

1101 Creative Living Workshop

“The story of Jesus is really your story.” (David McGregor)

‘What role does God play in our lives? It is an inevitable but wrong question. We shall be freed from it only by captivation to the right question: what role do we play in God's life? The story is not our story with a role for Christ. The story is Christ's story with roles for us. To state the most audacious of Barth's propositions straightaway: the God-man Jesus Christ, as an historical event, is the ontological foundation in God of all reality other than God' (R. Jenson).

“To look to him is to see him at the very centre, to see him and the history which, accomplished in him, heals everything and all things, as the mystery, reality, origin and goal of the whole world, all human beings, all life.” (K. Barth)

'If we can imagine God drawing up the plans for the universe before He created it, and if we could examine these plans, we would not see Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but Jesus Christ in the Gospel' (G. Goldsworthy).

‘When we see that the whole sum of our salvation, and every single part of it, are comprehended in Christ, we must beware of deriving even the minutest portion of it from any other quarter.’ (Calvin *Inst* II,16. 19)

Dignity: Review and Summary

Introduction

Basic principles:

1. God can only be known (*yada* = intimacy) by us according to the manner of his self – knowledge. (How he knows himself).
2. Only God can reveal God. This is a property of his personhood, and yours. (This is good news, as it means all human effort to know God is futile.)
“So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” (Rom 9:16)
3. God as he reveals himself in time is God as he exists in eternity. If this were not true, we would not truly know God.
4. The way in which God knows himself and makes himself known are two sides of the one reality.

Knowing God Reveals Human Dignity

1. God knows himself in eternity in the Spirit and Word

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) The Greek word for “with” is *pros*, it indicates active relationship, “face to face”.

“For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor 2:10 - 11)

This means that God’s own knowledge of God is Trinitarian in form.

2. God knows himself in creation through the Spirit and Word

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” (Gen 1:1 - 2)

“God said” (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26) i.e. spoke his Word

“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3)

“but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world... he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” (Hebrews 1:2 - 3)

There is a real revelation of God in Spirit and Word as Creator in nature to all people. God is really known. This is called general revelation.

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. **2** Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” (Ps 19:1 - 2)

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” (Rom 1:19 - 20)

3. God knows himself through his image

(a) This order is eternal

The image is first of all Christ, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” (Col 1:15 - 16). Subsequently, the image is those who are created in Christ’s likeness.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. **29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (Rom 8:28 - 30).

The purpose of God in creating was that we might share in all the aspects of the humanity of the Son of God: bone of bone, flesh of flesh, heart of heart, soul of soul, will of will, love of love, e.g. “my peace I give to you” (John 14:27), “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11). This is to share in Jesus relationship with the Father, “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”” (John 17:26).

Paul puts union with Christ in terms of being “in Christ”. The “in Christ” relation is eternal, “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). The “in Christ” relation is not nominal (in name only) but dynamically active, assuring salvation for all who participate in it. “who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Tim 1:9).

(b) Human beings are created in the likeness of the Son of God

“Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.” (Rom 5:14).

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”**27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:26 – 27)

“ For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.” (1 Cor 11:7)

The revelation to humanity of their status in the divine image was conveyed by the Word spoken. “And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over” (Gen 1:28). In this context, the warning/command, ““You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”” (Gen 2:16 - 17) was the revelation of his glory as Father - Judge to his first created son (Luke 3:38). cf. “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds” (1 Pet 1:17)

4. God loses his glory in man: Fall

Since God was revealing himself in his Word, the unbelief recorded in Genesis 3 is a rejection of the divine worth, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

The first recorded awareness of sin is shame. Shame is a sense of the loss of the glory of God. “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” (Gen 2:25; 3:7)

In shame, humans will always seek false images of devotion, i.e. idols, to cover their shame. “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Rom 1:22 - 23)

Sin is “turning in on oneself” (Luther). The only remedy (salvation) from such a glory – deprived state is a life wholly turned outwards in love for God and others. This is the life of Jesus.

5. God knows himself in the Spirit conceived Word made flesh

The goal of the coming of Jesus is that we might share absolutely in the divine likeness: “by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” (2 Pet 1:4)

“...the Word of God, 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.” (Irenaeus)

In more personal and ultimate terms, this means sharing in the Father – Son love. “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26) We are called “sons of God” because we share in Jesus relationship with the Father. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” (1 John 3:1). This is actual in the Spirit, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” **16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Rom 8:15 - 17).

Another way of expressing this state of intimacy is to speak of life “in God”.

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Col 3:3); “To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thess 1:1 cf. 2 Thess 1:1). “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him.” (1 John 3:24 cf. 4:15 - 16; Jude1:1)

Human abiding in God can only be achieved by God's renewal of humanity in humanity. This requires God to become human (Incarnation). Since Jesus took on himself our nature (John 1:14; Rom 8:3 etc.), this means his own humanity must be recreated/redeemed (Rom 6:9 - 10). The life history of Jesus is about the perfection of the image and glory of God in humanity. "For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering." (Heb 2:10; cf.5:9; 7:28).

Since Jesus is our mediator, this means that the stages of redemption of humanity are stages in his life story.

Stages of Redemption:

a. Election of the Son

"All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." (Rev 13:8)

"He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you" (1Pet 1:20)

In Jesus election, we are chosen, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4).

b. Generation – enfleshment

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14 cf. 1 Tim 3:16)

Incarnation by the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35) = regeneration of a fallen nature.

The incarnation pre-figures our regeneration, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12 cf. 3:3 - 8).

c. Identification for maturation

Jesus life is lived for us so that we might share his. E.g. his victory over temptation, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb 4:15) His obedience is the basis for our victory over sin, "can do all things through him who strengthens me." Phil 4:13)

His kingdom ministry of signs, wonders, compassion, teaching (Luke 4:18 - 21) is imparted to the church e.g. John 14:12; Acts 2:42 - 47; 4:32 - 35.

Jesus is completely set apart to God (sanctified) so we might be mature in him. “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. **18** As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. **19** And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.” (John 17:17 - 19)

This process of identification with lost humanity and victory over evil comes to a climax in the cross.

d. Death

The sin – bearing death of Jesus is the place where he bears humanity’s loss of the image and glory.

“As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—” (Isa 52:14).

In Jesus death to the penalty and power of sin, we too died, “that one has died for all, therefore all have died” (2 Cor 5:14 cf. Rom 6:2)

e. Justification

Jesus resurrection is his justification by the Father.

“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated (Greek = justified) by the Spirit, seen by angels,” (1 Tim 3:16).

In the Father’s declaration of Christ’s righteousness, is our right relationship with God. “who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Rom 4:25)

f. Glorification as Sonship

“and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Rom 1:4)

In being raised to life with Jesus (Rom 8:11; Eph 2:6) we share in his access to God as Father, by grace. “Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”” (John 20:17).

g. The Reign of Christ

As prophet, priest and king Jesus reigns at the right hand of God (Eph 1:21 -22) over the world, “he is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). There, “he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). Christians share in the reign of Jesus (Rom 5:17) and his life of prayer (John 15:7, 16).

6. Revelation means Participation in God's own Life

“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3). “But if anyone loves God, he is known by God” (1 Cor 8:3) “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God” (Gal 4:9). “by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

7. The Return of Christ

The return of Christ means the final manifestation of the glory of his divine – human nature. “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:9 - 11).

The return of Christ means our glorification in him, ‘when Christ who is our life appears, you also will appear with him in glory’ (Col 3:4 cf. Phil 3:20 - 21)

8. The Goal of All things

Jesus is the goal of creation, “making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ **10** as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph 1:9 - 10).

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” (Col 1:16)

Since Jesus is the image of *God* (not of himself) this is not to be thought of apart from the Father and the Spirit. Jesus fills “all things” (Eph 4:10) so “that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). According to the Trinitarian operations, this means the Father receives a family (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17) the Son receives a Bride (Eph 5:31 - 32; Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17) and the Spirit receives a temple (Eph 2:22; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19).

“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Eph 2:18 – 22).

What it means for us to be in the image of God is only known eschatologically (at the End), when who Jesus is in the fullness of his glory is revealed. “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2)

At the End, God's original purpose to fill creation with his presence via his glorious image will be fulfilled. "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." (Eph 1:22 - 23).

9. Apocalyptic Hope

The presence of apocalyptic in the Bible (Isa 24 -27; Ezek 38 – 39; Joel, Zech 9 – 14; Rev) is necessary because the realm of signs and symbols is better able to convey the reality of a world beyond our senses than literal thought can. Apocalyptic fires the imagination to an expectancy beyond what we can conceive (1 Cor 2:9; Eph 3:20).

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **17** For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Cor 4:16 - 18)

