should be a work that comes out of their incorporation with Him.

Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes into Me, the works which I do he shall do also; and greater than these he shall do because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. (14:12-14)

And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, Whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give to you. (16:23)

You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and I set you that you should go forth and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you. (15:16)

In the first passage the Lord makes it clear that the disciples will continue the works that He did on the earth, but

most surprisingly, He says that the works that the disciples will do will be greater than the works which He did. Detailing exactly what these greater works are and precisely how they are greater in comparison to those of the incarnate Son of God could easily be the aim of another major article; thus, I will not stray into a discussion on that. But here it is necessary to note that the greater works of the disciples depend on the Son's going to the Father, which, we have seen, is a reference to His death, resurrection, and ascension, and implies the coming of the Spirit, who bears the incorporating operations of the Divine Trinity into the disciples. Thus, in verse 12 the incorporation of the Triune God in the believers' acts is at least implied. In verses 13 and 14 it is explicit. The believers are encouraged to ask, and this, we should assume, is a reference to their prayer to the Father in their work. Their prayer, their asking, is their action and is indeed their chief action in the work of God's economy. What they ask for has been variously understood and, when taken out of context, misapplied to mean all sorts of unusual things. But in the context of these verses, their asking should be related to the greater works which they will do and which will continue the Lord's own works that He did when He was on the earth; it can hardly mean asking for prosperity, wealth, or other personal benefit. Their asking should be for the works that will accomplish God's economy on the earth. But the works that they ask for, the Son will do, according to these verses. They ask, but the Son acts. And when the Son acts, the Father is glorified because, as we have seen, the Father operates in the Son's action. Here again is the beautiful incorporation of the believers and the Triune God. The believers do greater works by asking the Father for them in the Son's name, but the Son does the works that they ask for, and in doing so, the Father, who operates in Him, is manifested and glorified. In point of fact, once the believers ask, they must also act; they must do the greater works. But in their acts the Son operates and can be said to act in their acting, and when He acts, the Father operates in Him. Of course, the Son can act in their acting because the Spirit indwells them and bears the Son with the Father into them. In the end, when the believers ask and act in this way of incorporation, the Father is glorified by the Son through the Spirit in them.

These three passages all refer to the very mystical action of the believers asking the Father in the Son's name. It is unfortunate that today this has been reduced to a mere formulaic appendage to Christian prayers. "In Jesus' name we pray" certainly adheres to the letter of the Lord's exhortation, but it is hard to believe that all

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that He intended was the repetition of a formula. I would like to suggest (again!) that when the believers properly ask the Father in the Son's name, they are actually asking out of their being in and being one with the Son's person. They ask not wildly and out of self-interest but for their greater works, which continue the Son's works in His earthly ministry and which now He does in His heavenly ministry. Their greater works are the continuation of His earthly works and, according to the first passage above, are works that He Himself will do. Hence, their asking, if it is to be effective at all, must be aligned with what He will do for God's economy. If they ask for something that is not in line with His operation for the fulfillment of God's economy, He will not do it, and this probably explains why so many Christian prayers go unanswered. These passages do not guarantee carte blanche for anything they want. Asking must be in the Son's name, not as some passcode to prosperity but as indicative of incorporating His operation in our action for the greater works that He promised we would do. Ask the Father in this way, and He will surely grant it, and the Son will surely do it. The third passage gives us some indication of what our asking should be for. The Son has set us for this work,

to go forth and bear fruit in the gospel or other Christian labor, and He intends that our fruit should remain. But this is not a given; it is something that we must ask the Father for, in the Son's name. If we ask for this, we are asking for something that is certainly aligned with what the Son wants, for He set us to do this, and we

can be assured that He will operate to accomplish it.

### *In Their Mutual Abiding with God*

In the Gospel of John there are two very compelling figures that refer to the divine-human incorporation in a comprehensive and extended way: the Father's house and the vine. The Lord's presentation of these two figures indicates that in His view the believers enjoy a definite mode of existence in which, as we may put it, they incorporate the Divine Trinity and live, act, and move according to His operation and as the expression of His operation.

In My Father's house are many abodes; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be. (14:2-3)

Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him. (14:23)



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I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If one does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is dried up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. In this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so you will become My disciples. (15:1-8)

The Father's house has been variously understood, but the most common interpretation is that it refers to the Father's heavenly abode, to which, the logic follows, the believers will go after their death. This passage provides one of the chief scriptural "proofs" for the popular belief that Christians go to heaven after they die and that heaven is the eternal destiny of God's people. We have devoted an entire special issue of *Affirmation & Critique* (Kangas) critiquing this notion and affirming that the actual eternal destiny of the believers is the divine-human incorporation that we are speaking of here. There is no need to repeat those arguments here. But if what we have been saying in the present essay is accepted, our view of 14:2-3 and 23 should be influenced by all the many details of the incorporation that the believers participate in. In 14:23 this incorporation is explicitly referred to as an abode with the believer, which results from the operations of the Father loving the believer, of the Father and the Son coming to the believer, and of the believer loving the Son and keeping His word. This abode with the individual believer should be understood to be one of the "many abodes" of 14:2, and thus the Father's house is a constitution of the many instances of the Father and the Son incorporating the believers into them; it is the aggregate abode of the Triune God and the believers. The Triune God comes to the believers and brings them into the economic incorporation that exists among them and which they are. The Son with the Father by the Spirit comes and receives the believers to Himself that the believers may be where He is, that is, in the Father. This mutual dwelling of God and the believers, this incorporation, is the Father's house. This interpretation of the Father's house is quite different from that of a heavenly mansion on a street paved with gold, but it is an interpretation that corresponds to the relationships within God and does not suggest a crass physicality that seems so unnatural to God and so unworthy of being the believers' hope and eternal destiny.

The passage from John 15 gives us a graphic metaphor describing the divine-human incorporation, the universal vine. Here the Lord describes Himself as the true vine and the Father as the husbandman. This first statement taken alone points to the Triune God as a divine incorporation. The Son is the divine plant in the earth, but He exists and thrives because of the Father's operation, not through His own self-growth. Just as a cultivated vine, though seemingly growing on its own, manifests the operation of the cultivator (and this is the literal meaning of the Greek word that has been translated *husbandman*) and depends on the cultivator for its continual maintenance and supply, so the Son, though seemingly alone and independent, manifests the Father's operation and draws on the Father as His eternal source. But there is more depth here than that of the divine incorporation because the divine plant that the Son likens Himself to is a vine full of many branches, and these branches are the believers who have been joined to Him in an organic union. The Son incorporates the believers into Himself, and He and they together are the vine. In calling Himself a vine with many branches, He indicates that His believers are part of Him and that they are the physical extension of His own spiritual existence. From the first statement we understand that the Father operates in the Son to "cultivate" Him as the "vine"; from the subsequent statements we discover more finely that the Father's operation is actually upon the believers and that this operation on them constitutes His cultivating operation upon the Son. The Father prunes (literally, in Greek, "makes clean") the believers as the branches, but it is the Son's word that actually makes them clean. The Father operates in the Son's word to do the work of pruning, cleaning up, the branches. Further, the branches bear fruit, but not of themselves; they can bear fruit only by virtue of their being incorporated into and abiding in the Son as the vine. He operates in them to make them fruitful, and the fruit that issues glorifies not the believers as the branches, nor the Son as the vine, but the Father as the divine source and Cultivator.

### *In the Son's Ultimate Aspiration for Them to Be One in God*

After the Lord's extensive discourse in chapters 14 through 16, He turned His eyes heavenward and prayed to the Father in a most deep and intimate way. This prayer has a number of unique qualities, but two are germane to our discussion here. First, this prayer is an open instance of the kind of fellowship that exists between the Father and the Son. As such, it exposes some of the inner feeling between the Father and the Son, especially in relation to their desire for the believers. Second, since this prayer was uttered shortly before His betrayal, crucifixion, and death, it expresses the incarnate Son's final sentiments before leaving this earth; it is, so to speak, a dying man's last wish.<sup>7</sup> But unlike any other dying man's

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last wish, it is not personal but completely selfless, and bears His ultimate aspiration for His disciples. Quite simply this aspiration is for the divine-human incorporation to be fully realized. It is summed up in the elegant petition: “That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us” (17:21). Here we want to examine this section of the prayer—its conclusion—as it relates to the incorporation of the believers into the Triune God.

And I do not ask concerning these only, but concerning those also who believe into Me through their word, that they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me. Father, concerning that which You have given Me, I desire that they also may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world has not known You, yet I have known You, and these have known that You have sent Me. And I have made Your name known to them and will yet make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (vv. 20-26)

There are a number of important points to note here. All the New Testament believers, from the very first ones in the first century to us today, are included in the Son’s aspiration here. And though we become believers through the word of the truth spoken to us, the most important result of our believing is not our accepting a system of beliefs but our being brought into the Triune God. The Son prayed that those who believed through the preaching would be one, but He refined this oneness by making it equivalent to being in Him and the Father. He desired not just that we would believe the precious word of the gospel but that we would be made one through it, and this oneness is not simply a oneness of belief nor a oneness among the believers themselves but is more deeply a oneness that results from the believers being in the Father and the Son. Characterized in this way, this oneness that enlarges is the oneness that already exists between the Father and the Son. The Son prays that in the same way that the Father and the Son incorporate one another (“even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You”), the believers would also be incorporated into them (“that they also may be in Us”). Thus, this oneness

is the enlargement of the divine and eternal incorporation to now include the believers and may be rightly called the divine-human incorporation (“I in them, and You in Me”).

This divine-human incorporation has a very specific purpose, which the Son stresses in this portion of His prayer, that is, that the operations of the Divine Trinity would be manifested to the world. The believers’ being perfected into the oneness of this incorporation with the Triune God should manifest the divine actions of the Father sending the Son and of the Father loving the believers as He has loved the Son. Though textually these seem to be two distinct actions, in point of fact they are one. In sending the Son, the Father shows His love toward the believers (cf. 1 John 4:9-10). It is the Father’s operation, but it is manifested in the activities of the Son in His incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus, that the believers have been incorporated into the Triune God manifests that the Father has operated in the actions of the Son, for the actions of the Son have redeemed the believers and brought them into God. Only through the believers being perfected into oneness with the Triune God by incorporation can the divine operations of the Triune God, particularly to express the Father’s love, be manifested to the world.

*Although we become believers through the word of the truth spoken to us, the most important result of our believing is not our accepting a system of beliefs but our being brought into the Triune God.*

In His prayer the Son speaks of the divine-human incorporation primarily as it involves Him and the Father; the Spirit does not seem to be included. But in the final sentence of His prayer the Son alludes to the

Spirit in two ways. First, He tells the Father that while He has made the Father’s name known to the disciples, He will yet make it known. Following the thought in the previous chapters, we should understand this as a reference to the Spirit’s work of leading the believers into all the reality (16:13). Further, *yet* here should correspond to *that day* in 14:20, when the Spirit of reality comes as the other Comforter to make the Father known in the Son by making the Son known in the believers. Second, the Son alludes to the Spirit when He speaks of the love with which the Father has loved Him. Again I have noted previously, this love is distinct from the Father and the Son. But because there cannot be anything but God in God (otherwise there would be a reality other than God), this love must be God Himself and should be related to God the Spirit, as Augustine and Aquinas have suggested. The Son prays to the Father that this love—God the Spirit as the love between the Father and the Son—would be in the believers and that He—the Son—would be in the believers as well. Through the operation of the Spirit as the love with which the Father loves the Son and the believers (v. 23) and which is now in the believers, the Son is incorporated

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into the believers, and through the Son the Father's name is made known to them.

### The Johannine Jesus as Bridge and Model for the Incorporation of the Believers into the Divine Trinity

I wish to conclude this two-part essay by returning to the title and applying it to what has been said throughout. This essay's title is inspired by the Lord's very mystical word to Nathanael at the beginning of the Gospel of John:

Nathanael answered Him, Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said to him, Is it because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree that you believe? You shall see greater things than these. And He said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, You shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. (1:49-51)

Nathanael accepted that Jesus was the Son of God and the King of Israel because of Philip's testimony to him (vv. 45-46) and the Lord's demonstration of His divine attributes to him (v. 48). As when anyone turns to God, the gospel word was preached to Nathanael and the Lord manifested Himself to him; then, Nathanael responded in faith and became the Lord's disciple. But it is quite interesting that the Lord here points Nathanael to something more concerning Himself than the mere contents of his belief. Nathanael believed, and the Lord no doubt appreciated that, but there were "greater things than these," which the Lord wanted His disciples to look to. (In verse 51 the Greek pronoun *you* is plural each time.) In a way, the entire Gospel of John tries to beckon the believers to something greater than what is presented in the Synoptic Gospels. The Jesus of John, as we have seen, is not simply a man who happens to be God but God incarnate having a particular kind of human living that incorporates the entire Divine Trinity and who ultimately brings His believers into that same incorporate living. The Lord's word to Nathanael can, I believe, be interpreted as a metaphorical reference to this divine-human incorporation, which Jesus refers to more directly later, in chapters 14 through 17.

The Lord equates the greater things that the disciples were to expect with "heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." To Nathanael this would not have been a completely alien statement. He had demonstrated his understanding of the Scriptures by expressing his doubt that the Messiah would come out of Nazareth (v. 46): the "good" of Israel should have been born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; cf. Matt. 2:4-6). Thus, the Lord's declaration to him would have been easily recognized as an allusion to Jacob the patriarch's dream in Genesis 28:11-17.<sup>8</sup> In that dream "there was a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were

ascending and descending on it" (v. 12). In the Lord's word to Nathanael, He as the Son of Man is this heavenly ladder upon which the angels of God ascend and descend. At the top of the ladder, according to the dream, is God, who is revealed not in a simple way but with the complex title "Jehovah, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac," and by this we can perceive an intimation of the Triune God. As the heavenly ladder, Jesus bridges God and man together. He is the Son of Man; thus, He stands as the archetypal human being on the earth, but based on what we have seen in this essay, He is more than simply a representative of humankind. His many declarations that the believers are in Him indicate that He incorporates the believers into Himself, and hence, relative to the believers, His title the Son of Man has special relevance and should include the notion of incorporation. Because the believers are incorporated into Him, He as the heavenly ladder serves as the personal bridge to the Triune God, incorporating in Himself the Divine Trinity and the believers. This is the very center of the universe, for in Him God and man are joined together, and the ministrations of God are focused on Him as this heavenly bridge. Within Himself He incorporates the unique enterprise of God's economy, that is, the Triune God operating through Him by the Spirit in the believers for the manifestation and expression of God the Father on the earth.

Further, when Jacob awoke from his dream, he realized that he had experienced something that was of tremendous import: "And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I did not know it. And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (vv. 16-17). This is the first mention of the house of God in the Bible, and it begins a notional thread that runs throughout the Scriptures. The Father's house in John 14:2 is an instance of this thread, and we have seen that the Father's house is a metaphorical reference to the divine-human incorporation. When the Lord alluded to Himself as the heavenly ladder of Jacob's dream, He was also making reference to the house of God, and this house of God is certainly the "greater things" that He as the Son of Man would bring the disciples into, both from the point of view of the whole truth of the Scriptures and from the full import of His allusion to Jacob's dream. The "greater things" are, to a large extent, the Father's house, composed of the many abodes, which are made when He and the Father come to the believers, indwell them as the Spirit, and incorporate them into themselves.

The Johannine Jesus serves as the organic bridge for the incorporation of the believers into the Divine Trinity, and this should be seen as His first and foremost relationship to the believers, as presented in the Gospel of John. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John portrays Jesus

not firstly as a model for the believers' living but as this very organically real realm of incorporation with the Divine Trinity. All that believers do for God is done out of this incorporation into God, which the Johannine Jesus authors and maintains. Apart from Him they can do nothing that would serve God's ultimate purpose to be expressed in the universe, and rightly so, because He incorporates the Triune God in Himself and works in them through the Spirit to manifest the operations of the Triune God in their actions as the Body of Christ. Their identity and activity as the Body of Christ are not representative at all; rather, they live and move through the operations of the Divine Trinity within them, taking the Son of God and of Man as their organic bridge to the Triune God and His actions. But this relationship is certainly very mystical and admittedly not grasped casually. Thus, the Gospel of John also presents Jesus as the model of a human being who lived absolutely and completely in incorporation with the Divine Trinity. While this Gospel emphasizes that God is incarnate as Jesus, we should never lose sight of the fact that here is a genuine human being, not God in a false human shell. Jesus was really a man in all aspects, and we should carefully examine how He, as a human being, managed the living out of the incorporation that He participated in. His life, as depicted in the Gospel of John, was indeed a model for the incorporation of the believers into the Divine Trinity. (Perhaps I succeeded in the first part of this essay in giving sufficient details of Him as this model.) But no one can live out the model of this incorporation apart from the reality of Jesus as the bridge in this incorporation. While we may admire the details of the Johannine Jesus as the model for this incorporation, He must first be the actual organic bridge into it if we, as His modern-day disciples and His Body, are to be in and are to live out this divine-human incorporation. **AC**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>As I point out in my previous article, the same applies to the Spirit; however, not as apparently ("Johannine (1)" 44). Thus, each of the three incorporate the other two by way of mutual interdependence of existence, or coinherence (circum-incession).

<sup>2</sup>Mark is also silent on the begetting of the God-man, no doubt because Jesus' status in this Gospel as the Slave-Savior did not warrant genealogical records (Lee, Recovery Version).

<sup>3</sup>I would further assert that these divine "goods" are not something other than the Godhead but have, like the Father and the Son, hypostatic existence and are actually the Spirit.

<sup>4</sup>I will not stray here into the fray concerning the bondage or the freedom of the human will in salvation. My comments on the matter are registered in my article "Justification of Life," *Affirmation & Critique* VI.1 (April 2001) 27-45, particularly p. 39.

<sup>5</sup>In the Gospel of John the Spirit is not mentioned in

relation to the drawing of the believers to salvation. But for the record, the Spirit certainly operates, as the rest of the New Testament testifies (cf. Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:2; Luke 15:8-10).

<sup>6</sup>The writer of Hebrews tells us that the Spirit was also operating in the death of Christ: "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).

<sup>7</sup>This is not the Lord's last prayer, of course. He later prayed three times at Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39-44), and He prayed on the cross (Luke 23:34, 46). But His prayer in John 17 expresses His final wishes for the disciples, who had been the object of all that He had done in His earthly ministry.

<sup>8</sup>Genesis 28:11-17 reads:

And he [Jacob] came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and he lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And there was Jehovah, standing above it; and He said, I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie, I will give to you and to your seed. And your seed will be as the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and in your seed will all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will cause you to return to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I did not know it. And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

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