

God in the Hands of Angry Sinners

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The prime purpose of the incarnation, in the love of God, is to lift us up into a life of communion, of participation in the very triune life of God.

—James B. Torrance

What was the Holy Spirit doing as Jesus was ridiculed, unjustly condemned, beaten and tortured, and then crucified on the cross? Jesus was conceived in the Spirit, baptized in the Spirit, lived his entire life in the Spirit, and offered himself up on the cross in the Spirit. So how do we understand the Holy Spirit in relation to those horrible hours of Good Friday? Trapped, as many of us have been in the penal theory of atonement, this question, as Moltmann notes,¹ rarely surfaces. And there is little wonder. The theory contends that, as the Father placed the sin of the world upon Jesus, he then poured out his wrath upon Jesus instead of upon us who deserved it, hiding his face from Jesus, abandoning his own Son in utter rejection.

The doctrine of penal substitution states that God gave himself in the person of his Son to suffer instead of us the death, punishment and curse due to fallen humanity as the penalty of sin... That the Lord Jesus Christ died *for us* — a shameful death, bearing our curse, enduring our pain, suffering the wrath of his own Father in our place — has been the wellspring of the hope of countless Christians throughout the ages.²

One cannot but think of George MacDonald here: “Good souls many will one day be horrified at the things they now believe of God.”³

In the context of such a notion, that the Father poured out his wrath on his own Son it is striking to ask about the Holy Spirit. What did the Holy Spirit do when the Father rejected his Son? What happened in the Holy Spirit’s heart, if we may so speak, when the Father forsook his Son and cursed Jesus? If we accept this model of the Father rejecting and damning his own

¹ See Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 62.

² Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), p. 21.

³ George MacDonald, *Christ in Creation: Unspoken Sermons*, ed., by Rolland Hein (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing), p. 292.

Son on the cross then we are left with the Holy Spirit simply and profoundly torn between the two. Did the Holy Spirit have to choose a side? Which one? Or perhaps the Holy Spirit is like a mother caught between an angry husband and her only son. Perhaps here we see the reason there is so little discussion of the Holy Spirit in the context of Jesus' death. If what there is in us of a godly mind can manage to stomach the idea of a horrid rift between the Father and Jesus, surely we are convicted of our folly to think of the Holy Spirit's heart being ripped apart as well.

But what if we reversed the theory? What if, instead of seeing the Father forsaking his own Son on the cross, we see the death of Jesus as the penetration of the oneness, the togetherness, the communion, the blessed life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit into the gnarled abyss of our alienation? What if the death of Jesus is not about sinners in the hands of an angry God, but about the Triune God in the hands of angry sinners? What if the crucifixion is not about abandonment, but its opposite, union? What if the purpose of Jesus' death is to find *us*, to establish his relationship with us in our sin and death and bondage, and to recreate us in the Holy Spirit? "The prime purpose of the incarnation, in the love of God, is to lift *us* up into a life of communion, of participation in the very triune life of God."⁴ Or as St. Irenaeus said so beautifully, "our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that he might bring *us* to be even what he is himself."⁵ The aim of Jesus' death was not to suffer the wrath of his Father, but to make personal, healing, life-giving, forgiving contact with us sinners, at the root of our sin and alienation. He died to unite himself with us at our most sickening worst, and to make us sinners heirs with him of his *Father* and of the *Holy Spirit* (Rom 8:17).⁶

The purpose and the nature of atonement are found in the very identity of Jesus Christ, as is the presence and heart of the Holy Spirit. As the early Church confessed in the Nicene Creed, Jesus Christ is the Father's eternal Son, "Light from Light, true

⁴ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: IVP), p. 21, emphasis added.

⁵ Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), V, preface, emphasis added.

⁶ "For that was the very purpose and end of our Lord's Incarnation, that He should join what is man by nature to Him who is by nature God, that so man might enjoy His salvation and His union with God without any fear of its failing or decrease," *The Orations of St. Athanasius Against the Arians* (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh), II.70; cf. III.34, and IV.6.

God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father (*homoousios to Patri*), through whom all things were made..." This confession was designed to call a halt to any notion that Jesus Christ was less than fully divine. He belongs to the circle of divine being, of the same being as the Father. What we meet in Jesus therefore is not a form that God assumed for a season in his relationship with us, but the living expression of God's eternal life. There was never a time, Athanasius argued against the Arians, when the Father was alone and simply God, not Father, without his Son and Spirit.⁷ "The Holy Trinity is no created being."⁸ The union of the Father, Son, and Spirit that we see lived out on the pages of the New Testament is not something that came into being two millennia ago. This is an eternal relationship, an eternal union predating creation.

As the Father's eternal Son, he is the one, as the apostles testify⁹ and the Creed affirms, in and through and by and for whom all things were created and are sustained.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-4).

Note these words from the cloud of witnesses.

The simple meaning is that the Word of God was not only the fount of life to all creation, so that those which had not yet existed began to be, but that His life-giving power makes them remain in their state. For did not His continued inspiration

⁷ *Ibid.*, I.11; 17-18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I.18.

⁹ See John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1Corinthians 8:6.

quicken the world, whatsoever flourishes would without doubt immediately decay or be reduced to nothing.¹⁰

All creatures, spiritual and material, are created in, through and by Christ... it is He Who sustains them in being. In Him they 'hold together.' Without Him they would fall apart.¹¹

There is already and always a relationship between the Son of God and the world and it now, uniquely, takes the form of personal presence.¹²

The critical point here, affirmed by Calvin, Merton, and Gunton, is that the eternal Son is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and as such he is the source of our being, without whom we would simply disappear, or "lapse back into non-existence," to borrow again from Athanasius.¹³ Before he became incarnate, the Son of the Father already had a relationship with the human race.

When this Son became a human being he was not therefore *creating* a relationship with the human race; he was establishing his existing relationship, his existing union with all things *inside*

¹⁰ John Calvin, *The Gospel According to John*, translated by T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 10-11. For more on Calvin's view of Christ as mediator of Creation, see Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 55-61. Note also Calvin's comment on Acts 17:28: "Now, we see that all those who know not God know not themselves; because they have God present with them not only in the excellent gifts of the mind, but in their very essence; because it belongeth to God alone to be, all other things have their being in him. Also, we learn out of this place that God did not so create the world once that he did afterward depart from his work; but that it standeth by his power..." (John Calvin, *Commentary from the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House) reprinted 1981), pp. 168-169.

¹¹ Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961), p.137.

¹² Colin Gunton, *The Christian Faith* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 98. Note here Thomas F. Torrance's comment: "Since he is the eternal Word of God by whom and through whom all things that are made are made, and in whom the whole universe of visible and invisible realities coheres and hangs together, and since in him divine and human natures are inseparably united, then the secret of every man, whether he believes or not, is bound up with Jesus, for it is in him that human contingent existence has been grounded and secured" [Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), p. 183].

¹³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1963), §6.

his humanity. On the one side, the incarnation was not an event of divine divorce. When the eternal Son became human, he did not leave the Holy Spirit behind or abandon his Father. It is the One who is *homoousios to Patri*, and the Son who is in the Holy Spirit who became flesh, establishing his union with his Father, and his anointing in the Holy Spirit in his humanity. On the other side, the One who became human is the “*arche* of the creation of God” (Rev 3:14), the source and meaning of all creation. All things have their existence in him. St. John is emphatic, “apart from Him nothing came into being.” The very identity of Jesus Christ speaks volumes. Note here the beautiful summation of Thomas F. Torrance.

With the Incarnation, God the eternal Son became Man, without ceasing to be God and without breaking the communion of the Holy Trinity within which God lives his own divine life. In the birth and life of Jesus on earth human nature and divine nature were inseparably united in the eternal Person of God the Son. Therefore in him the closed circle of the inner life of God was made to overlap with human life, and human nature was taken up to share in the eternal communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

In Jesus Christ — the incarnate Son — the Father, the Holy Spirit, the human race, and all creation are not separated, but *together in relationship*. The incarnate Son, Jesus Christ himself, is the relationship. For in him, in his own person the blessed Trinity and broken humanity are united. His humanity is the union.

Standing before this Jesus we are poised to see the nature of the atonement as the union not only of the Son and our humanity, but the union of the incarnate Son (and his Father, and the Holy Spirit) and us sinners. “The Word became *flesh*” (John 1:14, *sarx*, not simply *anthropos*). For what benefit would there be for us sinners — blind and broken, faithless and

¹⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, “Come, Creator Spirit, for the Renewal of Worship and Witness,” in *Theology in Reconstruction*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975 reprint), p 241.

trapped in the alienation and bondage of the evil one — if Jesus assumed our humanity, yet did not reach our *flesh*?¹⁵

Union. Union. Union. Anything less than the true, real, personal union of Jesus Christ — the Father's eternal Son incarnate, and the One anointed in the Holy Spirit — and the fallen human race is unworthy of the word 'salvation.' Here the penal substitution theory, with its vicarious punishment and imputed righteousness, proves itself inadequate, too shallow, too extrinsic, and profoundly too impersonal. What good is it to us to be declared legally clean, and to be given a robe of external righteousness, when we are still broken, alien, sinful inside? Who, to remember MacDonald again,¹⁶ will ever be comfortable in the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in whom there is no darkness (1John 1:5) or even a hint of shadows when all they have is an imputed righteousness covering the alienation residing within their hearts?

Did not Jesus himself pray that *we* would be *in* him, and with him where he was? "Father, I desire that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am" (John 17:24). And where is Jesus but face to face with his Father, in his bosom? (John 1:1; 18). The broken, indeed evil conscience can never stand on external accounting in the presence of divine, shadowless light. What is needed is the mind, the heart, the soul of Jesus Christ himself, the love of Jesus in his union with his Father in the Holy Spirit, setting up shop, as it were, inside

¹⁵ Note here St. Gregory's famous statement: "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole," Gregory Nazianzen, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. VII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), Ep. CI. Note also St. Athanasius: "As, on the one hand, we could not have been redeemed from sin and the curse, unless the flesh and nature, which the Word took upon Him had been truly ours (for we should have had no interest by his assumption of any foreign nature); so also man could not have been united to the Divine nature, unless that Word, which was made flesh, had not been, in essence and nature, the Word and Son of God. For that was the very purpose and end of our Lord's Incarnation, that He should join what is man by nature to Him who is by nature God, that so man might enjoy His salvation and His union with God without any fear of its failing or decrease," *The Orations of St. Athanasius Against the Arians*, II.70; see also I.40; and Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, V.14.3.

¹⁶ Here see especially the sermons, "Justice," "The Last Penny," and "Righteousness" in George MacDonald, *Christ in Creation: Unspoken Sermons*, ed., by Rolland Hein (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing), pp. 63-81, 167-176, 177-187, respectively.

the very core of our alienation. Anything less leaves the broken us destitute of the trinitarian life — legally clean perhaps — but lost to the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “I have made Thy name know to them, and *will* make it known; that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26). “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

Yet how is Jesus to make contact with us in our fallen humanity? How is he to bring his union with us in his humanity into our alienation? How is he to unite sinners with the Holy Spirit, and lost sons and daughters with his Father? How does Jesus Christ *reach us*, and deliver *us* from evil? Not by suffering the wrath of his Father, but by *submitting to us* in our darkness. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ — the Father’s eternal Son incarnate, the One anointed in the Holy Spirit — involves the shocking submission of the blessed Trinity in him to us as sinners in our greatest iniquity as it took shape in the murdering tutelage of the father of lies.

Note this beautiful vision of heaven penned by Jonathan Edwards.

There, even in heaven, dwells the God from whom every stream of holy love, yea, every drop that is, or ever was, proceeds. There dwells God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, united as one, in infinitely dear, and incomprehensible, and mutual, and eternal love. There dwells God the Father, who is the father of mercies, and so the father of love, who so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son to die for it...There dwells Christ in both his natures, the human and the divine, sitting on the same throne with the Father. And there dwells the Holy Spirit — the Spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God, as it were, flows out, and is breathed forth in love, and by whose immediate influence all holy love is shed abroad in the hearts of all the saints on earth and in heaven. There, in heaven this infinite fountain of love — this eternal Three in One — is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it, as it flows for ever.¹⁷

Edwards is here at his theological and poetical best, painting this breathtaking picture of the cascading fountain of trinitarian life and love. If we but change the *location* of Edward’s infinite fountain from ‘heaven’ to ‘our hell’ we will at once behold the astonishing meaning of Jesus Christ as atonement in himself, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” and “the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit” (John 1:29, 33). *There* — not removed from us — but *inside us*, inside our death and

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 1982), pp. 327-328.

appalling blindness, inside the trauma of our sin and alienation, *in our hell*, 'this infinite fountain of love—this eternal Three in One — is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it.' This is what Jesus Christ did on the cross; he reached us sinners in our greatest sin; he united all that he is with his Father in the Holy Spirit — the life, the communion, the fullness, the holiness, the righteousness and joy — with us in our unrighteous collusion with the wicked one, and its iniquity and death, and terrorizing guilt and shame.

Jesus loved us. Jesus found us, embraced us, accepted us as we had become in the dastardly schemes of evil. How did Jesus Christ reach us? How did he penetrate the terror of our souls? How did the Son of the highest unite himself with us at our lowest? How did the one who was rich become poor (2Cor 8:9), and he who knew no sin become sin on our behalf? (2Cor 5:21). Here, we can agree with the penal theory that that key was Jesus' submission to the will of his Father. Yet we refuse to accept the perverse notion that it was his Father's will to pour out his wrath upon his own Son.¹⁸

Scripture is clear. The insolence, the scorn, the mocking derision, the despising shame, the wrath poured out on Calvary's hill did not originate in the Father's heart, but in ours.¹⁹ "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."²⁰ It was not the Father or the Holy Spirit who beat Jesus, detested him, cursed him, and abandoned him; it was the human race. *We mocked him. We cursed him. We crucified him. As Jesus himself suffered our rejection, as he endured our betrayal, and*

¹⁸ Note here St. Hilary's comment on the heretic's misuse of '*The Eloi*.' "They construe this into the expression of a bitter complaint, that He was deserted and given over to weakness. But what a violent interpretation of an irreligious mind! how repugnant to the whole tenor of our Lord's words! He hastened to the death, which was to glorify Him, and after which He was to sit on the right hand of power; with all those blessed expectations could He fear death, and therefore complain that His God had betrayed Him to its necessity, when it was the entrance to eternal blessedness?" St. Hilary of Poitiers, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), *On the Trinity*, X.49.

¹⁹ For more of my thoughts here, see *The Shack Revisited* (New York: Faith Words, 2012), pp. 179-195; and *Across All Worlds* (Jackson: Perichoresis Press, 2007 and Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2007).

²⁰ Matt. 20:18-19; see also 16:21; Mark 10:33-34; Luke 24:7; John 18:35; 19:16, 18, and Heb. 12:3.

submitted himself to bear our scorn and hostility, he was personally entering into our iniquity. The Lord was causing the iniquity of us all to encounter or meet (*paga*) him, as Isaiah prophesied (Isa 53:6, cf. Heb 9:28; 1Peter 2:24).

Here is shocking, amazing grace, divine, humble, and astonishing love. He came to his own and his own received him not (John 1:11). Indeed his own damned him with a curse, siding with the enemy in blasphemy.

Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!
Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"
The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

"He was despised and forsaken of men," as foreseen by the prophet (Isa 53:3). "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself" (Heb 12:3). Down, down he went, into the twisted abyss of darkness, into the shame, into the perversion of our humanity, underneath the waves of evil's bitterness as it took form in our curses. "Cursed," St. Paul says, interpreting Moses, "is every one who hangs on a tree" (Gal 3:13), and the apostle deliberately misquotes Moses, leaving "by God" out of his apostolic mind. For it was not the curse of his Father that the merciful Son endured, but ours. For how could the One who knows the Father meet us in our darkness where his Father is unknown except by allowing us to pour our scorn upon him until the waves of our misery overcame him and he at last had our eyes in the great darkness?

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34 Psalm 22:1). This was a cry of true identification with us. Here Jesus made contact with the bottom of the abyss, with Adam in his treachery trembling in the bushes, with us and our broken eyes in blackest darkness, where fear has refused all light and hope, and the Father's face is tarred with the brush of evil's insanity. Here, in this place, in this prison of twisted lies, in this trauma of hopelessness where the Holy Spirit can scarcely be felt, Jesus comes to seek and to save that which is lost (Luke 19:10).

Of that moment none can know.²¹ It had to be. His love drove him to meet us as we were, and to become what we are. No fragment of our broken, guilt-ridden humanity could be lost. For his joy, his Father's mission, the desire of his heart was to bring blind sinners to see, to hear, to *know* his Father, to "bring us to God" (1Peter 3:18), and "many sons to glory" (Heb 2:10), to bathe in the fountain of the communion of the blessed Trinity. He had to submit himself to our blindness. He had to find the real us. But not for a moment did his Father or the Holy Spirit forsake him in his pain. This is not the story of divine abandonment, but of shocking grace, wherein the Son of the Father finds his way to the bottom of our sea. He submits himself to the destructive forces of our disaster, and as he does, as he identifies with us to the full he takes on our eyes, sees what we see, and feels what we feel, without ever losing his trust in his Father's presence and love. Never — not for the slightest moment, from all eternity — had he not seen his Father's face or felt the Spirit's presence. But now he comes to us. Now he meets us in the terror of evil's darkness. We damned him, and without a word he accepted our damnation — and he died in the horror of the great delusion.²²

The Psalm declares to us the hidden truth that in this moment of terror, when the incarnate Son's vision joined ours in the deep darkness, and he identified with us in our sin, when he cried out in the terrible pain of the cloud of unknowing, his Father's love stood fast as always. "For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He

²¹ Note George MacDonald's insight: "It was a cry *in* desolation, but it came out of Faith. It is the last voice of Truth speaking when it can but cry. The divine horror of that moment is unfathomable by the human soul. It was blackness of darkness. And yet he would believe. Yet he would hold fast. God was his God yet. *My God*—and in the cry came forth the Victory, and all was over soon. Of the peace that followed that cry, the peace of a perfect soul, large as the universe, pure as light, ardent as life, victorious for God and his brethren, he himself alone can ever know the breadth and length, and depth and height" ["The Eloi," in *Unspoken Sermons, Series 1-3 in One Volume* (Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, second printing, 1999), p. 112].

²² Note MacDonald again: "Never had it been so with Him before. Never before had He been unable to see God beside Him. Yet never was God nearer Him than now. For never was Jesus more divine. He could not see, could not feel Him near; and yet it is 'My God' that He cries" George MacDonald, *Christ in Creation: Unspoken Sermons*, ed., by Rolland Hein (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing), p. 334.

heard" (Psalm 22:24).²³ Crying out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), Jesus breathed his last breath in the trauma of our dungeon, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit" (Luke 23:46).

It was not his Father who banished his own Son from life, but us. And our blessed Lord Jesus received our judgment, bowed before it, suffered its loathsome fear, and in doing so turned our rejection into the mercy seat, the place where the Triune God personally endured the hostility of sinners in our bondage to evil. He died in the arms of our betrayal — *and he was not alone*. The Father and the Holy Spirit were in him. "God was in Christ," as St. Paul teaches (2Cor 5:19; see Heb 9:14). "Behold an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me" (John 16:32). It is precisely this 'witness' that constitutes the atonement, and the way of our salvation. Neither the Holy Spirit nor the Father were spectators to the pain of Jesus. This was not a moment when the Holy Spirit was torn between two loves; this was the moment of the astonishing humility of the Triune God, wherein the Father was in his Son and the Holy Spirit refused to be absent, and together in Jesus himself the unspeakable communion of the blessed Trinity found its way inside our estrangement, establishing forever the fountain of overflowing life inside the broken cistern of our alienated humanity.

Can we not hear Jesus' heart? "Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory" (John 17:24). He is saying, 'Father, I desire that they may see my essential nature as your Son, the anointed One, the One in whom my brothers and sisters live and move and have their being, that they may be liberated to live in the freedom of my heart, that they may *know* that I am in You, and they are in Me, and I Am in them (John 14:20). Father, in the Holy Spirit, I will go into the belly of the beast to bring good news to the afflicted, to heal the broken hearted, and to deliver my family from the evil one (see Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18). I will submit myself to the wrath and anger, the malice and injustice, the unholiness and bitter rage that originates in the father of lies, and yet has now formed in their minds and hearts and wills.' "I have made Thy name known to them, and *will* make it known" (John 17:26). 'I will enact your forgiveness. I will judge them, I will discern good from evil in them, divide evil from their hearts, and condemn sin in the flesh (see Rom 8:3; Heb 4:12). I will take my brothers

²³ See John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1878), pp. 237-247. Note the striking progression of Psalms 22, 23, and 24, foreshadowing the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

and sisters, and all creation, down in my death. As I allow myself to be damned by the human race in its collusion with evil's schemes, I will "commit my spirit" to your care, to our oneness, to our communion, in everlasting agreement with your heart and with the Holy Spirit, in whom our oneness reigns. I will wait for you My Father, and for the Holy Spirit in the great darkness that our union and communion in the Holy Spirit may quicken me and all creation with life as I see your face.'

And so Jesus turned toward Calvary, and the human race, both Jew and Gentile, joined as one man against the Father's Son. He submitted himself to us in our blindness. As we murdered the Father's Son incarnate, he established his existing union with us, and with creation, inside our sin, using our rejection of himself as his way of union with us as sinners. In the insanity of darkness we cut off the Father's Son incarnate, and he accepted our murder and transformed it into the way of our adoption, the reconstitution of our relationship with the Triune God. In Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Father have descended into our hell, and used our betrayal of Jesus as the way to get there. Jesus is in himself the one mediator between God and fallen humanity (1Tim 2:5), the very place where the life of the blessed Trinity intersects our dying and death.

Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or pain; the first things have passed away. And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost" (Rev 21:3-6).

As we focus on the Father's presence in Jesus' suffering, or on the fact that far from rejecting Jesus and abandoning him at the crucial hour, "God was in Christ" (2Cor 5:17), we are given eyes to see the deep, inner meaning of our justification, reconciliation, and adoption in Christ. Justification is not a mere external verdict, but the "end of us as sinners"²⁴ in Jesus' death. In Jesus Christ, Adam and his fall, and us in Adam were taken to our end, delivered up to destruction, crucified, put to death,

²⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), V/I, p. 253.

and buried.²⁵ Reconciliation is not a legal arrangement wherein we were forensically forgiven consequent upon Jesus' suffering our punishment. Reconciliation is our end and new beginning in Jesus himself as we were recreated in his resurrection in atonement with the Father in Jesus.²⁶ Adoption is not an abstract doctrine; it is reality. In Jesus — as he accepted our beatings, our scorn, our despising betrayal unto death — the Father was finding us, the broken, rebellious, sinful us, and there he embraced us, and using our crucifixion of his Son *for* us (or, *against* us), he put us to death in him, and brought us to life in Jesus in his resurrection, and lifted us up in his ascension into his own life with his Son. Who cannot but marvel at the redemptive genius at work here? Our contribution to our justification, and reconciliation, and to our inclusion in the life of the blessed Trinity was to reject and kill the Father's eternal Son incarnate. And the Father transformed our treachery into our own death, resurrection and ascension in Christ, using our sin as the way of his forgiving embrace.

What was the Holy Spirit doing as Jesus became "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3) and entered the domain of darkness? Refusing to abandon the beloved Son, the Holy Spirit was *in* Jesus submitting himself to angry sinners as "his *companion* in suffering."²⁷ "On Golgotha the Spirit suffers the suffering and death of the Son without dying with him."²⁸ As Jesus endured our hostility, the Holy Spirit was finding his way inside our death and alienation.

Hence in the union of divine and human natures in the Son the eternal Spirit of the living God has composed himself, as it were, to dwell with human nature, and human nature has been

²⁵ See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, V/I, pp. 250-256; 295-296; pp. 93-96. For a collection of striking quotes from a diverse group of Christian writers on our death and resurrection in Jesus see "Appendix: A Few Quotations on Our Inclusion in Jesus' Death", in C. Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited*, pp. 253-259.

²⁶ If we must speak of the wrath of God in the context of the death of Jesus, then Jesus himself is the wrath of God, the fiery, passionate, holy, unrelenting divine opposition to our destruction. This opposition, this wrath of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is embodied in Jesus' vicarious death, and is 'satisfied' in our resurrection and recreation and ascension in Jesus.

²⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, p. 62.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

adapted and become accustomed to receive and bear that same Holy Spirit.²⁹

In fellowship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, according to Irenaeus, "accustomed" himself "to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God."³⁰ And did so not as a watered down spirit, but as the Holy Spirit, 'the Lord, and giver of life.'³¹

On the one hand, the ongoing, unbroken relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus becomes the way of his resurrection.

It is precisely his suffering with the Son to the point of death on the cross which makes the rebirth of Christ from the Spirit inwardly possible. The Spirit participates in the dying of the Son in order to give him new 'life from the dead.' Because he accompanies Christ to his end, he can make this end the new beginning.³²

Who can fathom the mystery here? The Holy Spirit cannot die, yet must enter death, and did, in Jesus. Moreover, if the Holy Spirit is "the eternal light in which the Father knows the Son and the Son the Father,"³³ and if eternal life is knowing the Father, as Jesus teaches (John 17:3), then the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is integrated with the awakening of Jesus' communion with his Father in the Spirit. Accompanying Jesus on the cross

²⁹ T. F. Torrance, "Come, Creator Spirit," in *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 246; see also Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 189.

³⁰ Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, III.17.1; see also III.20.2; III.18.7; III.19.1; and IV.20.4.

³¹ "He came as the Spirit who in Jesus has penetrated into a new intimacy with our human nature, for he came as the Spirit in whom Jesus lived through our human life from end to end, from birth to death, and beyond into the resurrection. And therefore he came not as isolated and naked Spirit, but as Spirit charged with all the experience of Jesus as he shared to the full our mortal nature and weakness, and endures its temptation and grief and suffering and death, and with the experience of Jesus as he struggled and prayed, and worshipped and obeyed, and poured out his life in compassion for mankind" Thomas F. Torrance, "Come, Creator Spirit, for the Renewal of Worship and Witness," in *Theology in Reconstruction*, pp. 246-247.

³² Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 68.

³³ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 176.

the Holy Spirit becomes the eternal light shining in the darkness of Jesus' death revealing to him the Father's face in the grave. In the Spirit, the unspeakable communion of the Father and Son, 'this infinite fountain of love' found its way inside the netherworld of our darkness and death and bondage leading into Jesus' resurrection, and triumph over the forces of darkness, rendering "powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14), and into Jesus' ascension to his Father, taking captive a host of captives (Eph 4:8).

On the other hand, the unbroken relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus becomes the way of our recreation in communion with the Father in Jesus — the answer to Jesus' prayer. The crucifixion and resurrection of the incarnate Son constitutes the recreation of all things in the Holy Spirit, in Jesus Christ himself, and the eternal reordering of divine-human relationship. Not only was the Father in Christ together with the Holy Spirit, but recall that in his incarnation Jesus established his existing relationship with us in his own humanity, and now in dying establishes his relationship with us, and with all creation, in our death. Jesus alone died, but he was not alone. As the apostles testify, when Jesus died, we died (2Cor 5:14). When he rose, we rose. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1Pet 1:3). There and then, in infinite, overflowing mercy, the Triune God "made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:4-6; cf. Col 3:1-4).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon "all flesh" (*sarx*, Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28) at Pentecost is the natural fruit of the Holy Spirit accompanying Jesus into death in his union with us in our "flesh" (*sarx*, John 1:14). Pentecost is the manifestation of our inclusion in Jesus' own baptism in the Holy Spirit. In Jesus, and in his death, the Holy Spirit meets us, relates himself to us, knows us, and understands us in our plight. Having found his way inside our alienation in Jesus' suffering, the Holy Spirit (and all his gifts) knows how to give us ears to hear Jesus' own cry, "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). Having accustomed or attuned himself to us in our darkness, the Holy Spirit knows how to fulfill Jesus' prophecy: "In that day, you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20). As the Holy Spirit 'composed' himself to dwell in us in Jesus, he is now at work inside our shattered souls 'recomposing' us from the inside out. This work of the Holy Spirit is not an abstract word from on high. This is an internal work, inside our inner worlds, involving an ongoing revelation not "to" our intellect of a distant Savior and an external salvation, but an unveiling "in" us of Jesus himself (Gal 1:16), "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col

1:27), an unveiling which manifests our union with Jesus in his death, resurrection and ascension into the Father's embrace.

In the Holy Spirit, the living Word (*logos*) speaks (*rhema*) to us in person, inside our own broken hearts, inside the bizarre world of lies that beset our wounded minds, inside the dastardly delusion. As Jesus addresses us in the Spirit, our alien and hostile minds (Col 1:21), our afflicted conscience (Heb 9:9-14), our ignorance, our darkened understanding, and alienation from the life of God (Eph. 4:18) are gradually discerned and revealed to us. In the Spirit, the healing light of the Triune God searches and exposes, the Word pierces and divides (Heb 4:12) and we are given the mind of Jesus himself (1Cor 2:16), and seeing through Jesus' own eyes we are liberated to reject darkness and evil, and to turn (*pros*) face to face with his Father in the Holy Spirit.³⁴ Now, in the creative presence and witness of the Holy Spirit, "charged with all the experience of Jesus as he shared to the full our mortal nature and weakness,"³⁵ by the authority (*exousia*) of his own inner knowing, and his own unearthly assurance (*parrhesia*) which he shares with us, Jesus commands us to believe, to take sides with him against the way we see his Father, and ourselves, and others, to rise in his courage and faith and faithfulness, breaking all agreements with the wicked one, and to open our hearts to the Father himself, to receive his forgiveness, his love, his embrace, and to live in "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21) in the Holy Spirit. There, inside of our own broken souls 'this infinite fountain of love — this eternal Three in One — is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it, as it flows for ever' becoming a river of living water flowing out of our innermost beings (John 7:38).

A Prayer³⁶

Lord Jesus Christ, beloved and eternal Son of the Father, *Homoousios to Patri*, anointed of the Holy Spirit, incarnate, crucified, resurrected and ascended Lord of all creation, I believe in you. With great joy, with the praise of my whole heart I acknowledge and agree that you have found me in my darkness and sin, laid hold of me and taken me down in your death, freed me from sin and evil, quickened me with new life in

³⁴ Note here John 1:1 (*pros ton Theon*) and 14:6 (*pros ton patera*).

³⁵ See note 31.

³⁶ Originally posted as a blog on "Baxter's Ongoing Thoughts," October 7, 2013 (<http://www.perichoresis.org/baxters-blog.html>). Used by permission from Perichoresis, Inc.

your resurrection, and lifted me up into your Father's arms in your ascension. All of me, and mine, every war-torn fragment, every fearful, unbelieving, broken part is in you, in your Father, in the Holy Spirit. I rest in you, Jesus, lover of my soul, my Savior, my Salvation, my Sovereign, my King, my Liberator, the author and finisher of my faith. You have included me in all that you are and have in your union and face-to-face communion with your Father, and you have included me in your own anointing in the Holy Spirit. You have included me in your victory over evil and wickedness, and in your session at the Father's right hand, above all rule and authority in heaven and on earth. Nothing can separate me from you, your Father, and the Holy Spirit.

Thank you, blessed brother, Lord Jesus. You became what I am to bring me to be what you are in your life with your Father in the Holy Spirit. I hear you speak my name, and with the freedom of your heart I turn toward your Father to see him with your eyes. I receive the witness of the Spirit of Adoption. I hear you Lord Jesus, and your "Abba! Father!" inside my own soul. I receive your Father's everlasting love, and give myself, all of me, to your Father's embrace, and to the healing of the Holy Spirit's life.

Lord Jesus, in your courage, in the comfort of the personal presence of the Holy Spirit, and the unearthly assurance of your Father's arms, I pledge all of me to your service, to participate in your ministry of liberation of our brothers and sisters. Reveal to me the agreements that I have made with evil and darkness, that I may break these agreements in your name, and that I may walk in every way in the glorious freedom of the children of God, in full agreement with the Holy Spirit, and in all his gifts.

I take my stand in you, Lord Jesus, and in your name and authority I bind and banish from my life, my body, my family, my sphere of influence, my kingdom, and my properties every foul thing, every spirit, power, and art, every prayer, curse, covering, idea, and desire that is directed towards me, and mine, that is not in full submission to you, your Father, and the Holy Spirit. In your name, and by your authority, Lord Jesus, I summon the holy angels and command them to destroy the kingdom of darkness throughout my kingdom, and to establish the kingdom of the blessed Trinity throughout my domain.

Worthy are you Lord Jesus Christ, Father's Son, Anointed One, Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit, Victorious Warrior, worthy are you of all praise and adoration and worship, now and forever. Thank you for being my Savior, my Good Shepherd, my High Priest, my

true and faithful witness, my Alpha and Omega. I rest in you, and await your Word to me today. Amen.

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