

Bearing our Scorn: Jesus and the Way of Trinitarian Love

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The apostolic witness to the world is that the Father's Son himself has come. The one who is face to face with the Father from all eternity, the one who dwells in the Father's bosom,¹ has come across all worlds to meet us and to relate to us in our brokenness. The eternal Word of God became flesh, as John said, to tabernacle, to dwell with us.² Accepting the apostolic witness at face value, could anything be more astonishing than such humble stooping by the Father's eternal Son? What could be more amazing than the Creator of the universe, the one in and through and by and for whom all things were created and are constantly sustained,³ entering into his own creation and becoming human to be with us?

Some "beheld His glory,"⁴ which means they saw Jesus for who he really is⁵ as *the* Father's own Son, the Creator, and *the* One anointed in the Holy Spirit. In him, the light of life was shining in the darkness—and people were drawn to him. Full of compassion for the broken and overwhelmed, he poured himself out to help others, to heal and restore, to enlighten and liberate. As his fame spread like wild fire, great crowds gathered to hear him speak, to touch him, to be healed, to be part of his world. For a short while it was beautiful, something of the way it should be when the Father's Son enters our world.

But things quickly changed. Conflict seemed inevitable as the religious leaders watched Jesus with suspicious hearts. They had a lot to lose—and Jesus was making staggering promises and equally staggering claims. He spoke with "revolutionary boldness,"⁶ assuming not only superiority to the Jewish leaders, but also to the sacred Torah itself.⁷ For Jesus, God was his own Father, and he *the* unique and only Son. But Jesus made no promises that he did not keep. He produced. He healed. He restored. He gave new eyes to those born blind, and he even raised the dead.

Jesus' presence—his heart, his life, his healing—forced the leadership's hand, as it exposed the bankruptcy of their religion. In hush-toned, back-room meetings, they plotted to silence him. "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."⁸ So they sent out spies

¹ John 1:1; 18.

² John 1:14.

³ John 1:3; Colossians 1:16ff; Hebrews 1:1-3.

⁴ John 1:14.

⁵ For more on 'glory' as the essential nature of a person or thing, see David Kowalick's lectures, "The Hope of Glory." These lectures are available at <www.perichoresis.org>.

⁶ See Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 253.

⁷ See for example, MT 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39 & 44.

⁸ John 11:48.

to find proof, any proof that they could use to discredit him.⁹ Even in the face of Jesus calling Lazarus back to life from the dead, “they planned together to kill him,”¹⁰ in God’s name.

It is easy for us to throw stones at the outright blindness of the Jewish leaders, but in the end Jesus had few real friends, as he died virtually alone. The great crowds dwindled and then turned against him. One of his own inner-circle disciples betrayed him into the hands of the powers that be; another denied him publicly three times. All the others, save a handful, deserted him when it mattered most. A few women and the beloved disciple¹¹ gathered around him in his final hours.

In the space of three or so years of biblically unparalleled ministry, the Father’s Son incarnate died in apparent shame, while the scoffing of the Jewish leaders, and the sneering cheers of the world, filled the arena of his brutal execution.

Rejection

The point here is not the way Jesus’ fortunes changed or even to examine why. The point is that the almost universal response to him was one of rejection. The news that the Father’s Son came to be with us and to bless us with a share in his own life is astonishing indeed—who would have ever dreamed of such divine grace and blessing—but there is something here even more stunning. We mocked him. We abused him. We rejected him. We plotted against him and murdered the anointed One.

John announces that it was through the Word of God, (whom he quickly identifies as the Father’s only Son, Jesus), that “all things” came into being. He is emphatic and repeats his point, “and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”¹² Then John writes those terrible words, “He came unto his own, and His own received Him not.”¹³ In these two verses we are brought before the mirror to stare into the most terrifying irony. The Creator himself stooped to become one of us, and his own creatures did not receive him.

Straightaway John prepares his readers to see that something is terribly wrong. *His own received him not*. The Son’s coming was all too human, too non-divine. We did not recognize him. As the song writer says, “No banners were unfurled, as God stepped into the world. Held in the arms of a little girl, named Miriam.”¹⁴ The presence of the Father’s Son made no sense to us. He did not meet our expectations of God, or of God’s coming, or of God’s presence and blessing, or of God’s Messiah. “Is this not Jesus, the

⁹ See Luke 20:20.

¹⁰ John 11:53; cf. Matthew 28:11-15.

¹¹ John 19:25-26.

¹² John 1:3.

¹³ John 1:11.

¹⁴ Pierce Pettis, “Miriam,” from the Album, *Making Light of It*, Compass, 1996.

son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven’?’¹⁵

Far from being received with the honor due to the Father’s eternal Son himself; Jesus was in fact slandered as being a bastard.¹⁶ Think about it. The one person in biblical history who was anointed with the Holy Spirit as an abiding gift¹⁷ was accused of being demon possessed.¹⁸ The good shepherd,¹⁹ appointed before the foundation of the world,²⁰ was thought to be leading the multitude astray.²¹ Clearly there is a serious problem of perception, of mindset, of expectation—and judgment—at work within the equation of human thought.

But the issue of human misperception is far more catastrophic than a quibble over expectations or an inability to think clearly about God, or of God’s kingdom. Our confusion led us into serious *conflict* with the presence of the Lord. The blindness of “He came unto his own and his own received him not” grew with horrifying intensity into the curse of “*Away with this man!*” “*Crucify, crucify Him!*”²²

As Isaiah prophesied, “He was despised and rejected of men.”²³ But this rejection was no simple refusal to play God’s game. This rejection had a violent stinger in its tail. It was rejection with a double shot of bitterness and cruelty. The Father’s Son came to share his life with us, and he was spat upon. The anointed One was mocked, derided, scoffed at and beaten, and then in plain view of the world brutally murdered while his own creatures universally approved.

Crucifixion is not simply elimination; it is rejection. It is personal rejection under curse. What a terrible spectacle it must have been for the cosmos to watch Jesus’ own condemn him—the true Judge, *judged* by broken humanity, to borrow from Karl Barth.²⁴ Is it any wonder that the earth itself shook, and darkness fell over the whole land, as the sun hid its face?²⁵ But then again, what reader of Scripture is really that shocked? Did the prophets not receive the same treatment, and didn’t Jesus tell a prophetic parable about his own rejection and murder at the hands of the chief priests and elders?²⁶

There is much here that will never be understood. But two things are crystal clear. First, Jesus’ crucifixion and the enmity that rose to make it happen, shouts to us that something is hideously wrong, that humanity suffers from a depraved and perverted confusion. The Father’s Son came to be with us in person and not only did we not want

¹⁵ John 6:42.

¹⁶ John 8:41.

¹⁷ John 1:33; see also Isaiah 11:2.

¹⁸ John 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20.

¹⁹ John 10:11.

²⁰ Ephesians 1:4-5.

²¹ John 7:12.

²² Luke 23:18; 21; John 19:6.

²³ Isaiah 53:3.

²⁴ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, edited by G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1956), vol. IV.1. pp. 211ff.

²⁵ Matthew 27:51; Luke 23:44-45; Mark 15:33.

²⁶ See Matthew 21:33-46.

him, but we were hell bent on casting him out of our world and humiliating him in the process. We could not be more wrong, or wrongheaded. The fact that the presence of the anointed One produced a hostile reaction from us, leaving the Father's Son publicly cursed, declares that sin is far more disastrous than breaking God's laws; sin involves the most vile and ungodly blindness.

Second, there is serious venom in the attack upon Jesus. It is terrible enough to crucify a good and innocent man; it is even more horrific when we enjoy it. The Gospel narratives do not portray a larger crowd helplessly watching in horror as a hand full of wicked men play their power politics and snuff out their greatest threat. The leadership wanted Jesus dead, gone, eliminated—and so did the crowds. But the shouts, “*Crucify, crucify him!*” say so much more than simply ‘we want this man out of the picture.’ There is deep bitterness here. There is hostility and scorn, wrath, enmity. *Give him vinegar. Damn him.* The blasphemous confession of the Jewish leaders, “*We have no king but Caesar,*”²⁷ betrays a feverish, depraved animosity towards Jesus that drives them to violate the core of their own sacred beliefs to have him executed.

Real Relationship

The inherent legalism of the Western Church²⁸ trains our eyes to see Jesus' suffering as the judgment of God upon our sin, and virtually blinds us to the more obvious point that Jesus suffered from the wickedness of humanity.²⁹ Nothing could be more plain. It was the human race, not the Father, who rejected his beloved Son and killed him. The wrath poured out on Calvary's hill did not originate in the Father's heart, but in ours.³⁰ The humiliation that Jesus bore, the torment that he suffered was not divine, but human. We mocked him. We detested him. We judged him. We ridiculed him, tortured him, and turned our face from him. It was not the Father or the Holy Spirit who abandoned Jesus³¹ and banished him to the abyss of shame; it was the human race. *We cursed him.*

²⁷ John 19:15.

²⁸ For more on the legalistic bent of the Western Church, see C. Baxter Kruger, *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam* (Jackson & Adelaide: Perichoresis Press, 2003), chapters 1 & 2.

²⁹ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him up to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up” (Matthew 20:18-19). See also, Matthew 16:21; Mark 10:33-34; Luke 24:7.

³⁰ On Isaiah 53:2-7, see *The New Jerusalem Bible* and Eugene Peterson, *The Message*. The key word in vs. 6 is (*paga*) to meet, or encounter. The Lord caused the iniquity of us all to (*paga*) meet, encounter Him. On Isaiah 53:10 note *The New English Bible*, “Yet the Lord took thought of his tortured servant and healed him who had made himself a sacrifice for sin; so shall he enjoy long life and see his children's children, and in his hand the Lord's cause shall prosper.”

³¹ For my treatment of Jesus' cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,” see my book *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam*, pp. 58ff.

Either the Father, Son and Spirit were caught off guard by our hatred of Jesus, or there is a redemptive genius at work here that is too beautiful for words. Was the rejection of the Jews and the Romans not foreseen by the Triune God? Was the Father surprised when *we killed the solution*? Was Jesus bewildered when things went south and the crowds turned against him? Was the Holy Spirit shocked by the venom of our bite? Or could it be that the vile animosity of the human race towards the Father's Son was clearly anticipated and literally incorporated as a critical part in bringing about our reconciliation? Could it be that the Lord's way of reconciliation involves his acceptance of our hatred? Could the key to reconciliation be the Trinity's willful submission to our bizarre darkness and its bitter judgment?

What sin could be more heinous than hating—and then murdering—God, and what reconciliation could be more beautiful and personal and real than the Lord willingly submitting Himself to suffer our wrath, thereby actually meeting us in our foul darkness?

It is astonishing indeed that the Father's Son became what we are, and it is even more stunning that we rejected and abused and crucified him. But is it not more stunning still, that Jesus willingly accepted and endured it all, when one word would have unleashed legions of angels to his defense?³² Such is the astounding love of the Father, Son and Spirit for their lost and pitiful creatures.

Vladimir Lossky contends that the Western preoccupation with the redeeming death of Jesus as a sacrifice *to God* leaves us in a place where the larger emphasis of the New Testament and of the early Church, “‘that God made Himself man that man might become God,’ seems to be strange and abnormal.”³³ Lossky, and the Orthodox tradition, include the death of Christ within the larger purpose of the Triune God's union with us and our union with the Trinity. Paul's way of saying the same thing is by way of the concept of adoption. “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself.”³⁴ The point here is that the larger purpose of the Father, Son and Spirit for humanity is not merely the deliverance from sin and corruption (though this is critical), but our exaltation into the very trinitarian life of God.

Real relationship—shared life, communion of the most personal and profound order, union—stands as the driving purpose of God in creation and redemption. Logically speaking, when the great apostle stated that the Father predestined us to adoption before the foundation of the world, he is setting forward the ultimate framework within which we are to understand the coming of Jesus. It is about relationship, about communion, about *union* with the very life of the Father, Son and Spirit.

When we place this purpose for real relationship with us—relationship so rich and personal that all that the Father, Son and Spirit have together become as much ours as it is

³² Matthew 26:53.

³³ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 98-99. St. Athanasius says, “For He was made man that we might be made God,” *St. Athanasius On the Incarnation*, translated by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., reprinted 1963), §54.

³⁴ Ephesians 1:5

God's³⁵—side by side with the fact that we rejected and murdered the incarnate Son, we are standing before the end of the trinitarian dream for humanity, or a window into the ineffable *agape* of the Triune God. Adoption is the eternal purpose of God for us, and adoption means real relationship, but how far is the blessed Trinity prepared to go to meet us? The Father, Son and Spirit are eternally serious about loving us and about bringing us to know their love, but isn't there a line in the sand somewhere in the cosmos that they will not cross? Isn't there a point at which even the love of God draws back?

Adam's Fall

Looking back in the light of the trinitarian dream for real relationship with humanity, and in the light of Jesus' suffering our rejection, we can see something of the way of the trinitarian love in the aftermath of Adam's fall. The Lord's response to Adam's fall is as remarkable as it is beautiful. There is no pretending that nothing disastrous has happened, no looking the other way as if Adam's infidelity was a mere glitch in an otherwise properly functioning relationship. As Athanasius said, "the thing that was happening was in truth both monstrous and unfitting."³⁶ The Lord saw the disaster for what it was, but "what then was God, being Good, to do?"³⁷ Pretend all is well? Lash out in anger? He chose to accept the fall, without approving of it, and to accept Adam as a fallen creature. There is no denial or looking the other way on God's part. There is no divine indifference or neutrality as if the Lord could care less what happens in his creation. And there is no divine outburst of retaliatory anger. There is certainly judgment, judgment which discerns that a great wrong has happened, and judgment that insists on putting things right, on establishing peace and order and concord in the relationship. For the eternal purpose of our adoption stands.

So as an act of sheer grace, as an act of keen awareness of Adam's fear and of identification with him in his pain, and as an act of determination to meet and relate to him in his fallen state, the Lord accepted Adam in his shame and related to him as he was. *He clothed him.*³⁸ Such an act was not about God or a divine need to be appeased. This was an act of love, of acceptance and real relationship, flowing out of his determination to bring the purpose of adoption to fruition.

It was the great Anselm who said to his interlocutor Boso, "You have not yet considered the exceeding gravity of sin."³⁹ For Anselm, the problem of sin lay in the fact that it was committed against the great King, the eternal God Himself, and therefore even

³⁵ For more on the eternal purpose of the Triune God, see C. Baxter Kruger, *God is For Us* (Jackson and Adelaide: Perichoresis Press, 1995 and Carlisle: Paternoster Publishing, 1997) pp. 1ff, and *Jesus and the Undoing of Adam*, pp. 15ff.

³⁶ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, §6.

³⁷ *On the Incarnation*, §6.

³⁸ Genesis 3:21.

³⁹ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1909), XX1.

the smallest sin necessarily carried the weight of an eternal offense.⁴⁰ But in the Garden of Eden it is difficult to find such an offended God, or to see sin being weighed over against God’s eternal worth. We see the Lord, who, by our way of thinking, should have been highly offended, and who could have easily and with every right cursed Adam and destroyed him utterly—but he didn’t. We see the Lord putting aside all his rights to abstract justice and punishment, and we see him more concerned about his lost and terrified creature than he is about his honor.

There are no dazzling lights, no hosts of angels, no triumphal entry of a King demanding proper recompense or vengeance for Adam’s offense. The Lord came in the cool of the day for fellowship with his beloved creature. He finds his friend hiding, ashamed and terrified. He recognizes what has happened, and without flinching moves toward Adam in tenderness and accommodating love.

The dastardly confusion so obvious in our rejection of the Father’s Son incarnate is apparent in Eden as well. The problem of the fall, of sin, is not simply that there has been disobedience to a divine command. The problem is that Adam is now so lost in the cosmos of his own mind that he is utterly incapable of *relationship* with the Lord. Trapped in the tragic nightmare of his own self-referential confusion, he has become “the judge,” and in his judgment, he believes that *the Lord* is the *enemy* to be feared and avoided. He is, therefore, ashamed of himself and terrified of God. He hides.

The hiding of Adam—from the presence of the concerned and caring Lord—tells us that the fall, at the very least, is about a terrible twisting of human perception, about an alien, ungodly confusion which so warped Adam’s fundamental way of thinking that he hid from the greatest friend in the universe.

The most penetrating commentary on the disaster of Adam’s fall are the words of Jesus, “no one knows the Father, except the Son.”⁴¹ Jesus does not say that we are doing well but need some fresh insights about his Father, or that our basic vision gets good marks but needs to be tweaked. He says *no one knows the Father*. What statement could be more solemn? Here is the ‘exceeding gravity of sin.’ No one, not the Jews, not the Romans, not the Greeks, no one knows the Father. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” as the apostle Paul contended.⁴² For Jesus, the problem of human blindness is absolute. For all are so caught in the toils of Adam’s confusion that there is not one who knows the Father, not one who sees him as he is, not one who is even close—except the Son.⁴³ “I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not *remain in darkness*.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., XI, XX, XXIII.

⁴¹ Matthew 11:27.

⁴² Romans 3:23.

⁴³ Note Jesus’ or John’s comment: “What He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness, and no man receives His witness” (John 3:32).

⁴⁴ John 12:46.

A confused mind sees only through its own confusion.⁴⁵ We cannot push the weeds of our fallen minds to the side and know the Father's heart. A vast delusion now casts its alienating shadow upon the Lord's love for us. With Adam so confused, adoption now seems the dream of a fool, for the rug of any possible divine-human fellowship has been jerked out from under our feet. We are so trapped in our alien vision that we *will not* and indeed *cannot* let go of the way we see things, and therefore can do nothing other than impose our confusion upon the Father's face, creating a god in the image of our brokenness.⁴⁶ Jesus is dead serious, *no one knows the Father*.

Reconciliation is not about changing God, as if somehow our failure altered the Father's heart or his eternal dreams for us. Reconciliation is about how the love of the Father, Son and Spirit finds a way to do the impossible—*reach us* in our terrible confusion. The problem for God is not, 'How can I declare righteous those who are not righteous,' but 'How can I restore to communion with me those so utterly lost in their own fallen minds that they hate me and run for cover from my sight?'

How do you relate to one who does not want to relate to you? How do you get inside of blindness? How do you reach one whose projecting shame so disfigures your own face that he disowns your love and hides in fear at your sight? In our pain we, like Adam, have condemned ourselves, created a god in the image of our shame, and hand-crafted a religion to go with it, all of which we project onto the Father and defend with a vengeance.

The issue of reconciliation is not about satisfying legal justice; it is about how God gets through our darkness and makes Himself knowable to us. Revelation seems the obvious answer, but is it? What good is revelation, even inerrant divine transcripts, when our minds are so twisted that we could only misread them? How could authentic communication be possible at all when our fallen imaginations paint the Lord's heart by the numbers of our own guilt?

The Womb of Reconciliation⁴⁷

One of Professor T. F. Torrance's great contributions lies in the way he understands the gut-wrench of Israel's existence. The covenant between the Lord and Israel is a

⁴⁵ For more on the fallen mind our inability to know the Father, see C. Baxter Kruger, *Across All Worlds: Jesus Inside Our Darkness* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2007), pp. 7ff.

⁴⁶ See *Across All Worlds*, pp. 21ff.

⁴⁷ My discussion of the relationship between God and Israel is greatly influenced by the work of Thomas F. Torrance. For a detailed and thorough treatment of Torrance's vision of Israel see my essay, "The Womb of the Incarnation: The Place of Israel in T. F. Torrance's Vision of the Mediation of Christ" This essay will be available at <www.perichoresis.org> in early 2008. Of particular interest here is Torrance's, *The Mediation of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), chapters 1 & 2, and his essays, "The Word of God and the Response of Man," in *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 137ff, "Salvation is of the Jews" *Ev. Quarterly*, Vol. 22 (1950), pp. 164ff and "Israel and the Incarnation," *Judica*, (1957) vol. 13, pp. 1-18.

relationship of love and grace and promise, but it is also one of anguish. Out of the twisted darkness of Adam's fall the Lord called a pagan man named Abram, and in him formed a nation called to be God's partner in his reconciling love for humanity. The covenant is God's reestablishment of real relationship with fallen humanity in Israel, but Israel, trapped in the delusions of the Adamic mind, is scared to death.

The One from whom Adam hid walked into the room of Israel's conscience, closed and bolted the door. This is a relationship of grace to be sure, but also one of agony and conflict, for the sheer love of the Lord alone, while certainly comforting and full of hope, nevertheless brings Israel's sin and wickedness to light. His presence with Israel means the presence of *life*, and this life inevitably reveals that what Israel is living is not life at all but a gnarled form of sadness and dying. Israel is caught between the love and grace of God and the divine exposure of its broken and sinful existence.

The pain of Adam's fall had nowhere to hide in Israel, for the presence of the Lord was a terrifying blessing. How could it be otherwise? "Depart from me O Lord, for I am a sinful man"⁴⁸ are not only the words of Peter to Jesus; they echo the writhing pain of Israel's nakedness. For neither the Lord nor his exposing love will go away.

So long as the cords of the covenant were not drawn tight, and God remained, so to speak, at a distance, the conflict was not very sharp, but the closer God drew near the more the human self-will of Israel asserted itself in resistance to its divine vocation. Thus the more fully God gave himself to this people, the more he forced it to be what it actually was, what we all are, in the self-willed isolation of fallen humanity from God. Thus the movement of God's reconciling love toward Israel not only revealed Israel's sin but intensified it.⁴⁹

Behind Torrance's insight into the intensification of Israel's conflict with God is his refusal to split the subjects of 'God's self-revelation' and 'our reconciliation to God' into separate theological topics and treat them intellectually. While most books and essays on the revelation of God never mention our reconciliation, as if it has nothing in common with reconciliation at all, for Torrance we cannot possibly have one without the other. Why? Because for Torrance, the revelation of God means the unveiling of God *himself*, not simply the transmission of accurate truths or information *about* God. And since revelation is about the personal self-disclosure of God, human reception of that revelation means an encounter not with information or with intellectual ideas, but with God in person.

Real revelation means that the Lord is not only walking in the garden, but has actually found Israel hiding in the bushes. *But Israel is fallen*. The 'go away, do not disturb' sign is blaring, and Israel is not about to allow the light of God's love to shine into the corridors of its shame and wickedness. Even with the sacrificial system provided in

⁴⁸ Luke 5:8.

⁴⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 38.

tender grace by the Lord himself, his personal presence is still too much for Israel to endure.

As the Lord walked into the room of Israel's conscience, his presence jabbed every raw nerve of the fallen mind, from its guilt and its home-made religion to its shame and self-justification, from its fear of exposure and self-protective hiding to its pride and self-referential judgment. If revelation only meant information, then Israel could transcribe the words, put the clay tablets on the wall and contemplate things from a safe distance. While there is great accommodation and tenderness to be sure, (the Lord takes baby steps, so to speak) nevertheless revelation means that God himself is in the room with fallen Israel, and thus that Israel's heresy and carnality, its heathenism and alienation are exposed, stirring up all manner of hostility and animosity towards God. Israel's recoil, its rebellion against the love of God was neither approved nor ignored, but accepted as the way things are with fallen humanity. But even the Lord's acceptance of Israel's rebellion means that he is one step closer, thus pushing Israel's conflict with God towards a fever's pitch.⁵⁰

In his wisdom and grace, God used the responses (both good and bad) that his revealing presence provoked in Israel to create a new medium for human understanding.⁵¹ As Israel's fundamental way of being and thinking were thrown into the fiery furnace of God's love, its basic beliefs were melted down and remade. As Israel encountered the living Word of God, its fallen mind was being crucified and resurrected—reconciled. In the presence of the Lord, Israel's entrenched ideas were being thrown onto the potter's wheel, broken down and refashioned. New and unparalleled theological concepts and categories began to emerge in Adam's fallen world—the names of God, the Word and Spirit of God, the love of God, covenant, sin, atonement, grace, prophet, priest and king, mercy and forgiveness⁵²—all of which Torrance calls “the essential furniture of our knowledge of God.”⁵³ In the glorious affliction of covenant relationship, the revelation of God's love began to find its fruit in the restructuring of Adam's tragic confusion and death.

But so real and personal is God's self-giving to Israel that the “Word of God is on the road to becoming flesh”⁵⁴ in Israel's *fallen being*. The presence of the Lord pressed for its counterpart not simply in good theology, but in reconciling union and communion with God. Far more than new ideas rippling the surface of Israel's thought, the living Word sought to be embodied not in Israel's head, but in Israel's heart, in its way of being and way of relating to God.

To be the recipient of divine revelation means to walk with God Himself, and that means both seeing the light of life and finding hope, and feeling the pain of being stripped naked with all of your illusions laid bare. Either the Lord naively failed to

⁵⁰ See Thomas F. Torrance, “The Word of God and the Response of Man,” p. 137ff.

⁵¹ See Thomas F. Torrance, “The Word of God and the Response of Man,” p. 147.

⁵² See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 28.

⁵³ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, volume 1 (London:Lutterworth Press, 1959), p. 266.

anticipate that his life, light and love would rattle the bones of Israel's very being and thus intensify Israel's conflict with God, or, inconceivable as it may sound, the intensification is deliberate, and the deliberate intensification of Israel's conflict with God is part of God's way of reconciliation.

That intensification, however, is not to be regarded simply as an accidental result of the covenant but rather as something which God deliberately took into the full design of his reconciling activity, for it was the will and the way of God's grace to effect reconciliation with man at his very worst, precisely in his state of rebellion against God. That is to say, in his marvelous wisdom and love God worked out in Israel a way of reconciliation which does not depend on the worth of men and women, but makes their very sin in rebellion against him the means by which he binds them for ever to himself and through which he reconstitutes their relations with him in such a way that their true end is fully and perfectly realised in unsullied communion with himself.⁵⁵

Torrance has here thrown almost the entire Western discussion of reconciliation on its head. Far from being about appeasing the wrath of an offended and angry deity, or about fulfilling God's honor code, or pretending there is no problem, reconciliation is about the Triune God deliberately embracing us in the twisted trauma of our fallenness and drawing so near to us in real relationship that *we feel* the hellish anguish of our estrangement, and lash out against him.

Jabbing every raw nerve of Israel's fallenness is the point. For real reconciliation necessitates that the Lord get to the very bottom of the fall, into the catacombs of our human hostility towards him and his love. All the poison of the fall has to surface. Anything less leaves us unsaved and the Father unknown.

The one thing that the Lord could count on from his fallen creatures is that we would not be able to cope with his presence and love, and that we would do everything within our power to escape them both, including creating a religion custom designed by our fallen minds to keep the Lord at a distance. As the Lord in his great love drew near to Israel, the more intensely Israel wanted to run. It was too much. The bitter enmity inherent in Israel's attempt to push the Lord out of the room and close the door is the chilling and terrifying and unnerving, yet very real and personal situation into which the Father's Son will be born. This intensifying conflict between Israel and the love of God is the "womb of the incarnation,"⁵⁶ the womb of real reconciliation. For this conflict is

⁵⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 38. See also, T. F. Torrance, "Israel and the Incarnation," *Judica*, (1957) vol. 13, p. 6ff.

⁵⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, "The Word of God and the Response of Man," p. 149. See also "Salvation is of the Jews," p. 166, and *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 42. The "womb of the incarnation" is a multi-dimensional concept in Torrance's work, referring, in general to Israel as the unique sphere within fallen creation of God's personal interaction, and more specifically to the hermeneutical or conceptual matrix of ideas, concepts and categories that began to emerge within the relationship. Its most precise meaning,

destined to reach its boiling point as the Lord at his gracious best comes *in person* to meet Israel at its blind, fallen and obstinate worst, and the odious contradiction between fallen humanity and the love of God square off in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Messiah Damned

The eternal, unflinching purpose of the Father, Son and Spirit is to share their trinitarian life with us, and to bring us to taste and feel and know and experience their shared life—adoption. But such sharing of life necessarily involves meeting us where we are in our tragic alienation. “Reconciliation means sharing in all that the other is.”⁵⁷ But how can the Lord really meet us in our fallenness, share in our confusion, and identify with us? It would seem impossible that the blessed Trinity could so enter into our miserable, projecting nightmare as to make contact with the *real us*. But what is reconciliation if it leaves the *real us* trapped in our confusion, unable to hear and see and receive the Father’s love? What kind of reconciliation would it be that declared humanity legally clean, yet left us lost in the cosmos of the fallen mind and its appalling pain?

Following Torrance’s line of insight, the deliberate intensification of Israel’s animosity and conflict with God leads straight into the cruel rejection of Jesus by the Jews, and by the whole race of humanity. Such rejection is actually included in the way of God’s astounding love. Here is amazing grace indeed. For the trinitarian way of reconciliation involves the inconceivable *submission* of the Trinity to our bizarre darkness. This is how the Lord reaches the *real us*: he comes to us in person, and submits himself to our evil, nauseous, alien judgment. He does not try to win us theologically. He does not call fire down upon our brazen stupidity. He does not shame us for our self-incarcerated pride and detestable prejudice. He simply comes in person, and the brutal conflict between fallen humanity and God’s presence reaches its boiling point. There is nowhere to hide. The fury of our hell breaks loose.

But unlike Adam and Israel, the Father’s Son does not run to escape the pain of real relationship. Refusing to pretend that all is well, he embraces the venomous conflict, allowing himself to become the personal target, the scapegoat for all of our pain. He willfully, deliberately, humbly and astonishingly bows to suffer the fierce rage of our loathsome enmity. He accepts our damnation. He suffers our wrath. He takes a dagger to the heart—without ever approving of or agreeing with our dastardly confusion. While we are breathing Christological air, he, the creator and sustainer of the universe, the Father’s Son, and the anointed One, allows us to pour our wrath upon him.

however, is the deeply relational, beautiful and fiery movement between God and fallen Israel as God’s self-giving pressed for its end in human knowing and life in fallen Israel.

⁵⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, “Reconciliation in Christ and in His Church,” *Biblical Theology* 11:2 (1961), p. 31. The fuller quote reads: “Reconciliation means sharing in all that the other is. In Christ God became man, in order to share in our creaturely life, and through sharing in our estrangement and our burden of sin to abolish evil and division and estrangement and corruption and so to unite us with Himself that we might share in His divine life and love.”

On a human, relational level, when someone is angry with us, we have several possible avenues of response. We can pretend that there is no problem, that all is well, and go our merry way. We can invoke the “I don’t care” clause and move on in indifference. We can retaliate, matching anger with anger. But none of these responses serves the purpose of *relationship*, or solves the problem. What then is the way forward? Forgiveness? Yes, but forgiveness does not get to the bottom of the original enmity. But what if we accept the other person’s way of seeing? What if we could enter into their way of seeing *us*, and, without approving of their judgment, submit ourselves to their stubborn, anger-producing blindness, receive their wrath, taking into ourselves their wrong-headed rage, without condemning them?⁵⁸ And in doing so, in bearing the scorn of their hatred, what have we done? Have we not identified with them, embraced them, and related to them as they are, in the depths of where they are in their darkness? Have we not taken them into ourselves and established a real and personal relationship with them in their pain and estrangement? Indeed, have we not *reached them*?

Such is the way of the trinitarian love of God for us in our terrible darkness. In person, the Son of God walked into the room of Israel’s fiery conflict with God and bore Israel’s animosity. Who would have ever imagined that the Father’s Son himself would come among us, let alone allow himself to be rejected, damned, and cursed by his own creation? Such astounding love, such care, such determination *to be with us* and to share life is beyond our wildest dreams. It cannot be. *But so it is.*

For the Father’s Son did come. He did enter into our traumatic, wicked confusion. He did not pretend that all is well. He did not abandon us, moving on to other, more important things. He did not shout instructions from the sidelines of the conflict. And He did not retaliate. Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, the anointed One, stepped into the arena of our hostility, and he deliberately submitted himself to suffer our damnation— *and we damned him*. His presence stirred up the hell of Adam’s fall, and we poured out our wrath upon him. We cursed him.

In bearing our wrath against God, what has Jesus done? Dying in the arms of our hatred, the Father’s Son has met us where *we are*. He has *reached us*. Accepting us at our most wicked moment, he has embraced us in the terrible abyss of our gnarled and twisted pathology, thereby penetrating to the core of the fall and its original sin. Jesus has written the new covenant upon the dark walls of Adam’s hell, nailing proof of the Father’s love on the barren limbs of the forbidden tree. Bearing our scorn, the Father’s Son has reached us in our rage, personally closing the abyss between his Father’s dream for our adoption and our insane blindness. In dying under our judgment, the anointed One has ushered the Holy Spirit himself into the dreadful world of our guilt and shame and our hand-crafted religion and its death. “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”⁵⁹ Jesus has suffered the contradiction of fallen humanity.

⁵⁸ I am not suggesting here, of course, that anyone stay in an abusive relationship. I am only giving an analogy that helps us see how the Lord loves and endures us in our blindness in order to reach the real us.

⁵⁹ John 1:29.

Adoption

But in what sense has Jesus taken away our sin? Is the ‘taking away’ to be understood as his suffering the punishment of God upon us, thus removing the legal penalty for our sins by satisfying an external justice? Or is sin, and Jesus’ taking it away, far more personal and relational? Could it be that he ‘takes away’ our sin by overcoming it, by meeting us in our wickedness, thus taking our utter confusion and wrongheadedness, and our hatred of God, and all of our dastardly deeds out of play relationally? Could it be that by removing our sin is meant that Jesus has so met us in the corridors of our wrath that he has established a real relationship with us of the most profoundly personal order?

Having borne our curse, Jesus has not only met us in our fallenness, but penetrated to the core of our very being, on the other side of the original sin. In doing so he has overcome our sin and blindness. And it is here in Jesus himself that the Father’s eternal dream for our adoption is accomplished. For the one who suffered our damnation is the *Father’s Son*, and in bearing our wrath he has brought his own relationship with his Father—and nothing less—into our foul darkness. In suffering our scorn *as the Father’s Son*, he has included the real us, the fallen, offensive, blind and broken us in his fellowship with his Father.

As the great Athanasius and the early church insisted, Jesus Christ is *homoousios to Patri*, of the same being as the Father. Athanasius understood that unless Jesus is fully divine, God of God, from the inner circle of all that it means to be God, then he cannot bring God or God’s life to us. At the same time, if Jesus Christ is not of the same being as us, fully and truly human, born from the stock of Adam’s fall, then he may have God’s life but it does not reach the real us. In the person of Jesus himself, all that God is and has, and all that we are in our lost and broken existence meet and are united. But the ‘Godness’ of Jesus is not an abstract, naked divinity. It is relational. Jesus is God of God, to be sure, but God exists in relationship. Jesus is the Father’s eternal Son, and thus *his* incarnation means far more than that One who is fully divine has come among us. His incarnation means that the fully divine Son of the Father, the One who dwells in the Father’s bosom from all eternity and knows him face to face has come *and* therefore brought his divine relationship with his Father with him. The incarnation of the Son of God means the incarnation of the trinitarian fellowship itself.

Through Jesus’ suffering our curse, not only is God meeting us in our pain, but the Father himself is meeting us in our traumatic world. In Jesus, the trinitarian life of God has set up shop inside our hell forever. For Jesus did not break ties with his Father when he became what we are. He did not leave his Father behind as he entered our broken world and suffered our wrath. Our darkness is now included in the life of the Trinity.

In being the scapegoat upon whom we poured out all our sin and pain, he has taken away every barrier between his own divine communion with his Father and our broken, gnarled, and lost existence. The new covenant between the blessed Trinity and fallen

humanity has been cut into our damnation. The trinitarian life now fills the relationship between God and Israel, and in Israel the human race.

The gospel is not the news that we can accept an absent Jesus into our lives. The gospel is the news that the Father's Son has received us into his. We don't make Jesus part of our world; he has made us part of his. In bearing our scorn, Jesus has made room for the *real us* in his divine, trinitarian life. Adoption is not a theory or a theoretical doctrine; it is reality in Jesus Christ, for in him the Father himself has met, accepted and embraced us as we are forever. In a variation on Paul's great statement, 'For you know the stunning grace of the Father's Son that though he was rich in the shared life of the blessed Trinity, yet for our sake he became poor, suffering our wrath to meet us, and now through his suffering we who were so poor have been included in Jesus' own rich relationship with his Father.'⁶⁰

To be so loved by the Triune God that the Father's Son would go to such lengths and suffer such animosity to share his life with us is almost too good to be true. But it is true, indeed it is the truth that sets us free⁶¹ from ourselves. What could be more beautiful than the love of the Father, Son and Spirit for us? Yet, as with Adam and Israel, the love of God is also scary. Having borne our bitter rejection, we now have to live with Jesus' love. His presence proclaims to us that we belong to the Father, Son and Spirit forever, and that we have a beautiful life to live, but his presence also shines the light into our delusions, revealing our religions to be dead, and the life we are living as sadness itself. Included in Jesus' own relationship with his Father, the human race now lives in the crisis of adoption.⁶² For Jesus Christ is in the room with us. His presence exposes our world of darkness and death and begs the question: Which world are you going to live in, your own or mine?

History is the time and space given to us to wrestle with Jesus Christ within us. He has embraced us forever, but we are scared to death, and bring into Jesus' relationship with us the most bizarre, alienated way of thinking. Jesus' world of adoption, of self-sacrifice, of suffering love and reconciliation makes no sense to us. It cannot be. And it is here, in our "it cannot be" that we see that sin is our refusal to believe in our adoption. Such disagreement with Jesus, such unbelief in the fact that we are included in the trinitarian life leaves us believing in ourselves and our own dark and twisted vision, *and* such belief in ourselves leaves us spending our lives trying to impose our way of seeing upon the universe. Sin is not simply about breaking a divine commandment; it is insisting that Jesus change his vision and receive ours, that he let go of the way he sees his Father and us, and believe in our god and our separation. Sin is insisting that Jesus Christ repent and believe in us. Jesus never will, and neither will he go away, and we cannot kill him again.

⁶⁰ See 2 Corinthians 8:9.

⁶¹ See John 8:31-32.

⁶² For more on the crisis of Jesus' presence inside our darkness, see my book *Across All Worlds*, pp. 49ff.

Herein lies the plight of the human race: The Father's Son is inescapable. He dwells within our darkness, and there his light exposes our pretense, revealing that we are wayward sons and daughters of his Father who have lost our minds. We are free to live in our own worlds, free to wrest the cosmos and the Triune God into submission to us—or to die trying.⁶³ But that is to damn ourselves to the joyless hell of meaninglessness. And even then—especially then—Jesus won't forsake us. Bearing our scorn, the Father's Son has found his way inside our alienation, and in our dastardly confusion the living Word of God speaks: "Come unto me. Put the ledger down, and let me teach you about my Father and his love. Let me tell you who you are. Be reconciled."

Come, Holy Spirit of Adoption

Adoption is not the dream of a fool. It is the stunning truth in Jesus Christ. In bearing our enmity, Jesus has established a real relationship with us at our very worst. As the Father's Son incarnate, he has brought his own relationship with his Father into our fallen world, taking our sin out of play and embracing us in the Father's love. But Jesus is also the *anointed One*, and thus establishing a relationship with us at our worst means that he has brought the Holy Spirit himself into our world of flesh. Jesus is "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" *and* "the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit."⁶⁴

As Jesus embraced us in our darkness he was including us in his own anointing with the Holy Spirit. Meeting us where we are and accepting us into his own life, Jesus has given us a place in his relationship with his Father *and* in his relationship with the Holy Spirit. But who is the Holy Spirit? What is He like? What is his passion? What does his presence with us mean?

While there are many spirits, there is only one unique, special Spirit of God. He is referred to variously as the Holy Spirit,⁶⁵ the Spirit of the Lord,⁶⁶ the Spirit of the Father,⁶⁷ the Spirit of the Father's Son,⁶⁸ the Spirit of Jesus Christ,⁶⁹ the Spirit of truth,⁷⁰ the Spirit of adoption,⁷¹ the Comforter,⁷² and the Spirit of Grace.⁷³ Unlike every other spirit, the

⁶³ Note Barth's comment on our resistance to our life in Christ. "He can still rebel and lie and fear, but only in conflict, in impotent conflict, with his own most proper being. He can and necessarily will be judged, but his own most proper being will be his judge" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, p. 91.

⁶⁴ John 1:33.

⁶⁵ See Matthew 1:18, 20; 3:11; Luke 1:15; Acts 2:14; 7:51; Romans 5:5.

⁶⁶ See Luke 4:18 and Acts 8:39.

⁶⁷ See Matthew 10:20.

⁶⁸ See Galatians 4:6.

⁶⁹ See Philippians 1:19.

⁷⁰ See John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13.

⁷¹ See Romans 8:15.

⁷² See John 14:16; 26; 15:26.

Holy Spirit traverses the intimate, face-to-face fellowship of the Father and the Son themselves, dwelling in the midst of their relationship on equal terms. He is fully divine, yet distinct from the Father and the Son. His passion is fellowship, togetherness, shared life.

As the Spirit who dwells in the relationship of the Father and Son, he does not come to us to establish a relationship between us and Jesus, as if the Father and Son are absent from us and our adoption is a mere theory. He comes because we are children of the Father in Jesus, included in the trinitarian life itself. For how could the Spirit be absent from the ones Jesus and his Father have embraced? And how could the Spirit of the Father and Son bear for us to be included in the trinitarian life, yet be so lost and bound in the great darkness? The identity of the Holy Spirit as the One who shares life with the Father and Son, together with our identity in Jesus as those included in the trinitarian life (yet blind as bats) translates the Spirit's passion for shared life into a determination to bring us to be our true anointed selves in Jesus. As the unique and special Spirit of the Father and Son, he is inherently the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of grace towards us.

As Jesus learned what it means to be the Father's Son incarnate through the things that he suffered,⁷⁴ could it be that the Holy Spirit learned how to meet us in the great darkness through Jesus' affliction, and through his steadfast ministry to the suffering servant of God? As 'the Word of God was on the road to becoming flesh' in the covenant between God and Israel, and as that Word has in fact become flesh and dwells among us, could it be that 'the Holy Spirit was on the road to dwelling with the fallen children of Adam,' and in Jesus has learned to do so forever?

In fellowship with the Father's Son, as he bore our blind judgment, the Holy Spirit has "accustomed" himself, as Irenaeus said, "to dwell in the human race."⁷⁵ As Jesus suffered, the Holy Spirit was learning first hand, so to speak, and from the inside about our alienation and pain. Through nurturing Jesus in the agony that he suffered from us, the Holy Spirit, who traverses the intimate fellowship of the Father and Son, understands how to traverse the deepest trenches of our blindness.

The Holy Spirit's burden is to educate the human race, to make subjectively, personally, emotionally and spiritually real *to us* in our darkness that which is already real in Jesus Christ. The Spirit of adoption meets us in our terrible blindness, to convict us of sin, righteousness and judgment,⁷⁶ for his passion is to take the things of Jesus and disclose them to us,⁷⁷ so that we can be who we are and live. But we have wrong eyes and are unable to see, so he walks with us relationally, meeting us where we are in our

⁷³ See Hebrews 10:29.

⁷⁴ See Heb 5:8.

⁷⁵ Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmann's Publishing Company, reprinted 1987), III.17, 1.

⁷⁶ See John 16:8-15.

⁷⁷ See John 16:13-25.

confusion, yet insisting that we see that which is beyond our belief, but at a pace that does not overwhelm us.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not an external event, for in Jesus he has made his way into the living room of our blind souls. It is here in the very center of our created being that the Holy Spirit witnesses to our innermost beings and begins to free us to live in the inconceivable world of our adoption in Christ. For while it is impossible for us to push the weeds of our fallen minds to the side, and thus to believe in anything other than what we perceive through our blindness, Jesus has penetrated our darkness and brought the Spirit of truth with him. The Holy Spirit is not a spectator, watching from the outside, giving abstract and external instructions that he hopes that we will apply to our lives. He meets us in the corridors of our souls, bearing witness to the ‘unbelievable’ world of Jesus and his Father. He works within us to help us see through our own blindness to know who God is in Christ and who we are in him, and in this way to help us take baby steps against our own judgment and alienation.

Inside, at the core of our being, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits⁷⁸ that it is true, that we are sons and daughters of the Father himself in Jesus, crying the exclusive words of Jesus, “Abba! Father!” within us. “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”⁷⁹

‘No one knows the Father, except the Son.’ No one in biblical history ever heard, “Thou art My beloved Son, in whom My soul delights”⁸⁰ and no one ever uttered, “Abba! Father!” in response—except the Son incarnate.⁸¹ In the terrifying and lonely darkness of our fallen minds, the Holy Spirit cries nothing less within us than Jesus’ own cry “Abba! Father!” For while Jesus dwells in the bosom of the Father, he also dwells in us in our confusion. The Holy Spirit takes of Jesus and discloses it to us, so that we can know and experience and taste and feel Jesus’ own relationship with his Father, and we can be free to live in the Father’s embrace with Jesus.

From the inside out, the Holy Spirit is at work within us, witnessing to the truth as it is in Jesus,⁸² so that our minds can be reconstructed in the light of life, and we can have new eyes. In disclosing the presence of Jesus Christ in our darkness, the Spirit of truth places us on the razor’s edge of what we believe, exposing the contradiction between the world of Jesus and his Father, and our own world of darkness and pain. “Abba! Father!” is not simply a bible phrase; it is *Jesus himself present in his life with his Father within us*. As the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus in us, as we hear his cry, we know that there is more to us than we ever dared to dream, that we belong to glory, that we are loved and safe in the arms of the Father. At the same time this disclosure reveals to us that the life we are living is sadness and death; we see our religion as empty and feel its nothingness. We see

⁷⁸ See Romans 8:16.

⁷⁹ Galatians 4:4.

⁸⁰ Matthew 3:17; 17:5.

⁸¹ See Mark 14:36. See also Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, pp. 55-57 and *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, vol. 1, pp. 5-6.

⁸² See Ephesians 4:21.

our darkness for what it is—woeful and terrible confusion—feeling the pain of its alienation from the Father’s embrace.

The blessed empowering of the Holy Spirit is not an act of God from the outside, or the application of abstract truths to our religious behavior, and certainly not the product of our religious charm. The empowering of the Holy Spirit is the fruit of his witness to us in our darkness, which discloses Jesus himself within us, thus granting us eyes to see that which is inconceivable—that we are wrong and that there is another God, another way, another life. Revealing Jesus and our hope in him, and exposing our misery and making us feel it, forces the issue of our faith and throws us into the crisis of decision. We are so blind we do not even know that we are in hell, and are quite content to stay there, but the revelation of Jesus Christ within us strips away our pretense, lays our religions bare and stirs malcontent within the marrow of our souls. Seeing Jesus’ heaven reveals our hell, and forces the issue—which world are we going to live in?

The crisis of our adoption is not theological, but personal. Disclosing Jesus in us, the Spirit creates a crisis of faith, convicting us of our folly by haunting us with the courage and sanity and life of Jesus himself. Are we going to answer the call of our god and perpetuate our religion of death, or are we going to believe the cry of the Spirit of the Father’s Son, and live in the freedom of our adoption? Which spirit are we going to follow, the spirit of the age, or the Spirit of Jesus, the spirit of error or the Spirit of truth?⁸³

Human history is about the Holy Spirit’s work within us bringing the human race to hear Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, to see and encounter Jesus himself within our own brokenness, so that we can begin to discern good from evil, light from darkness, life from death, and heaven from hell. Choosing Jesus, taking baby steps of faith in him and his world, releases the power of the Spirit in us. For believing in Jesus is accepting our acceptance; it is receiving the Father’s love, and thus Jesus’ own *parrhesia*—freedom, assurance, confidence, boldness and life—is free to take baby steps within us. The anointing of the Holy Spirit begins to flourish in our humanity.

The hope of the human race in Christ is that the Spirit of adoption will not back away. The Spirit’s passion is to bring his anointing of fallen humanity in Jesus to full and personal and abiding expression in us, and not only in us personally, but in our relationship with the Father through the Son, and in our relationships with one another, and indeed with all creation.

The Spirit of truth, the Spirit of adoption will not rest until our reconciliation, adoption, and anointing made real in Jesus himself, has taken shape on earth, and throughout the cosmos. Meantime, humanity lives in the liberating crisis of Jesus’ real presence and of the Holy Spirit’s revealing ministry, between the beauty of the trinitarian world of grace and freedom and life, and the exposure of the mess we are making of our own. Even when we run from the exposing revelation of Jesus, the Holy Spirit does not forsake us, but takes our running and in time turns it into a way of revealing the truth to us again.

⁸³ See IJohn 4:6.

Life in the Spirit is relational. He is determined, but kind and gentle. The Holy Spirit is a redeeming genius, most competent to meet us where we are in our darkness, and without overwhelming us to lead us to begin to use Jesus' right mind, and to risk leaving our own darkness and its strange comfort, embracing the new world of the Father and his Son incarnate.

Come, Holy Spirit of adoption, open our eyes and ears, help us know the Father's Son, the hope of glory, within us⁸⁴ and live according to your empowering witness, beyond the great darkness and its religion in the freedom of real reconciliation with the Father in Jesus.

Christmas 2007
C. Baxter Kruger

⁸⁴ See Ephesians 1:17ff and Colossians 1:27.