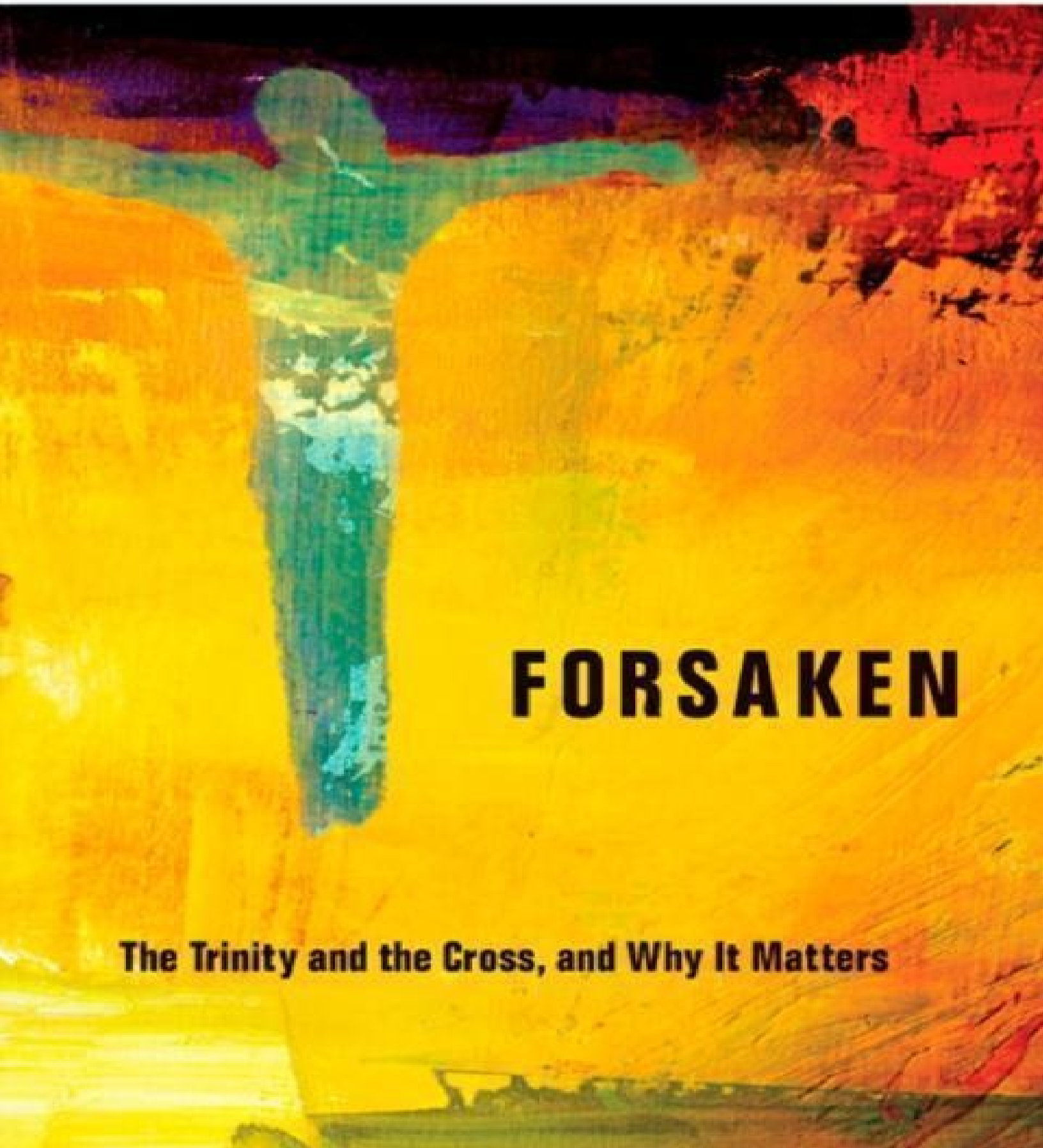
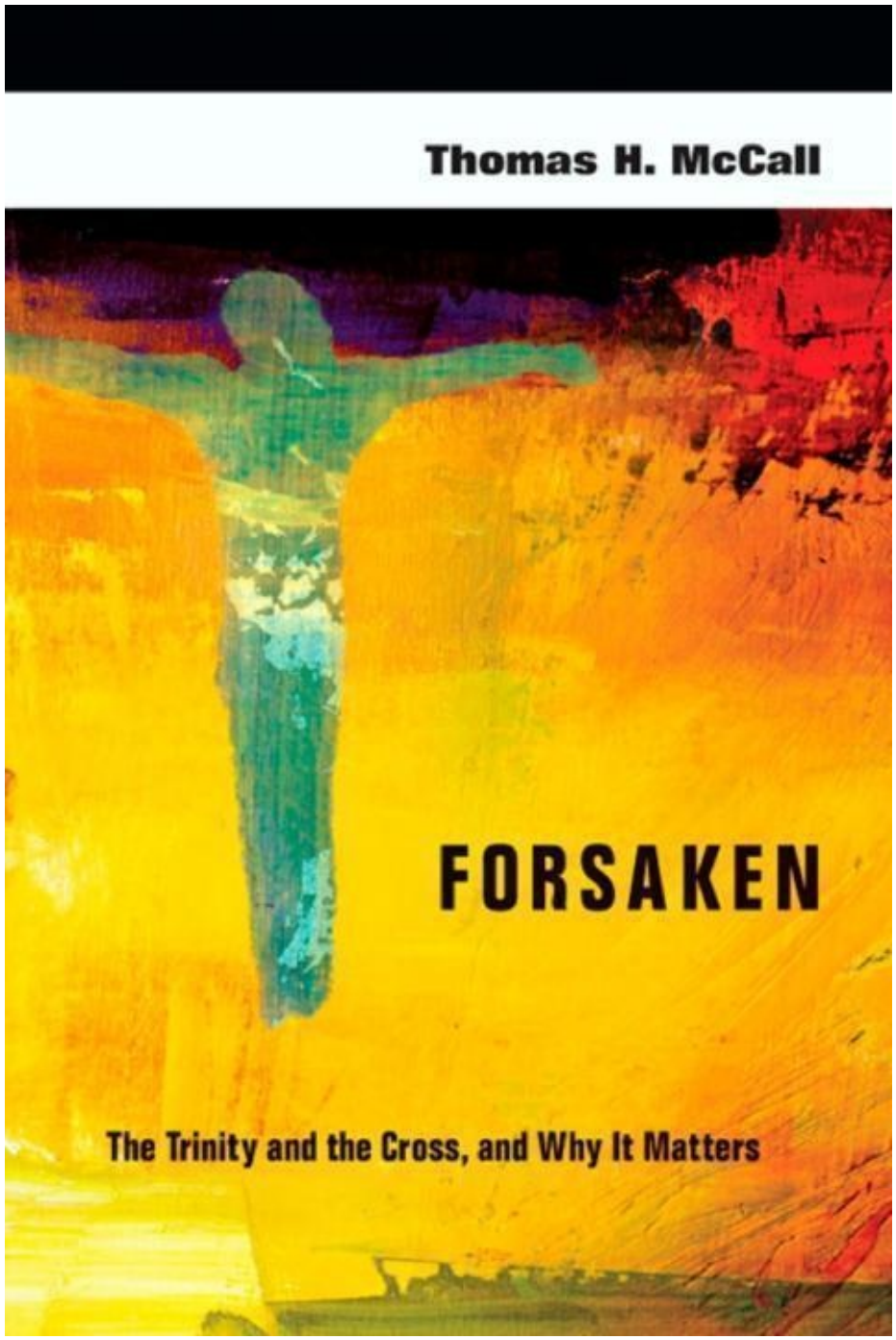
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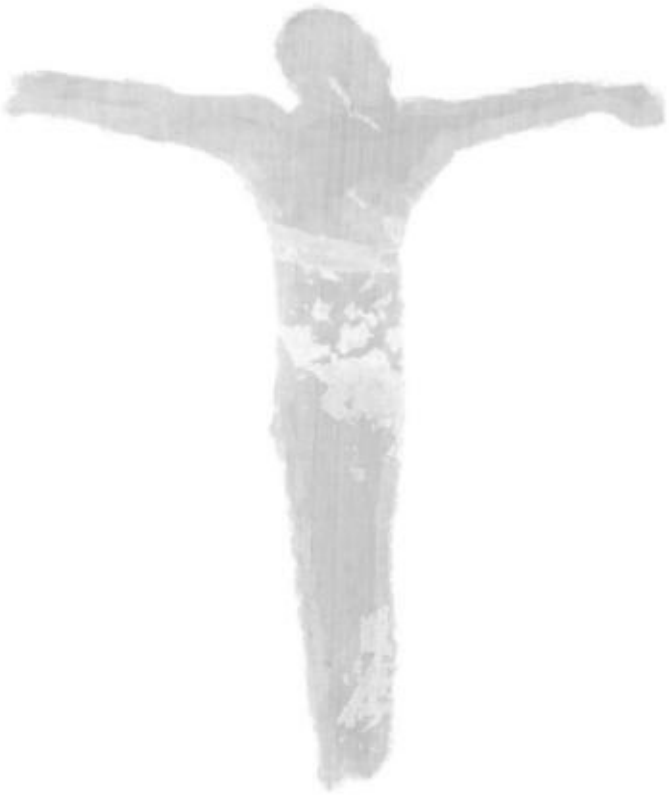


FORSAKEN

The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters



Thomas H. McCall



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To Cole, Josiah, Madelyn and Isaacbecause the holy love of the triune God is far better than we dare dream and hope, and because the gospel is for you.

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Introduction

Christians believe that there is exactly one God. But Christians also believe-and this is what makes Christian belief distinctively Christian-that this God is three persons. Surely this is mysterious, but there is more: Christians also believe that one of these divine persons, without ceasing to be fully divine, became fully and completely human as Jesus of Nazareth. They believe that he "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried," and further that he rose again from death. They hold these truths dearly, for without them there simply is no Christian faith.

But Christians also read Scripture, and there they encounter the piercing and haunting cry of Jesus from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Naturally, important questions arise: Did God forsake Jesus? Did the Father turn his back on the Son in rage? Was the Trinity ruptured or broken on that day? Did the death of Jesus somehow make it possible for God to love me? Why did Jesus die? Did his death accomplish anything? Or was it merely a senseless act of brutality, a meaningless tragedy?

Many people, including devout Christians, sometimes feel as though God has forsaken them. Does God forsake those who are dearest to him? Does God do so because of sin? Must God do so because of sin? Is Jesus for us, on our side, protecting us from God? Again, how exactly are we to understand what happened on the cross of Christ? What does it say about the relation of Jesus to his Father, and about our relation to the Father and the Son? And how does all this matter?

The chapters in this book are organized around such questions. In chapter one, I address the question, was the Trinity broken? looking closely at Jesus' cry of dereliction and contrasting the understanding of the cry, very common in contemporary exegesis and theology, that the Trinity was somehow "broken" in that moment, with more classical Christian interpretations. I make a case for the traditional view. In chapter two, I ask if the death of Jesus makes it possible for

God to love us, and here I explore the relation of divine wrath to the love of God. In chapter three, I ask if the death of Jesus was a meaningless tragedy, and here I show that God has provided the remedy for our sin in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Finally, in chapter four, I show that the doctrine of the Trinity makes a massive difference in the Christian life: persons joined in union with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit face no condemnation, no defeat and no despair.

I make no claims here either to originality or comprehensiveness. I do not have the last word on any of these matters, nor am I confident that full and complete answers are within my reach. Nevertheless, I believe God has revealed enough of himself and his actions that we can hold some things very dear and close while also avoiding some misleading, problematic and potentially damaging conclusions. I write not for other scholars (although I will be grateful if some benefit from what I say) but for pastors, students and friends-indeed, for anyone genuinely interested in moving toward a deeper understanding of God's being and actions.' I write from the conviction that the Christian conception of God is true, and that it matters more than we can say.

The Father, the Son and Their Cross

1

Was the Trinity Broken?

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The question shocks us-so much so that it may seem wrong-headed from the start. Those of us who believe in the faithfulness and justice of God might be tempted to think that whoever asks such a question is fundamentally mistaken, and indeed that the question itself demonstrates a flawed understanding of God. "Don't you know? God doesn't forsake anyone! You must have forsaken God." Such a question surely comes from someone who has been unfaithfuland who now blames God for their abandonment. Otherwise, the only possible explanation must be that this question comes from a truly pious-though mistaken-person who just feels abandoned; it is only the honest cry of someone who believes that she has been forsaken.

But this question, of course, does not come from someone who has been unfaithful. It does not come from a pious person who simply isn't theologically astute enough to know better. It comes from the lips of none other than Jesus Christ. It comes from the only one who has been utterly faithful. It comes from the one of whom the Father said, "This is my beloved son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). It comes from the one who is the eternal Logos (Jn 1:1), the second person of the Trinity. So these words ring out like a thunderbolt. My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me? Why? Why have you forsaken me? Why have you forsaken me? Why have you forsaken me?

Many devout Christians understand this as nothing less than a scream of total desperation, and they do not hesitate to take this cry as anything less than an expression of a complete and total rupture in the life of the triune God. It is very common, especially among conservative evangelical Christians who strongly

defend the necessity and sufficiency of Christ's atoning work, to hear statements such as the following.

> The Father rejected the Son.
>
> As he exhausted his wrath upon the Son, the Father completely abandoned the Son.
>
> The Father hid his face from the Son.
>
> Jesus "became sin." Therefore the Father's wrath was poured out on Jesus.
>
> The Father turned away from the Son.
>
> The physical pain Christ suffered in his passion was nothing in comparison to the spiritual and relational pain that Christ endured as he was separated from his Father.
>
> God cursed Jesus with damnation.
>
> The eternal communion between the Father and the Son was ruptured on that fateful day.
>
> The Trinity was broken.

Many preachers-especially in the sermons of those who believe that Jesus Christ was our substitute in the sense that he paid the penalty for our sins-make such solemn pronouncements. But such claims raise some interesting, and very important, questions. Is such a view of Christ's abandonment really necessary for a robust view of the gospel? Is it even consistent with the good news? Jesus seems to be quoting from Psalm 22, which begins with apparent despair but ends in confidence and hope: could this be important? Must we say that the Father-Son relationship was ruptured? Indeed, can we even say that the Trinity was brokenor are there troubling implications of such a claim? In what follows we explore some of these issues. We look first at how a few representative

theologians and exegetes (from across the theological spectrum) understand this cry as a rupture within the Trinity, and then we contrast this common understanding with some representative examples from the early church. This contrast will enable us to take a closer look at the cry itself and to come to a better understanding of it.

DERELICTION IN MODERN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Despite some differences in nuance among them, many contemporary theologians share an understanding of the cry of dereliction, very common in contemporary Christian thought, that the cross of Christ represents a rupture within the Trinity. A few representative examples make this plain.

Contemporary theology: Some examples. Jurgen Moltmann, according to one scholar "probably the most widely known and popular contemporary Protestant theologian,'" is also possibly the "best-known expositor" of the twentieth-century revival of trinitarian theology.' His view of the cry of dereliction has exerted massive influence in contemporary theology. He insists that all truly Christian theology must grapple with this haunting question. Indeed, it is the starting point of all truly Christian theology: "All Christian theology and life is basically an answer to the question which Jesus asked as he died.... Either Jesus who was abandoned by God is the end of all theology or he is the beginning of a specifically Christian, and therefore critical and liberating, theology and life."3 Moltmann does not only mean that we should understand our plight as sinners and our hope of salvation in light of the cross of Christ (although he means this too), but he also insists that we must understand God in light of the cross. The crossmore particularly Jesus' scream of abandonment from the crossis decisive for our understanding of God as well, for "to take up the theology of the cross today is to go beyond the limits of the doctrine of salvation and to inquire into the revolution needed in the concept of God.'"

Moltinann's working principle is that we can only truly understand something in contrast to its opposite.' This principle means that "God is only revealed as `God' in his opposite: godlessness and abandonment by God. In concrete terms,

God is revealed in the cross of Christ who was abandoned by God.... The deity of God is revealed in the paradox of the cross."6 He explicitly connects Jesus' experience of abandonment on the cross with the proper understanding of God: the cross shatters the utterly unique and unparalleled communion shared between Father and Son. He insists that the level of abandonment is directly proportional to the previous level of trust and love, and he dismisses the idea that Jesus only felt abandoned. Thus he concludes that "just as there was a unique fellowship with God in his life and preaching, so in his death there was a unique abandonment by God."

According to Moltmann we cannot overemphasize the degree of abandonmentJesus suffered at the hands of his Father. The rejection of Jesus must be understood "as something which took place between God and God. The abandonment on the cross which sepa rates the Son from the Father is something which takes place within God himself; it is stasis within God-'God against God'-particularly if we are to maintain that Jesus bore witness to and lived out the truth of God.."" Make no mistake: Moltmann is here describing nothing less than "enmity between God and God"-and it is "enmity to the utmost degree.'" He interprets Paul's statement that Jesus became "sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21) in a directly literal way (rather than as a "sin offering"), and he takes Paul's teaching that Jesus was cursed (Gal 3:13) to mean that the Son was cursed by the Father. to Moltmann explains what this means for his theology.

> In the forsakenness of the Son the Father also forsakes himself. In the surrender of the Son the Father also surrenders himself, though not in the same way.... The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of his Son.11

Moltmann goes even further. Not only is the Father-Son relation broken as Jesus is abandoned by the Father-the Father-Son relation must be broken for God really to be God. In other words, God's very identity is constituted by this event (along with the resurrection), which means that without us-without our sin and the abandonment that it occasions-God would not be God. As Moltmann puts it,

"A trinitarian theology of the cross perceives God in the negative element and therefore the negative element in God, and in this dialectical way is panentheistic."i2

Moltmann's understanding of the cry of dereliction should be clear. It refers to the utter, total, complete separation between Jesus and his Father. For "when God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man's godforsakenness. In Jesus he does not die the natural death of a finite being, but the violent death of a criminal on the cross, the death of complete abandonment by God. The suffering in the passion of Christ is abandonment, rejection by God, his Father."" So for Moltmann, we dare not take the cry of dereliction as anything less than full and complete rejection of the Son by the Father. The forsakenness of the Son by the Father is what makes the gospel really good news. Indeed, the forsakenness of the Son by the Father is what makes God God.

Moltmann has made a massive impact on modern and contemporary theology, but he is certainly not alone. His views are representative of many theologians. As another example, consider this statement of Alan Lewis: "God's very being as trinitarian community has on Easter Saturday been delivered up to contradiction and falsification; the Godness of the Father who gave up his only Son; the Godness of the Son who gave himself away; the Godness of the Spirit who, it seems, allowed death to sever the divine fellowship's eternal bonds of unity."" Note what Lewis claims here: not only that the Father sent the Son into the world and "delivered him up" (see Rom 8:32) for the sake of the guilty sinners, but nothing less than this: God's own being "as trinitarian community" has been broken and "the eternal bonds of unity" severed. This is truly a radical doctrine, one with farreaching consequences.

Contemporary biblical commentary: A gallery. Given, first, biblical scholars' commonly stated commitment not to go beyond what is explicit in the text and, second, their general aversion to specu lative theology, we might expect more caution from them in their conclusions. And, indeed, some commentators are quite cautious. Robert Stein says of Mark's Passion Narrative that "Mark does

not give us any explanation" of what is going on here.15 He insists that we should understand this cry of dereliction in light of Paul's teaching on salvation, and when he says "Pauline soteriology" he evidently means a particular aspect of Paul's doctrine of salvation, for he highlights only the importance of Romans 3:24-25; 2 Corinthians 5:21; and Galatians 3:13. So we are to understand the cry of abandonment in terms of Jesus' becoming a sin offering and taking the curse of death as the punishment of sin. And yet, Stein insists, Jesus's cry is not one of total despair, for he quotes Ps. 22:1.'"6

R. T. France says that Mark's account creates a "mind-stretching antinomy, which Mark leaves unresolved for his readers to work at."" He cautions against concluding too much from Psalm 22, for to read "into these few tortured words an exegesis of the whole psalm is to turn upside down the effect which Mark has created by this powerful and enigmatic cry of agony."" He warns that interpreting this text by appeal to 2 Corinthians 5:21 or Galatians 3:13 "goes far beyond" anything in Mark's account itself, and he concludes that "a commentary on Mark is not the place to debate how this sense of abandonment fits into the christology and trinitarianism of later Christian orthodoxy."")

Craig Evans thinks that "perhaps Jesus did have the whole of the psalm in mind ... but the reality of his sense of abandonment must not be minimized."20 He concludes that "Jesus has not lost his faith in God, [but rather] feels utterly

D. A. Carson insists that Jesus in Matthew's account "does trust in God.... Jesus does trust his heavenly Father. But that means that his cry of desolation cannot be read as evidence that he does not trust his heavenly Father."22 He also refers to the Father's "judicial frown," and he says that "we hover" at "the edge of the mystery of the Trinity."23

But many New Testament commentators (including some who are excellent scholars) do not exercise such restraint, and they insist on very bold conclusions. James Edwards concludes that "Jesus is wholly forsaken and exposed to the horror of humanity's sin"; this is a "horror so total that in his dying breath he senses his separation from God." 24 Ronald Kernhagen says that "it is

impossible for us to comprehend the sense of abandonment that Jesus He insists that "the cry of despair was authentic, and it came from a kind of pain that no other human being can This is because "God had turned away" from Jesus.21 Commenting on Matthew, France says that these are words of "unqualified desolation." To read all of Psalm 22 into these words of Jesus is to "read a lot between the lines"; instead, we should conclude that there was a "temporary loss of contact" between Father and Son. 28 Alan Culpepper goes further: "The abandonment reflects an enmity between God and God that `requires a revolution in the concept of William Lane speaks of a "full alienation from God" and says that Jesus was "cut off from his Father." 30 Craig Blomberg also rejects the idea that this is a shorthand reference to Psalm 22: "the view thatJesus' quotation of Ps 22 anticipates the vindication found in the larger context of the psalm stresses what does not appear in the text at the expense of what does" appear. He concludes that this text shows us nothing less than "spiritual separation" of Jesus from his Father-what we have here is an "abrupt loss of communion with the Father."31 He warns that "readers of the Gospels who cannot accept this concept probably reflect an unwitting Docetism-the heresy that Christ was not fully Leon Morris thinks that "for some modern readers the words are so shocking and so different from anything Jesus said ... that they feel it is impossible to accept them."33 But he insists that we must accept them for what they are-and the cry indicates nothing less than a broken relationship between the Father and the Son. He rejects appeal to Psalm 22 at this point, but he is more radical in this than many other commentators. While other scholars think it is mistaken to read all of Psalm 22 into this cry, Morris doubts that Jesus intended any reference to Psalm 22: "He may not have been quoting at all," and at any rate it is "perilous to argue from the use of one verse that Jesus was quoting the whole psalm."34 Morris explains this text with reference to Habakkuk 1:13: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing." Since he takes 2 Corinthians 5:21 to mean that Jesus Christ really was "made sin" for us, he concludes that the Father must have turned away from and utterly rejected the Son. "It seems that in the working out of salvation for sinners the hitherto unbroken communion between the Father and the Son was mysteriously broken. It surely is better to accept this, knowing that we do not

understand it fully, than to attempt some rationalization of the saying so that it becomes more palatable to the prejudices of modern Westerners."35 Quoting Moltmann as authoritative, he concludes: "Not until we understand this abandonment by God and Father ... can we understand what was distinctive about his death. Just as there was a unique fellowship with God in his life and preaching, so in his death there was a unique abandonment."3°

We can summarize much of this recent theology as follows: Jesus cries out in despair because God has forsaken him completely. God has turned away fromJesus because Jesus has "become sin" and now bears the wrath of the Father. Jesus has been cursed by his Father. The eternal communion between the Father and the Son has now been broken. We now see "God against God." And amazingly, it is this event that defines God, that gives the triune God his own being and life.

DERELICTION IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Some consider the foregoing account-we'll call it the "brokenTrinity" theology-to be the old-fashioned or traditional theology. But even a brief look at what some of the fathers and doctors of the church have said about this text shows something else.

Patristic theologians. First we look to the early church, to the theologians who articulated the orthodox understanding of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. By way of example, the fourth-century theologian Athanasius explained Christ's cry of abandonment as identification with our human affections. In the incarnation, the Son "receives them from us and offers them to the Father, interceding for us, that in him they might be annulled."37 Ambrose, also in the fourth century, takes a similar line: "He speaks, bearing with him my terrors, for when we are in the midst of dangers we think ourselves abandoned by God."" So we are not to conclude that Jesus is himself says these things only to identify with us. He represents us, and he knows that sometimes we feel as though we are abandoned by God. As our substitute, Jesus takes our affections-in all of their marred and distrustful expressions-and offers them to God on our behalf.

But what about 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:13? Did not Jesus become sin and thereby become odious to God? Was not Jesus damned by God? Gregory of Nazianzus deals with these texts directly, and he denies that the eternal and holy second person of the Trinity became sin. Instead, he insists, what Christ became was a sin offering, an offering for sin (a reading that is entirely consistent with the biblical text itself, one that is even indicated in marginal readings). It was "not that the Lord was transformed into either of these [sin or a curse], how could he be?" For Gregory it is simply inconceivable-literally nonsensical and thus unthinkable-to suppose that the divine Son, who is eternally and necessarily holy, could literally become sin or a curse. So what are we to make of these important texts? Gregory is clear again: Christ represents us. "But because by taking them upon Him He took away our sins and bore our iniquities."3" Cyril of Alexandria, in the fifth century, agrees with this line of thought: we are to understand 2 Corinthians 5:21 as indicative of the fact that Jesus Christ was "counted among the lawless."40 So when we hear Jesus' cry of dereliction, Cyril insists, we should not think in terms of a broken and forsaken man. 4' Rather we are to "understand that in becoming man, the Only Begotten spoke these words as one of us and on behalf of all our nature. It was as if he were saying this: `the first man transgressed. He slipped into disobedience.... But you Lord have made me a second beginning for all on the earth, and I am called the Second Adam. In me you see the nature of man made clean, its faults corrected, made holy and

The work of John of Damascus, who lived in the seventh and eighth centuries, often serves as sort of a summary of mature patristic theology, and this is true with respect to the cry of dereliction. His view of the matter is straightforward: "Neither as God nor as man was he ever forsaken by the Father, nor did he become sin or a curse, nor did he require to be made subject to the Father. For as God he is equal to the Father and not opposed to him or subjected to him." Because Jesus Christ is the fully divine Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, it is, strictly speaking, inconceivable that he could be divided from or opposed to his Father. What are we, then, to make of the statement? We are to understand it as his identification with us and our sin: "Ranking himself with us,

he used these words." For it is we who are "bound in the fetters of sin and the curse as faithless and disobedient, and therefore forsaken."43 Rather than being forsaken himself, Jesus Christ identifies with those who are forsaken-with us-and in so doing bridges the gap over our forsakenness and rescues us from the curse of sin.

Medieval theologians. To Christians accustomed to the brokenTrinity view, these important theologians might sound unconvincing and perhaps even evasive. John of Damascus simply denies that Jesus Christ was forsaken by God. So what are we to make of the statement of Jesus himself? It surely sounds like Jesus was forsaken by God. Who are we to deny what is so obvious from Scripture?44 Theologians in the medieval era reflected further on this issue, and they offer further clarification.

Peter Lombard wrestles with this cry of Jesus. He has absolutely no room for anything that even remotely resembles a brokenTrinity view. But he is also wary of several other possible options. Importantly, he insists that the cry of dereliction not be understood as signaling God's abandonment of humanity. He denies that God rejected the humanity of Christ on several grounds. His first objection is christological: "God had not departed from the man in such a way as to dissolve the union of God and man, otherwise there would have been a time when Christ, who was still alive, was man and not God, for he was still alive when he This would be a clear case of the ancient heresy known as Nestorianism, for it would entail the problematic conclusion that the incarnation was a man (rather than human nature) joined with God, and it would result in the independent existence of the man Jesus Christ apart from his divine nature. Lombard's second objection is soteriological: God's rejection of Christ's humanity would have terrible implications for our salvation. On this view God would become incarnate and would sojourn with human sinners, teaching and healing and ministering and challenging and inviting and warning. And then-right at the point of greatest need, right at the point where humanity is most desperate for salvation-God abandons humanity. Lombard rightly has nothing but scathing criticism for such a view.

So Lombard, as a believer in the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity, will have nothing to do with any kind of brokenTrinity view. It simply is not an option for him. Nor will he entertain the possibility that God abandoned the humanity of Christ. So what are we to make of the cry of dereliction, for Lombard? His answer is simple and straightforward: the Father abandoned the Son to this death, at the hands of these sinful people, on this cross. "So let us profess that God abandoned that man to death in some way, because for a time he exposed him to the power of his persecutors; God did not defend him by displaying his power so that he would not die. The Godhead severed itself because it took away its protection, but did not dissolve the union; it separated outwardly so that it was not there to defend him, but it was not absent inwardly in regard to the union" between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.4"

Thomas Aquinas takes a similar approach. Given his understanding of the nature of the triune God, any kind of brokenTrinity view is not possible. Nor is the "abandonment-ofhumanity" view viable for him. As he puts it, "Since, then, there was no sin in Christ, it was impossible for the union of the Godhead with the flesh to be dissolved."47 Again, Aquinas tells us what we are not to conclude about the cry of dereliction. But what are we to make of it? His answer echoes that of Lombard (and Augustine): God forsakes him "by not shielding him from the passion, but abandoning him to his

When it comes to the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ, there are many differences of opinion among the theologians of the early church and the middle ages. Even within the bounds of creedal orthodoxy, there are those who, for instance, think that the human nature of Christ is "abstract," and there are others who think that it is "concrete." Among those who think that it is concrete, some employ "part-whole" strategies for resolving difficulties related to the two natures of Christ, and some prefer "subject-accident" strategies.49 Despite these differences, however, there is considerable agreement-from patristic to medieval and from Greek to Latin theologians-as to what we should and should not conclude about the cry of dereliction. We should not understand it to mean any abandonment of the humanity that Christ came to take on himself

and to save. And we should not understand it to mean that the communion between the Father and the Son was disrupted or that the Trinity was in any way "broken." We should, however, take the cry of dereliction as a powerful expression of the identification of the Son of God with us and our predicament. And we should understand it to mean that what the Father abandoned the Son to was death at the hands of sinful people. So while the abandonment is real, it in no way implies a loss of contact or relationship between the Father and the Son.

Protestant theologians. John Calvin rejects the view (held by some predecessors, as we have seen) that Christ was only giving expression to the opinions of others and only venting their feelings as their representative when he uttered this awful cry. And yet for Calvin, though Christ stands in for us as our representative, he is not "swallowed up" by death.50 Thus Calvin insists that "we do not, however, insinuate that God was ever hostile to him or angry with him. How could he be angry with his beloved Son, with whom his soul was well pleased? Or how could he have appeased his Father by his intercession for others if He were hostile to himself?"" So how are we to understand this cry? "But this we say, that he bore the weight of the divine anger, that, being smitten and afflicted, he experienced all the signs of an angry and avenging God.."52 Christ felt, "as it were, forsaken of God," but "he did not cease in the slightest degree to confide in his goodness."53

The post-Reformation scholastic theologian Francis Turretin takes a view in many important respects similar to Calvin's. He denies that Christ enjoyed the beatific vision, and he is certain that the sufferings of Christ were not merely physical or outward but also internal and spiritual.54 But he also denies that the desertion of Christ was "absolute, total, and eternal."55 In even the darkest moment of his passion, the Son did not lose "communion and protection because God was always at his right hand (Ps. 110:5), nor was he left alone (John 16:32)."56 The forsakenness Jesus experienced was, then, at most only a loss of the intimate sense of his Father's power and presence. It was a "withdrawal of vision, not as to a dissolution of union; as to the want of the sense of the divine love"-but "not as to a real privation or extinction of it."57

So on one hand we have a view-very common in contemporary Christian thinking-according to which the Father is against the Son; the relationship of mutual communion, love, and trust between the Father and Son is ruptured; and the Trinity is broken. On this view, the Father turns his face away from and utterly rejects the Son. This utter rejection, these contemporary theologians tell us, is good news. On the other hand, we have something very different; the deeply traditional view is this: the Father forsook the Son to this death, and he did so for us and our salvation. But even so, the communion of Father and Son is unbroken. And this too, the tradition tells us, is good news.

READING AGAIN

What are we to make of such contrasting views? Given the centrality of this cry to the gospel and its importance for a proper understanding of the nature of God, I suggest that we revisit the biblical texts and think through the broader theological implications.

Starting with the text. Jesus' cry of dereliction is reported in both Matthew (Mt 27:46) and Mark (Mk 15:34). Both gospel accounts tell us that it became dark around noon, and both tell us that Jesus cried out in the "ninth hour." Both accounts provide a quotation of the Aramaic, and both offer a translation. Both point out that some observers thought that Jesus must be calling Elijah. Both versions tell us that someone offered a drink to Jesus after hearing his cry. Both Gospels inform us that Jesus cried out again-and that immediately after that cry, he died. But neither comments on the meaning of the cry. Both Gospels leave us with the haunting echoes of the cry. But neither tells us exactly what it means, what we should conclude from it about the intratrinitarian life.

Sober recognition of this fact should caution us from concluding too quickly that either the traditional or the contemporary view is wrong. If, on the one hand, it would be premature to adopt the classical view from the mere fact that Jesus cries out this way, then it would also be premature and indeed irresponsible, on the other hand, to conclude that the text demands the common recent reading. Given its popularity in the current theological climate, it is important to ask

some direct questions of those who proceed as if the mere fact that Jesus cried out this way supports the common, modern view. Does a proper interpretation of this cry demand the conclusion "the Father rejected the Son"? Does the text of either Matthew or Mark actually say that the Father turned his face away from the Son? Does a responsible interpretation of this text demand that we believe "God cursed Jesus with utter damnation"? Is there anything here that says-or even implies-that the eternal communion between the Father and the Son was ruptured? Does the text actually say that the Trinity was broken? The answers to these questions are surprisingly clear: neither the Matthean nor the Markan account says any of these things. On the contrary, as I shall argue, there are indications in both accounts that push toward the traditional view; Jesus' "loud cry" after his cry of forsakenness pushes us further, and the allusions to Psalm 22 are intriguing. We shall return to these considerations shortly, but at this point one thing should be clear: neither Matthew's account nor Mark's tells us that the Trinity was broken.

Reading as Christians: Why the doctrine of the Trinity matters. For Christians, the doctrine of the Trinity resides at the very heart of the faith. Far from being ancillary or unimportant, it is vitally connected to the most crucial Christian claims. It is what is most distinctive about the Christian doctrine of God. The doctrine of the Trinity ties the Christian faith together; without it there is no truly Christian faith. It is central to the gospel itself.58 Famously it claims that the one God exists in three persons. It is monotheism, but it is Christian monotheism. One of those divine persons-one as fully divine as the others and of the "same essence" with thembecame human, lived and died as a human, and was crucified and then resurrected from the dead "for us and our salvation." Given the centrality and importance of the doctrine of the Trinity, we should carefully evaluate any claim that there is "spiritual separation" or a "rupture" in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

The force that drives much of the contemporary "renaissance" of trinitarian theology, sometimes called "social trinitarianism," generally emphasizes the distinctness of the three persons; methodologically, social Trinity theorists "start"

with God's threeness and then work toward securing claims to monotheism. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. provides a good representation of this approach; he says that any "social theory" will recognize that the three divine persons are "distinct centers of consciousness" while also holding that the "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must be tightly enough related to each other so as to render plausible" the Christian commitment to monotheism.59 Plantinga summarizes his proposal for social trinitarianism this way.

> The Holy Trinity is a divine, transcendent society or community of three fully personal and fully divine entities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or Paraclete. These three are wonderfully united by their common divinity, that is, by the possession of each of the whole generic divine essence.... The persons are also unified by their joint redemptive purpose, revelation, and work. Their knowledge and love are directed not only to their creatures, but also primordially and archetypally to each other. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. . . . The Trinity is thus a zestful community of divine light, love, joy, mutuality, and verve.bo

Motivations and strategies differ among social trinitarians, but we can summarize the basic tenets as follows: (1) the divine persons are of "one essence" but in the sense that they share a common nature (much like Peter, James and John share their human nature) rather than in the sense that they are numerically the same substance; (2) the divine persons must each be both fully divine and properly related to one another for the view to be a kind of monotheism.'" Although defenders of social trinitarianism employ different strategies to defend their view from charges of tritheism, they have this in common: the divine persons are distinct from one another in a full and robust sense, and they are joined to one another in unbreakable communion. John Zizioulas, a representative of the social trinitarian view, says that "the being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God.... [God has] no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion."f'2

Not all Christians think social trinitarianism is tenable. The major traditional

alternative to social trinitarianism is often called "Latin trinitarianism."63 Latin models of the Trinity emphasize the oneness, or unity, of the persons, and Latin theorists insist that the divine persons are numerically one in an important sense (rather than merely generically of the same nature, as social theorists hold). The three divine persons are genuinely distinct; the Father is really distinct from the Son and Spirit-he does not merely appear to be distinct but really is so within the intratrinitarian life. But what makes the divine persons distinct from one another is only the relationships that hold between the three persons. What makes the Father the Father is nothing more nor less than his relationship to the Son (whereby he eternally generates the Son). What makes the Son the Son is the fact that he is generated by the Father. In contrast to the external actions of the triune God (in creation, preservation and redemption), the intratrinitarian relationships are both eternal and necessary; they could not be other than they are. The Father is the eternal Father of the Son, and he could not be other than the Father. So there is one God in the strongest possible sense of one, for there is numerically one divine substance. Yet the three divine persons are fully distinct and necessarily related to one another within the divine life.

Social trinitarians and their critics often debate each other rigorously and sometimes heatedly. Fortunately we need not sort out all of the arguments here, nor do we need to take a definitive position on the best resolution to the "threeness-oneness problem" to see what the doctrine of the Trinity means for a proper understanding of the cry of dereliction. For a closer look at the issue shows that the complete-abandonment view is incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity on either side of the social- or the Latinmodel debate.

Let us begin by considering the more traditional, or Latin, approach. Recall Moltmann's claim that the Father "suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son."f 4 This very idea is strictly impossible on the Latin view, for it implies that the Father could yet exist-at least as something-apart from his relationship to the Son. According to traditional doctrines of the Trinity, however, there is nothing to the Father apart from his relation to the Son. As Bruce D. Marshall explains, "God the Son can be truly Fatherless only if God

the Father has genuinely given up whatever is necessary for his paternal relationship with his Son.."65 Marshall rightly points out that this kind of thing tragically occurs all too often among humans, for fathers forsake and abandon their paternal relations with their children. That this happens in the created order underscores the fact that fatherhood is, strictly speaking, something exists whether or not he is a daddy. He remains who he is whether he has children or whether he does not; whether he nurtures and loves his children or neglects and abandons them, he does not cease to exist or cease to be Joseph.66 By contrast, however, the divine persons are distinct divine persons only in their relations to one another, and it is only by virtue of those internal and necessary relations that God is triune. As Marshall puts it, "In God, however, the person of the Father is inseparable from the act of generation by which he eternally brings forth the Son. Without this act of generation, there would be no person of the Father."67 Marshall shows why the broken-Trinity view is impossible on the Latin account: "Were God the Father to renounce his paternity in the passion of the incarnate Son, therefore, the Son would at that moment cease to be brought forth from the Father. If this Son came to be Fatherless, he would himself instantly cease to be. At the same time he would naturally cease to suffer the Father's dereliction, since what is not cannot suffer."" As if this is not disastrous enough theologically, the problem actually gets even worse. For not only does the Son lose his personhood in such dereliction, but the Father also loses his. Again Marshall explains: "The Father cannot really suffer over his dead Son, since the Father has also ceased to be; nor can he rescue his derelict Son from death, since what is not cannot raise the dead.."""" On a traditional, Latin view the broken-Trinity perspective cannot possibly be right. It could be correct only if the doctrine of the Trinity is false-which is to say that it could be correct only if Christianity is false.

But perhaps, some critics will say, the problem is with such an old and stodgy formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Maybe the spiritual-separation view just needs a more "social" doctrine of the Trinity. Well, maybe. But it is less than obvious that social trinitarianism can be any more hospitable to the "Father-versusSon" view than the Latin approach. Critics often accuse social trinitarians of tritheism, and indeed the social trinitarians feel the need to do something to

"cling to respectability as They take different routes in their responses to such charges, but what the various routes have in common are these elements: first, they deny that social trinitarianism is a version of polytheism; and second, they affirm that the unbreakable bond of loving communion (or perichoresis) that the divine persons share is strong enough to satisfy the (relevant) criteria for monotheism.7' But when one proposes an interpretation of a scriptural text in which we see "God against God," what else is there to do but conclude that there must be (at least) two gods? What point is there in even trying to defend monotheism at this point?

Even if we were to admit that a phrase such as "God against God" is a mere rhetorical flourish (though an unfortunate and potentially misleading one), it is still far from clear that social trinitarianism can successfully defend the broken-Trinity view. Consider Plantinga's affirmation that the divine persons are "wonderfully united by their common divinity, that is, by their possession of the whole generic divine essence." Can the Godagainst-God view affirm this much? Perhaps-but only if such attributes as faithfulness and holy love do not belong to the divine essence. But surely not if God is essentially or necessarily triune. Or consider Plantinga's further statement that the Father and Son are "also unified by their joint redemptive purpose, revelation, and work." Can the broken-Trinity account say this much? How could it? Recall the dictum of Zizioulas that "the being of God is a relational being: without communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God.... [There is] no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion." The problems here for the broken-Trinity model should be obvious-if the being of God is a relational being, and if the relationships are sundered, then surely there is no God at all. If there is no ontological content or being apart from the triune communion of holy love, then there can be no ontological content if that triune communion of holy love is lost.

The upshot of all this should be plain enough: if what makes the Trinity one God rather than three gods is their relatedness (as on social trinitarianism), and if this relationality is lost or destroyed, then we lose all claims to monotheism. And if this intratrinitarian communion of self-giving and receiving of holy love is

essential to the very being of the Christian God, then without such relationship there simply is no Christian God. To make the point a different way, for Latin trinitarianism there is no Trinity without the relations between the persons, while for social trinitarianism there is no monotheism without the relations between the persons. Either way, then, the triune God of the Christian faith does not exist apart from the relations between the divine persons.

Forsakenness in the Passion Narratives. I have argued that a trinitarian reading-that is, a properly Christian reading-of the cry of dereliction should offer strong motivation to stay with the classical or traditional view and to reject the common contemporary view. Often, however, critics of the traditional view dismiss it as resting entirely on "abstract" theological considerations. But a careful reading of the texts themselves-and not abstract theological speculation-points us in the direction of the traditional view. As we have seen, nothing in the cry itself demands the broken-Trinity view, nor do the Matthean or the Markan narratives lead us to conclude that the Trinity itself is being ruptured. What Stein says of Mark is true of Matthew as well: the text "does not give us any explanation."73 If we interpret this cry within the broader sweep of the Gospel accounts, however, several insights emerge. First, remember that both Matthew and Mark record a "loud cry" after the cry of forsakenness (Mt 27:50; Mk 15:37). Neither Matthew nor Mark tells us what Jesus said in this cry. And while it is possible that Jesus repeats the cry of dereliction, in light of what the other Gospel accounts tell us, this possibility seems quite remote. Indeed, for the canonical reader, the ambiguity itself points us toward those other accounts.

And what do we find when we look at those accounts? John's last recorded words of Jesus come as a triumphant cry from a man with his head held high: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). Luke records the famous story of the dialogue between Jesus and the two criminals with whom he was crucified. When one criminal launches abusive insults at Jesus (and it must be noted that he is only doing what the other observers were doing as well, Lk 23:35-36; cf. Mt 27:39-44; Mk 15:29-32), the other criminal responds by rebuking the abusive one. More importantly, this criminal then cries out to the Messiah: "Jesus, remember me when you come

into your kingdom" (Lk 23:42). To this desperate request Jesus responds with a clear and confident declaration. "Today," he says, "you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43). Such a bold and powerful statement: today you will be-you will be with me-in paradise, hardly fits with the picture of a Jesus who is experiencing "spiritual separation" or who knows that he is completely rejected by his Father. Perhaps more importantly, Luke appears to tell us what Jesus cried just before he "breathed his last": `Jesus called out with a loud voice, `Father, into your hands I commit my spirit'" (Lk 23:46). This is no statement of despair. This is no cry of utter and total abandonment. There is no hint here of a severed or even strained relationship. There is no sense here of a Father who has rejected his Son or who has turned his back on him. In fact, it is hard to see how such a view could even be compatible with these last words of Jesus. To the contrary, Jesus prefaces his last words with a sense of deep relational intimacy: Jesus addresses his "Father." And they are words of complete trust; what we see here is an expression of the closest imaginable spiritual communion. "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

The last words of Jesus, as recorded by Luke, are not words of spiritual separation or of utter abandonment by God. They are not the words of someone who knows that the Father has "turned his face away," nor is it the response of someone who believes that he has been rejected by his Father. Luke's last words of Jesus are an expression of confident trust and glad hope. They stand in contradiction to any broken-Trinity interpretation of the cry of dereliction. They are, however, completely consistent with the traditional understanding that the Father-when he could have rescued him-abandoned Jesus to this death, on the cross, at the hands of these sinful people, for us and our salvation. But even in this abandonment, he is the beloved Son of his Father. The one abandoned to this awful humiliation and death is the one with whom the Father is "well pleased" (Mt 3:17 // Mk 1:11 // Lk 3:22).

The place and importance of Psalm 22. We should not forget that the cry of dereliction itself is a quotation of Psalm 22:1. Many Christians have noticed that while Psalm 22 begins with this wrenching question, it moves beyond it to

affirmations of hope and faith, and these Christians have thus interpreted Jesus' cry of dereliction in light of the entire psalm. Other scholars protest this move; they insist that "to read into these few tortured words an exegesis of the whole psalm is to turn upside down the effect which Mark has created by this powerful and enigmatic cry"74 and conclude that these kinds of "softening explanations are unsatisfactory."75 What are we to make of the fact that Jesus is quoting this psalm? How should that fact affect our interpretation of the cry? I, for one, think that Psalm 22 is very important for understanding the meaning of Jesus' cry of dereliction.

Was Jesus only quoting the opening lines of Psalm 22 because that was all that was relevant to his situation? Or was he intending to point us to the message of the whole psalm? If Jesus' quotation were the only hint we had, we might not be able to make a decision on this (at least not with any confidence). We might even reasonably conclude that the safest interpretation would be to assume that Jesus intended only the lines that he actually quoted. But a closer look at the texts shows that Jesus' direct quotation is not the only reference to Psalm 22 in the Gospel accounts. Psalm 22 says,

> [I am] scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
> All who see me mock me;
>
> they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
> "He trusts in the LORD," they say,
> "let the LORD rescue him." (Ps 22:6-8)

Both Matthew and Mark repeat this scenario in their accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, and in doing so they detail those who mock and insult: the soldiers mocked Jesus; those who passed by shook their heads and insulted him; the chief priests, teachers of the law and elders mocked him; and even the criminals hanging next to him joined in (Mt 27:27-31, 38-44; Mk 15:16-20, 25-32). The psalmist tells us that his tormentors gamble for his clothes.

All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment (22:17-18)

Again Matthew and Mark paint this picture in detail, for the soldiers divide up his clothes by casting lots (Mt 27:35; Mk 15:24). The psalmist even describes the condition of the oppressed as having his hands and feet pierced (Ps 22:16). Is not all of this echoed in both the Matthean and Markan accounts of Christ's passion? The connection between the cry of dereliction and Psalm 22, we clearly see, is not limited to Jesus' citation of the first lines, important though that is. Rather, the whole narrative clearly and strongly echoes the Psalm throughout. Surely Matthew and Mark intend for their readers to be drawn to the background of Psalm 22 as an interpretive key to understanding the story of Jesus' death.

When we look closely at Psalm 22, we cannot miss the cry of lament. Surely the forsakenness is real in some sense. But in the midst of this apparent despair, the psalmist also recognizes that God is the "Holy One" (Ps 22:3), and he recounts the testimonies of those who have trusted in the Lord before him (Ps 22:4-5). He details the conditions of his plight-the mockery and misery of his state are on full display (22:6-18). Turning again to Yahweh for help, he asks the Lord to bring deliverance from "the mouth of lions" and salvation from "the horns of the wild oxen" (Ps 22:1921). But this time he calls all Israel to praise Yahweh, and his trust in the Lord is evident in this crescendo.

For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help. (Ps 22:24)

For the psalmist, there can be no mistake-the Lord is faithful and steadfast and has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one. The Lord has not rejected or abandoned him, for he "has listened to his cry for help." And this is, for the psalmist, incomparably good news. It is good news for rich (Ps 22:29)

and poor (Ps 22:26). It is good news for the children of Israel and for foreigners alike (Ps 22:27-28). And it is good news both for the present and for future generations (Ps 22:30-31).

So we should take Jesus' quotation of the first lines of this psalm as a signpost to the whole psalm. Jesus announces once again the meaning and significance of his mission. As Richard Bauckham explains, this cry tells us of Jesus' voluntary self-identification with sinners. Taken from and for Jesus himself, Bauckham argues, the cry simply does not make sense: "Mark's Jesus already knows that it is God's will that he die (8:31; 9:31; 10:34, 38), but also why this must be (Mark 10:45; 14:24).... Jesus asks the question, not on his own behalf, but as the question asked by those with whom his use of the word identifies him."76 Jesus, as our high priest, stands in our place, on our behalf, facing our sin and our death while unprotected by his Father. At the same time, we should not conclude that Jesus here announces the Father's utter aban donment or forsaking of him. As Rikki Watts says, "While not detracting at all from Jesus' suffering, it is hard to understand why Mark would work so hard at evoking Ps. 22 if he did not also expect his informed readers to know exactly what was coming next: a startling reversal and deliverance." " Jesus is not saying that the eternal communion between the Father and the Son has been broken (however "mysteriously" such rupture is said to occur). Instead, we should conclude that "he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one" (Ps 22:24)-it is, after all, the enemies of Jesus who do that (in both Psalm 22 and the Gospel accounts). The Gospels deliberately and clearly contrast Jesus' Father with his enemies: the Father "has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help" (Ps 22:24).

Understood in the light of Psalm 22, Jesus' cry of dereliction does not support the broken-Trinity view. It does, however, cohere remarkably well with the more traditional approach. The Father forsook the Son to this death, at the hands of these sinful people, for us and our salvation.

CONCLUSION

So where does this leave us? We are now in a position to see both what we should avoid and also what we should affirm.

To be avoided. There are several misleading and potentially dangerous ways of interpreting the cry of dereliction. The first of these is the view that Jesus did not really suffer or was not really abandoned at all. Taking this approach would lead us into the ancient heresy of docetism, according to which Jesus only appeared to be human but was not so in reality. The Gospel accounts, as well as subsequent biblical and creedal statements, are simply too clear about this to accept such a view. Jesus was fully human, and as someone who was fully human he suffered a shameful and horrific death.7s And according to the Gospel accounts, this suffering involved abandonment in some sense. So we should see all docetic views for what they are: mistaken attempts to "safeguard" God from something that God does not shield himself from.

Second, we should reject any approach that asserts God's abandonment of the Son's humanity during the crucifixion. Scripture neither demands nor even suggests such a view. And as we learned from the medieval theologians, such a view would result in another ancient heresy, Nestorianism, in which Christ is two persons rather than one person in two natures.79 Moreover, it would have terrible implications for our hope of salvation. There is no hope for this view (which fortunately does not seem to be popular today).

But what about the view, so popular in contemporary theology and preaching, that "the Father rejected the Son"? Nothing in Scripture says this. Did the Father "completely abandon the Son," causing Jesus to lose trust in his Father? No, Jesus commits himself fully to his Father at the point of death. Did the Father "turn his face away from his Son"? No, the only text of Scripture that we can understand to address this question directly, Psalm 22:24, says that the Father did not hide his face from his Son. To the contrary, he has "listened to his cry for help." Was the eternal communion between the Father and the Son somehow ruptured on that terrible day? Was the Trinity broken? The answers to such questions should be resoundingly negative: careful study of the biblical text makes such a view unnecessary, and orthodox trinitarian theology makes it

impossible.

To be affirmed. But Jesus does utter this terrible cry. If we should avoid misleading and mistaken interpretations of it, how then are we to understand it? First, there is a genuine sense in which the Son in fact was abandoned by his Father. Jesus suffered and died. This much is obvious from the Passion Narratives themselves, and the subsequent New Testament witness to the gospel witnesses to the vast importance of the death of Christ. His Father did indeed leave him to die, and could have rescued him; Jesus could have been spared the terrible humiliation, agony and death. The Father could have done so, but he did not. Jesus was abandoned-the Father abandoned him to this death, at the hands of these sinful people, for us and our salvation.

Second, we should affirm that throughout the passion and death of Jesus, his union with humanity was unbroken (and remained so through the resurrection and ascension and indeed is today as well). He is united to us in our humanity, and he identifies with us in our condition of fallenness.s0 It is we who have-as rebellious sinnersabandoned God. But rather than leave us in our state of abandonment, the Son has become human and has identified himself with us: "These are my people. I am here for them. I have come to redeem them from this abandonment and to bring them home."

The third affirmation, the focus of much of our discussion so far, is also of crucial importance: the Son's relationship to the Father is unbroken. The works of God in creation and redemption (what the Christian tradition has termed the opera ad extra-works toward that which lies outside of God's being) are always undivided, and the Son's communion with the Father is unblemished. If we understand the doctrine of the Trinity properly, we will be in a position to see that saying "the Trinity is broken" amounts to saying "God does not exist." Such a view is utterly antithetical to the Christian faith. There is every reason to believe that throughout Christ's passion he remains the beloved Son, in whom the Father is "well pleased."

Why it matters. Sometimes earnest Christians tell the story of God's work on

the cross like this.

> The cry of dereliction means that some "part" of God-the Father-is full of wrath against sin. He is just and holy, and he demands punishment for sin. His righteousness causes him to become increasingly angry against sin, and finally he reaches the point at which he hits someone. The Son, however, is loving and compassionate. The Son looks on sinful humanity with great compassion, and he wants to extend grace and mercy to sinners (even though they do not deserve it). The Father's righteous wrath demands that sinners be punished-but the Son's merciful love wants to see sinners redeemed. So they reconcile the problem in this manner: the Son takes the punishment that sinners deserve and absorbs the Father's fury. The Father pours his wrath upon the Son, and he stops only when he is utterly exhausted-and when the Son lies in a broken and lifeless heap. Thus the Father's wrath is dealt with, and the Son's love is extended, as the Father turns away from the Son and rejects him. Now, when the Father looks toward the sinners for whom Christ died, he knows that he cannot come after them again, for his wrath has already punished someone. The Christian life is one in which we hide behind Jesus, the one who is "on our side."

What are we to make of such a view? There are elements of truth to it. There is ample biblical evidence of the wrath of God (evidence too often ignored in contemporary Christianity). It is true that Jesus is our representative and substitute. And of course it is true that Jesus loves us. But for all the important elements of truth within it, this story is seriously skewed, and it is skewed in a way that dangerously misrepresents the intentions and actions of God. There is no biblical evidence that the wrath of God belongs to the Father only (or even that it belongs to him in some special way) it is simply the wrath of God that is revealed in Scripture. We know that we, sinners redeemed by grace, are now invited into communion with the triune God. We who are no longer under condemnation because of the work of Jesus Christ are now enabled by the Holy Spirit to cry "Abba, Father" (Rom 8). Furthermore, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity will not let us embrace such an understanding. We will revisit the biblical witness to the wrath of God in the next chapter, but at this point it is important to emphasize this point: the Holy Trinity is completely unified in divine intentions

and actions-unless there are multiple gods, we cannot believe otherwise. Some "part" or "parts" of God are not against me while another part is for me. The Son does not love me and bless me while the Father hates me and curses me (or would like to do so, and would do so, if not for the presence of the Son between us). Rather, it is God who is for us. No "part" or aspect of Godsurely no divine person-wants to see me damned while another wants to see me saved. Not at all! God-the triune God whose essence is holy love-is for us.

So all of our affirmations matter. As Bauckham puts it, "It is essential to recognize both that the forsakenness of Jesus is concretely real and also that both Jesus and the Father remain faithful to each other."" It matters that the incarnate Son has not abandoned humanity at the point of suffering and death. If he had done so, we would still be in our sins and without hope. It matters that the incarnate Son was abandoned by God to this death, for in doing so he identifies with us and stands in for us. And it mattersindeed, it makes all the difference in the world-that the relationship of purest holy love between the Father and Son was not broken on the cross. For not only is the broken-Trinity view biblically unwarranted and theologically impossible, but it would also be terrible news if it were might be on our side, but he would be lost as well. As Thomas F. Torrance puts it, "Cut the bond in being between Jesus Christ and God, and the Gospel message becomes an empty mockery."82

Properly understood, the cry of dereliction means that the Father abandoned the Son to this death at the hands of these sinful people, for us and our salvation. It means that the triune God is for us-and he is for us in a way that is beyond our wildest hopes or dreams. It means that by the power of the Spirit, the Son of God "humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:8). And it means that the Father has

> exalted him to the highest place . . .
> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9-11).

It means that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8) and that the God whose nature is holy love "so loved the world" (Jn 3:16) that he "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Rom 8:32). Godthe God who is triune-is for us.

2

Did the Death of Jesus Make It Possible for God to Love Me?

Righteous Wrath, Holy Love and the Heart of the Triune God

The Trinity is not broken; God is one in being and act. The unity of God's operation in creation and redemption is grounded in the internal unity of the triune life. The Bible speaks in clear and compelling ways about the beautiful, holy love shared between the three divine persons, and it tells us that this love is the same love that God extends to the world. God loves the world-and God does so because God is love within the triune life. But the Bible also speaks in uncomfortably clear terms about the "wrath of God." Just what are we to make of the biblical witness to the wrath of God? Is it opposed to his love? Is it a "dark side" to God that is inconsistent with his holiness or with his mercy? Or is the fact that God's wrath is directed against all rebellion-and, more personally, against all rebels-somehow "good news"?

RIGHTEOUS WRATH AND HOLY LOVE

Again, Scripture speaks-repeatedly and powerfully-of both the wrath and love of God. Even a brief review of some of the biblical witness shows both the prevalence and power of God's selfrevelation. But, as we shall see, the biblical witness does not set love and wrath in opposition to one another.

The wrath of God. Paul tells us that he is "not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Rom 1:16). He is not ashamed because a "righteousness from God" (received "by faith") is revealed (Rom 1:17). And

then Paul immediately tells us that "the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom 1:18). Paul here says that the wrath of God is being revealed. He says that it is being revealed "from heaven." And notably, he says that it is being revealed against both the "wickedness" (adihia) and the "godlessness" (asebeia) of humanity.

Divine wrath is directed against "wickedness"; it is opposed to the evil affections and behaviors of human sinners as they violate each other and pillage God's creation. It also stands in diametric opposition to "godlessness," for it is directly pointed at all creaturely rejections of their Creator and Sustainer. This doublepronged focus is well-attested in both the Old and New Testaments.' The Old Testament has unmistakable warnings for those who deny justice to the oppressed. "This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place" (Jer 22:3). God's command is clear.

Administer justice every morning;
rescue from the hand of the oppressor
the one who has been robbed. (Jer 21:12)

And the warning is just as clear.

Or my wrath will break out and burn like fire
because of the evil you have done. (Jer 21:12)

In the Old Testament, sins against fellow human creatures, including oppression and injustice as well as all manner of social ills and sexual abuses, are closely tied to and indeed follow from sin against God (e.g., Ex 22:16-24). Idolatry is quickly followed by debauchery, oppression and violence (e.g., Ezek 22:1-29). Godlessness-expressed most commonly and most openly in the practice of idolatry but also present in all those who do not follow God wholeheartedly as well as those who do not speak truthfully of him-deserves God's wrath and threatens those who either practice or condone it (e.g., Ex 32:1-

10; Num. 25:3; 32:10-14; Job 42:7). Thus we have repeated and forceful warnings not to "forget" the Lord, who rescued Israel, and the commands to

> fear the LORD your God, and serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land. Do not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah. Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. Do what is right and good in the LORD'S sight, so that it may go well with you. (Deut 6:13-18)

Idolatry, nothing less than rebellion against God, brings nothing but wrath and judgment (e.g., josh 22:16-18; 23:16), for God opposes our opposition to his purposes and will.

God in his wrath opposes the sins of Israel, both before (e.g., Num 32:14) and during the divided kingdom (e.g., 2 Chron 28:11-13) as well as after the exile (e.g., Neh 13:18). God exercises his wrath against the sinful nations as well (e.g., Ezek 25:14, 17). Accordingly, God uses Israel to chastise and discipline her pagan neighbors,2 but he also uses those same pagan neighbors to discipline Israel (e.g., Is 10:5-19; Ezek 21:1-24; Hab 1:5-11).3 Everywhere it is clear that the people who sin do so against God's good and just intentions for his creation, and they do so in direct opposition to God's desires for them. "Now your impurity is lewdness. Because I tried to cleanse you but you would not be cleansed from your impurity, you will not be clean again until my wrath against you has subsided" (Ezek 24:13).

The consequences of sin are both breathtaking and frightening. As D. A. Carson notes,

> The wrath of God manifests itself in sword, hunger, and plague (Ezek. 6:11-14), in wasting diseases "until you perish" (Dent. 28:22), devastation (Jer. 25:37-38), scattering (Lam. 4:16), and depopulation (Jer. 50:13). God treads the nations in his winepress (Isa. 63:1-6); alternatively, God gives them the

> cup of his fury to drink (Isa. 51:17; cf. 63:1-2; Joel 3:13). Under the wrath of God, members of the covenant community may be "cut off" from their people (e.g., Exod. 30:33, 38; Lev. 7:20; Num. 9:13;

Carson is correct when he says that the biblical witness to the wrath of God against sin is "humbling and frightening."5

The wrath of God is sometimes depicted in intensely personal terms in the Old Testament. We know well the frequent portrayals of God as King and Judge in Scripture. But he also reveals himself as a Father, which throws the personal nature of our relationship with him-and of his wrath toward us as sinners-into sharper relief (e.g., Ex 4:22; Ps 103:13). Seen in this light, God's wrath is not detached and impersonal; nor is it the polar opposite to his love and mercy. It is not the selfish frustration or temper of someone who is self-obsessed and irate with anyone who gets in the way of his own self-actualization or self-fulfillment. Instead, it is the wrath of someone who loves deeply and powerfully-it is the wrath that says, "What are you doing to yourself? How dare you do such a thing?" As Leon Morris says, the wrath of God in the Old Testament is "the wrath of a loving father who yearns for his children to come to him."6

But God also gives us self-portraits in the Old Testament that show an even more personally intense side of divine wrath, for he portrays his relationship to his people in explicitly nuptial termsas that of a spouse who is faithful to one who is unfaithful? God likens his people to those who have committed adultery by prostituting themselves and sleeping with the enemy (e.g., the Egyptians, the Assyrians and the Chaldeans in Ezek 23:1-49, with the Philistines and Babylonians included in Ezek 16:23-29). Yahweh lays charge against his people in uncomfortably straightforward and direct terms.

> But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. You took some of your garments.... You also took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself idols and engaged in prostitution with them. And you took your embroidered clothes to put on them.... Also the food I provided for you....

> And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to idols. (Ezek 16:15-21)

The Lord points out that this prostitution is so twisted that "you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors" (Ezek 16:33). We see God's wrath here to be "jealous anger" (Ezek 16:38), and it results in judgment, as God says that he will "deliver you into the hands of your lovers" who will destroy you and leave you "stark naked" (Ezek 16:39-41). Divine wrath as portrayed in the Old Testament is both real and personal.

Carson observes that a common misconception is that the New Testament is less concerned with divine wrath than the Old Testament; for while there might be a "residue of wrath" in the New Testament, in general "a gentleness takes over and softens the darker period: God's love is now richer than his wrath. After all, Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies and turn the other cheek.'" Carson rejects this misconception: "Nothing could be further from the truth than this reading of the relationship between the Testaments.'" Carson is right to point out both that the Old Testament testifies to the love of God and that the New Testament reveals the wrath of God. John the Baptist warns both the Pharisees and the Sadducees of the "coming wrath" (Mt 3:7; Lk 3:7). Jesus displays anger (Mk 3:5), and he claims that he is the one who is able to save sinners from God's wrath: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them" (Jn 3:36). Paul addresses those who are "dead in your transgressions and sins" (Eph 2:1) as being "by nature deserving of wrath" (Eph 2:3).10 And to those who are believers he warns of the wrath of God.

> Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
>
> But among you there must be not even a hint of sexual immorality, or of

> any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-such a person is an idolater-has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (Eph 5:1-6)

Because of "sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry," Paul says that "the wrath of God is coming" (Col 3:5-6). And the book of Revelation concludes in nuptial terms: "The Spirit and the bride say, `Come"' to life (Rev 22:17) while also warning of the "wrath of the Lamb" in vivid terms (e.g., Rev 6:16; cf. Rev 14:10; 16:19; 19:15).

The love of God. Most contemporary Christians take the love of God for granted. And it is true that the biblical witness to the love of God is deep, broad and rich beyond comparison. The Old Testament writers know that God is a "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6) and that Yahweh is "gracious and compassionate, / slow to anger and rich in love" (Ps 145:8). Similarly the authors of the New Testament understand that God's love has been revealed supremely and finally in Jesus Christ. John tells us that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). John goes deeper: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). Paul exults in the sovereign supremacy of divine love: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

But in the very familiarity lies a danger. All too often we think of the love of God in inadequately trinitarian ways, and we very often reduce the love of God to mere sentiment. We do not easily remember that when Paul says that "nothing can separate us from the love of God" he is talking about the love "that is in

Christ Jesus our Lord." We do not easily remember that he is talking to those who "live in accordance with the Spirit" and are "governed by the Spirit" (Rom 8:5-9) as they are "led by the Spirit" (Rom 8:14) and indeed have the Holy Spirit "living in" them (Rom 8:11). We find it easy to forget that Paul is talking about those who are "in Christ Jesus"-the same Christ Jesus who died as the "sacrifice of atonement," or propitiation (Rom 3:25), and that this sacrifice of atonement was due to our sinfulness and rebellion (cf. Rom 3:10-18). We easily gravitate toward John's affirmation that "God is love"-but without paying so much attention to his parallel claim that "God is light; in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn 1:5). All too often modern people (who perhaps have been inoculated with just enough of the biblical gospel to be able to withstand it) hear that "God is love" and assume that they know well enough what this means. "Hey, I've heard the songs, read the books and seen the movies-I know what love is. Cool, so God is like that. Sure, God loves me." In light of such rampant-and complacent-confusion, we must see a couple of points very clearly.

The first point is this: the love of God is a holy love. We readily assume that we know what love is. But just as John tells us that "God is love," he also goes on to tell us what love really is: "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 Jn 4:9-10).

Importantly John tells us that we did not love God. Rather, John tells us just how God showed his love to us. God showed his love to us by sending his Son to die so that we might have life. God revealed his love to us not with mere words (even important ones); he revealed his love to us when the "Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). Our "love" is not the standard against which love is measured. Quite the opposite is true for John: "not that we loved God, but that he loved us." "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (1 Jn 3:16). So we dare not use our common experience or sentiments of "love" as an adequate measure by which to understand God."

And when God sent his Son into the world, he sent him as a "propitiation" (or "atoning sacrifice") for our sins (see I Jn 2:2). John pulls no punches but instead unflinchingly and honestly diagnoses the human condition. We did not love God but had rebelled in sin against God. God's love for us-love that we cannot even begin truly to grasp apart from the incarnation of love in Jesus Christ-is the reason that he "sent his Son." The Son, according to John (and the general plot line of Scripture), comes for a specific purpose: he comes to deal with our sin and to secure our salvation.12 The love of God is a holy love. It cannot be reduced to sentimentality or indulgence; it does not ignore or brush away or indulge our sinfulness. Instead God expresses his love in a way pointed directly at our sin. Divine holiness cannot be considered in abstraction from God's love. And divine love is always at the same time pure and holy. "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). "God is light-and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn 1:5). None at all.

The second point is this: God's love is the love of the triune life, and Jesus' prayer in John 17, before his trial and death, offers a precious glimpse into this triune life. Jesus prays that those who follow him will know and share the love between the Father and Son, which is so deeply rooted within their shared life that it is of the very essence of the triune God. The love between Father and Son, Jesus explains, existed "before the creation of the world" (Jn 17:24), and he prays that those who believe in him will be brought to "complete unity" so that "the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (Jn 17:23). He asks that those who belong to him will also know and cherish "the love you have for me" (Jn 17:26).

To affirm with Scripture that "God is love" is to make a statement about God's essence. We should not reduce the statement "God is love" to "God is loving toward us" or "God performs loving actions." While the statement "God acts in a loving way" speaks of what God does, the statement "God is love" goes much deeper and grounds his loving action within his own intratrinitarian life-it speaks of who God is. We can make no deeper affirmation about God. God's love is not arbitrary or accidental or extrinsic to him-as if he could either have or lack love. It is not something added to him; he does not first exist and then develop into

someone who does loving things. The triune God does not merely decide to be loving, nor does he only act in loving ways. No, when we affirm with Scripture that "God is love" we are making the most profound and penetrating of all theological statements. We are talking about who God is; we are referring to the intratrinitarian life in which the Father, Son and Spirit share openness, trust, shalom, life and love with one another in the greatest way possible. As Thomas F. Torrance puts it,

> The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who indwell one another in the Love that God is constitute the Communion of Love or the movement of reciprocal loving which is identical to the One Being of God. It is as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit that God is God and God is love. As one Being, three Persons, the Being of God is to be understood as an eternal movement of Love, both in himself as the Love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for one Another, and in his loving Selfgiving to others beyond himself.13

There is "nothing greater, nothing better" than the love of the triune God.14

The fact that holy love is of the essence of the fullness of the triune life informs us that God does not in any sense need us. Within his own life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the triune God knows no lack or need. The expression of his grace toward us is, then, completely free. God does not love us out of a lack or emptiness; instead, he loves us out of the fullness of the triune life of holy love.

At the same time, his actions are fully in accord with his nature as holy love. Because God is the triune God, because the holy love that the Father, Son and Spirit share is of the essence of God, it is quite literally unthinkable that his actions would not be in accord with his nature. "God loves us," says Torrance, "with the very same love with which he loves himself, in the reciprocal love of the three divine Persons for Each Other in the eternal Communion of the Holy Trinity."" The love that God is as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not different from the love that God extends and offers to us (e.g., Jn 17:26). As Torrance

explains,

> In the Communion of the Holy Trinity the Father is Father in his loving of the Son and the Spirit, the Son is Son in his loving of the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is Spirit in his loving of the Father and the Son. It is as such that the Love that flows between the Father, the Son and the Spirit, freely flows in an outward movement of his loving activity toward us with whom God creates a communion of love corresponding to the Communion of Love which he ever is in himself.... It is as this infinite, unlimited, transcendent self-giving Love that God is, that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, three Persons, one Being, seeks and creates fellowship with us in order to reconcile us with himself and to share with us his own eternal Life and Love."

The incarnate Son and the promised Spirit bring to us this irreducibly pure and holy love of the intratrinitarian life-the love that God is.

Love and wrath in Scripture: a brief summary. Arguably the New Testament (when compared with the Old) heightens and strengthens the witness to both the wrath of God and the love of God. It emphasizes the everlasting consequences of divine wrath, and it grounds the love of God within the triune life of God in a way that goes beyond the Old Testament. But in neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament do we see the love of God and the wrath of God as polar opposites. Even the terrible scene of Yahweh's judgment of his unfaithful people in Ezekiel 16 is couched within the framework of God's love. The discussion ends with the promise that-despite the fact of the unfaithfulness of God's people-God will "remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you" (Ezek 16:60). Then you will (again) "know" me, and I will "make atonement for you," says the Lord (Ezek 16:63). The psalmist also shows, through retelling Israel's story, that God displays both mercy and anger. Again and again, the psalmist recounts, Israel has acted in ways that showed her unfaithfulness. But again and again, the Lord has punished them only so that they would return to him. The psalmist goes on,

In spite of all this, they kept on sinning;
in spite of his wonders they did not believe. (Ps. 78:32)

The verdict is clear.

Their hearts were not loyal to him,
they were not faithful to his covenant. (Ps 78:37)

But God has made his stance toward them clear as well.

Yet he was merciful;
he forgave their iniquities
and did not destroy them.
Time after time he restrained his anger
and did not stir up his full wrath. (Ps. 78:38)

Yahweh is "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" but not leaving "the guilty unpunished" (Ex 34:6-7). For "the LORD is good, and his love endures forever" (e.g., Ps 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1).

Love and wrath in the hands of the theologians. The biblical witness to both the wrath and love of God is plain: Scripture attests to both love and wrath (though not, as we have seen, as polar opposites). Many modern theologians (academic and pastoral theologians alike) tend to deal with this witness in several ways: either they ignore the biblical depictions of divine wrath, they "depersonalize" it by describing wrath as the natural consequences of sin, or they try to take full account of both the wrath and the love of God by pitting one against another as if they were equal, independent and in opposition to one another.

Some theologians take little or no notice of the biblical testimony to the wrath of God (it would be much harder to find those who ignore the biblical affirmations of the love of God).'7 Other theologians render divine wrath as what D. A. Carson describes as "the impartial and inevitable impersonal effects of sin

in a culture."" The proponents of this approach usually translate the words hilasmos, hilasterios and hilashomai, found in Romans 3:25 and I John 2:2, as "expiation" rather than "propitiation." Whereas "propitiation" refers to the wrath of God, "expiation" refers to sin. C. H. Dodd, for instance, has famously argued that the very idea of propitiation is pagan and thus foreign to any biblically acceptable doctrine of God.19 References to God's "wrath" do not really refer to his personal antagonism toward sin; instead, "the wrath of God" really means the normal consequences of sinful behavior.

Meanwhile, defenders of "propitiation" respond that while we certainly ought to reject all pagan notions of propitiation, there is surely also a properly biblical and Christian account of propitiation. Thus John Stott argues that while "crude concepts of anger, sacrifice and propitiation are indeed to be rejected," such a rejection "does not mean, however, that there is no biblical concept of these things at all. What is revealed to us in Scripture is a pure doctrine (from which all pagan vulgarities have been expunged) of God's holy wrath, his loving self-sacrifice in Christ and his initiative to avert his own anger."20 The biblical account comes nowhere close to the pagan versions, for it is only in the Christian concept of propitiation that "it is God himself in his holy wrath [who] needs to be propitiated, God himself who in holy love undertook to do the propitiating, and God himself who in the person of his Son died for the propitiation of our sins.""

Another way that modern theologians wrestle with the biblical depiction of both the wrath and love of God is to argue that there must be a "strife of attributes" within God. Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy describe this position as one that sees a real dilemma for God: "This sinfulness poses a dilemma for God, for he perfectly loves us, on the one hand, but he is perfectly holy and cannot have anything to do with sin, on the other hand."22 Stott argues (against P. T. Forsyth) that there indeed is a "strife of attributes" within God. He appeals to the biblical language of both the wrath and mercy of God, and he says that there "surely is a conflict of emotions, a strife of attributes, within God."23 There is a "duality" within The sin of humanity has occasioned a crisis within God, for now

God's holiness and justice demand to see sinners damned while his love and mercy desire to see them saved. God now has a "problem," and "the problem is not outside God; it is within his own being."25 Even more boldly, Helmut Thielicke insists that "it is at the heart of the Lutheran view of God that God does contradict himself, that he sets his grace in opposition to his judgment and his love in opposition to his holiness; indeed, the gospel can be traced back to this fundamental opposition within God himself."26

So, on the one hand, there are Christians who quietly ignore (or not so quietly deny) the reality of the wrath of God, and there are other theologians who reduce it to what Dodd calls "an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe." 21 On the other hand, many contemporary theologians want to insist on the reality of God's wrath as well as his love, but they do so by pitting wrath and mercy (and holiness and love) against one another within the divine nature. How should we think about such matters?

LOVE AND WRATH IN THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

We need to take the biblical witness to the wrath of God with utter seriousness. And we must, of course, do so without losing sight of the love of God. We must therefore situate discussions of divine wrath and love within the broader context of the doctrine of God. And when we do this, two important issues especially call for attention: divine impassibility and divine simplicity.

The doctrine of divine impassibility. The first of these issues, the doctrine of divine impassibility, is in some form or other deeply traditional. While we often associate this doctrine with specific names, such as Augustine, Anselm and (especially) Thomas Aquinas, the vast majority of the church fathers, medieval theologians and post-Reformation scholastics held to it as well. Many people understand-or, more accurately, misunderstand-the doctrine of divine impassibility to be the belief that God is utterly devoid of any affections or "emotions." An impassible God, many say, is the "God of the philosophers," a God who is cold and detached, the "Unmoved Mover" or "Greatest Conceivable Being" or "Iceberg Greater Than Which Cannot Be Conceived." For many

modern Christians, in other words, impassibility just means apathy (rather than a testament to the sheer goodness of God).28

Standing in direct and adamant opposition to this classical doctrine of God, according to which God is said to be cold, detached, impersonal and (especially) "static," revisionist proposals maintain that God is "relational" and "dynamic" (rather than "static"). God is not, the revisionists tell us, the "God of the philosophers"; rather, he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.29 And the God of the Bible is clearly a God who is passionate. God is, by turns, furious in his wrath and then gentle in his forbearance. God is, the revisionists are quick to point out, actively and intimately involved in his creation, and with Israel in particular. God makes no secret of the fact that he is influenced and affected by his creation. He is anything but "static" or impassive about it, but is, rather, pained by it and suffers accordingly. The God of the Old Testament, moreover, is anything but impassible-he is the very opposite of an apathetic "Unmoved Mover." Migliore asks, "How can Christians talk about the apathy of the God who `so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son' for its salvation (John 3:16)?"30

Moreover, the revisionists argue against the classic doctrine of divine impassibility from the fact of the incarnation. Thus Paul Fiddes announces that "God suffers on the cross in oneness with the person of Christ." Moreover, "God suffers eternally in the cross"indeed, "God is most Godlike in the suffering of the cross."" Eberhard Jungel says that the cross "has destroyed the axiom of absoluteness, the axiom of apathy, and the axiom of immutability, all of which are unsuitable axioms for the Christian concept of God."" Jurgen Moltmann speaks of the "eternal passion of God"; he insists that "the abandonment on the cross which separates the Son from the Father is something which took place between Jesus and his Father . . . that is, as something which takes place within God himself."33 As we have seen, he concludes that there is conflict with the divine life-that, on the cross, we see "God against God."34

At stake for these revisionist theologians is nothing less than the reality of God's personhood. Moltmann says that if God were incapable of suffering, then

"he would also be incapable of love."35 Fiddes says that "if God is not less than personal, and if the claim `God is love' is to have recognizable continuity with our normal experience of love," then it clearly seems to be necessary for God to have an emotional life that is very much like ours.3' Richard Creel helpfully explains that "all these rejections of divine impassibility seem to be motivated by a clash between the conviction that God should be thought of as a loving person and the further conviction that an impassible being cannot be a loving person."37 If these are the options-either God as impassible or God as truly loving-then the right choice should be obvious: "Whether God is impassible or not is negotiable (for biblical theists), but whether God is love or not is not" negotiable.38

Let us also note the sort of "apologetic" impulse that often drives the rejection of the classical doctrine of divine impassibility. For many contemporary thinkers, theology "afterAuschwitz" (where "Auschwitz" stands, as Thomas Weinandy helpfully ex plains, for the "radical evil that humankind is capable of perpetrating ... the inexpressible monstrous and morally intolerable suffering of the poor, the weak, and the innocent") means that the doctrine of divine impassibility is not only mistaken but also offensive.39 For Moltmann the doctrine of impassibility is a moral outrage. Only the "suffering God" can help, and "any other answer" to the questions raised by the moral horrors of the twentieth century "would be blasphemy."40 For "there cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would condemn men to indifference."41 On the contrary, Moltmann, argues, God was present in Auschwitz, and the sufferings of its victims are also the suffering of God.

In summary, we can see that the critics of the classical doctrine reject it for several reasons. First, they claim that it flatly contradicts the way the Bible actually talks about God. Second, they claim that it is inconsistent with the central Christian claim that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God who suffered, died and rose again. Third, they claim that it violates deeply held

Christian convictions about the reality of God's personhood. Last, they worry that the classical doctrine of the incarnation is morally problematic in the face of widespread and horrific human suffering, and that the Christian faith is unfortunately discredited and the good news obscured by the doctrine.

Defenders of the classical doctrine of impassibility, however, protest that it has been misunderstood and misrepresented (though perhaps not necessarily in that order). The doctrine, as Thomas Weinandy tells us, primarily tells us about what God is not: God does not undergo successive or fluctuating emotional states. God is not somehow reduced by the actions of the created order. God is not in any way "debilitated" or "crippled" by the passions, as humans so often are. Richard A. Muller says that "the exclusion of `passions' from the divine being never implied the absence of affections."4Z We are not to confuse impassibility with the "Stoic notion of apatheia."43 Impassibility, rather, denies any mutation or distress within God. Muller says that "the modern writers who argue against the doctrine of divine impassibility as if it were little more than the uncritical importation of a Stoic concept are beating, not a dead, but a nonexistent horse"44 Contrary to what the critics of the doctrine would have us believe, he says, the doctrine "in no way implies an absence of relatedness, love, long-suffering, compassion, mercy, and so forth."45 To the contrary, the doctrine of divine impassibility safeguards and protects the fact that holy love is the essence of the triune God. Rather than a denial of the love of God, it resoundingly affirms that holy love.

What are we to make of the criticisms of the doctrine? Taking them in reverse order, let us first consider the claim that "only a suffering God can help." Here it is important for us to realize that the relevance for salvation-and what the doctrine means for genuinely Christian hope-was not lost on the traditional advocates of the doctrine. On the contrary, they insist that impassibility is foundational to genuinely Christian hope. 4 On the one hand, they insist that "the unassumed is the unhealed." On the other hand, though, they also insist that what is assumed must be assumed by someone able to rescue it! In other words, they argue, salvation hinges on impassibility. So what if we have a fellow sufferer

who is entrapped in our predicament? How is that really good news? What we need is someone who joins himself to our humanity, and to our condition, but who is not affected by it and ensnared by and overcome by it as we are. In other words, we actually need a Savior who is impassible.

What about the argument that the incarnation itself destroys the doctrine? The common argument can be summarized like this: Jesus Christ is God (according to orthodox Christianity); Jesus Christ suffers; therefore God suffers. While this argument seems quick and decisive, the defenders of the classical position will say that it is much too quick and not at all decisive. Should we say that Jesus Christ is God? Of course we should-but we should also add that Jesus Christ is truly and fully human as well. Should we say that Jesus Christ suffers? Of course we should (on pain of the ancient heresy of docetism, i.e., that Christ only appeared to be human)-but we should also add that he suffers according to his human nature. As Thomas Aquinas says, "Although we do not distinguish things predicated of Christ, yet we distinguish that by reason of which they are predicated, since those things that belong to the Divine Nature are predicated of Christ in His Divine Nature, and those that belong to the human nature are predicated of Christ in His human nature."47 In other words, when considering the suffering of Christ, we must maintain the distinction between the humanity and the divinity of Christ. His divinity was not subject to suffering as was his humanity, so there is a way in which his divinity is impassible while his humanity suffers.

What about the charge that love is incompatible with impassibility? Here the defenders of the classical doctrine argue that it is the revisionists who have things exactly backward. Perfect love, rather than being incompatible with impassibility, demands impassibility. Love that is passible fluctuates. Love that is passible gets caught up in the "heat of the moment." Love that is passible is subject to greater and lesser degrees of intensity. Love that is passible could, then, strengthen or weaken. To affirm impassibility, then, precisely denies that any of these things are true of God. Impassibility thus means that God's love is absolutely steadfast and perfect. If it could weaken or wane, then God's love

would not be absolutely steadfast and perfect. If it could weaken or wane, then God would be caught up in the same vortex of passion that surrounds and encompasses us. If, however, it could improve or be strengthened, then it would also be less than perfect. In other words, to say that God is impassible (in the Christian sense) is to affirm that God's holy love is perfect. God does not depend on anything outside of himself, and he is not caught up in the swirling vortex of creaturely events that capture and threaten us all. As Weinandy puts it, "To say that God is impassible is again to ensure and to accentuate his perfect goodness and unalterable love," and we affirm impassibility "in order to safeguard and enhance his perfect and dynamic passion-his all-consuming goodness and ardent love."4s Aquinas says that "God loves without passion."49 Weinandy's explanation summarizes well the central point: God "loves without undergoing the passible processes and changes that are inherent in human love." 50

Seen in this light, the doctrine of impassibility coheres well with both the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of divine simplicity. God is impassible because God is a Trinity, a point Weinandy helpfully summarizes: the divine persons "are impassible not because they lack passion, in the sense of being fully loving and completely self-giving, but again precisely for the opposite reason. As subsistent relations fully in act, the persons of the Trinity are completely and utterly passionate in their selfgiving to one another and cannot be more passionate for they are constituted, and so subsist, as who they are because they have absolutely given themselves completely to one another in love."" Impassibility, then, is the complete opposite of "inert" or "stagnant" or "static" being-impassibility is true because God's "love is fully in act and therefore his passion is fully in act. God cannot become more passionate or loving by actualizing, as human beings do, some further potential and so become more passionate or loving." 52 Impassibility should thus be understood as consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity, for "within the life of the Trinity ... the love among the persons of the Trinity is immutable in that it is fully actualized. Their love for one another does not develop or mature. Rather, the love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is eternally and immutably perfect, and so supremely dynamic and passionate."53 Thus impassibility is supported not only

by (special) revelation (the revealed doctrine of the Trinity) but also by reason (or general revelation): in the impassible purity of the intratrinitarian divine life of holy love, God is what scholastic theologians called "pure act" (actus purus).

But still, the critics of the classical doctrine may persist, the biblical accounts depict God as having tumultuous emotional states. His love and wrath wax and wane. If the traditional proponents of the classical doctrine would have been paying attention to the Bible, would they not have veered away from this doctrine? Does not the biblical depiction destroy the classical doctrine? Defenders of the classical doctrine will again say that such an argument, upon closer scrutiny, moves much too fast and is not so decisive. We certainly should take the biblical descriptions of God with utter seriousness. Of course we should accept God's selfrevelation as final and authoritative. But we should also, of course, seek to understand those biblical descriptions in a way appropriate to their subject, and that demands careful interpretation (as well as an adequate understanding of religious and biblical language).

The Bible describes God as a "Rock": "He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him" (Ps 92:15). Indeed, the psalmist proclaims that God has become "the rock in whom I take refuge" (Ps 94:22). Theologians have argued about many things through the centuries, and some of those arguments seem silly indeed. Nonetheless, I know of no theologians or denominations who have split off into, say, "granitic Christians" who are opposed to "those dangerously mistaken basaltic theologians." Why have Christians not splintered into such groups? Why have Christians not held that God at some point just turned himself into a big slab of granite? Well, presumably, they have understood that while we are to learn something important of God's nature and actions from these ascriptions (e.g., God is exalted as well as steadfast and trustworthy), we will badly misinterpret and misunderstand God by taking such descriptions literally. The description of God as a rock tells us something-something we need to know-about his nature and actions. But the biblical depiction was not given to us to tell us that God is a piece of granite. We know better than to interpret the biblical portrayals this way.

Scripture also describes God as having physical body parts, sometimes those of humans (a face, an arm, a backside, etc.) and sometimes those of other creatures (e.g., feathers and wings in Ps 91:4). Again, an overly literalistic interpretation of these passages will cause us to miss the point and will even mislead us. These descriptions of God tell us something important about his nature and our relation to him, but they do not tell us the size of the divine biceps. We know better than to interpret the biblical portrayals in this way. Those who defend divine impassibility will say that the situation is similar with respect to the language of tumultuous and traumatic emotional states for God. Again, such portrayals tell us something important about his nature and our relation to him. But again, these portraits are not offered to inform us that God has bad moods, or gets caught up in crises that threaten him and overwhelm his perfection, or flies into fits of rage, or on other days becomes sentimental and melancholy. We know better than to interpret the biblical portrayals this way-at least, we should know better.

There is a great deal more we could say about biblical interpretation (particularly with respect to various genres of biblical literature) and biblical language, but the basic point is this: we neither respect the authority of the Bible nor glorify God as he has revealed himself by insisting on overly literalistic interpretations of such descriptions.54 Even worse, such overly literalistic interpretation will cause us to miss the central points about God's selfrevelation. We should receive God's self-disclosure as utterly reliable and as finally authoritative. And we should seek to understand it in a way that is appropriate to the triune God, who is greater-than-which-cannot-be-conceived.

The doctrine of divine simplicity. For God to be made up or composed of some "parts" or pieces (either divine persons or divine attributes) that are divided from others would mean that some of those parts may be for us or on our side while others are against us. However, according to the venerable doctrine of divine simplicity, God has no parts or pieces. But the doctrine is largely unknown in some theological quarters. As one recent introduction to theology observes, "Most Christians have not even heard of the doctrine of divine

simplicity."55 "What?" Christians ask, "God is simple? I thought God wasn't that easy to understand." In other circles, it is well known but very unpopular. Richard Plantinga, Thomas Thompson and Matthew Lundberg assert that the doctrine of divine simplicity "has been the biggest reason why the Trinity has been presented as an impenetrable mystery of faith ... and why most Christians finally tend toward a unipersonal view of God-typically associated with the Father." They "believe this doctrine has no real biblical basis and has in fact worked to defeat the resources of a full-fledged trinitarianism."5t' The doctrine is, however, a very deep part of the Christian inheritance. However maligned it may be in modern theology, it is a staple ingredient not only of medieval Latin theology but also of patristic theology (both Greek and Latin) on one hand and post-Reformation scholasticism on the other hand. It is part of the creedal and confessional heritage of many theological traditions; the Westminster Confession, for instance, denies that God has "body, parts, or passions." The doctrine has been an important (some would say essential) element of the Christian doctrine of God for most of two millennia, being held by most of the fathers and doctors of the church; it is also, as we shall see, very important for an appropriate understanding of holy love and righteous wrath.

The most basic point of the doctrine is this: God is not composed or built up out of parts or pieces; God is without any metaphysical or moral complexity whatsoever. While it is appropriate to refer to the various divine attributes, and while it is fine to predicate dif ferent perfections of God, the doctrine of divine simplicity reminds us that such talk should not mislead us into thinking that God is literally made up of or composed out of various attributes or divine parts. As Muller says, "if some of the late patristic and medieval expositions of the doctrine class as philosophical and perhaps speculative, the basic concept is not: from Irenaeus to the era of Protestant orthodoxy, the fundamental assumption was merely that God, as ultimate Spirit is not a compounded or composite being."57

While there is not an explicit biblical basis for the doctrine (in the sense of having discrete passages that serve as "proof" of the doctrine), Scripture speaks

of God as truth (e.g., Jn 14:6), light (e.g., Jn 1:5), life (Jn 1:4; 14:6) and love (1 Jn 4:8). Its proponents argue that it is implied by God's sovereignty and aseity-which are clearly taught in Scripture (e.g., Ex 3:14). According to the doctrine of aseity, God does not depend on anything outside of himself for his existence; God says and identifies himself as "I am," and the fullness, sufficiency and blessedness of his life come from himself. God does not need his creatures to exist, nor does he rely on them to be fully actualized. Rather he is, in the beauty of his own intratrinitarian life, both fully and completely himself and fully and completely satisfied in that fullness.

Alvin Plantinga, who himself is critical of the doctrine of simplicity (or at least some expressions of it), says that the "sovereignty-aseity intuition" is one that "must be taken with real seriousness. Suppose that God has the property of being omnipotent and suppose that property is an object distinct from him, is uncreated by him and exists necessarily. Then in some sense he does depend on that property."58 Thus God would be dependent on what is not God for his own existence, and such a conclusion is simply incompatible with the doctrine of divine aseity. Further, everything that is composite has a cause; discrete and independent things cannot be united unless something put them together. So God would be dependent on something else-something greaterthat is able to put him together. Even worse, everything made up of parts and pieces is subject to dissolution. That is, it could come apart. But of course this is completely repugnant to the doctrine of God. So there is good reason to think that if God is, as Scripture teaches, truly sovereign and completely faithful to all eternity, then the doctrine of simplicity must be true.

Having said that, however, it is also important to note that the doctrine of divine simplicity has taken a beating in recent times. I freely admit that there are versions of the doctrine that seem to be utterly indefensible. (Indeed, some of these seem to be indefensible because they are indefensible.) Yet there is also at least one historic version of the doctrine that is defensible and meaningful. Although it requires a bit of careful analysis, it is relevant to the current discussion, for it has the potential to reorient our understanding of divine

attributes and action. Thus it is worth the hard work of understanding it.

One historic version of the doctrine allows only for "rational distinctions" within the divine essence. That is, the only distinctions between, say, divine goodness and divine power are those distinctions that we make up. There are no "real distinctions" within God, for such distinctions would have to be between different things. Within God himself there is absolutely no distinction between God's goodness and power. Even though we refer to divine power as different from divine goodness, within God "they" just are the same. This sameness is true, of course, because "both" just are the undivided and simple divine essence. To draw on an old illustration, when we see the "morning star" (the planet Venus) we do not see anything that is really distinct from the "evening star." There is only one object to which we refer, and yet it is entirely appropriate to call the planet Venus either the "evening star" or the "morning star." It is acceptable, and indeed more appropriate, to refer to it as the "evening star" in some cases and the "morning star" in others. But our common speech should not mislead us into thinking there is more than one object before us, for what makes it more appropriate to call it the "evening star" or the "morning star" is our relation to it.

Another formulation of the doctrine draws an important distinction "between" those that are "real" and those that are merely "rational." Real distinctions are distinctions between independent things (different things of the same essence-e.g., different chairs-or different things of different essences-e.g., tables and chairs-or different parts of the same thing-e.g., the legs and seat of a chair), and rational distinctions are merely those made up for convenience. So while real distinctions are distinctions between things that exist independently, rational distinctions fail to tell us anything true about the thing in itself and are thus more of a useful fiction than anything else.59 However, the scholastic medieval theologian John Duns Scotus sees that neither of these categories is adequate when we are thinking about God; the divine attributes are not independent in the sense that they could exist "on their own," but neither are they exactly the same. So he introduced another alternative, namely a "formal" distinction.60 The

attributes are, according to this reasoning, formally distinct: they are both really inseparable and yet genuinely distinct on account of distinctions found in themselves (that is, not merely artificial or rational). While illustrations (or analogies) are not all that easy to come by, and at any rate are not perfect, one illustration might help us to grasp this: the hardness of a table is genuinely distinct from its flatness but not separable from that flatness or indeed from the table itself-lose the hardness or the flatness and you've lost the table. So the flatness is formally distinct from the table and from the hardness; it is genuinely distinct from them but not really distinct (in the technical sense of "real" in play as separable or independent) as it is not even logically separable from them. We can put this distinction to work in various ways: for our discussion, it is important to see that the divine attributes are formally distinct. Thus God's power is inseparable from his goodness while still genuinely distinct from it.

Also important to any discussion of the divine attributes is the distinction between necessary, or essential, divine attributes and those that are contingent."' Attributes that are essential to God on the one hand are those that make God who he is-they are characteristics or perfections of God's own life. Attributes that God has only in relation to the world, on the other hand, are not essential to him but instead are contingent. After perceiving this distinction between essential and contingent attributes, it is important to note that within the unity of God's being and act the attributes that are contingent are grounded in and flow from what is essential to him. Consider the "attribute" of mercy.62 Surely we would agree that mercy is rightly to be attributed to God; God really is merciful. Yet without the presence of creatures-more precisely, without sinful creatures-it makes no sense to predicate mercy of God. Had God not created, God would not be merciful. So mercy is contingent rather than essential to God. However, divine mercy is grounded in, and is an expression of, the goodness that is essential to God's life. It is not arbitrary or random.

We could say much more about the doctrine of divine simplicity, but these issues need not concern us further, for we are now in a better position to think about how the holy love and righteous wrath of God are related to one another

and to the gospel.

WRATH, LOVE AND THE GOSPEL

Paul is "not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). The gospel he is so bold to proclaim is the gospel in which "the righteousness of God is revealed-a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: the righteous will live by faith'" (Rom 1:17). Paul says this just as he begins to speak of the wrath of God as it is "being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (Rom 1:18). Clearly for Paul one cannot talk about the gospel without also talking honestly about the wrath of God. We are, according to Paul, "by nature deserving of wrath" (Eph 2:3). To be saved is to be saved "from God's wrath" through Christ (Rom 5:9). And to be saved is to be saved by love: "But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:4-5). Any holistic understanding of the gospel must take both wrath and love into account. Based on the discussion of divine impassibility and simplicity above, we are now in a position to make some important observations about God's wrath and love.

God's righteous wrath is contingent. Scripture always portrays God's righteous wrath as God's antagonism toward sin. We thus rightly understand it as the contingent expression of what is essential or necessary to him against sin. Wrath is the contingent expression of the holy love shared between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We should not confuse "contingent" here with arbitrary; given sin, God inevitably expresses his holy and righteous love as wrath against sin. Wrath, in other words, is the natural expression of God's righteous and holy character toward all that stands opposed to him and his good purposes for his creatures. But it is a contingent expression nonetheless; it is not as though wrath is necessary or essential to God; if it were essential to him, he could not exist

without it. We should not conclude that God somehow needs wrath-and thus sin-to be God.

God's righteous wrath is the contingent expression of the holy love of the Trinity. Scripture leaves no room for doubt about the wrath of God. It also leaves no room for doubt about the love of God. It does not, however, place the love and mercy of God, on one hand, and the holiness and wrath of God, on the other hand, in opposition to one another. We may tend to see these as if they are in tension or even opposition, but the Bible itself does not. Wrath and love may be in tension, or even contradict one another, in fallen and sinful human lives (although I am not convinced that this is always or necessarily the case-must wrath cast out love?). But why think thus of God? Why suppose that love and wrath are "in tension" within him? Scripture does not demand that we do so.

Moreover, the doctrine of divine simplicity makes such a supposition impossible. God's holiness and love, rather than opposing one another, cohere within his own nature. Within the simplicity of God's own triune life, one divine person is not for us and another somehow against us. Notwithstanding the popularity (within some evangelical circles) of the phrase "the wrath of the Father," it is unthinkable that the Father is full of wrath and wants to see us damned while the merciful and loving Son is on "our side." How could it be? The Father and Son are, together with the Holy Spirit, exactly one God, and their operations are always undivided. Thus it is, according to classical trinitarian doctrine, strictly impossible that they are divided in their work. Fur thermore, they are of one essence (homoousios), and they share the same undivided divine nature. The holy justice of the Father is the same holy justice of the Son. The love of the Son is the same love as the love of the Father.

Furthermore, it is not possible that there are "competing attributes" within God. In the simplicity of the divine nature, then, God's holiness and his love may be formally distinct-that is, they may be genuinely distinct-but not really separable. They are not, and cannot be, "opposed to" one another. Nor is "tension" internal to God's own life. We cannot, with any good theological grounding or support, go beyond what the Bible tells us about the love and

holiness of God to posit an internal struggle within God's own life. We cannot, with good theological conscience, make such claims as "God's holiness and justice demanded to see me damned, but-thankfully-God's love and mercy wanted me to be saved, resulting in the death of Jesus so that God could get this tension resolved." Nor can we say that "part of God called for my damnation, while another part wanted my salvation, so Jesus died to deal with God's problem," as if the real problem were within God! The real root of the problem that Jesus came to deal with, according to Scripture, is our problem-it is sin. God's wrath is not the product of his holiness while his mercy is the expression of his love. God's righteous wrath is the contingent expression of his holy love-for within the simplicity of the divine life, holiness and love cohere with one another.

God's righteous wrath is the expression of holy impassible love. We need not solve all puzzles about impassibility to see the relevance of the basic point for our discussion. On the one hand, God is not ever unconcerned about sin. He does not relax his standards on some days. His steadfast and relentless opposition to all that stands against him knows no holidays. Within the impassible life of triune holy love, his white-hot wrath never fluctuates or varies in its opposition to sin. As the Reformed scholastics put it, "This is terrible to wicked men: God is unchangeable which hath threatened to curse and bring destruction on them; they must change, or else there is no repealing of the curse.... [The divine] threatenings and judgments" will come upon all who do not re On the other hand, neither does God succumb to madness or fits of rage. As Weinandy says, "Anger, when applied to God, was not seen as a separate passion or an intermittent emotional state within God, but constitutive of his unchanging perfect goodness and providential care, and so must be predicated of God in a manner suitable to the divine nature."64 Thus, while there is no room within a truly Christian understanding of divine wrath for pagan notions of propitiation, Scripture nevertheless reveals to us the sober truth that, as sinners, we are under the wrath of God. God's wrath must be dealt with, and the Bible teaches us that it is dealt with by the death of Christ. So propitiation is important, but we must not confuse biblical propitiation with its counterparts in pagan religion-as if God (or

"the Father") becomes so consumed by rage that he vents his pent-up anger in a fit of bloodthirsty passion, while the loving Jesus steps up between us and the force of that wrath and so gives God just enough blood to satisfy him or "buy him off." Scripture teaches that the wrath of God is the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16). The wrath of God-that is, God's holy and righteous love expressed in steadfast antagonism toward all that is opposed to God and his purposes for creation-is not subject to fits of rage. Nor can any act either satiate or exhaust it-as if God would no longer care about sin or no longer have the moral energy to do anything about it because of the work of Christ. Instead, Christ's work for us (in both propitiation and expiation, which must be closely related) saves us from God's wrath by saving us from our sin.65 John the Baptist expressed it well when he saw Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). God makes no exceptions here. He eternally and inexorably opposes sin and evil. God never forgives the sin itself-God forgives sinners.

God's righteous wrath, which in the simplicity of the divine nature is the (contingent) expression of his holy love, is reason for hope. Sometimes the divine attributes are said to be "in tension with" one another or even "opposed to" each other. As we have seen, sometimes preachers and theologians will say, "God's love and mercy want to see me saved while his holiness and justice demand to see me punished-and the God-appointed and Godapproved death of Christ is God's way of sorting out the problem that my sin has caused for him." We should note that this is a speculative proposal for thinking about the death of Christ; the fact that Scripture testifies to divine love and mercy (as it does) and also to divine holiness and justice (as it does) does not mean that Scripture teaches that the divine attributes are "in tension with" or "opposed to" one another. Nor does the fact that love and justice sometimes stand in tension for us mean that they do so for God. On the contrary, there are good reasons to think that such speculation cannot be right. God's wrath-as the expression of his holy love-is reason for hope. As Torrance puts it,

> It is the wrath of the lamb, the wrath of redeeming love. As such the very wrath of God is a sign of hope, not of utter destruction.... Judgment and wrath mean that far from casting us off, God comes within the existence

> and relation between the creator and the creature, and negates the contradiction we have introduced into it by and in our sin. God's wrath means that God declares in no uncertain terms that what he has made he still affirms as his own good handiwork and will not cast it off into nothingness. Wrath means that God asserts himself against us as holy and loving creator in the midst of our sin and perversity and alienation. God's wrath is God's judgment of sin, but it is a judgment in which God asserts that he is the God of the sinner and that the sinner is God's creature: it is a wrath which asserts God's ownership of the creature and asserts the binding of the creature to the holy and loving God.... It must take the form of judgment over against sin, but a reaffirmation that the creature belongs to God and that he refuses to cease to be its God and therefore refuses to let it go. God's very wrath tells us thatwe are children of God. It is the rejection of evil, of our evil by the very love that God himself eternally is.66

This affirmation matters for a clear grasp of the hope of the gospel; far from being foreign to the gospel, or even annoying distractions from it, the doctrines of simplicity and impassibility are crucial for the gospel message. As Paul D. Gavrilyuk says, "It is precisely because God is impassible . . . that repentant sinners may approach him without despair. Far from being a barrier to divine care and loving-kindness, divine impassibility is their very foundation. Unlike that of humans who are unreliable and swayed by passions, God's love is enduring and devoid of all weaknesses with which human love is tainted."67

As I have argued, the doctrine of divine simplicity teaches that the essential divine attributes are (at most) only "formally" distinct. That is, they are neither separated nor even separable. We cannot, then, think of the divine attributes as being "opposed" or "in tension." If we accept some doctrine of divine simplicity, it is unthinkable that, say, God's righteous justice demands one thing while his love and mercy demand the opposite. Nor is it possible that some divine attributes (or divine persons) work for some re suits while others work for other results. John McLeod Campbell surely is closer to the mark when he says that

> the justice, the righteousness, the holiness of God have an aspect according to which they, as well as his mercy, appear as intercessors for man, and

> crave his salvation.... But justice looking at the sinner, not simply as the fit subject of punishment, but as existing in a moral condition of unrighteousness, and so its own opposite, must desire that the sinner should cease to be in that condition, should cease to be unrighteous-should become righteous, righteousness in God craving righteousness in man.... So also with holiness. In one view it repels the sinner, and would banish him to outer darkness, because of its repugnance to sin. In another it must be pained by the continued existence of sin and unholiness, and must desire that the sinner should cease to be sinful.68

This observation means a lot for our hope of salvation.

> So that the sinner, conceived of as awakening to the consciousness of his own evil state, and saying to himself, "By sin I have destroyed myself. Is there yet hope for me in God?" should hear an encouraging answer, not only from the love and mercy of God, but also from his very righteousness and holiness ... the consolation will be not only, "Surely the divine mercy desires to see me happy rather than miserable"-but also, "Surely the divine righteousness desires to see me righteous-the divine holiness desires to see me holy-my continuing unrighteous and unholy is as grieving to God's righteousness and holiness as my misery through sin is to His pity and love."69

God is, therefore, "'a just God and a Savior,' not as the harmony of a seeming opposition, but `a Savior,' because `a just God.'"70

George Eldon Ladd observes that "whatever modern scholars may do with it, Paul clearly felt that there was neither contradiction nor incongruity between God's love and his wrath.,,7 ' As we have seen, divine wrath is not the opposite of divine love. It is not even in tension with his love. Quite the contrary is true-the righteous wrath of God is the (contingent) expression of the holy love that is the essence of God. Indifference would be opposed to divine love. We are often indifferent about sin; the sins we or others commit do not usually concern us very much unless they somehow directly damage us in financial, physical or psychological ways. But the fact that God is angry at sin tells us that God is

anything but indifferent toward us or the wrong that we do! The sovereign Lord, who alone enjoys blessedness and aseity, does not "need" us, nor can we "damage" him. The fact that he is implacably, unchangingly and personally opposed to all that is hostile to him is a testament to his sheer goodness. He cares about our sin-and the damage it does to us-more than we do. The fact that the whole world is under the wrath of God tells us-in no uncertain terms-that the triune God of holy love cares about the whole world. The wrath of God is an expression of his love; it serves his holy love.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have briefly surveyed a lot of theological terrain: the biblical witness to the righteous wrath and holy love of God, the traditional doctrines of divine impassibility and simplicity, and the importance of these doctrines for our grasp of the gospel. Perhaps it will be helpful to summarize some conclusions.

To be avoided. We commonly downplay-if not deny outrightthe wrath of God. It is sometimes difficult to imagine contemporary preaching that follows the sustained warnings of, say, the opening chapters of Isaiah or Jeremiah. The temptation to downplay the wrath of God is understandable. The societal and cultural pressures to quietly ignore the biblical teaching are strong. The understanding that "God is love"-combined with the conviction that love and wrath are incompatible-is prevalent. But we should resist such temptations and avoid such conclusions. Too much is too clear from Scripture, and too much is at stake.

Similarly we should avoid the "depersonalization" of divine wrath. Surely it is true that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), but this truth in no way means that the language of "divine wrath" always and only refers to the "natural" consequences of sin divorced from the divine nature. The concerns of those who want to avoid the connotations of pagan views of deity are both understandable and commendable; I too want to avoid all such connotations. But the way to do so is not to depersonalize God's wrath-it is to understand divine wrath in a theologically responsible way. God is both simple and triune, thus God's wrath

cannot be depersonalized.

We should also avoid "anthropopathic" understandings of divine wrath (i.e., attributing human emotions to God). God does not "get mad," nor does he explode in fits of anger. We should not think of God as being mildly annoyed, and then growing more frustrated, and then getting angry, and finally blowing up in a moment of uncontrolled rage. His wrath is very unlike human wrath in several important respects. Central to these differences is the fact that his wrath is not concerned with or directed toward sinners because they have somehow damaged him (as if the trinitarian aseity of God could be damaged). Their refusal to glorify him is at the core of their sin (e.g., Rom 1:21), and it brings them under the wrath of God. But God's passion for his own glory is not ultimately selfcentered; it is his desire for us to benefit from it and to come into the joy and shalom and communion of God's own life of triune holy love. His wrath is very much unlike ours (see Jas 1:20); where ours is oriented around what bothers or damages us, God's wrath is an expression of his other-oriented and self-giving love.

I have argued that it is mistaken to see divine wrath in terms of a "broken Trinity," and again I conclude that we should avoid any suggestion that the Father is "opposed to" or "against" his holy Son. As Herman Bavinck puts it, "Also on the cross Jesus remained the beloved Son, the Son of his Father's good pleasure (Mt 3:17; 17:5). Precisely in his suffering and death, Christ offered his greatest, most complete obedience to the will of the Father (Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8; 10:5-10; 12:2); and Jesus himself tells us that the hour would come when all his disciples would abandon him, but that he himself would not be alone for the Father was with him (John 16:32)."72

Similarly we should avoid any explanation of the work of Christ that posits a "tension" or "conflict" or "strife of attributes" within God. According to biblically based Christian orthodoxy, there is exactly one triune God. The divine persons are distinct, but they are neither separated nor separable. They are distinct in virtue of their relations, and if these relationships are broken there simply is no triune God. But of course for Christian orthodoxy the relationships

are necessary and unbreakable, so the very idea of a broken Trinity is untenable. And in the simplicity of the divine nature the divine persons share the same divine attributes. The holy love of the Father is the same holy love as the holy love of the Son (and Spirit), and the righteous wrath of the Father is the same righteous wrath as the righteous wrath of the Son. Moreover, within the simplicity of the divine nature, the righteous wrath of the Father, Son and Spirit is their holy love (contingently expressed against sin). God does not have some parts that are opposed to us while others are "on our side," for God does not have "parts" at all. God does not experience internal conflict, nor is the barrier standing between us and salvation a problem within God. To think that our real problem is within God-to think that we have produced a conflict within God that he finds himself needing to deal with-both far overestimates our own importance and far underestimates the constancy and simplicity of the divine perfections. We should avoid any suggestion that there is such a conflict within God.

To be affirmed. First, as I have argued, we should see the wrath of God as real and personal. Our sin is, to put it bluntly, very "personal" to God. Speaking of Isaiah 10, D. A. Carson says that "in this passage there is no textually faithful way of domesticating the personal nature of God's wrath"; more broadly, he says that "there is no exegetically responsible way to dissolve the personal nature of God's wrath throughout the canonical Scriptures."73 Carson is exactly right here. To deny or downplay the wrath of God is to miss something vital to the biblical portrayal of reality. Moreover, to think of it only in terms of the natural consequences of sin threatens to eviscerate the oppositional relation of the sheer, unblemished and necessary goodness of God to evil.

Second, holy love is the "source" of God's righteous wrath. Wrath is not essential to God's nature; God would be God without it. God's wrath is the expression of his holy love against sin. This point brings us to the third observation: God's holy love is the source of atonement. John R. W. Stott forcefully makes this point when he says that "there is no possibility of persuading, cajoling or bribing God to forgive us, for we deserve nothing at his hands but judgment. Nor, as we have seen, has Christ by his sacrifice prevailed

upon God to pardon us. No, the initiative has been taken by God himself in his mercy and grace." 14 Thus it "cannot be emphasized too strongly that God's love is the source, not the consequence, of the atonement." 75

Why it matters. In this chapter I have tried to show that Scripture portrays the wrath of God so clearly and so powerfully that we ignore it only to our peril. At the same time, I have argued that we should be careful so that we do not misunderstand the wrath of God; here I worked to situate our understanding of divine wrath, along with holiness and love, within the context of divine impassibility and simplicity (properly understood). I have tried to show that we should not confuse God's wrath with pagan or anthropomorphic notions of anger, that God's wrath is not the opposite of his holiness or his love but is instead the expression of it against sin, and that it does not break the Trinity or cause a strife of attributes within God.

These points of doctrine matter immensely for our understanding of both sin and salvation. We trivialize our sin, we blind ourselves to its consequences, we indulge ourselves in the folly of self-deception. Unless someone else's sin affects me immediately and directly, sin is really no big deal. Frankly we typically do not care that much about our own sin. And we do all that we can to ignore its consequences. The fact that God stands against our sin-that fact that his holy wrath blazes against us when we oppose him-strikingly witnesses to the deadly seriousness of our sin. Without an adequate concept of the holiness of divine love, without a biblically informed sense of the wrath of holy love when opposed to sin, our sin becomes trivial to us. And when sin becomes trivial to us, so does God's love. As P. T. Forsyth puts it, "If we spoke less about God's love and more about his holiness, more about his judgment, we should say much more when we did speak of his love."" When we ignore the holy wrath of God, we trivialize his love, making salvation cheap and paltry.

Forsyth puts it this way: "The atonement did not procure grace, it flowed from grace."77 Torrance also is correct when he says that "God does not love us because of the atoning propitiation enacted in the sacrificial death of Christ. Rather does that propitiation flow freely from the consistent self-movement of

the Love that God himself is. It is through the sheer overflow of his eternal love that God has provided for mankind atoning propitiation in the blood of Christ, in order thereby to draw near to us and to draw us near to himself in such a way as to do away with all barriers of sin, hostility and fear between us and himself."" And Stott says it well when he concludes that "it is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). It cannot be emphasized too strongly that God's love is the source, not the consequence, of the atonement.... God does not love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loved us." " God is for us. It is not part of God that is for us-as if some divine persons or some divine attributes were opposed to me while others are for me-it is just God who is, in the impassible simplicity of the trinitarian life, radically for us. The death of Jesus does not make it possible for God to love us. The death of Jesus makes it possible for us truly to know God's love, makes it possible for us to love God.

3

Was the Death of Jesus a Meaningless Tragedy?

Foreknowledge, Fulfillment and the Plan of the Triune God

If Jesus was not separated from his Father and the Trinity broken, then what are we to make of Jesus' death? If the work of Jesus was not to remedy some problem with the divine attributes and make it possible for God to love us, then what was going on? Was the death of Jesus merely a tragic accident? The death of Jesus (as well as the circumstances surrounding it) has throughout history been the object of great fascination and intense scrutiny. Indeed, it is hard to make it through an Easter season in North America without encountering in the mainstream media multiple pronouncements on "the real Jesus" or "the fate of Jesus of Nazareth finally understood." Major print periodicals and television outlets promote the assured findings of "real historical investigations" into the historical Jesus and his demise. Similarly from within religious circles one also finds an astounding range of views of the meaning of Jesus' death. Many devout Christians think of his death as nothing more than a tragic proclaimed and lived out a truly revolutionary message, and he paid the ultimate price for that message when it incurred the interest and subsequent wrath of the dominant political forces. Many followers of Jesus know that the death of Jesus matters for us in some deep way-but they find it almost impossible to specify just what that meaning is. Some Christians, however, show no signs of reticence or hesitancy at all. They are convinced that the meaning of the death of Christ is obvious. They know who killed him, they know why he was killed, and they know

exactly how his death relates to us today. From such believers, we often hear such expressions as "God killed his Son," or, delivered with great emphasis, "God. Killed. His. Son."

So interest in the death of Jesus is perennial and pervasive. We recognize that his death is of utmost importance. The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are central to the biblical story line. The Gospels have been called "Passion Narratives with extended introductions," and with good reason.' The Gospel writers draw undeniable connections to the Old Testament in their accounts; indeed, it is almost impossible to understand their account of the person and mission of Jesus without that background. And the other New Testament documents are in many ways centered on the meaning and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus proclaims his own coming death and resurrection (e.g., Mt 16:21). He claims that his mission is nothing less than ultimately significant, for he claims to be the judge of all humanity (e.g., Mt 25:3146). That significance becomes even more apparent after his resurrection. So the question, why did Christ die? is crucially important for understanding the central message of the Bible-and indeed of Christianity itself. It is vitally important in real existential, pastoral and personal ways as well: if my own destiny is tied up with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then it is hard to think of a question that is more important.

THE "PLAN AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD"

So what are we to make of the death of Jesus? Was it merely a tragic accident, one that cut short the promising life of a teacher with a radically important (and radically countercultural) message? Or did God himself do it? Did God kill Jesus?

Foretold and fulfilled. When we look at the earliest followers' proclamation of the meaning of Jesus' life and death, we see several interesting and important themes. Peter connects Jesus Christ with the God of Israel; Jesus is the "servant" of the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers" (Acts 3:13). Jesus is nothing less than the "Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14). Indeed,

Peter says, "All the prophets testify about him," and they say that "everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). Similarly Paul recounts the story of Israel; he focuses on their need for a deliverer and their promise of one sent from God, and then he says in no uncertain terms that this promise has been fulfilled in Jesus. This is the "message of salvation" (Acts 13:26). Unfortunately, "the people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath" (Acts 13:27). Paul here connects the person and work of Christ with that of the long-awaited Messiah. And he leaves no doubt: Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise.2

This theme of promise and fulfillment-where the fulfillment occurs not merely in the incarnation of the Son of God but even in his death-is part of the earliest apostolic understanding and proclamation of the gospel. Peter's post-Pentecost sermon makes this plain: Jesus Christ was "handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23).

The early apostolic proclamation. A closer look at the earliest apostolic preaching helps us see the meaning of the death of Christ. Peter's sermon after Pentecost clearly shows, as we have just seen, that the passion and death of Christ did not take God by surprise or overwhelm him. To the contrary, the omniscient God foreknew the death of Jesus, and God used his foreknowledge of the actions of sinful humanity to bring about the deliverance and salvation of the very people responsible for his death. These things occurred according to "the plan and foreknowledge" of God. At the same time, however, Peter just as clearly makes it obvious who killed Jesus: "You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). He contrasts the actions of sinful human persons with the action of God. You killed him"but God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Acts 2:24). Peter then quotes Psalm 16 as directly applicable to Jesus; here, as elsewhere, he refers to Jesus as the "Holy One" (Acts 2:27; cf. Acts 3:14). He says that the psalmist spoke of his confidence that "one of his descendants" would take the throne (Acts 2:30), and

he insists that what David said is true of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:31). Again Peter draws a sharp and deliberate contrast between what sinful people have done and what God has done: God has raised this same Jesus-the one you crucified-to life (Acts 2:32-36). It is to this truth (among others), Peter concludes, that "we are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). And in light of this truth, he urges his listeners to respond accordingly: repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Peter follows this point with the declaration that God has "glorified his servant Jesus" (Acts 3:13). Again he leaves absolutely no room for doubt about the identity of those responsible for the death of Jesus: "You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life" (Acts 3:13-15). And again Peter draws a striking contrast between the sinful actions of human persons and the action of the Lord: "But God raised him from the dead" (Acts 3:15). Peter points out that this happened in fulfillment of what had been foretold, for the prophets had foretold that Christ would suffer (Acts 3:18). Once again, it is to this fact that we are witnesses, and it is in light of this truth that we should respond in repentance (Acts 3:19).

The power of this message is undeniable and its impact unmistakable. When their message causes an uproar, Peter and John are brought before the rulers and priests by the temple guard. Their message is the same. Again Peter, now speaking directly to the rulers, elders and teachers of the law (Acts 4:5), is faithful to deliver to them the ugly but undeniable truth: "you crucified" Jesus (Acts 4:10). And once more Peter contrasts this action with divine action: but God raised him from the dead (Acts 4:10). When Peter and John return to the company of believers, they reflect together on the meaning and significance of the divine "plan and foreknowledge." In prayer, the followers of Jesus acknowledge God's universal reign; he is the "Sovereign Lord" who created the "heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them" (Acts 4:24). And this

same Creator has revealed himself by prophecy ("the mouth of your servant, our father David") and supremely in Jesus. Furthermore they recognize the redemptive purposes of God as evident throughout the events surrounding the death of Jesus: "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen" (Acts 4:27-28). The leaders (religious and political, Jewish and Gentile) and the people (Jewish and Gentile) are the ones who conspired to kill Jesus, and there is no question that the earliest apostolic witness to the cross places the blame squarely on them. At the same time, the cross did not happen as a senseless tragedy, or as an accident that over whelmed God. To the contrary, it was within the plan of God to redeem the world. And to do so, God has acted to overturn and undo the actions of the conspirators: you killed him, but God raised him. What William Burt Pope calls the "first hymn of the Christian church" is one that "sings to the fulfillment of a decree for which all events had been prepared and in the accomplishment of which all the most diversified agents conspired."3

The early followers of Jesus insist that they simply must proclaim the fact and meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection-"We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29). When this proclamation again lands them in trouble, their response is (by now) predictable. Again they do not hesitate to place the blame for the death of Jesus on the people who now accuse them: "You killed [him] by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30). And again they insist that God has worked to undo what Jesus' killers had done: "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead" (Acts 5:30), and he has "exalted him to his own right hand as the Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins" (Acts 5:31). We, the apostles insist, are only being "witnesses" to this fact (Acts 5:32).

Stephen's testimony to the religious leaders (just before his martyrdom) echoes these themes. He reminds them of Abraham's call from God, and he recounts the covenantal promises of God (Acts 7:2-8). He recalls God's providence and deliverance of his people-and their refusal to obey. He reminds

them of their rebellion, idolatry and debauchery. He points out that this sin was accompanied by a self-righteous presumption and arrogance, and he concludes by calling them "stiff-necked people" who "always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51). It is you, he says, who have rejected and killed the prophets who promised a Savior. And now, in the supreme act of defiant folly, "you have betrayed and murdered" the promised one who came for your salvation (Acts 7:52).

As the realization that God does not show partiality begins to sink more deeply into Peter, his message remains consistent. Following the testimony of the Old Testament, he says that "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:34; cf. Dent. 10:17). He again recounts the "good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:26-38 [here Acts 10:36]). And once more he is faithful to his calling as a "witness": "They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen" (Acts 10:39-40). This is, Peter insists, the fulfillment of prophecy in accordance with the plan and foreknowledge of God: "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

When Paul begins to proclaim the gospel, his message is consistent. He recounts the history of Israel: God's election of them as a people; God's action in preserving, rescuing and guiding them; their rejection of his messengers; and the culmination of his work in Jesus Christ (as testified to by John the Baptist) (Acts 13:16-25). He then summarizes the "message of salvation": the people and their leaders (unwittingly) fulfilled the words of the prophets in condemning Jesus when they cried out for the death of Jesus (Acts 13:26-29). Clearly, they killed him; his death is on their hands. But just as clearly, God has acted miraculously to reverse their actions-"but God raised him from the dead" (Acts 13:30). This, Paul says, is the heart of the gospel: "What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus" (Acts 13:32-33).

God's plan and foreknowledge-not determinism. Some wellmeaning Christians, eager to "protect" divine sovereignty (as if it needs protection),

conclude from the fact that the betrayal and death of Christ occur as fulfillment of prophecy and according to the "plan and foreknowledge" of God that a kind of "divine determinism" is true. According to this view all events-everything that happens-are determined to be what they are and could not be any other way. More precisely, given the relevant natural laws and the history of the world to this point, only one future is compatible with the past.' In William Hasker's summary, "For every event which happens, there are previous events and circumstances which are its sufficient conditions or causes, so that, given those previous events and circumstances, it is impossible that the event should not occur.'" Or, as William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland put it, determinism is the view that "for every event that happens, there are conditions such that, given them, nothing else could have happened. For every event that happens, its happening was caused or necessitated by prior factors such that given these prior factors, the event in question had to occur.'" Of course these determinist Christians will also remind us that they are divine determinists-God determines everything. Everything that happens is determined to be so and, given the actions of God's alldetermining will, could not possibly be otherwise. And are not the betrayal and death of Jesus proof of divine determinism? Did not God's will make it inevitable that the conspirators would betray and murder Jesus? It is not therefore true that "God killed Jesus?" Does not the Bible say that the death of Jesus happened according to "God's set plan and foreknowledge"?

There are large and complicated issues involved with such questions, but we need not resolve all of them (or try to remove all that is mysterious about divine action) to see several points with clarity. First, while the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus' death happened according to the divine plan and foreknowledge, this fact does not of itself entail or imply determinism. It is one thing to affirm that God foreknows what human agents will freely do, and that he uses that foreknowledge to plan for the salvation of those who rebel against him. This much the biblical account demands. But it is another thing entirely to further conclude that God made the evil actions of the murderers of Jesus inevitable; that is, that God determines their evil actions and is ultimately causally responsible for those actions.

Second, the earliest Christian proclamation of the gospel itself, as we have seen, cuts directly against the grain of the determinist view. Recall Stephen's speech just before his own death. He cites a litany of rebellious offenses against God, and he makes plain the fact that the people chosen by God (to bless the world) have "refused to obey" (Acts 7:39). He then delivers this indictment: "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:51). These words deserve a moment's reflection; if divine determinism were true, then it would be true that these people resisted God's entreaties and warnings because God made it impossible for them to respond appropriately. If divine determinism were true, then these rebels would have committed idolatry because God made it impossible for them to do anything else. If divine determinism were true, then these conspirators would have betrayed and murdered Jesus because God made it impossible for them to respond in repentance and faith. But if this were the case-if God determined all things-then these people would have been following and obeying God's will in doing these things. In other words, they would be cooperating with the Holy Spirit in committing these heinous sins. The immediate-and very serious-problem for such a view, however, is that it directly contradicts what Scripture explicitly says here.' Stephen concludes that in doing these things "you always resist the Holy Spirit"-not cooperate with him.9

Third, the view that God determines these sinful actions threatens to mitigate moral responsibility for those actions. Are the conspirators morally responsible for the natural laws of the universe? Clearly not, for they had nothing whatsoever to do with the establishment of those laws. Are they morally responsible for the entire history of the world? It is hard to see how they could be; although they are responsible for their own actions, it is implausible to suggest that they were, for instance, guilty for the sinful actions of the Pharaoh who would not let the people of Israel leave Egypt. Are they guilty for the fact (according to determinism) that the combination of natural laws and world history, as determined by God, leave only one course of action open to them? Of course not; even if determinism is true, they did not make it true. But if they are not morally responsible for any of these factors, then it is hard indeed to see how

they could be morally responsible for the events that happen to move through them-when it is impossible that they do anything else. But if all of their actions are determined (as determinists insist), then they are not morally responsible for any of their actions.10 So it is, to put it mildly, difficult to see how those who betrayed and murdered Jesus could be morally responsible for doing something that God had made inevitable for them. But the earliest proclamation of the gospel leaves no doubt. It clearly places the moral responsibility for the betrayal and murder of Jesus directly on those who betrayed and murdered him.

Fourth, if determinism mitigates or removes moral responsibility from the human agents (who are, according to Scripture, sinners), then it raises another, even more serious worry: if God is the ultimate causal agent who makes it impossible for the conspirators not to kill him, then we have reason to worry about the goodness, justice and holiness of God. But biblically and theologically, the utter goodness of God simply is not up for grabs. As D. A. Carson puts it,

> The Bible insists again and again on God's unblemished goodness. God is never presented as an accomplice of evil, or as secretly malicious..... He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deut. 32:4). "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). It is precisely because of this that Habakkuk can say to God, "Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil; you can tolerate no wrongdoing" (Hab. 1:13), that he has a difficult time understanding how God can sanction the terrible devastations of the Chaldeans upon his own covenant community. Note then, that the goodness of God is the assumption, the nonnegotiable. 11

In light of the unyielding biblical evidence of the holiness of God, it is no wonder that so much of the Christian tradition has found determinism untenable. As the important Synod of Orange puts it, "But not only do we not believe that some have been predestinated to evil by the divine power, but also, if there be any who will believe so evil a thing, we say to them, with all detestation, anathema."12

Summary. The apostolic proclamation of the gospel places the fault and blame

on the sinners who are responsible for the death of Jesus. You were ignorant (Acts 13:27). You "conspired against him." You betrayed him. You resisted the work of God. You crucified him; you hung him on the tree. You killed Jesus. The omniscient God, however, planned for your redemption, and he executed that plan of redemption even as you were executing his own precious Son. You killed him, but God raised him from the dead.

Clearly the biblical witness tells us that these events happened according to the "plan and foreknowledge of God." This biblical witness does not, contrary to teaching recently popular in some evangelical Christian circles, in any way amount to a "proof" of divine determinism. Indeed, a closer look shows us that there are good reasons to reject divine determinism. But this much should be obvious: God, as omniscient, foreknew the freely chosen actions of sinners who are responsible for those actions, and in his wisdom he is able to use even their most heinous crimes for the accomplishment of his purposes.13 In his plan to save those sinners who have rebelled against him and killed his own son, it is the Lord's will for Christ to be the sacrifice of atonement (Is 52:15-53:12). "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Rom 5:20).

The pattern of gospel proclamation is straightforward and unmistakably clear.

You killed him.
God raised him.
We are witnesses.
Repent and believe for the forgiveness of sins.

Should we say that God killed Jesus? Not at all, for we should not bear false witness against the Lord and Giver of Life. Was, then, the death of Jesus a tragic and meaningless accident? Not at all, for God's plan was to use the death of Jesus for his purposes and for our good even as the incarnate Son willingly submitted himself to it.

FOR US AND OUR SALVATION

So the death of Christ was within the plan of God for the redemption of sinners.

But how did the death of Christ provide for that rescue? The biblical answer to this question is multilayered and rich, and several major themes stand out as vital to the scriptural account: Christ came to be our representative and substitute, and to serve as the "sin offering" (2 Cor 5:21), Christ has come so that he could "destroy the devil's works" (1 Jn 3:8), and Christ "suffered for us, leaving us an example" (1 Pet 2:21).

In our place. We can only understand the work the incarnate Son of God has done for us against the backdrop of Israel's story. The people of Israel are aware (and increasingly so) that they, like the rest of humanity, are sinners who stand in desperate need of salvation. One of the words used to describe that salvation is kipper, which refers to the act of redemption, and it means to "purge, cleanse, expiate, purify, cross out, cover, spread over, or forgive." 14 Sin has placed a barrier between the human sinners and the God who has been sinned against, and the act of hipper is the sacrifice by which the sin and resultant guilt that stands between God and the human sinner is removed.

Atonement takes place in the Old Testament through sacrifice. It is important to remember that the sacrifices are divinely ordained: the initiative comes from God, and the worshipers are always completely dependent on him. There is no sense of bribing or manipulating God. Instead, the sacrificial system was meant to drive home the lesson that while sin results in death, the divinely appointed act of substitutionary sacrifice brings cleansing and life (Rom 6:23; cf. Gen 2:17).ts

But it is "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4), and "only the precious blood of Christ" would suffice to save sinners. As Thomas F. Torrance explains, "The sacrifices and oblations offered by the High Priest were not regarded as having any efficacy in themselves, but as having efficacy only in so far as they were acts of liturgical obedience bearing witness to the fact that it is only God himself who can make atonement for sin and effect reconciliation"; thus the Day of Atonement "carried within it the promise of a final Day of Atonement when God himself would provide the Lamb for sacrifice and cleanse his people from their sin, making them holy as he himself is holy.""

The prophecy of Isaiah makes this promise explicit.

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,

stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all. (Is 53:4-6).

As Torrance says, this promise is "precisely what was fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his death on the cross, and fulfilled once for all, not in liturgical repetition, but in the flesh of Jesus Christ."" John the Baptist announces the arrival of Jesus as the entrance of "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Caiaphas, the high priest who opposed Jesus, unwittingly spoke the truth about the mission of Jesus when he said that "it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (Jn 11:50). Jesus himself announces his own mission in no uncertain terms: he predicts his own betrayal, condemnation, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem, and he says that he must "drink the cup" due to his people (Mk 10:39). He concludes that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).

Jesus' own understanding of his mission was not lost upon the authors of the New Testament. They emphasize, repeatedly and forcefully, that Christ has come to serve as the sacrificial offering who stands in as our representative and substitute." In Paul's letter to the Romans we are faced with the divine indictment: all have sinned, "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" (Rom

3:9), and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). As rebellious sinners we are confronted by the fact that "the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18). Sinners "have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy" (Rom 1:31).

"There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."

"Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."
"The poison of vipers is on their lips."
"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."
"Their feet are swift to shed blood;
ruin and misery mark their ways,
and the way of peace they do not know."
"There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Rom 3:10-18)

The law only makes us more conscious of our sin-we do not have the ability to follow it completely or to rescue ourselves by it (Rom 3:20).

But while we were helpless-and utterly hopeless apart from grace-the triune God took decisive action for us in the incarnation of the Son. And Paul plainly states the way that God took action: "God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement"-as a propitiation-for our sins (Rom 3:25). In doing so, God is the one who is both "just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). For Paul, Jesus is the one who "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom 4:25). When we were powerless and unable to help ourselves, Christ died on our behalf. He died "for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6). "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While

we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Because of Christ's death, those who were God's enemies can now be reconciled (Rom 5:9-11). Paul has no doubt: Jesus Christ is our "sin offering" (Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 5:21). As the sin offering, he took upon himself the "curse" of sin (Gal 3:13).

The other New Testament writings are in substantive agreement. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus, the sinless high priest, does not need to enter the "Most Holy Place" by "means of the blood of goats and calves" (Heb 9:12). Instead, he enters in his own righteousness, thus "obtaining eternal redemption" for believers by the sacrifice of "his own blood" (Heb 9:12). Christ has offered himself as a sacrifice in order to "do away with sin" (Heb 9:26). Accordingly this ultimate and final sacrifice is the means by which God "has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Heb 10:14). Drawing on vast Old Testament imagery, Peter says that Christ "himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness," for although we "were like sheep going astray," through the work of Christ we "have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet 2:24-25). The divine Son, now incarnate for our salvation, "died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Pet 3:18). As John puts it, "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10).

These representative texts illustrate the pervasiveness and importance of this theme of substitution in Scripture. To ignore it is to miss something vital to the biblical presentation of the gospel. At the same time, it is important not to misunderstand or misrepresent the doctrine. As Thomas Oden says, "The language of sub stitution must be used but cautiously and wisely."" As I have argued, we should avoid any understanding of the work of Christ according to which the Father and Son are opposed to one another-as if one divine person is for us while another is against us. To the contrary, as Torrance notes, "Through the shedding of the blood of Christ in atoning sacrifice for our sin the innermost nature of God the Father as holy compassionate love has been revealed to us.."20 An exclusive emphasis on this important theme can also be misleading; it could

even cause us to misunderstand the full scope of Christ's work on our behalf. And certainly we should resist all conceptions of propitiation that echo pagan notions of God. It is not as though we somehow change God-as if God were the one who needed to be changed. As Torrance points out, "By `propitiation,' of course, is not meant any placating or conciliating of God on our part, for God is never acted upon by means of priestly sacrifice offered by human beings. . . . It is always God himself who provides the sacrifice whereby he draws near to the worshiper and draws the worshiper near to himself, so in the actualized liturgy of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, it is God himself who draws us near to himself. God does not love us, Calvin once wrote, because he has reconciled us to himself; it is because he loved us that he has reconciled us to himself."21

Some Christians interpret 2 Corinthians 5:21 to mean that Jesus literally became sin. On the surface, this is a possible reading of the text-although the text may also mean that Jesus Christ became a sin offering. (I understand the latter to be much more the traditional view.) And taken in isolation from what Scripture teaches elsewhere, it may even be a plausible reading. But as Oden cautions, it is "difficult to make the point that our sins were lit erally transferred to him without seeming to make him a sinner. He was not a sinner in the sense that he sinned. Nor was he righteous in such a way as to replace all need on our part for righteous response."22 Some Christians will insist, however, that "Jesus Christ was the greatest sinner who ever lived." But not only does the text not demand such a claim, but it is also problematic. One may nuance the claim that Jesus was the "greatest sinner" by adding that this was the case despite the fact that "he never committed a sinful action," but this is hard even to understand. How is someone really a sinner if that person neither has a sinful nature nor commits sinful actions? More troubling, however, are the theological problems. If Jesus Christ is really a sinner, then he is not-and cannot be-divine. To be divine is, after all, not only to be good; but also, to be divine is to be necessarily good, it is to be Goodness itself. But classical Christian orthodoxy, based as it is on the teachings of Scripture, leaves absolutely no room for doubt: Jesus Christ is fully and truly divine (in addition to being fully human). So he is not a "sinner."

Moreover, it would be terrible news for us if Christ were a sinner. For if Christ were a sinner, then he would not be qualified to be the savior. Indeed, he himself would need salvation. Nothing less than orthodox Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity would be at stake here-and with it our hope of salvation.

We can only charitably assume that the theologians who make such statements do not mean that Jesus Christ really became a sinner. Perhaps they mean something more like this: God really thinks that Jesus Christ is the greatest sinner-God really believes that Christ is morally responsible for the sins of the world (or, alternatively, the sins of "the elect") and thus guilty for those sins, and he treats him accordingly. But this alternative is not much better, for it would involve God in a mistaken belief. Thus God would not be omniscient, and he would be liable to an error of greatest importance. Moreover, once again this would be terrible news for us: our salvation would be based on a mistaken understanding of massive proportion. It seems much better to understand 2 Corinthians 5:21 to mean that God "made him who knew no sin to be the sin offering for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Christ, the sinless Lamb of God, takes the punishment for sin that is not his-the punishment for sin that is ours-upon himself. And he takes it "away" from us, so that we need fear it no more (Jn 1:29). This idea of Jesus taking our sin upon himself is, after all, a deeply traditional Christian understanding of the text. As Ambrose says, the Lord was not turned into sin, but "since he assumed our sins, He is called sin. For the Lord is also called an accursed thing, but because He himself took on our curse."23

So we must not confuse this biblical teaching with pagan or otherwise-mistaken notions. But we must also see that it is important-vitally important-that the substitutionary element of the work of Christ is central to the gospel itself. We should avoid misunderstandings and misrepresentations, but we should not let those misunderstandings and misrepresentations cause us to miss the glorious truth of this teaching.

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christians have, for centuries, asked, why the incarnation? as they have reflected

on the meaning of Jesus. As I have said, the biblical answer is multilayered and complex, and it includes the affirmation that the Son of God became incarnate to serve as our substitutionary sin offering. But the Bible also gives this straightforward answer: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8). Thus it should be no surprise that the Christus Victor theme has been very significant in the Christian understanding of the work of Jesus. Jesus came to defeat the powers of sin, death and the devil, and his defeat of them in his death and resurrection means that we no longer need to live in bondage to sin or in fear of death.

This view of the meaning of Christ's life, death and resurrection is grounded in vast biblical teaching that God is a "warrior."24 The doctrine of Christus Victor is found very early in Scripture: the promise that "he [the offspring of Eve] will crush your head" is included in the judgment of the serpent's sin in Eden (Gen 3:15). So the first promise of a Savior is a promise that the Savior will defeat our foe. Jesus himself presents his own mission in terms of the defeat of Satan and his minions (e.g., Mt 12:22-29). In Peter's first sermon after Pentecost, he identifies the work of God in Christ with victory over his enemies (Acts 2:32-36).25 Following this line of thinking, Paul also sees the work of Christ in terms of the defeat of evil. Recognizing Christ's full deity, he insists that Christ's sovereignty is supreme: he "is the head over every power and authority" (Col 2:10). In the death and resurrection of Christ, God has "disarmed the powers and authorities," and he has "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col 2:15). It is no wonder then that Paul, recognizing that "the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law," exclaims, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57). The author of the book of Hebrews answers the why-the-incarnation question similarly: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death-that is, the devil-and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb 2:14-15). John, as we have noted, puts it succinctly: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8).

Just as with the biblical witness to the sacrificial and substitutionary element of Christ's life and death, so also we must be careful when dealing with the Christus Victor theme. Some of the historic expressions of the doctrine have been not only unduly speculative but also crude and unhelpful. Sometimes, when theologians or pastors give this biblical theme almost exclusive consideration and even define it as the biblical account of the meaning of Jesus' death, the full richness of the biblical portrait of Christ's work on our behalf is lost, and the results can be pastorally devastating.26 It is easy to emphasize the battle between evil and God to the point that it minimizes the sovereignty of the divine nature, and this can lead to an imbalanced view of Christ's work. The most influential statement of the Christus Victor view in recent years, that of Gustaf Aulen, is plagued by this problem and even extends a kind of dualism into the doctrine of God itself.27 As Hans Boersma points out (with reference to the work of Aulen): "On the one hand, there is a divine conflict with evil; on the other hand ... there is an ambivalence that ultimately goes back to a tension between divine love and divine wrath. God's love overcomes his wrath through the divine self-sacrifice." 28 As we have seen, it is unhealthy to pit divine love against divine wrath. Even when we avoid these pitfalls, emphasizing this theme to the exclusion of other elements of the biblical portrayal can lead to a warped view of sin and salvation, and it can become all too easy to view ourselves as captured and helpless victims who only need rescue by a valiant warrior. While it is true that we are captured and helpless, that is not the whole story. Indeed we are, like poor Edmund in C. S. Lewis's famous The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, enslaved by a power so dominant that it cannot be escaped and so malevolent that it leaves us with no hope. But it is also true that we-again like Edmund-are the captives of an evil power because we have committed treason against our King. We are captives and slaves; we long for release, and we wait for rescue. Apart from grace, we have no hope, but we are also rebels and traitors. We need rescue-and the biblical picture of the work of Christ for us includes this dramatic scene. This is a crucial part of the story. But we must remember that it is not the whole story.

Following Jesus. The medieval theologian Peter Abelard claimed that the Son

of God "has taken upon himself our nature and preserved therein in teaching us by word and example even unto death-he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity would not now shrink from enduring anything for him.."29 This is the sum total of the work of Christ according to Abelard; this simply is the work of Christ. Abelard's view (or versions thereof) have long been popular with people who reject both substitutionary and Christus Victor views of Christ's atoning work but who still think that there is something significant about the death of Christ. In particular, theologians of the classical "liberal" tradition have embraced it; F. D. E. Schleiermacher was sharply critical of classical accounts of the person and work of Christ, and he concluded that "the Redeemer assumes us into the power of his God-consciousness, and that is his redemptive activity."30

Perhaps not surprisingly some evangelical theologians criticize this approach; they deny that the teaching and example of Jesus have anything to do with his atoning work. Many of these evangelicals (quite rightly) want to hold to the substitutionary theme, and sometimes they respond to the critics of substitution not only by defending substitution but also by rejecting the alternative pushed forward by the critics. It seems to me, however, that this response is an unfortunate (though understandable) overreaction. The mission of Israel's prophets was to teach, persuade, guide, guard and warn, and we rightly understand Jesus' own mission as including the role of prophet. As John Calvin put it, Jesus Christ is prophet as well as priest and king.3i Accordingly much of Jesus' life and ministry as recorded in the four Gospels is consumed with his preaching, teaching and healing. Is not this part of Christ's "work" as well? Surely it is not merely ancillary or peripheral to his mission-as if the "real" work of Christ only began at, say, his arrest and trial that led to his death. Peter explicitly connects the death of Christ with his example for us: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet 2:21). In doing so he only echoes what Jesus himself had said to his disciples: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Surely the Christian life is one of following Jesus;

truly we ought to "walk as he walked" (1 Jn 2:6). And if we learn anything at all from Scripture about sin and salvation, it is that salvation is possible-and sin is overcome-only by the work of Christ.

It should come as no surprise, then, to learn that many important theologians in the history of the church have recognized and affirmed this element of biblical teaching about the life and death of Christ.32 Boersma explains that the patristic theologians of the early church emphasize "what has become known as the moral-influence perspective," and he argues that

> we need this emphasis on illumination and moral persuasion. Christ is not just priest and king; he is also prophet and teacher. The emphasis in the early Church on morality and the corresponding preeminence of Christ's role in illuminating and modeling God's love for us ensure that talk about Christ's victory is not just empty rhetoric. Salvation in Christ only overcomes the bondage of sin and violence if our lives begin to reflect the life of Jesus Christ. Atonement, in other words, remains a forensic fiction unless it receives a subjective telos in the lives of Christians today. If Christ is teacher and example, then the Church benefits through illumination and reconciliation, and God's hospitality and love triumph over violence and hatred.33

So while it is true (as it is elsewhere) that overemphasizing this theme-especially when combined with the rejection of other crucial elements-will cause us to warp and misunderstand (or even lose) the gospel, it is also true that the empowering example and influence of Christ is an important element of his work.

Further reflections. Many of the great theologians of the Christian faith have seen and embraced these various strands of biblical teaching on the work of Christ. John Calvin, for instance, affirms that Christ has come to "satisfy the justice of God, and pay the penalty of sin."34 Christ "by his own blood expiated the sins which rendered them hateful to God" and "by this expiation satisfied and duly propitiated God the Father."35 In "making expiation" Christ has worked to "wipe away our guilt," and by this expiation he has "appeased the just anger" of

God.36 But Christ has also come to "swallow up death ... to conquer sin [and] to put to flight the powers of the air and the By expiation Christ "abolishes all the evil that is in us, so that we, formerly impure and unclean, now appear in his sight just and holy."3s Calvin says further that, in light of the sacrifice and victory of Christ, we are subjectively and really enabled to move forward in confidence and victory. "We are not only encouraged by the example of a risen Savior to follow newness of life, but we are taught that by his power we are renewed unto righteousness."39 Taken together, these elements bring us to the place where Calvin concludes that "our salvation may thus be divided between the death and the resurrection of Christ: by the former, sin was abolished and death annihilated; by the latter, righteousness was restored and life revived, the power and efficacy of the former being still bestowed upon us by the means of the

Calvin takes this holistic view for good reason: not only are these elements not mutually exclusive, but they also cohere in the biblical account. Notice how Peter interweaves these themes in a seamless whole.

> Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.
>
> "He committed no sin,
> and no deceit was found in his mouth."
>
> When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." For you "were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Pet 2:21-25)

To rightly understand and appreciate the full-orbed nature of the work of Christ, we need to accept all that is revealed about it in Scripture.

It is also important to see that the "person" and the "work" of the incarnate

Son cannot be neatly separated. Jesus Christ is our "high priest" and our "sin offering" precisely because he is the holy and sinless divine person who is also fully and completely human. Jesus Christ is able to rescue us because he is the God-Man. He sets an example for us because he is really and truly human, and the example truly has the power to change us because it comes from the one who is omnipotent. In the incarnation, the eternal Son of God takes human nature upon himself in order to redeem it. This insight is what led the theologians of the early church to see the importance of the affirmation that Jesus Christ is both of one essence (homoousios) with the Father in his divinity and at the same time of one essence (homoousios) with us in our humanity. Torrance states well the importance of this affirmation.

> Unless Jesus Christ is God himself, God the Son incarnate, then the God proclaimed to us in the Gospel is not a God who loves us to the uttermost, but a God whose love falls short of identifying himself with us in Jesus Christ to the extent of actually becoming one with us in and through him. Only God can forgive sins, so that unless Christ is God, his word of forgiveness is empty of any divine substance. Unless Christ is of one and the same being as God, as well as of one and the same being as ourselves, then the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross for us and our salvation is in fact without divine validity or saving power.41

Christ's work is significant only because of who he is. "Cut the bond in being between Jesus Christ and God, and the Gospel message becomes an empty mockery."42 Our salvation is possible because of who Christ is; our salvation is found in Christ.

Just as deeper reflection on the work of Christ points us to further appreciation of his person (with both human and divine natures), so also does reflection on the divinity of Christ point us to his relationship with the Father and the Spirit within the triune life. Here we catch a glimpse of the depths of divine love, and here we see that God's work for us in Christ is fully trinitarian. It is fully trinitarian at the level of the work or operation of the triune God for us. Jesus becomes incarnate, for us and our salvation, in full accord with the will of the

Father. He ministers in the power of the Spirit. He does nothing of himself; he does only what the Father sends him to do and only what is in full agreement with the Father and their Spirit (e.g., Jn 6:38). As Torrance puts it, "It is precisely in this propitiating movement of reconciliation and justification through his Son that God the Father opens his innermost heart and mind to us in the self-revelation of his love, and through the communion of his Spirit makes himself present to us within the conditions of our creaturely existence in such a healing and creative way as to open our hearts and minds to receive and understand his self-revelation as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."`+3

So the work of God for us in Christ is not-and cannot without theologically disastrous consequences be seen as-the work of one divine person (or part) against another. Salvation is the unified work of the one God in three persons. 4 And at an even deeper level, the motivation for the atonement is grounded in, and springs from, the triune life. Torrance helpfully notes that "we cannot but think of the atonement as a threefold act grounded in and issuing from the triune being of God. While the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are personally distinct from one another, they are nevertheless of one and the same being with one another in God, and their acts interpenetrate one another in the indivisibility of the one Godhead."45 The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that holy love is of the essence of-and not accidental to-God. It is not something that he could or couldn't have. To the contrary, it is the very heart of the intratrinitarian life, which we catch a glimpse of in the prayer of Jesus to his Father in John 17. There is nothing more basic or central or vital to God's own life than this holy love. It is the blessed communion (or perichoresis) shared between and among the divine persons. It is, as John Zizioulas expresses it, "the supreme ontological predicate."46

So while God of course takes loving action for us, it is important to see that this loving action is grounded in the holy love that God simply is (1 Jn 4:8, 16). We are, according to the unflattering diagnosis of Scripture, warped and twisted and perverted sinners. We are anything but holy or loving. Indeed, sin has damaged us to the point that we cannot even begin to respond to love without

miraculous intervention. So the triune God takes such drastic action on our behalf. "God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son" (Jn 3:16). The Son so loved that he offered himself by becoming the sacrificial Lamb who defeats sin, death and the devil through his life, death and resurrection. And the Holy Spirit both empowered and guided Jesus, and now sanctifies and gives life, applying Christ's work to our hearts and lives and drawing us into the communion of God's own triune life. Torrance is right: "The Trinity belongs to the inner heart of the Christian message of salvation: perfect communion with God means perfect salvation.'47

SOME CONCLUSIONS

We have covered a lot of ground in this chapter. In summary, we can see several things to avoid. Even when based on partial truths, they are misleading and potentially dangerous to our understanding of the gospel. We can also see several things to affirm with hope and gratitude.

To be avoided. We should deny that the death of Jesus was merely a tragic accident or meaningless tragedy. It did not somehow take God by surprise, nor did it in any way jeopardize the divine plan of redemption. The coming of Jesus-to suffer and die for his people-is too clearly foretold in the Old Testament (and fulfilled in the New) for us to entertain such a notion.

However, we should refrain from saying that God killed Jesus. The Bible does not actually say that God killed his Son. To the contrary, when we examine the early Christian proclamation of the gospel, we see that the blame for the death of Jesus is clear indeed: you conspired against him. You handed him over to be killed. You disowned him. You nailed him to the cross. You killed the author of life. The authors of Scripture outline God's action in direct and sharp contrast to the actions of sinful killed him, but God raised him from the dead. The pattern of gospel proclamation is clear and consistent.

You killed him.
But God raised him.
We are witnesses.
Repent and believe for the forgiveness of sins.

Just as we misconstrue the gospel account if we leave the death of Jesus hanging as a deeply mysterious and tragic accident, so also we misunderstand and misrepresent God's action in Christ if we conclude that the evil actions of sinners were really divine actions.

Similarly we should avoid the view that God somehow determined all of these events so as to make them inevitable or unavoidable. The biblical account neither states nor entails that (any version of) determinism is true48 On the contrary, the Christian proclamation of the gospel goes against determinism. As Stephen puts it to his persecutors, "You always resist the Holy Spirit!"not do his bidding by murdering the Savior (Acts 7:51). Determinism undercuts the very moral responsibility that is demanded by the concept of sin, and it even threatens to call God's goodness into question.

Similarly we should be careful to avoid misunderstandings (however well intentioned) of the various elements of the biblical message. Pagan notions of substitutionary atonement, as well as one-sided affirmations of the Christus Victor or moral-influence themes, are deeply problematic. Skewed statements of partial truths are both theologically worrisome and pastorally dangerous: his example is empowering to us, but this insight alone is not the gospel. Christ wins the decisive victory for us, but not in any sort of mechanical way that is purely extrinsic to us or detached from us. Jesus is the sin offering, but he is not a sinner. The heart of Christian orthodoxy is at stake here, and so is our hope of salvation.

To be affirmed. The death of Christ was according to the "plan and foreknowledge of God." In his omniscience, God foreknew the evil actions of the ignorant conspirators. In his wisdom, God used their foolish actions-actions for which they are morally responsible-to bring about the salvation of those who

are lost and hopeless. In his love the Father sends and the Son becomes incarnate. In his holiness the Son of God becomes the sacrificial offering for our sin. By his power he defeats sin, death and the devil. In his humanity he unites himself with us. In his divinity he remains one with his Father and their Spirit. And in the unity of his person he bridges the awful, yawning chasm between sinful, broken humanity and the wholeness and richness and shalom of the triune life of self-giving holy love.

Perhaps we can summarize this discussion by recognizing what Eleonore Stump (who follows Thomas Aquinas) sees as two closely related yet distinct problems that the triune God addresses in the atoning work of Christ. The first is what she calls the "problem of past sin,"49 which refers to the guilt of sins committed, and it stands between sinners and salvation. We are sinners who are utterly unable to take care of our guilt and the penalty it deserves, thus our only hope is in the sacrifice of Christ, which "brings satisfaction for our past sins."50 The second problem is equally severe, and equally depressing, to consider: the sinful nature will, if left unchecked, continue in rebellion and sin.si

Through the richness and complexity of the work of the incarnate Christ, the triune God addresses both problems. As the sin offering, Christ makes satisfaction for our sin and guilt. As the one who gives himself away, Christ shows us how to live a life pleasing to God in the power of the Spirit. As the one who wins the decisive victory for us in his death and resurrection, Christ defeats the enslaving powers of sin. In all this, we receive these benefits when we are joined, by the Holy Spirit, in union with Christ.

4

Does It Make a Difference?

The Brokenness of Humanity and the Unbroken Work of the Triune God

Since the Trinity is not broken but is one in being and act, we should understand divine action in a holistic way. But just how does this divine action matter to us? A closer look at Scripture shows us that the application of the work of the triune God for us has several important and complementary elements. Our legal status before God is changed when we are joined in union with Christ. But more than our legal status changes-we are changed, really and thoroughly, as we are brought into communion with God's own life. Does this change matter? It matters immensely, for nothing in our lives can remain unchanged when this happens.

NO CONDEMNATION

According to Scripture, sinners stand guilty and condemned before God. We don't merely feel guilty; we are guilty. Indeed, we are guilty whether or not we feel the burden of that guilt. Justification is God's answer to the problem of our guilt. As Thomas C. Oden summarizes it, "The nature of justification is pardon, its sole condition is faith, its sole ground is the righteousness of God, and its fruits and evidences are good works.'" In justification, God declares that, because of the work of Christ, we can stand without condemnation before God. The divine action removes our guilt and accepts us as righteous due to our union with Christ. The work is grounded in the holy love of the triune life, and God offers it to us so that we might become all that God calls us to be.

Justification: A summary. When Scripture gives the full diagnosis of our condition as sinners, we find that we stand guilty before God. The language in

these discussions is heavily legal; we are in a court of law, and we stand guilty and condemned before the all-righteous and omnipotent Judge of the universe. Rightly understood, such biblical teaching has led to clear summaries in the history of the church.2 Justification is "an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardons all their sin, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in his sight, not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone."3 Thus Christians believe that "we most wretched sinners are justified before God and saved alone by faith in Christ, so that Christ alone is our righteousness."4 "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works. Therefore, that we are justified by faith is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort."5

In addition to these important statements, many individual theologians have made important contributions to the reception of this biblical teaching. For instance, John Wesley's own view is clear:' "I think on justification ... just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him a hair's breadth."' Wesley argues from the perspective of federal headship (both Adam and Christ), and he argues for justification from the "ground" of the doctrine in an affirmation of (penal) substitutionary atonement.8 He asserts that we are not to confuse justification with sanctification: justification refers to what God does "for us" by changing our legal status or standing, while sanctification-actually being made just or righteous-is what God does "in us." He denies that justification is the removal of any accusation or that it is legal fiction. Justification "is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father, whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he `showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins.."'y Our sins are imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness (both active and passive) is imputed to us.i° Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as "the bestowing (as it were) [of] the righteousness of Christ, including his obedience, as well passive as active ... in the privileges, blessings, and benefits, purchased by it; so a believer may be said to be justified, by the righteousness of Christ imputed. The meaning is, God

justifies the believer, for the sake of Christ's righteousness, and not for any righteousness of his own."" As Wesley puts it, "I have no hope, but that ... [I shall] be found in him, not having my own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ."" It is sinners who are justified-and it is only sinners who are justified. And sinners are justified by grace through faith: "Faith therefore is the necessary condition of justification. Yea, and the only necessary condition of justification."" He is utterly insistent on this point: "I believe justification by faith alone, as much as I believe there is a God.... I have never varied from it, no, not an hair's breadth, from 1738 to this day." 14

This biblical doctrine of the justification of sinners by grace, received by faith alone, is a lively and powerful one. It is also-to sinners struggling under the unbearable weight of their own depravity and guilt-a very beautiful and glorious doctrine. It comes as no surprise, then, to see the doctrine celebrated in hymns of worship and praise. Charles Wesley's famous hymn "And Can It Be" exults in the truth of justification.

No condemnation now I dread,
Jesus and all in him is mine;
Alive in him my living head,
and clothed with righteousness divine;
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim, through him, the crown my own.

Truly the doctrine of justification gives us reason to rejoice. It is "very full of comfort."

Justification and the Trinity. Throughout this work I have argued that the relation of Jesus to his Father matters for our hope in the gospel. Indeed, Jesus' relation of holy love with his Father and their Spirit is what makes his work so important for us-it is not too much to say that his own participation in the triune life is what makes his identification with us such good news. But how do justice and justification relate to the Trinity? Is there justice within the Trinity? If we think of justice only along the lines of laying down the law and enforcing that

law, the question hardly makes sense. At best it is of dubious coherence, and it may be worse: it might border on heresy or even blasphemy. If divine justice is all about laying down standards and rules of morality, and then enforcing those with punishment and reward, then how is this part of God's own triune life? Indeed, how could it be? Perhaps one divine person lays down the law for the intratrinitarian life and then holds the other divine persons accountable and ensures that they do the right thing or pay the price? Surely not; the very idea should leave an orthodox trinitarian Christian shuddering with horror.i5 Nicholas Wolterstorff notes that when most people hear of "justice," they think in terms of "meting out justice" or in terms or "rendering judgment" (or a combination of the two)? We think, that is, of justice in terms of making a decision in cases of conflict, of determining guilt and innocence (or degrees thereof) and then executing appropriate punishment. But there is no rendering of judgment or pronouncement and execution of justice within the triune life. There is no wrongdoing within the triune life-there are no accusations to sort out or wrongs for which restitution should be made. So "how dare one even think of justice in the Trinity? Love is what resides in the Trinity. Love casts out justice."17

But Wolterstorff argues that this sentiment, however common, is mistaken. The common notion of justice (as rendering judgment) is itself limited, and it is limited in a way that reveals its inadequacy. It simply cannot do all the work it is so often pressed to do. Why not? Because the notion of rendering judgment requires something deeper; after all, a just judgment is rendered if and only if there is something more fundamental than the judgment itself.'8 On pain of infinite regress, there must be something that makes a judgment just. So rendering judgment can work well enough as a kind of justice Wolterstorff calls it secondary justice-but it cannot bear all the weight. Secondary justice requires something more basic, and what is more basic is primary justice. Primary justice, Wolterstorff argues, cannot be equated with a "rightly ordered social whole." Instead, it concerns the rights of individuals, of persons. It is, fundamentally, the treatment of other persons with all due respect for who and what they are.'9

So if we think of justice only in the more limited sense of secondary justice,

then it surely seems wrongheaded to think of justice within the life of the triune God. But if we think of primary justice, Wolterstorff argues, we are in a very different situation: "How could there not be justice within the Trinity-primary justice, of course, not secondary or corrective justice? How could the members of the Trinity fail to treat each other with due respect for their worth?"2o

In terms of Wolterstorff's distinction between secondary justice and primary justice, I agree that we should deny secondary justice of the intratrinitarian life. I also agree that we should affirm that primary justice-the primary justice and the standard of all other claims to justice-is essential to God's own life. God is the God of essential (primary) justice, who always acts in accordance with that justice in God's external actions (the opera ad extra of the Trinity), and we are, as the Bible tells us, sinful creatures who stand under the secondary justice of God. Thus our only hope is to be "justified."

To reiterate a point made earlier, justification is rightly understood in legal, forensic categories: we stand guilty and condemned before the righteous judge, but when we are without hope, Jesus Christ takes our place, and his righteousness is imputed to us. Justification is brought to us by grace alone, and we receive it by faith alone (with that faith itself being a gracious gift). When received in faith, it brings us immediately to the place where we can say, "No condemnation now I dread, /Jesus and all in him is mine; / alive in him, my living head, / and clothed with righteousness divine." Justification is the change of our legal status; it is the transformation of our legal state from guilty and condemned (thus "dead men walking") to righteous and alive in Christ.

How might a properly trinitarian perspective affect such a view of justification? As I see things, being fully trinitarian here does not alter the traditional, legal view of justification itself. What it does is locate it on a broader soteriological canvas. Righteousness or justice-again, primary righteousness or justice (in Wolterstorff's sense)-is the treatment of other persons with all due respect for who and what they are. Sin is the refusal to do just that toward God-it is the stubborn and absurd refusal to recognize that the triune God is supremely worthy of all worship and honor and glory and praise. Sin is the refusal to

recognize God's rightful place; we are made to worship, obey, love, enjoy and honor God-in a word, to glorify God-but in our sin we rebel against the triune God, who deserves the utmost and ultimate respect and praise. In justification (again, classically understood) our sin, our rebellion, our refusal to grant to God what rightly belongs to him-all of this-is transferred to the one who is our all-holy sin offering, while the magnificent righteousness of the Son of God is transferred to our account. So justification is the action of the triune God on our behalf with respect to secondary justice: here the incarnate Son of God takes the sin of the world upon himself to do what we cannot do for ourselves. He takes our place to make us "right with God," to restore us to a place of proper legal standing before the righteous judge. In the work of salvation the Father sends and the Son lives and dies and is raised to new life for us (in the power of the Spirit). God is both just and the justifier of sinners who have faith in Christ (Rom 3:26). The triune God works for our salvation; God justifies us by restoring us to a position of legal (or "forensic") righteousness.

But what about primary justice? Is it left behind? Is there no place after all for it in the doctrine of justification? Not at all-God's action on our behalf in justification, which relates to secondary justice, is grounded in, and flows out of, his concern for primary justice. It comes from his concern that we be rightly related to God. "Rightly related" of course has a legal sense. But if we take God's concern for primary justice into account, the doctrine of justification itself points us to something much richer and deeper, something more original and basic, than secondary justice and the changed legal status: the doctrine of justification itself points us to the fact that God graciously seeks to restore us really and actually to the place where we are "right with God." The radical and gracious action of the triune God on our behalf in justification is not, and cannot be reduced to, an end in itself-as if God were concerned only or even primarily with changing out a legal status or merely rewarding the good and punishing the evil (either in us or in Christ). It is only a part of his larger purposes for us-purposes that include the complete renovation of the human person until we can really and actually be rightly related to God. Forensic justification, important and precious though it is, is not and cannot be the whole sum of the gospel

message. It is his work for us in secondary justice, and it brings us to the place where we reflect and receive his primary justice. Put simply, forensic justification brings us to our telos in communion with the triune God; it brings us home.

The glorious truth of the doctrine of justification-the truth that God freely justifies those who cannot help themselves-is thus also grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a beautiful and powerful doctrine. But it points us beyond itself; it points us to the deeper purposes for which we were made and for which we are redeemed. It points us toward the triune life of holy love for which we were created.

NO DEFEAT

So how is it that all their twistedness and perversion -can ever "come home" to the life with God for which we were made and for which Christ died? As we have seen, we have more than one problem. One problem, which we noted at the close of the previous chapter, is what Eleonore Stump calls "the problem of past sin"; more broadly (and, since the legal consequences of our sinful actions would continue to condemn us if it were not for Christ's work, more appropriately) this problem regards the moral liability and legal consequences of the sins we commit. God deals with this problem through his grace as he justifies sinful humans. But this is not our only problem; we also deal with the problem of the sinful nature. For without radical change, we will continue in rebellion and sin. Without a complete transformation, we will not be able truly to enjoy God's presence. Without utter renovation, we will not be able to walk with God or to participate within God's own life of holy love. Where the doctrine of justification speaks of God's gracious remedy for the first problem, the doctrine of sanctification bears witness to the work of the triune God in addressing the second problem. It testifies to God's work in cleansing and renewal.

Sanctification: An overview. But what does God really do for us? What does he expect? What should we expect? G. C. Berkouwer asks some sobering questions. "Is this sanctification indeed a radiant reality crowding out the

darkness? Are the children of God really a different breed.... Or is sanctification a mere fancy, beautiful but barren when put to the test?""

It is impossible to read Scripture carefully and come away with the conviction that God's only (or even primary) purpose is to change our legal status. To the contrary, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:25-27). We are told in Scripture to "live a life worthy of the calling" that we have received (Eph 4:1). We are called to "be made new" and to "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:23-24). We are told, in no uncertain terms, to "make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). We are invited and called-indeed, we are commanded-to appropriate and receive all that God has made available to us. The Son died and rose again so that we might be holy, and the Holy Spirit lives and works today to apply the work of Christ to our lives and communities. Sanctification is, then, something worth taking with utmost seriousness.

The basic meaning of sanctification is fairly straightforward. Initially, we can capture much of the meaning under two headings: separation and purity. Separation is a key concept. Holiness is separation from all that alienates us from God and from all that displeases him. Holiness is separation from all that is impure and evil. But separation cannot be restricted to a merely negative issue. For we are not only separated from what is evil and displeasing to God; but we are also called to be separate for God. We are called, that is, to be set apart for fellowship with him and for his service. God calls his people to separation from defiling influences when he says that "you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). "For I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.... I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev 11:44-45, cf. Lev 19:2). And this theme is clearly articulated in the New

Testament as well: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (1 Pet 2:9). Paul quotes from God's commanding promise when he says,

> "I will live with them
> and walk among them,
> and I will be their God,
> and they will be my people."

Therefore,

> "Come out from them
> and be separate,
> says the Lord.
> Touch no unclean thing,
> and I will receive you."

And,

> "I will be a Father to you,
> and you will be my sons and daughters,
> says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor 6:16-18; cf. Lev. 26:12).

This emphasis on separation is perhaps one that the current generation needs to hear and heed. But it is also important to understand that separation is not for its own sake, as if somehow being "other" or "different" were the point. No, those persons and communities who belong to God are called to be separate so that they might be pure. Christ died and rose again so that his people might be pure. He "gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Tit 2:14). Therefore God "did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thess 4:7), and it is for this reason that it "is God's will that you should be sanctified" (1 Thess 4:3). God desires an unimpeded and clear relationship with his people, and so he insists that there be no alien elements that might hinder that communion.

At points in Scripture these themes of separation and purity are explicitly intertwined; Peter quotes from the Old Testament when he says, "Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Pet 1:15-16; cf. Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). All God's redeemed people are called to be sanctified; never is there any hint that holiness is reserved for only a select few or that some people can hope only for a changed legal status but not for a life truly lived in joyous and transforming communion with God. Nor is there any indication from Scripture that sanctification is an optional matter-as if to be a "real Christian" is to be justified and have one's legal status altered, with the life of holiness merely elective. Finally, the sanctification to which we are called involves the whole person. Paul's benediction to the Thessalonians captures well the holistic and inclusive sense of his theology: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thess 5:23-24).

Justification and sanctification. The relation of justification to sanctification is crucial. To confuse justification and sanctification is both theologically mistaken and pastorally dangerous. Sanctification is distinct from justification. Justification deals with the vitally important issue of our legal status before God; it has to do with forensic or legal righteousness. Sanctification, however, has to do with real and actual, rather than positional, righteousness or holiness. Justification is concerned with the imputation of righteousness (from Christ to sinners). Sanctification refers to imparted or infused righteousness; where justification testifies to Christ's work for me, sanctification bears witness to the application of that work in me by the Holy Spirit. And where justification is instantaneous-it occurs at a point in time when we are pronounced "righteous" before God-sanctification is progressive. Justification is God's declaration that the sinner is accounted or credited with the righteousness of Christ on his behalf, while sanctification is the real-life outworking of that righteousness within the life of the justified person. Accordingly sanctification has an element that is in some sense past, but it also has a present and future aspect as well. It is past in

the sense that the process of sanctification started at the moment when the repentant sinner was justified by faith. It is present because if someone is redeemed and thus belongs to God, then there is no time that the Holy Spirit is not at work in that person's life. And it is future because the Holy Spirit continues to cleanse and to reshape the life of the believer. So justification and sanctification are distinct, and the ways in which they are distinct are important.

But if we should not confuse justification and sanctification, neither should we separate them-as if one could be truly justified without the process of sanctification beginning, or as if one could be sanctified and thus be really holy without being pronounced righteous by God. After all, as Paul emphasizes, both our justification and our sanctification come to us through our "union with Christ." Paul says that if anyone is "in Christ" that person is a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). So when he continues by saying that Christ became our sin offering in order that we might become "the righteousness of God," it does injustice to the text to limit this righteousness to merely legal or forensic righteousness. As William Burt Pope says, "Our forensic justification being included of necessity, our moral conformity to the Divine righteousness cannot be excluded.... These are only aspects of one and the same union with The "vital union of faith secures both objects: our being reckoned as righteous because found in Him, and our being made righteous."23 Both justification and sanctification are made complete in union with Christ: he is "our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).

If it is dangerous to our Christian lives either to confuse or to separate justification and sanctification, then it is absolutely disastrous to get the direction wrong. Although the process of sanctification begins at the moment of our justification, there is an important sense in which justification precedes and enables our sanctification. We do not first make progress in sanctification, and only after being made completely righteous begin to hope for the reversal of our condemnation and acquittal before the divine law court. If that were so, then we should never have hope or confidence, and without such hope and confidence, the process of sanctification would be short-circuited. No, it is when we are

graciously justified-by grace alone and received by faith alonethat we can say "no condemnation now I dread, / Jesus and all in him is mine; / alive in him, my living head, / and clothed in righteousness divine." And only then are we truly able to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the God who has saved us. As our sanctification progresses, we rejoice in both the work of the Spirit in us and the completed work of Christ for us. As Pope puts it, "While this work [of sanctification] is in its process its perfection is always anticipated by the imputation of grace, and righteousness is reckoned to cover its sin of defect," and "when it is accomplished the perfection is from him and not our own. He is for ever and ever the Lord our Righteousness." 24

The doctrine of sanctification is sometimes neglected. I have argued that such neglect, even if benign, is theologically mistaken. Such neglect is also, I believe, personally and pastorally disastrous. However, in some quarters the doctrine of sanctification gets central billing. Sometimes it marginalizes or minimizes the doctrine of justification, and the central emphasis is on good works (or good results, or good religious experiences, or good intentions) in such a way that the gospel gets lost. Sometimes the emphasis falls so heavily on behavioral "standards" or restrictions that the good news gets muted or muffled (if not lost entirely). For when this happens, we are thrown back upon ourselves to try to earn favor with God and escape from his condemning glare-and we finally know that we simply cannot do this. So among some Christians the doctrine of sanctification reeks of rules and regulations, and they avoid it as a kind of "legalism" or "moralism." Among other Christians, sanctification is also about community standards and levels of "perfection." These Christians often take one of two roads: either they live lives of moralistic effort-and with despair-or they reject any concern with sanctification at all. The reactions are very different. Some Christians continue to do battle with their sinfulness-but with a continual sense of failure and despair. Other Christians weary of the fight and insist that they might as well "sin boldly" so that they might celebrate grace as well.25 But in either case the underlying conception is remarkably similar: both those who reject concerns about holiness as "legalism" or "works righteousness" and those who live in bondage to such concerns take the process of sanctification and the

life of holiness to be primarily about following commands and keeping moral codes. Both responses are unfortunate, because the underlying conception of holiness is deeply mistaken.

The doctrine of sanctification is about the utter and complete renovation of the human person. And of course this remaking of the human person will influence our affections and our actions. It makes a mockery of the work of the Spirit in sanctification to say that the Spirit cleanses and renews us but that such operations have no effect on our lifestyle. But understood within its proper theological context (alas, it often is not-by detractors and defenders alike), it can never be limited to a moralistic or legalistic effort. The achievement of some moral or spiritual status is not the end point or telos of the Christian life-as if being able to say "well, I've had a particularly powerful religious experience" or "the rest of the world and the church may be failing, but I haven't committed such sin" is what the Holy Spirit desires to do when he cleanses and renovates the human heart. No, when we understand sanctification in its proper theological context, we cannot reduce it to legalism or moralism but must understand it in a robustly and fundamentally trinitarian way.

Sanctification and the Trinity. To see the trinitarian dimension of sanctification, consider the threefold work of the triune God for us. The cleansing of sin from the believer is the will of the Father; the provision of the incarnate, crucified and resurrected Christ; and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has come to do nothing other than the will of the Father (e.g., 2 Cor 6:16-18; 1 Thess 4:3), and he has come to cleanse his church (Eph 5:25-27). In his role as prophet he reveals God's standard and purpose (e.g., Mt 5:8), and he announces God's invitation and command to live as God's own people who receive and reflect God's own holiness. Thus he provides the standard, example and grace to us who "must live as Jesus did" (1 Jn 2:6) so that we might "follow in his steps" (1 Pet 2:21). In his role as priest-a role that continues into his ascended reign (Heb 7:24)-Christ represents both God to humanity and humanity to God. He functions as a priest by embodying God's own righteousness and holiness as the mediator between God and humanity. Jesus Christ is the great

high priest (Heb 4:14; 6:20). He is the high priest who is "holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (Heb 7:26). Yet he is fully human and has "been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet he did not sin" (Heb 4:15). As the great high priest he is also the sanctifying sacrifice; the "blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7). He was sacrificed to "take away the sins" of his people (Heb 9:28). He is thus "able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb 7:25). We can, then, through the incarnate Christ who is both fully divine and fully human, "approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb 4:16). In union with Christ we truly share in his righteousness. Moreover, in his role as king Christ exercises sovereignty. Specifically he reigns supreme over sin, death and the devil. He has, as Paul celebrates, destroyed our last enemy (1 Cor 15:57). And if we do not need to fear death as we did without Christ, how much more shall we exult in his victory over sin?

Taken together these roles mean, first, that we have a fellow traveler who shows us the way of holy living and dying. Far from an abstract ideal, holiness is embodied in the man Jesus Christ. His life is our example, and his call to discipleship is a concrete summons to take up our crosses and follow him (Mt 16:24). Second, they also mean that we have a great high priest who both sympathizes with us and has made the supreme offering of himself on our behalf. His finished work is sufficient for our salvation, and we can trust in him. Third, in his priestly role, he intercedes for his brothers and sisters. And in his priestly role, he has provided for the cleansing of our sins (as well as the removal of the guilt in justification). So when we are threatened with confusion about the way of holiness, we look to Jesus. When we are tempted to despair of our own righteousness, we can look to the continuing intercession of Christ for us as well as his sufficient sacrifice on our behalf. And when we are threatened by the forces of evil in the world-and in our own lives-we look to the suffering servant who has conquered sin, death and the devil.

Jesus promised that at his ascension he would send "another Comforter" (Jn

14:16). The Holy Spirit is the one who has come, and he has come as one who is both fully divine and fully personal. He is no less divine than the Son or the Father, and he is no less personally active in the world and in the lives of Christians than the incarnate Son. He has come to bring to completion in us all that Christ died to do for us. As Thomas Oden puts it, "The descended Spirit is here to counsel the world of sin, of the righteousness of the Son who intercedes with the Father, and of the future judgment of the idolatry of the world (John 16:8-11)."26 We see the Spirit's ministry in various ways.

> The Spirit works in the community to offer new life, birthing, regenerating (John 3:3; Titus 3:5), baptizing believers into the body (1 Cor 12:13), indwelling in their hearts (1 Cor 3:16), freeing from sin, guilt, and death (Rom 7:9-8:2), strengthening the inner life amid hardships and challenges (Eph 3:16-19), bearing witness to their sonship and daughterhood with the Father (Rom 8:16), sealing believers until the day of redemption (Eph 4:30), bearing fruits of faith active in love (Gal 5:19-23; Rom 14:17; 15:13), guiding into all truth (John 16:13), directing the life of prayer (Rom 8:26, 27; 1 Cor 14:15; Eph 6:18; Jude 20), bringing into accurate recollection the words of Christ (John 14:26), enabling fitting proclamation of the good news of God's own coming (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 2:1-5), revealing the deep things of God through spiritual discernment.27

The presence of the Holy Spirit within the lives of those who belong to Christ is nothing less than the presence of God. As such his presence is nothing other than a holy presence. And it is nothing less than an omnipotent holy presence. Oden expresses the importance of this well: "There is nothing too subtle or dense for the Spirit to penetrate or too sinful for the Spirit to cleanse or too weary for the Spirit to refresh or too dark for the Spirit to un derstand or too dead for the Spirit to breathe life into again." 18 And yet the Spirit's work is as gentle as it is powerful: "The Spirit strives with us, prays with us, groans with us." 2°

Sanctification, the work of the triune God for us, is the will of the Father, who gives his Son and Spirit to us; it is the provision of the Mediator, who gave himself for our cleansing and renewal; and it is the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, who comes as the other comforter (Jn 14:16). But the work of God

for us, as important as this is, does not exhaust the trinitarian dimension of sanctification, which has an even deeper dimension: sanctification is grounded in, flows from and is directed toward the inner life of the triune God. God's being, as triune, is essentially holy love; God's own triune life is an interpersonal life of holy and self-giving love. All divine actions stem from that love and work in full accord with it. God has created us to know and experience the holy love of the triune life. That life-and nothing less-is what we were made for. C. S. Lewis puts it this way when he reflects on why the doctrine of the Trinity is so important.

> It matters more than anything else in the world. The whole dance, or drama, or three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made.... If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They are not the sort of prizes which God could, if he chose, just hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality.30

We are made for communion with the triune God. Yet we are sinners. We have plunged ourselves (individually and collectively) into utter ruin. We have shaken our fists at God in rebellion; we have turned away from the holy light of his life and into the blindness of our own stupidity; we have turned away from the shalom of God's own life and into the confusion, disintegration and depression of our own futility; we have turned away from his life-giving holy love and into the hatred that destroys. Indeed, we have killed the Lord and Giver of life.

And yet God has not abandoned us. We have been faithless; he has been faithful. He has pursued us with a steadfast affection that only the impassible triune God can maintain. He has redeemed sinners, and here again to be fully Christian we must be resolutely trinitarian. God has not pardoned us to live as criminals who cower and scurry away; he has saved us for nothing less than participation in the holy love of the triune life. So the action of the triune God is grounded in, and flows from, the nature of the triune God as holy love. But

further, this same holy love is the telos of his action. It is the end for which God made us, and it is the end for which God is remaking and cleansing us. This observation is utterly crucial for our understanding of sanctification. Sanctification, as we noted previously, is not-and cannot be reduced to-merely a kind of moralism. Of course it is about morality; sanctification is God's work to make us righteous and holy. But it is not merely about doing "better" or "doing your best"-all the while somehow hoping that you have made yourself good enough for God but all the while knowing deep down that you simply cannot make yourself that good. No, sanctification is the gracious provision of the triune God in the death and resurrection of the Son, applied by the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit, to make us whole, to make us truly fitting for communion with the triune God. It is God's work to make us what he intends us to be, to make us more than we could ever ask or even dare to dream. It is God's work to bring health and wholeness and shalom and true justice to his people (as individuals and communities). It is, in a word, the work of the Trinity to make us holy.

Trinitarian salvation and the real Christian life. Some Christians will say that this all sounds good, but they will protest that the reality of the Christian life-both as experienced and as depicted in the Bible-is very different. Consider the words of Paul himself.

> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.
>
> So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a

> prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:14-25)

Many Christians read this text as a description of the normal Christian life; they take it to be the definitive statement of genuine Christian life and an honest portrayal of the daily life of the earnest Christian (a sort of "Groundhog Day for the Christian"). Does not even Paul say that although he has the desire to do what is good and right, he simply does not-and indeed cannot-carry through with his desires? Does not even Paul say that "good does not dwell in me"? Is it not clear that Paul's sinful nature wars with his desire to do what is right? And is it not plain and obvious, on Paul's own confession, that the sinful nature wins?

The view that this is Paul's own Christian experience-and thus is definitive for our own expectations of the Christian lifeis very common among contemporary Christians. Indeed, they are prone to ask, what else could be going on in this text? Such people are sometimes very surprised to learn that classical Christian exegesis has largely veered away from such an interpretation (Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, Basil, Theodoret, Chrysostom, Jerome, Ambrose, Cyril of Jerusalem, Macarius, among many others, have not understood Paul to be referring to his own Christian experience)." It seems obvious enough, they will protest: Paul actually speaks in the first person ("I"), and he speaks in the present tense. The lesson is plain indeed: if this was Paul's own experience (and if Paul was the "greatest Christian ever"), then surely the ordinary Christian life will be much like it. So while it might be nice to hope and dream of a life lived in enjoyment of the holy love of the triune God, it simply is not intended for or available to us at all.

But on closer examination it is not so obvious at all. Indeed, a closer look shows that the evidence points away from what many people take to be the commonsense or straightforward reading of the text. Several considerations are important here. First, the use of the present tense does not of itself demonstrate that this is Paul's current experience. He may well be using the "historical" or "dramatic" present (much like someone who is retelling the story of something

dramatic that happened earlier that day might move from "then he said" to "so I say to him. . ."). Second, Paul's use of "I" here is not definitive either; at least not when read within the context of Paul's broader discussion. In the discussion immediately preceding this section, Paul uses the "I" to refer to someone who has been "put to death" (Rom 7:11) by sin-hardly reflective of Paul's view of the Christian life (e.g., Rom 5:21; 6:23). In Romans 7:14-25 Paul seems to be using the "I" in a way reflective of someone who is not yet a Christian. New Testament scholar Ben Witherington points out that "it would be rhetorically inept for Paul to use a fictive `I' in vv. 7-13 and then with no signal change to a non-fictive use of `I.' Unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary, the `I' in vv. 14-25 must also be seen as fictive because Paul is continuing another part of the same argument found in vv. 7-13."32 And as Gerald Bray admits, "Most of the Fathers believed that here Paul was adopting the persona of an unregenerate man, not describing his own struggles as a Christian. As far as they were concerned, becoming a Christian would deliver a person from the kind of dilemma that the apostle is outlining here."33 So the main support for the common contemporary reading, which seems so straightforward and obvious, evaporates on closer consideration. Third, to understand this text to refer to Paul's own Christian life would be to introduce something that would contradict many other clear and decisive elements of Paul's testimony. He says, for instance, that the Thessalonian Christians join with God as his witnesses that he is "holy, righteous and blameless" (1 Thess 2:10; see also 2 Tim 1:12; Col 1:12-13; Phil 4:12-13), and that he has "kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:6-8) even as one of those who "have not yet attained" but are "pressing on toward the goal" (Phil 3:12-14).34

There are also several decisive factors that weigh against the common reading of Romans 7:14-25 (the view that this text refers to the normal Christian life, one in which the Christian is condemned to a life of defeat).35 First, the person described here has been "sold as a slave to sin" (Rom 7:14). But Paul has just described-in terms that no one finds uncertain-regenerate persons as those who were formerly slaves to sin. Christians are those who "used to be slaves to sin" (Rom 6:17); they "were slaves to sin" (Rom 6:20). Second, the person is here described as "unspiritual" (sarkinos) (Rom 7:14). But Paul follows this

description with a clear description of such a person as one in a state of spiritual death (Rom 8:6). The person Paul describes in Romans 7:14-25 is said to be mastered by indwelling sin, and to such an extent that "it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me" (Rom 7:17; 7:20). But Paul's clear description of the privileges of those who are no longer under condemnation but who are "in Christ" is very different: "You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you" (Rom 8:9). You are no longer dead and powerless, for "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you" (Rom 8:11). The person in Romans 7:14-25 testifies that he is enslaved by sin, for it has made him "a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me" (Rom 7:23). But when Paul talks about those who are "in Christ," he says that "the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

We are now in a position to see how the life described in Romans 7:14-25 actually contrasts the life "in Christ" and "in accordance with the Spirit." One refers to the life of a slave, the other to the life of a former slave, the life of one who has been emancipated and is now free. One refers to death-the other rejoices in life. One is controlled by sin and cannot escape from it. The other is controlled by the Spirit. Paul himself makes this contrast explicit.

> Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.
>
> You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. (Rom 8:5-9)

In conclusion, it seems highly unlikely that Paul is referring to his Christian experience in Romans 7:14-25.36 Gordon D. Fee says that the evidence

"overwhelmingly" favors "the view that Paul is here describing life before and outside Christ, but from the perspective of one who is himself now in Christ."37 It is, then, both mistaken and potentially very harmful for Christians to read this as the diary of their own Christian life. There are no good reasons to take this text in support of the view that the normal Christian life is characterized by customary defeat and failure. Of course his description of an ongoing struggle with sin resonates very deeply with Christians. And Paul does address the ongoing battle with sin in his letter to the Galatians. He is utterly realistic about the struggle: "The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh" (Gal 5:17), and he is aware of the possibility that followers of Christ may be "caught in a sin" (Gal 6:1). He draws the sharpest of contrasts between the "acts of the sinful nature" and the "fruit of the Spirit." The former "are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (Gal 5:19-21). The consequences of such a sinful lifestyle are as unmistakable as they are grim: "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:21). The "fruit of the Spirit," however, is "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23).

A life controlled by the sinful nature produces these sinful actions. Paul is clear that this is a possibility for the followers of Jesus (otherwise there would be no point in warning them about it). But he is equally clear that such a life is not necessary for the Christian. The Christian is under no compulsion to live this way. Indeed, "those who belong to Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24). Paul thus issues a command and promise: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). The command is to "walk," to live each moment of life, in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The promise is distinct from the command and follows on it: walking in continual surrender to and communion with the Spirit yields a lifestyle that is not hostage to the sinful nature. As Oden explains,

> The Galatian audience was imperfectly formed, while growing in grace. The conflict between Spirit and flesh raged in them. They were neither wholly unjustified nor unsanctified, but believing recipients of justifying grace in whom sanctifying grace was beginning to work to bring them to full maturity in Christian freedom, wherein they might refract the image of God exquisitely.38

Paul's words are, then, an encouragement to them: do not be surprised by the struggle with temptation or the possibility of sin, but do not despair either, for the Spirit has provided for a life of victory rather than defeat. So while Galatians 5:16-25 also speaks of the Christian's struggle with sin, it does so in ways that are markedly different from the testimony of the unregenerate person in Romans 7:14-25. For while the unregenerate person of Romans 7:14-25 struggles with sin but is defeated and enslaved, Paul in Galatians 5:16-25 emphasizes the ability of the Holy Spirit to bring victory over the sin that ensnares and enslaves.

NO DESPAIR

For those people who struggle forward through life in the hope of the gospel, these are anything but matters of indifference. Nor are they only important in a theoretical sense. Paul exults in the work of the triune God for us, and he rejoices in what that work means for us.

> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"

> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 15:54-57)

Paul's message is unmistakable, and it is powerful. We knowall too well-that there is no escape from death. Sooner or later, and all too often much too soon, it

comes for all of us. We are, in a word, utterly powerless against it. In the end, death wins every time. But in the face of this incontrovertible fact, Paul dares to challenge our last enemy, and he asserts Christ's victory over it. The work of the triune God-his work for us-is so strong and so fierce and so complete that not even our last enemy can stop it. And if not even death can stop it, then nothing can.

As Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli put it,

> The existential consequences of the resurrection are incomparable. It is the concrete, factual, empirical proof that: life has hope and meaning; "love is stronger than death"; goodness and power are ultimately allies, not enemies; life wins in the end; God has touched us right here where we are and has defeated our last enemy; we are not cosmic orphans, as our modern secular worldview would make us. And these existential consequences of the resurrection can be seen by comparing the disciples before and after. Before, they ran away, denied their Master and huddled behind locked doors in fear and confusion. After, they were transformed from scared rabbits into confident saints, world-changing missionaries, courageous martyrs and joy-filled touring ambassadors for Christ.39

Because of the work of God for us in Christ, there is no reason for despair. No matter how much a Christian may struggle in this life, no matter how much it may seem that our enemy has supremacy, the gospel of the triune God tells us that Christ has destroyed sin, death and the devil. "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57).

SOME CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have argued that the work of the triune God on our behalf has several important consequences. Far from being abstract speculation, it matters at the deepest levels. In summary, we can see that while there are several pitfalls to avoid, Christians both can and should affirm that the work of God for us affects us with respect to both the "problem of past sin" and the "problem of the sinner."

To be avoided. As I have argued, we should avoid the (sometimes-widespread) picture of salvation as involving only the alteration of our legal status. It may be true that the most important question for many of us is, how do I escape the penalties of my sin? But this is not the most important question that Scripture addresses-there the question is, how am I to be delivered from my sin and brought into the communion with God for which I was made? We should resist any notions of "legal fiction"-as if God's sole or primary purpose is to turn us into sinners who now enjoy a change in their legal status (from "guilty" to "no condemnation") but who still persist in their rebellion and treason against God. Jonathan Edwards notes that some people, "instead of embracing Christ as their Savior from sin, trust in him as the Savior of their sins."'o Such people, Edwards says, "make Christ the minister of sin, and great officer and viceregent of the devil."`' To limit the work of God in salvation to a change in our legal condition (without a corresponding and radical change in us) is to err in several ways: in doing so we would impute dishonesty to the righteous Judge, reduce the work of the triune God to (one aspect of) the work of Christ and thereby ignore or deny the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and miss the richness and beauty of the life with God for which we were made and for which we are redeemed.

Just as we should not reduce the gospel of the triune God to justification, so also it is both theologically mistaken and pastorally dangerous to confuse justification and sanctification; getting the direction wrong is also disastrous. Even though they are inseparable (in that there is no justification without sanctification or sanctification without justification), justification precedes and enables sanctification. We do not first somehow make ourselves holy and only then hope for justification. And no matter how much growth there may be in grace and godliness, we never outgrow either the need for the sufficiency of "the Lord our righteousness."

At the same time we should resist all temptations to reduce sanctification to moralistic or legalistic effort. Similarly we should avoid overconfident "perfectionism." It is not "our part" of the process of salvation. We must always remember that sanctification is first and always God's work-work in which we

are called to receive by faith and work that does not happen apart from us or against us-but God's work nonetheless.

To be affirmed. Christians affirm, along with other elements in the "order (or "way") of salvation," that the gospel of the triune God includes both justification and sanctification. Justification is God's gracious and righteous act in which he removes our guilt and accepts us as righteous. Due to our union with Christ, the riches of Christ's righteousness cover the debt of our guilt, while he extends his glorious righteousness to us. "God justifies the believer, for the sake of Christ's righteousness, and not for any righteousness of his own." "z It is sinners who are justified-and it is only sinners who are justified. Christ died for the ungodly; "God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Sanctification, as we have seen, refers to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit within us. Sanctification is the transformation of wicked, perverse and twisted sinners into saints of whom it can truly be said, "This is my beloved son-this is my beloved daughter-in whom I am well pleased." Sanctification is the will of the Father. Christ has provided it for us through his victory over our last enemy-if he has won the victory over death, which is the "wages of sin," then surely the power of sin itself has been broken. Moreover, the teachings and example of Christ offer us a concrete exemplification of the life of holiness. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Son and the Father as the "other Comforter" (Jn 14:16, 26), now works to bring to reality what God has provided for us. Even now he continues to renew the image of God in us, to cleanse us of all that is displeasing to God, to bring us to the place where we can love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and our neighbor as ourselves (see Mt 22:37-39). The doctrine of sanctification teaches us that God is not satisfied with anything less than the complete renovation of the sinner, in order that we may "participate" in the triune life (see 2 Pet 1:4). The doctrine of glorification reinforces these teachings by telling us that our last enemy-death (as the "wages of sin")-has been defeated. The salvation provided by the triune God is not, therefore, merely about how to get out of a place called "hell" and

into a place called "heaven." God is concerned with much more (though not less) than that-God is concerned to bring heaven into our hearts and lives now. And that means that he must get the hell out of It is this-and nothing less-that the triune God of grace intends for his people.

Why it matters. But the doctrine of justification matters for more than our final hope at the day of judgment. It also matters for life in the here and now. For when we grasp the truth that our righteousness is found in the all-sufficient righteousness of Christ, we begin to escape the life-quenching and seemingly inescapable grasp of the drive for self-justification. If I am truly justified before God by the righteousness of Christ, if I am joined in union with him by faith, then while I never have righteous standing on my own, I always have enough in him. Therefore I do not need to justify myself constantly; I do not need perennial self-justifying and defensive maneuvers that choke out true honesty and intimacy and growth. As Oden says,

> Salvation by grace through faith is itself the central blessing that most distinctively belongs to life in Christ. Who is most completely freed to live a truly blessed life? One "whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Ps. 32:1-2). If you are one whose sin the Lord does not count against you, you are blessed in the distinctive way that believers are blessed. Your life is not trapped in the deceit that comes with self-justification 44

Truly justification is "a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort."45

Sanctification is God's gracious work to make us into persons who truly know, glorify, love and enjoy the communion of the Holy Trinity. It is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Jonathan Edwards describes this life as one of dynamic growth.

> The more a true saint loves God with a gracious love, the more he desires to love Him, and the more uneasy he is at his want of love to him; the more he hates sin, the more he desires to hate it ... the more he hungers and thirsts

> after God and holiness, the more he longs to long, and breathe out his very soul in longings after God.46

God calls us to enter this work as well, for as C. S. Lewis says,

> "Make no mistake," He says, "if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, then understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you ... whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect- until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less."47

And the promise of the Lord is sure: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt 5:6). God's "power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Pet 1:3).

The doctrine of glorification assures us that as God has destroyed our last enemy by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so also we who are joined in union with Christ rejoice in the benefits of that victory. This gives us great hope where otherwise there could be no hope. It also gives us energy and courage for the life to which God has called us. Paul exults: "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57). And he immediately follows this with an exhortation: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:58).

Conclusion

A Personal Theological Testimony

For as long as I have been interested in theology, I have been fascinated by the doctrine of the Trinity. And for as long as I have been interested in theology, I have tried to proclaim the gospel. Deep down I have believed the doctrine of the Trinity to be both radically surprising and true. And deep down I have known that the doctrine of the Trinity really matters. Perhaps it has only been the rural Michiganders and rustic Alaskans that I have had the privilege of serving in ministry, but I have found that many Christians hold as both true and precious the conviction that the fully human Jesus is also (somehow) fully divine and united with his Father; that his life, death and resurrection matter more than we can say; and that the Holy Spirit is with us today. So I have believed these truths, and I have been convinced that these truths are important.

But the importance of the trinitarian gospel came home to me with great force in October of 2009. One clear autumn Sunday morning we came out of church to find a phone message from my mother. My father, who for decades had served small-town and rural churches in Idaho and Montana with quiet strength, humble dignity, and deep and unadorned sincerity, had for the last several days been struggling with H1N1 influenza. Now my mother was calling from her car as she followed the ambulance to the emergency room, and she was telling us that by early that Sunday morning he had been struggling to breathe. The physicians in the emergency room of that small-town hospital in western Montana soon came to the realization that they could not help him, and he was taken by helicopter transport to a larger hospital in the nearest city. The family was called together, and by the next day I found myself standing beside the bed of my comatose father. My sisters and I stayed with my mother for the next week, and for a while we were hopeful that he might be weaned from life support and begin a full

recovery.

During that week my mind was flooded with memories. I remembered holidays and holy days, everyday prayers and evenings filled with laughter, gentle hands and a huge heart. I remembered his strong convictions as well as his deep compassion. I remembered the strength of his loyalty and his instinctive support for those beaten down by life. I remembered countless hours spent with me and with my sisters, and I remembered his devotion to my mother. As I sat beside him, I knew without doubt that the man I've known best was the best man I've ever known. But as I sat with him, I also remembered what I had learned (as an adult) about his own childhood: stories of dysfunction, unbelief, violence, abuse and despair. I was struck by the fact that his was the kind of life that tempts one to say "that kid has no chance." And at this point the power of the gospel of the grace of the triune God-so raw and so pure-hit me again. The Trinity was not "ruptured" or "broken," and this is amazing good news for us. God-the triune God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit-is for us. It is not as though one divine person is for us or on "our side" while another is against us, for the being and actions of the triune God are always undivided. Nor are some divine attributes "for us" while others are somehow "against us," for in the simplicity of the divine nature there is no possibility of a "strife" or "conflict" of attributes within God. The triune God of the Christian faith is not a bigger version of a dysfunctional family. No, God is both radically for us and radically against sin-indeed, God's radical "No" to sin is the same thing as his radical "Yes" to the sinner.

And this is not mere abstraction: as a twelve-year-old boy my father had been saved from his sin and its consequences by being changed (legally and positionally, as the doctrine of justification attests, but also really and personally, as the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification testify). The death of Jesus did not make it possible for God to love my father. Instead, it made it possible for him to truly know the holy love of the triune life. It made it truly possible for him to love God. And the work of the triune God really does make it possible for us to know and love God. By his life, death and resurrection, Jesus calls and

empowers his followers to walk with him on a path of complete and all-encompassing discipleship, he gives himself as a sacrificial offering for sin, and he defeats the powers of evil. The salvation that comes from the triune God saves us from the judgment of God and thus gives us confidence and freedom to grow in grace as we walk with God. It rescues us from the condemnation of sin and the compulsion of self-justification. It liberates us-as it did my fatherfrom the bondage of sin. And in his application of the work of Christ, the Holy Spirit transforms perverse and twisted sinnersthe very people who seem to be without hope-into sons and daughters of God who bask in the warmth of his approval and who are filled with holy energy. Again, this is not a mere abstraction: I am a witness to the amazing power of God's holy love to grab a life and set it on a radically new course.

After a week, the attending physicians advised us that he might be comatose for some time and that any recovery process would be long and arduous. They counseled my sisters and me to return to our homes and to be flexible regarding expectations and plans. And so on the last day together, I shared Scripture and prayers with him, and then I told him goodbye. I looked down at this strong man, now so helpless, and told him although I was not sure of the outcome of his illness, I was sure that I would see him again.

I very reluctantly boarded a plane and headed home, and was somewhat less than thrilled to find that I had to fly from Missoula to Seattle before I could return to Chicago. After a wait in Seattle, I realized that I was hoping for privacy on the evening flight to Chicago. And so I was disappointed when I found myself seated next to a chatty young traveler. We exchanged pleasantries, and I found out that she was a graduate student returning home from a philosophy conference. She found out that I was returning from what might be my father's deathbed. We talked at some lengththe length available on a flight from Seattle to Chicago-about some of the biggest and most challenging issues in metaphysics: mind and body, life and death. Then we talked about resurrection-and about hope. Talking with her highlighted the sharp contrast between a worldview hungry for hope and one that offers it. And there I again was struck-

so forcefully-by the radical difference that is made by the trinitarian gospel. I have hope-"sure and certain hope," as some liturgical formulations put it-because the man Jesus Christ is the Son of God incarnate. I have hope because Jesus offered himself for our sins. I have hope because the Father did not reject or abandon Jesus but instead raised Jesus from death. I have hope because the Holy Spirit is with us today, bringing to us the benefits of Christ's victory.

Over the next week I stayed in close contact with my family. Each day the conversations, emails and text messages told the same tale-"Dad is comfortable. Still unconscious. Somewhat worse. Doesn't look good. Love you."-until finally the doctors told my mother that she should gather the family together one last time. So once again, with a heavy heart, I boarded a plane for Missoula. I was just hoping to see him again, but when the wheels touched the tarmac I turned on my phone to hear the tear-choked voice of my sister: "He is gone." We gathered together as a family and made the arrangements that must be made for everyone but that no one really plans to make: it would be a plain pine box, which reflected the Bitterroot Mountains he loved so much, and the unpretentious simplicity seemed as natural to him as any casket possibly could. The grandkids (at least the dozen who were old enough) would sing "Jesus Loves Me." I would bring the homily-I was sure that I just had to. He would be laid to rest in the Lone Pine Cemetery, under the peaks, just up from the river, facing east. We would use sandstone, from his beloved Medicine Rocks, engraved with a verse that was precious to him.

On Sunday afternoon we met at the chapel of the funeral home for a time of visitation. We knew that friends and members of the congregation would stay for most of the afternoon and evening, so we planned some time together as a family before the other friends arrived. We took each of our young children to the casket. There we explained to them, as best we could, what was going on, and we prayed with them. Then we put the toddlers in an adjacent room where they could watch VeggieTales in relative peace and quiet, and we sent the older children (all elementary age) across the street to play outdoors with their cousins. That afternoon hundreds of people came by. Some wanted to talk a lot;

others could find no words. Well-known friends came, and so did people 1 had never met: ranchers, loggers, lawyers, teachers, kids-people telling me that they had never known anyone with such gentleness, strength, and love, people telling me that they were followers of Jesus because of my father. Several hours later the people began to disperse, and we started to gather our children. Finding three of our children, I took them to the car and secured them there. Missing our fourth, Josiah, I walked back into the funeral home. I checked the side rooms and the hallways, but I did not see him. I walked back into the chapel, which was now deserted. And there I saw him: he was in the front of the chapel, his seven-year-old body draped across that simple pine box. I went to him, and as my arm went around him I felt his little body shake with big shoulderheaving sobs. I held him close, and then I began again to share the faith that is a gift to those who believe: "Si, this is not the end. Gramps loved Jesus, he loved Jesus with everything in him. He loved Jesus because Jesus loved him and died for his sins. Jesus rose again from death, and he promises that everyone who belongs to him will be with him forever. Gramps is gone now, with Jesus. Someday he'll get this body back, and someday we'll see him again." Josiah looked at me, with young eyes full of sincere belief, and said, "I know, Dad, I know, but we miss him now, don't we?" Again I was struck-so forcefully-by the difference that is made by the trinitarian gospel.

The next day we gathered to celebrate his life, to mourn his death and to rejoice in our hope. As I heard his grandchildren sing and looked out at his brothers and sister (all of whom are now involved in Christian ministry), I wondered in amazement at the grace of the triune God: the grace that can reach out and grab hold of a twelve-year-old boy whose life is already marked by brokenness and set it on a new course, radically changing one hopeless young boy into the best man I've ever known and altering the course of subsequent generations. As we stood around that awful open hole in the ground, I saw my seven-year-old son join my mother as she knelt at the casket one last time, now overcome by grief. And I heard Josiah now reminding his grandmother that this is not the end, for God is for us. And once again, standing there under those piercing blue skies and the snowcovered Bitterroots, longing for the day when

all things will be made new, I was struck again by the difference that is made by the trinitarian gospel.

Truly, the omnipotent triune God "has given us everything we need for a godly life" (2 Pet 1:3). And he has done so while fur nishing us with "his very great and precious promises, so that through them you might participate in the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Thanks be to God, the God who is triune, the God who is for us, the God who has taken radical and decisive action on our behalf, the God who has secured for us "the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57).

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'Accordingly, I quote from editions and translations that are most readily available (rather than the best scholarly editions), and I try as hard as I can to speak plainly about these important but deep matters.

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61For further, more-detailed discussions, see Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea, "Introduction," in Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity, ed. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 2-7; Thomas McCall, Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 12-39.

62John D. Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 17.

"Often called this due to its association with such luminaries as Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas. In truth, it has a great deal in common with the Greek theological tradition, and some of the characteristics of social trinitarianism can also be found within the Latin tradition. But for present purposes, we will use the common labels.

65Bruce D. Marshall, The Dereliction of Christ and the Impassibility of God," in Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, OP (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 275.

66Joseph will, of course, be changed by his relations (or lack thereof).

64Moltmann, Crucified God, p. 243.

"Marshall, "Dereliction of Christ," p. 275.

70Plantinga, "Social Trinity," p. 31.

"McCall and Rea, "Introduction," p. 3.

fi8lbid.

69lbid.

'2Zizioulas, Bcing as Communion, p. 17.

"Stein, Mark, p. 715.

74France, Mark, pp. 652-53.

`C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to Saint Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 458.

'hRiehard Bauckham, Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 261-62.

"Rikki Watts, "Mark," in Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 236.

"Theologians in the tradition of classical Christian theology have insisted that Christ indeed did suffer, and they have also insisted that he suffered according to his human nature, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica 3.15.5 and 3.16.4. See further the helpful discussion by Paul Gavrilyuk, The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

75Subordinationism (the view that holds Christ to be a lesser deity) or Apollinarianism (the view that, in the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity replaces a human mind or soul) could also result from such a view.

80This does not mean that Christ had (or has) a "fallen humanity," on which see Crisp, Divinity and Humanity, pp. 90-117.

a2Thomas F. Torrance, The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), p. 8.

81Bauckham, Jesus and the God of Israel, pp. 267-68.

'Leon Morris points out that the Old Testament uses more than twenty Hebrew words to depict the wrath of God-with almost six hundred instances of those terms; The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross: A Study of the Significance of Some New Testament Terms, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 149.

2We must not misunderstand the election of Israel. God chose Israel as a corporate body (see Gen 25:23) for the purpose of bringing God's salvation to the world. There are, of course, individuals within this group who finally rebel against God and are judged by God for that rebellion (e.g., Num 16:135), while there are also individuals who are not of this group who do turn to the Lord for salvation (e.g., Mt 1:5). Provision for salvation was made for both Israel (the "elect") and the "aliens" (e.g., Nun 15:14-16, 29-30). See especially Christopher J. H. Wright, The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006).

"Ibid., p. 39.

'Ibid., p. 40.

30n Isaiah 10:5-19 see D. A. Carson, The Wrath of God," in Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 43-44.

Morris, Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, p. 177.

7Dennis F. Kinlaw, Let's Start with Jesus: A New Way of Doing Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 57-70.

8D. A. Carson, The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2000), p. 70.

"ibid.

'The Nrv rendering ("deserving of wrath") is less than satisfactory here, for it down- plays both the force and the familial sense of the statement. Far better is "children of wrath."

12I outline how God "deals with" our sin in the fourth chapter.

"The same could, of course, be said about wrath as well (see especially Hos 11:1-11).

13Thomas F. Torrance, The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 165.

"See Kevin J. Vanhoozer (who follows Richard of St. Victor), ed., Nothing Better, Nothing Greater: Theological Essays on the Love of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

"Torrance, Christian Doctrine of God, p. 165.

"Ibid., p. 166.

19E.g., C. H. Dodd, The Bible and the Greeks (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935), and The Epistle to the Romans (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), pp. 21-23.

"I could find the wrath of God mentioned only twice in Daniel L. Migliore's widely used theological textbook-both of which were in reference to older (and appar- ently outmoded) theories of atonement. See his Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 154, 158. John Macquarrie, meanwhile, denies that wrath' indicates anger," Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 192.

20John R. W. Stott, The Cross of Christ (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 169.

"Carson, Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God, p. 68.

22Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 116. 1 owe this reference to Graham A. Cole, God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 49 n. 47.

23Stott, Cross of Christ, p. 130.

24lbid., pp. 130-31.

26Heltnut Thielicke, Theological Ethics: Volume 2, Politics (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), p. 575. I owe this reference to Cole, God the Peacemaker, p. 49. 1 suspect that Thielicke's "Lutheranism" owes more to Hegel than to classical Lutheran theology, but this is not the place for an argument about such matters.

21lbid., p. 175.

2slbid., p. 133.

30Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, p. 73.

C. H. Dodd, Romans (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), p. 23.

"Richard Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson and Matthew D. Lundberg use "impassibility" and "apathy" interchangeably, e.g., An Introduction to Christian Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 105. Daniel L. Migliore replaces "impassibility" with "apathy," e.g., Faith Seeking Understanding, p. 73.

33Jurgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), pp. 151-52.

"'I agree entirely with the revisionists that we should worship the God who reveals himself to us rather than our own ideas of God. But simply to pit the "God of the philosophers" against the "God of the Bible" misses the possibility that God could be the "God of Abraham, Isaac ... and Anselm." See Thomas V. Morris, Anselnsian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 10-25.

;Paul S. Fiddes, The Creative Suffering of God (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 31.

"Eberhard Jungel, God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of Theology in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), p. 373.

40Molanann, Crucified God, p. 274.

41Ibid.

"Ibid., p. 152.

351bid., p. 230; cf. Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 38.

36Fiddes, Creative Suffering of God, p. 17.

"Richard E. Creel, Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 2.

3slbid.

44lbid.

45lbid.

"Thomas Weinandy, Does God Suffer? (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), p. 3.

42Richard A. Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725: Volume Three: The Divine Essence and Attributes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 33.

46Ibid., pp. 310-19.

"Ibid., p. 310.

47 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica 3.16.4 (in St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province [Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1981], 4:2110).

5'Weinandy, "Suffering and the Sovereign Love of God: A Conclusion to God's Sovereignty and Evangelical Theology," in The Sovereignty of God Debate, ed. D. Stephen Long and George Kalantzis (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2009), p. 145.

48Weinandy, Does God Suffer, p. 111.

"Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica 1.20.1 (1:114).

50Weinandy, Does God Suffer, p. 126.

51Ibid., pp. 119-20.

"Ibid., p. 127.

140n hermeneutics, see especially Grant R. Osborne, The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, rev. and exp. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006).

"Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson and Matthew D. Lundberg, An Introduction to Christian Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 104.

56Ibid.

17Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three, p. 276.

"Alvin Plantinga, Does God Have a Nature? (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), p. 34.

"This description risks oversimplification, but the basic point should be clear. For further discussion, see Eleonore Stump, Aquinas (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 92-130.

OOSee Richard Cross, Scotus on God, Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2005), esp. pp. 99-114.

62It is an "attribute" in the sense that it is something that we (rightly) attribute to God.

61For a helpful discussion, see Jay Wesley Richards, The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity and Immutability (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 231-40.

64Weinandy, Does God Suffer? p. 111. See also Weinandy, "Suffering and the Sovereign Love of God," pp. 146-49.

63See the discussion in Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three, p. 319.

BSAs we shall see in the next chapter, this happens in a legal, forensic or positional sense (the doctrine of justification), but this sense cannot be divorced from the personal or "real-life" sense (the doctrine of sanctification).

67Paul D. Gavrilyuk, The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialetics of Patristic Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 62.

"Thomas F. Torrance, Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), pp. 249-50.

68John McLeod Campbell, The Nature of the Atonement, new introduction by James B. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 51-52.

69Ibid., p. 52.

70lbid.

"George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 466.

'Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ, vol. 3, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 389.

"Ibid., p. 174.

"Carson, The Wrath of God," pp. 44, 45.

74Stott, Cross of Christ, p. 173.

76P. T. Forsyth, The Cruciality of the Cross (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), p. 73.

"Ibid., p. 78.

'"Torrance, Christian Doctrine of God, p. 245.

79Stott, Cross of Christ, p. 174.

'Martin Kahler is usually credited with the statement.

2See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., The Messiah in the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

'William Burt Pope, A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being the Outline of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical, Volume 2, 2nd ed. (New York: Philips and Hunt, 1889), p. 93.

4Most of these Christians would also affirm "compatibilism" (the view that determinism is compatible with freedom and responsibility) and thus would be "soft" determinists rather than "hard" determinists. But of course "soft determinism" (or "compatibilism") is determinism (rather than an alternative to it or some sort of middle ground between determinism and indeterminism), so what follows applies to both "hard" and "soft" determinism.

'See Keith E. Yandell, Philosophy of Religion: A Contemporary Introduction (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 361.

'William Hasker, Metaphysics: Constructing a Worldview (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), p. 32.

'J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 268.

9A common determinist response is to take refuge in appeal to the "two wills of God." For discussion of this proposal, see Thomas H. McCall, "I Believe in Divine Sovereignty," Trinity Journal (2008), pp. 205-26; John Piper, "I Believe in God's Self-Sufficiency: A Response to Thomas McCall," Trinity Journal (2008): 227-34; and Thomas H. McCall, "We Believe in God's Sovereign Goodness: A Rejoinder to John Piper," Trinity Journal (2008): 235-46.

'The view that God determines everything is also (arguably) at odds with a great deal else in Scripture. For starters, consider (1) (some) texts that seem to require genuine alternative possibilities, e.g., Deut 30:1-20 (esp. Dent 30:11-14); 1 Cor 10:12-13; (2) texts expressing the will of God that all be saved, e.g., Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11; Zech 6:11-14; Mt 23:37; Jn 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4; 4:10; Heb 12:15; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 Jn 4:14; and (3) texts expressing divine lament, e.g., Dent 9:12;

29:25-27; 1 Sam 2:30-31; Is 57:15-21; Jer 44:4-10; 48:29-46; Ezek 16:1-63; Hosea 6:1-11; 7:13; 11:12; Mt 23:37-39; Lk 13:34; 19:41-44. Further exploration and argument would take us far beyond the scope of the present work.

'2See Henry Bettenson, ed., Documents of the Christian Church, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 62.

"For a refreshingly frank admission of this, see Derk Pereboom, Living Without Free Will (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

"D. A. Carson, How Long, 0 Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 182.

"Both "Thomism" (understood in an indeterminist way) and Molinism offer proposals for understanding how this works. See, e.g., Thomas P. Flint, Divine Providence: The Molinist Account (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); and Eleonore Stump, Aquinas (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 455-78.

'4Thotnas Oden, The Word of Life: Systematic Theology, Volume 2 (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 352.

"For helpful discussion, see Richard E. Averbeck, "Sacrifices and Offerings," in Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch, ed. David Baker and T. Desmond Alexander (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 706-32, and Richard E. Averbeck, "Offerings and Sacrifices," in New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), pp. 996-1022.

"Thomas F. Torrance, The Mediation of Christ (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), p. 108.

"Ibid.

"Of course not all of the references to sacrifice explicitly mention the guilt of sin. But the guilt of sin, as well as its other consequences, are clear from Scripture, and some texts (e.g., 1 Pet 3:18) make the link explicit.

22Oden, Word of Life, p. 384.

2'Ibid., p. 110.

190den, Word of Life, p. 384.

'Torrance, Mediation of Christ, p. 109.

23Ambrose, The Incarnation of Our Lord 6.60, quoted in Oden, Word of Life, p. 384.

24Helpful insights may be found in, e.g., Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, God Is a Warrior (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

25For discussion, see Gregory A. Boyd, "Christus Victor View," in The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 31.

26E.g., Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Healing Response," in Nature of the Atonement: Four Views, pp. 54-60.

27Gustaf Aul@n, Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

28Hans Boersma, Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 184.

30F. D. E. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), p. 425.

25Peter Abelard, "Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans," in A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ochham, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 283.

32For discussion of some of these figures, see Boersma, Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross, pp. 116-32.

31John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion 2.15.1-6, trans. Henry Beveridge (1989; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 425-32.

33Boersma, Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross, p. 116.

37Calvin, Institutes 2.13.2 (p. 401).

34Calvin, Institutes 2.12.3 (p. 402).

"Calvin, Institutes 2.16.2 (p. 435).

"Calvin, Institutes 2.12.3 (p. 402).

'Calvin, Institutes 2.16.13 (p. 447).

"Calvin, Institutes 2.16.3 (p. 436).

"Calvin, Institutes 2.16.13 (p. 448).

41Torrance, Mediation of Christ, p. 124.

12Thomas F. Torrance, The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), p. 8.

45John D. Zizioulas, Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 46.

43Torrance, Mediation of Christ, p. 111.

44In traditional theological terms the opera ad extra stint indivisa; divine action is "always undivided."

"Torrance, Mediation of Christ, p. 113.

"Torrance, Mediation of Christ, p. 124.

48The biblical teaching would demand such a conclusion if the only options were either (1) what happened was completely unforeseen and unplanned, or (2) everything that happened was determined by God so that no alternative courses of actions were open to anyone. I see no reason to think that (1) and (2) exhaust the options. For options see, e.g., William Lane Craig, The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987).

50lbid.

"Ibid., pp. 430-42.

"Stump, Aquinas, p. 430.

8john Wesley, "Justification by Faith," in Wesley's 52 Standard Sermons (Salem, Ohio: Schmul, 1988), p. 44.

'Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, art. 11., in Philip Schaff, ed., The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. 3: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p. 494. Thomas C. Oden observes that the Anglican article on justification was left unchanged by the early Methodists, Justification Reader, p. 104.

'Westminster Longer Catechism, Q/A 70, quoted in Oden, Justification Reader, p. 39.

'The Formula of Concord (Epitome), quoted in Oden, Justification Reader, p. 40.

'By "Wesley's view" I mean his view post-1738.

"Wesley, "Justification by Faith," p. 45.

"'John Wesley, "The Lord Our Righteousness," in Sermons, p. 194; cf. Collins, Scripture Way of Salvation, pp. 92-94.

'Wesley, "The Lord Our Righteousness," p. 196.

12Collins, Scripture Way of Salvation, p. 92.

7 Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 4:298. See the helpful discussion by Kenneth J. Collins, The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), pp. 86-100.

17 Ibid.

"Wesley, Justification by Faith," p. 49.

14Co11ins, Scripture Way of Salvation, p. 95.

"One could readily argue that such a view entails tritheism and Arianism, but such an argument is beyond the scope of this essay.

'Nicholas Wolterstorff, Is There Justice in the Trinity?" in God's Life In Trinity, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), p. 177.

2 Ibid., p. 185.

"Ibid., pp. 178-79.

19Wolterstorff points out that such concern extends to (some) social entities as well (ibid., p. 184).

21G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Sanctification (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 10.

23Ibid., pp. 416-17.

"William Burt Pope, A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being the Outline of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical, Volume 2, 2nd ed. (New York: Philips and Hunt, 1889), p. 416.

2'Any who would appeal to Martin Luther in support of a flippant decree to "sin boldly" should read Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New York: Touchstone, 1995), pp. 51-54.

24Ibid., p. 417.

21Thomas C. Oden, Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology, Volume 3 (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 58, emphasis in original.

"Ibid., p. 56.

30C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 137.

25Ibid., p. 55.

29Ibid.

32Ben Witherington III, Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhctorical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 193.

33Gerald Bray, ed., Romans, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 6 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 189-90.

34See Oden, Life in the Spirit, pp. 244-45.

31See Oden, Life in the Spirit, pp. 245-46.

35For an especially helpful discussion of these issues (one to which I am indebted), see Douglas J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 445-48.

31Oden, Life in the Spirit, p. 246.

"Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 177.

40Jonathan Edwards, The Religious Affections (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), p. 286.

41Ibid.

42Wesley, The Lord Our Righteousness," p. 196.

"Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, art. 11, in Creeds of Christendom, p. 494.

431 owe this expression to G. Steven Blakernore.

44Oden, Justification Reader, p. 3.

46Edwards, Religious Affections, p. 303.

"Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 158. John Wesley famously defines Christian perfection as "loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength," A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (Peabody, Mass.:

Hendrickson, 2007), p. 53.

'The clearest and most extensive of these summaries are found in Protestant scholasticism.

'Thomas C. Oden, The Justification Reader (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 3.

37 Gordon D. Fee, God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 511.

36For a helpful summary of the interpretive options, see Witherington, Romans, p. 187.