

THE Plain Truth

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Garden and wilderness temptations.

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Trinitarian vs. Unitarian worship.

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Why was Jesus baptised?

After going through a 12-lesson bible correspondence course I was fully persuaded that Jesus was the Saviour of the world. He came to save sinners like me from sin and death. I knew I was a sinner, so I accepted Him as my personal saviour and asked to be baptised.

I knew I must confess my sins before I could be baptised. So, I made a long list of my sins and told God, "Here is my list. Please forgive me!" The pastor was satisfied with my confession and I was baptised. That was many years ago.

What does baptism picture?

Baptism is one of the Christian sacraments. The other is communion. Sacraments are symbolic. A *sacrament* is an outward *sign* of an inward *reality*. It has a profound meaning.

In a baptism ceremony, you go under the water and rise up out of the water. Your going under the water pictures the death and burial of your *old* (sinful) self and your rising up out of the water pictures your *new* life in Christ (holy and blameless). But, it is symbolic of something more. It symbolizes your *acceptance* of Christ's death and burial, and His resurrection and ascension on your behalf, and that you believe that you *co-died* with Him and *co-rose* with Him. This is a profound mystery that acknowledges your faith!

You might say, "How can this be? I'm still alive?" Nevertheless, you acknowledge by faith that you are seeing what He sees, and believing what He believes about you. That's how God sees you in the spiritual realm. *Faith is seeing what He sees and believing what He believes about you.*

Your baptism

What about your baptism? How were you baptised? Did you repent of *all* your sins sincerely and fervently? Did you even understand fully what sin was and if so, were you really able to remember all those times you sinned? Was your faith in Christ perfect? If your answer is no, was your baptism really valid?

Then what about your life after baptism? Did you stop sinning? And if you sinned and repented, did you do it perfectly?

It looks like your baptism, however sincerely you repented or believed, was still *imperfect*! Does that mean it was invalid? Not at all! Baptism is symbolic. It is a ritual you participate in to affirm your faith in Christ's death and resurrection on your behalf, *as you*. What you have acknowledged is that you accept his death and resurrection as your very own death and resurrection.

by
Dr. P. Sellappan

The thief on the cross was not baptised, and yet Jesus assured him of eternal life in His kingdom. There are very sick people; patients who accepted Christ as their Saviour, but died before they could be baptised. A person could die on their way to being baptised! Would these persons then, for whom Christ died, be lost? Of course not! They too would be saved!

Baptism doesn't save us! Christ does! So we don't have to worry if our baptism was not done properly!

Jesus' baptism

Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit so He was born holy. He *never* committed any sin, so He had no sin in Him. He didn't need to be baptised. Baptism is for people like you and me who sin. So, why was Jesus baptised?

Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptise Him. John protested saying it was he who needed baptism.

Jesus asked him to do it anyway, explaining that it was necessary to fulfill all righteousness - and so that we would be made righteous! The entire Trinity was involved in this very significant act. John baptized Jesus; the Spirit descended upon Him visibly like a dove; and the Father declared, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus acted *vicariously* - *doing this for us, as us, on our behalf*. He was baptised for us. He received the Holy Spirit on our behalf and the Father declared us His beloved sons/daughters. This one act was for *all* people!

Not only was He baptised on our behalf, He overcame and lived a sinless life! He assumed our twisted desire and our fallen mindset, and He defeated it all in the wilderness when He was sorely tested after fasting for 40 days!

All this was in preparation for His 3½ year ministry; to be the Saviour of the world, to make us holy and righteous, to convince us once and for all that He defeated our sin and death which was brought into existence by our twisted desire, and to adopt us into His family as His beloved children. It's *fait accompli* - a done deal! We don't have to worry about whether our repentance and baptism were perfect. It is in Christ's baptism and overcoming, and in His death and resurrection on our behalf, that saves us and makes us perfect!

The incarnation changed everything; this reality that God came in the flesh and lived the perfect life we failed to live, and did it as one of us. This is how we have been re-created in His image and likeness! □



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Something to think about.

What our readers say:

Does God intervene in our daily lives?

Mathew Samuel

Ed: Absolutely! If God doesn't intervene in our lives, we have no way of knowing or experiencing Him. The Holy Spirit draws us to God (John 6:44) and grants us repentance (Romans 2:4). As we participate in His life, He renews our minds daily. Many believers have experienced divine healing and protection. Whether we realize or not, we are intimately connected to Him; we have no separate existence apart from Him.

Dear Sirs, I have received the first issue of The Plain Truth (Oct-Dec 2016) and after reading the articles therein, I have found them to be very basic in the promotion of Christianity. What I have learnt is more than that. The seven fold nature of mankind is not mentioned, or perhaps you have not heard of it. Also, meditation is not taught and neither is reincarnation or rebirth mentioned. There was no mention of the law of karma governing the life of mankind and that every person is the master of his/her own destiny, no vicarious atonement whatsoever. Thus, I hereby wish to cancel my subscription with immediate effect.

**Siew Wah Kwie
Singapore**

Ed: Thank you for your feedback on our magazine. Sorry, the magazine didn't meet your expectations. I suspect your understanding of scripture is quite different from ours. If we understood God's mission correctly, God has no desire to promote his religion called Christianity. Rather, He is inviting us to come and participate and experience His abundant life here and now and forever in His kingdom. And we believe He wants us to share that wonderful message with as many people as possible and as simply as possible (2 Corinthians 11:3).

I am a lucky receiver of the Plain Truth magazine for several years now. I love your magazine for staying true, current and fresh. As a young Christian, I have so many questions and thirst for answers. One particular question that I have is: "What/how much work should I do to enter heaven?" I may have misunderstood the verse in Roman 2:6-7, which says, "God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life." I feel inadequate in my faith, always feeling inadequate, always wondering 'have I done enough?' Your article, 'What must you do to be save?' by Johanness Maree has literally answered my prayer. Kudos to the writer! Please keep on blessing with your articles. My spiritual journey has literally

changed after reading that article. I have gained a fresh confidence in my relationship with God. Thank you for that. God bless you.

**Botthe Toimin-Suzuki
Matunggong, Kudat
Sabah**

Ed: We are glad to hear the article has been helpful to you. A rich young man during Christ's earthly ministry asked a similar question, "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?" Jesus' answer was, "Follow me" (Matthew 19:16-24). We can never qualify for eternal life no matter how good or righteous we are, or how many good deeds we do. God gives salvation freely to us because we are His children, not because of our good works or good behaviour. He invites us to come and participate in His life and experience His kind of life. We must read scripture in the correct context; otherwise our interpretations will be wrong.

As I was waiting for my wife yesterday at the Sultan Ismail Hospital... I saw The Plain Truth magazine on the rack. It seems ages I missed reading your magazine. I read the Daily Bread and pass it on to my brothers and sisters and friends and foreign workers and they love to read it too. I took the email from your magazine and am requesting for a copy. I can pay for it - though not much. Thank you and God bless you and the entire Plain Truth team.

**David Yap
Johor Baru**

Ed: We are happy to hear that you like our magazine! Sure, we will add your name to our mailing list. While there is no subscription price, we always welcome contributions from our readers who wish to support our mission to share the gospel with others.

Keep up the good work in God. We have deposited RM200.00 into the Plain Truth account.

**Suranthiran Naidu and family
Sungei Petani**

I just banked into your CIMB account a sum of RM100.00. This is my contribution towards your publication of the Plain Truth magazine. I look forward to receiving your wonderful magazine regularly. Thank you.

Stanley Yeoh

Ed: Thank you all for your generous contributions. We appreciate your support and participation in this ministry.

The PLAIN TRUTH inspires me. It has taught me the way of Life and it is valuable to my spiritual life.

**Kung Kuan Hao,
Tawau**

The PLAIN TRUTH articles open our minds to many things that we take for granted and the words of the Lord become more meaningful. After I have read it, the copy is circulated to many others.

**Dr. Daisy Arianayagam,
Sungei Petani**

The PLAIN TRUTH is spiritually enlightening and helps to spread the Good News to my patients too. A small contribution to continue your good work.

**Dr. Shanta Oommen,
Kuala Lumpur**

The PLAIN TRUTH enlightens me on the knowledge of the Bible. It relates the simple interpretations of the Bible to our everyday life.

**Bobby Ng
Kuala Lumpur**

The current religious knowledge we receive nowadays during the one hour Sunday mass is not enough. Parents and children are too busy with schoolwork, tuition and extra activities and they do not have sufficient time to study the Bible. The PLAIN TRUTH tackles current and biblical issues by using a down-to-earth approach, making the issues easier to understand.

**Lawrence Michael
Cheras**

Although THE PLAIN TRUTH is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel. Donations should be sent to the addresses listed on page 3 or sent electronically to the bank account:

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The Empty Tomb: Reasons to Believe

Jesus Christ's resurrection from a rock sepulcher galvanized the faith of early Christians. The empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Lord were the crowning proof that the Master they loved and served was not just another moral teacher. He was, as he claimed to be, God in the flesh.

This conviction energized the early church. "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard," the apostle Peter testified to the Jewish religious authorities, who could not quench the faith of those early believers.¹

We who read the accounts almost 2,000 years later need to remember that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not, as Paul boldly declared before the elite of his nation, "done in a corner."² Just the opposite was true. The disciples testified in the laboratory of public scrutiny and debate. People in their audiences could refute them at every point, if they were not telling the truth.

To first-century Christians, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the pivotal event in history. Their dramatic encounters with Jesus after his escape from the rock tomb were vivid and unforgettable:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.³

John, an apostle and disciple of Jesus Christ, wrote as an eyewitness to Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead.⁴

Luke, an educated man who wrote a detailed study of the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth, authenticated the report that went from tiny Judea into the world beyond: "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."⁵

Paul distilled the essence of the new faith he helped spread across the Roman Empire: "What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."⁶

by
Neil Earlie

Full public scrutiny

The apostles faced the test of informed public opinion, a jury of their contemporaries. Some in their audiences already had Jesus' blood on their hands. The execution of one or two more fishermen from Galilee wouldn't make much difference.

Yet the disciples had unconquerable confidence. Their words still pulsate with moral fervor and authority. The good news of the resurrection was big news on the streets of Jerusalem. It was hard-hitting. It was effective. It changed lives.

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know," Peter trumpeted.⁷ "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

This bold preaching threw the Jerusalem religious hierarchy completely on the defensive. "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood," they protested.⁸

If the disciples had been perpetrating fraud or deceit, their testimony could have been easily overturned. It wasn't. The willingness to risk all for the truth of the resurrection was convincing testimony from fallible human beings—men who had earlier deserted Christ and fled.⁹ That willingness, and the powerful miracles being done in Christ's name, made the gospel compelling. It rocked Jerusalem.

Continues on pg.7



Christ's Resurrection: Our Hope of Salvation

"If Christ has not been raised," the apostle Paul taught, "your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."¹ The resurrection of Jesus Christ is of momentous importance for every Christian, indeed for everyone on this planet. Because Jesus Christ conquered death, we, too, will live again — and so will our friends and relatives who have already died. That is why the most exhilarating message human ears have yet heard was the one announced to some astonished women outside a rock tomb in first-century Jerusalem: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"²

A foundational teaching

The resurrection of Christ has always been the central teaching of Christianity. James Hastings says, "If the resurrection is not a historic fact, then the power of death remains unbroken, and with it the effect of sin."

Michael Green in *Man Alive* is emphatic: "Without faith in the resurrection there would be no Christianity at all." W. Robertson Nicolls, quoting another writer, puts it plainly: "The empty tomb of Christ has been the cradle of the church."

Anchored to history

To mention Jesus Christ and his life, death and resurrection is to get to the root of the Christian faith, for Christianity claims a basis in historical fact. "There are ancient myths in pagan literature about dying gods who attained some form of resurrection," writes Philip Rosenbaum, "but no other sacred writing intersects human history the way the Bible does. For it is the historical fact of Christ's life, death, and resurrection that separate God's Word from all others."

But the New Testament accounts have come under intense scrutiny and attack. Scottish philosopher David Hume argued in the 1700s that miracles — including Christ's resurrection — violated all known workings of natural law. In our century, theologian Rudolph Bultmann concluded, "An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable." In light of such arguments from rationalists and critics, it is no wonder that theories have been devised for the events of crucifixion week:

- The Swoon Theory: The idea that Jesus didn't really die but faked a death on the cross, then tricked his disciples into thinking that he had conquered death, only to live out his life elsewhere.
- The Theft Theory: The idea that the disciples, other sympathizers, perhaps robbers or someone else stole the corpse. This is the oldest and most widespread argument against Christ's resurrection.

These are bold contentions, almost as bold as the resurrection claim itself. They are rhetorical daggers

by
Neil Earlie

aimed at the very vitals of the Christian faith. Peter wrote, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories... but we were eyewitnesses."³

Who is right?

What about the Swoon Theory? This theory suggests that Jesus Christ plotted — for whatever reasons — the biggest hoax in history. Did Jesus, by some amazingly cunning strategy, fake a death on the cross? Let's keep in mind that the four Gospels are the primary documented evidence for Christ's death, burial and resurrection. We have good internal evidence for believing. These writings are emphatic that Jesus Christ's execution was a public and state-certified spectacle.⁴

"This thing was not done in a corner," Paul argued before King Agrippa, the most influential Jewish official of his day.⁵ How right he was. Jesus Christ's mortal enemies — the leadership elite of his nation — were on the scene. They were watchfully determined to stamp out the Jesus movement.⁶ That is why they schemed behind closed doors to carry out their plot, at risk to their own standing among the people.⁷ It had to be the perfect crime.

Pontius Pilate, the chief Roman official on the scene, double-checked to verify if Christ had died.⁸ The testimony of John 19:23 and Mark 15:39 indicate that at least four Roman soldiers, including a centurion, carried out the execution. You can be sure that Roman occupation troops of the first century knew what death was.

Consider this: Would Christ's foes — opponents eager to crush out the infant Christian movement — have allowed Christ, once in their clutches, to fake a death? This hardly seems logical or consistent with their motives and with the biblical narrative. John Stott demolished the Swoon Theory with common sense. He asks if we can really believe that after the rigours and pains of trial, mockery, flogging and crucifixion he could survive...in a stone sepulcher with neither warmth nor food nor medical care? That he could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which secured the mouth of the tomb... without disturbing the Roman guard? That he could appear to the disciples in such a way as to give them the impression that he had vanquished death? ... Such credulity is more incredible than Thomas' unbelief.

First-century propaganda

The oldest argument advanced against Christ's resurrection is the intriguing theory that Christ's body was stolen. This is a significant claim. The one crowning blow to disprove Christ's resurrection would have been a public display of his body. A display of the corpse would quickly end any "myth" that was developing about the resurrection of Jesus.

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:17

² Luke 24:5-6

³ 2 Peter 1:16

⁴ Mark 15:29

⁵ Acts 26:26

⁶ John 11:46-53

⁷ John 7:25-52

⁸ Mark 15:44-45

⁹ Matthew 28:11-1

¹⁰ John 20:25

¹¹ Acts 17:6

Public exhumings have happened more than once in history; why didn't the rulers of first-century Judea do that? There was a good reason: The body could not be found. Christ had been bodily resurrected. The Gospel account makes the most sense.

The rulers of Jerusalem "gave the soldiers a large sum of money" to circulate the story that Jesus' disciples stole his body.⁹ The Theft Theory is indefensible, no matter who the robbers supposedly were. If the guards were sleeping, how did they know who had stolen the body? Second, the Jerusalem hierarchy had outsmarted themselves — they had posted a guard to prevent this very sort of thing from happening.

As Paul Little asks in *Know Why You Believe*: "What judge would listen to you if you said that while you were asleep, your neighbor came into your house and stole your television set? Who knows what goes on while he's asleep? Testimony like this would be laughed out of any court."

In his book *The Resurrection and the Life*, George Hanson made this point: "The simple faith of the Christian who believes in the Resurrection is nothing compared to the credulity of the skeptic who will accept the wildest and most improbable romances rather than admit the plain witness of historical certainties."

Any explanation, to be credible, must fit all the facts. The Theft Theory doesn't. The case against it is devastating. Even the existence of the New Testament church is evidence that something happened in

Jerusalem, something no adversary could explain. There is no doubt that these defenses of the resurrection ring true. Sincere and learned scholars have labored hard to nullify the claims made against Jesus Christ's resurrection.

A question of faith

Christianity is more than a series of clever arguments. It is more than a list of intellectual debating points that can be argued back and forth. This is why the validity of the Gospel testimony does not remain at the mercy of the latest "debunking" best-seller or archaeological find in the Middle East. In the end, Christianity rests on faith, faith based on a living and ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ, a living Savior!

Thomas wanted the strongest form of proof: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were...I will not believe it."¹⁰ Thomas saw, he tested, and then he believed. Yet Jesus followed this dramatic encounter with the words: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

As Oliver Barclay wrote, "The historical Jesus Christ was an amazing power in the lives of men years after his death. It is not so much the fact that a miracle happened.... The chief reason that the disciples spoke so often about it was that Jesus was alive and with them again." This is why the disciples came storming out of Jerusalem and so influenced the world with their message.¹¹ The living Christ had changed their lives. He can do the same for you. ☐

Continued from pg.5

No wonder Christ's newly energized disciples were "highly regarded by the people."¹⁰ Remember something else: Other popular movements had come and gone in first-century Judea. Sensational leaders had arisen before Jesus of Nazareth, people the world at large has forgotten. One of them, Judas, was also a Galilean, who lived not far from where Jesus was reared.

Around A.D.6, Judas gathered a following and set himself against the Roman power. His movement failed and he was killed. But no one in the first century claimed that this Judas of Galilee was raised from the dead or that he and his followers had many prolonged talks after a resurrection. Still less did anyone risk life and limb for the Judas movement years afterward. Yet ordinary human beings risked their all for Jesus of Nazareth.

History not dogma

The late F.F. Bruce, evangelical author, notes:

The Christian gospel is not primarily a code of ethics or a metaphysical system; it is first and foremost good news, and as such it was proclaimed by its earliest preachers.... This good news is intimately bound up with the historical order, for it tells how for the world's redemption God entered into history, the eternal came into time, the kingdom of heaven invaded the realm of earth, in the great events of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

The disciples were convicted by seeing and touching the Lord Jesus. They believed in the power of the

resurrection. Their testimony was believable because they believed. How about us? Do we believe?

We should. The same Jesus Christ who walked the dusty paths of Galilee is alive today, alive and glorified. He intervenes for those of us who turn to him in faith and belief, just as he did for Peter, Andrew, James and John. The empty tomb could not hold him, and the evil powers of this world—natural and supernatural—could not stamp out the truth of his resurrection.

To experience this transforming power for ourselves, to "know Christ and the power of his resurrection,"¹¹ we will also have to believe in the empty tomb and in the power of the resurrection. We are not asked to make a commitment to Christ without evidence. The empty tomb stands as stark evidence that our Lord and Savior is risen from the dead.

Peter, preeminent preacher of the empty tomb, said it best: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you."¹²

The decision is yours. Will you believe? ☐

¹ Acts 4:20

² Acts 26:26

³ 1 John 1:1-2

⁴ John 20:30-31; 21:24-25

⁵ Luke 1:3-4

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

⁷ Acts 2:22

⁸ Acts 5:28

⁹ Matthew 26:56

¹⁰ Acts 5:13

¹¹ Philippians 3:10

¹² Acts 3:19-20

Jesus Christ's Last Sermon



Jesus Christ spent his final hours of human life nailed to a cross. Despised and rejected by the world he came to save, history's only perfect person took upon himself the consequences of our sins. The Bible records that on that spring day, from a hill outside Jerusalem, Jesus spoke several times. No one Gospel writer records all his sayings. Matthew and Mark describe one. Luke and John each give us three. Together, these sayings constitute a powerful message from our Savior's heart during the hours of his greatest personal agony. They reveal Jesus' innermost feelings as he poured out his life for us.

1) "Father, forgive them"

Only Luke tells us that Jesus, shortly after he was crucified, prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."¹

Nearby were Roman soldiers gambling for his clothes, common people whipped to frenzy by the religious leaders and gawkers who came for the hideous spectacle. The Jewish elders mockingly said they would believe in him if he saved himself (Matthew 27:42-43). On his left and right were two criminals condemned to die with him.

Not everyone at the foot of the cross was hostile to Jesus. Women who had followed him during his ministry and some of his disciples now came forward. His mother, Mary, was mourning the Son whom God had miraculously given her.

by
Grace
Communion
International

Innocent of any crime against God or humanity, Jesus had been betrayed, arrested, scourged and condemned. Now, from the cross, Jesus' thoughts reached above his pain and rejection. Instead of being consumed with his own pain and misery, Jesus asked forgiveness for those responsible for the evil done to him—by extension, all who ignorantly go the way of sin and death.

2) "You will be with me in paradise"

Jesus next spoke to encourage one of the criminals crucified with him. Both criminals, likely thieves or murderers, early on joined bystanders in reviling Jesus. ² Luke tells us, "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!'"³ This man wanted only escape from his pain. The gulf between them remained because this faithless criminal had no desire to know his Savior and repent of his sins.

But a miraculous change occurred in the other criminal. He came to believe. This man was just as guilty as the first. He admitted he deserved to die. He, too, had mocked Jesus earlier, but now he rebuked the other criminal.

We are not told of any other conversation between this second criminal and Jesus. Perhaps only Jesus' example and prayer, which he overheard, moved him so deeply. He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied by offering him hope

for the future: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

All who surrender to Jesus receive not only strength to face the present, but also lasting hope for the future. There is a future beyond the grave. Eternal life in God's kingdom awaits those who will embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior.

3) "Woman, behold your son!"

Jesus honored and showed concern for his mother. When it seemed impossible for him to help anyone, he provided for Mary's care through his trusted friend John.

"When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."⁴

4) "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

For the first time, Jesus' thoughts were on himself. He cried out, "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'—which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"⁵

Many have puzzled over Jesus' seeming doubt. Was Jesus afraid? Had his Father deserted him in his greatest need? Jesus was quoting the first portion of Psalm 22:1, a prophecy of the Messiah's suffering and exaltation.

We sometimes forget that Jesus was fully human. Yes, he was God in the flesh, but he was also subject to all the feelings of mind and body that any of us feel. Jesus spoke these words after three hours of darkness had covered the land.⁶ Jesus hung on the cross alone, where he took our place, to feel the pain and anguish that sin causes.

There, in the darkness and pain, bearing the burden of our sins, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon 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."⁷

Soon Christ would savor the sweetness of eternal victory over sin and death. His final three statements came in rapid succession.

5) "I am thirsty"

Death drew near. The time of final sacrifice was close. Jesus had endured—and overcome—the heat, pain, rejection and loneliness. He could have suffered and died in silence. Instead, unexpectedly, he asked for help. "Knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'"⁸

Jesus asked for a drink and received vinegar, fulfilling David's 1,000-year-old prophecy.⁹ "Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink."¹⁰ The man who had hurried to answer Jesus' request said: "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down."¹¹

6) "It is finished"

Jesus had finished his work on earth. His sixth message was one of triumph: "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."¹²

Jesus' humility rings in his words. His was not a vain, I-showed-you attitude. He did not even say, "I did it." He claimed no credit. He asked no pity. To the end, Jesus' mind was on the work he came to do. He announced, for all to hear, "It is finished."

7) Jesus' final words

Matthew tells us, "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit."¹³ Only Luke preserves Jesus' words: "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last."¹⁴

God is love, and Jesus' ministry showed what love is. He gave himself for us. He preached his last sermon most effectively, by both word and example. In his last seven statements, he affirmed God's greatness and glory.

God's work goes on

Jesus' example and words on the cross bore fruit even before his death, when the repentant robber acknowledged him as Lord and appealed for his mercy.

On that Passover so long ago, Jesus finished his own mission as a human on earth. But his work goes on now in his church. Christ's followers today preach his gospel of salvation. They show his love for fellow humans. And they look for his return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is the wonderful message of good news that Jesus Christ preached the day he died for all. □

Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross

Jesus shared in our humanity. He set an example for us, suffered for us and was victorious over sin and death in his work on the cross. His victory, both in his death and his resurrection, enables us to be reconciled to God and restored to fellowship with him.

While hanging on the cross, Jesus spoke of:

- Forgiveness (Luke 23:32-34)
- Hope (Luke 23:39-43)
- Care (John 19:25-27)
- Loneliness (Mark 15:33-34; Matthew 27:45-46)
- Suffering (John 19:28-29)
- Triumph (John 19:30)
- Reunion (Luke 23:44-46)

¹ Luke 23:34

² Mark 15:32

³ Luke 23:39

⁴ John 19:26-27

⁵ Matthew 27:46;
Mark 15:34

⁶ Matthew 27:45

⁷ Isaiah 53:4-6

⁸ John 19:28

⁹ Psalm 69:21

¹⁰ Matthew 27:48

¹¹ Mark 15:36

¹² John 19:30

¹³ Matthew 27:50;
Mark 15:37

¹⁴ Luke 23:46

Perichoresis - What's That?



A discussion with C. Baxter Kruger, founder of Perichoresis, Inc.

Question: Most of us can't even pronounce perichoresis, much less spell it. What does it mean?

Baxter Kruger [BK]: Some years ago a woman walked into my office around Christmastime with a stack of newsletters in her hand. She was crying, and she slammed the newsletters down on my desk and said, "I just feel like a pile of junk!"

I said, "What is wrong?"

She said, "I've been reading these newsletters from these people from all over the world, and they and their children are all doing all these great things for God, and it just hit me what a worthless life I have. For Pete's sake, I'm married and I've got three kids. When I'm not grocery shopping, I'm cooking the groceries, and when I'm not cooking the groceries I'm cleaning up, and when I'm not doing that I'm trying to find clothes for my children and keep this mess of a house presentable. Sometime in there I'm trying to find time for my husband. I don't even have time to read my Bible. What do I have that I can do for God?"

I said, "Wait a minute, hang on here a minute. Yesterday you spent two hours driving around Jackson searching for a coat for your daughter. A winter coat, and not just any winter coat, but one she would like, one that would be large enough to put away for next year but not look like it was bought this year. One that was on sale. You did it, you found it, and she's thrilled."

The woman said, "What's that got to do with this?"

I said, "Where did that concern for your daughter come from? Did you wake up yesterday morning and decide you were going to be a good momma?"

She said she had been thinking about the coat for a week.

I said, "Isn't Jesus the good Shepherd who cares about all his sheep? He put his concern for this sheep (your daughter) in your heart. You are participating in nothing less than Jesus' life and burden. He was tending to his sheep through you. What is greater than that?"

In the light of the fact that Jesus Christ has laid hold of the whole human race, cleansed us in his death, lifted us up in his resurrection and has given us a place in his relationship with his Father and Spirit in his Ascension,

we've got to rethink everything we thought we knew about ourselves and others and our ordinary human life.

There is nothing ordinary about us and the life we live. Caring for others, from orphans to our friends and the poor, our love for our husbands and wives and children, our passion for music and beauty, for coaching, gardening and fishing; these things do not have their origin in us. They are not something that we invented. It is all coming from the Father, Son and Spirit. When this dreadful secular/sacred divide is exploded, we can see and honor life as it truly is—the gift of participating in the life and relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Question: So we're talking about God meeting us in our day-to-day lives?

BK: Exactly. Through the work of Jesus, we have been adopted into the Trinitarian life. The concept of perichoresis helps us understand what our adoption means for us. We could define perichoresis as "*mutual indwelling without loss of personal identity*." In other words, we exist in union with the Triune God, but we do not lose our distinct personhood in the process. We matter. We are real to the Triune God.

Only the Trinity could have union without loss of personal distinction. If you have union without distinction, you tumble into *pantheism*, and we would be united to God in such a way as to be completely absorbed into him. There would no longer be a distinct "us" to feel and taste and experience the Trinitarian life. If you have distinction without union, you end up with *deism*, where God is up there watching us from a distance, and we never see our humanity as included in the Trinitarian life. Motherhood and fatherhood, work and play and music then appear to be merely secular, non-divine aspects of our human experience. Deism leaves us with a Christ-less humanity, and forces us to search beyond our humanity for connection with God.

In Trinitarian theology we say "no" to both pantheism and deism. We have union but no loss of personal distinction, which means that we matter and that our humanity, our motherhood and fatherhood, our work and play and music form the arena for our participation in the Trinitarian life of God. The Triune God meets us not in the sky or in our self-generated religions, but in our "ordinary" human existence.

Question: So the gospel is about God knowing us and us knowing God?

BK: Exactly. Let me give you a quick story. I like stories better than long and convoluted theological explanations. Many years ago when my son was six (he's 18 now), I was sitting on the couch in the den sorting through junk mail on a Saturday afternoon. He and his buddy came in and they were decked out in their camouflage, face paint, plastic guns and knives, the whole nine yards. My son peers around the corner of the door and looks at me, and the next thing I know, he comes flying through the air and jumps on me. We start wrestling and horsing around and we end up on the floor. Then his buddy flies into us and all three of us are just like a wad of laughter.

Right in the middle of that event the Lord spoke to me and said to pay attention. I'm thinking, it's Saturday afternoon, your son comes in and you're horsing around on the floor, it happens every day all over the world, so what's the big deal? Then it started to dawn on me that I didn't know who this other kid was. I had never met him. He had never met me. So I re-wound the story and

to taste and feel and know my son's relationship with me. He participated in my son's life and communion with me.

Then it dawned on me that that's what perichoresis and our adoption in Christ mean. Jesus is the one who knows the Father. He knows the Father's love and acceptance. He sees the Father's face. Jesus has freedom for fellowship with his Father, and Jesus shares his heart with us. He puts his own freedom for relationship with his Father in us through the Spirit, and like that little boy we get to taste and feel and experience the relationship Jesus has with his Father. He shares it all with us. He unites himself with us, and we get to experience his divine life with him. He shares with us his own knowledge of his Father's heart, his own knowledge of the Father's acceptance, his own assurance of his Father's love, his own freedom in knowing the Father's passionate heart. He reaches into his own soul, as it were, and pulls out his own emotions, and then puts them inside of the whole human race. We're all included in the Son's relationship with the Father in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.



thought about what would have happened if this little boy would have walked into my den alone. Remember, he didn't know me and I didn't know him, and he didn't know my name and I didn't know his name. So he looks over and sees me, a complete stranger, sitting on the couch. Would he fly through the air and engage me in play? Would we end up in a pile of laughter on the floor? Of course not. That is the last thing that would have happened.

Within himself, that little boy had no freedom to have a relationship with me. We were strangers. He had no right to that kind of familiarity and fellowship. But my son knows me. My son knows that I love him and that I accept him and that he's the apple of my eye. So in the knowledge of my love and affection, he did the most natural thing in the world. He dove into my lap. The miracle that happened was that my son's knowledge of my acceptance and delight, and my son's freedom for fellowship with me, rubbed off onto that other little boy. He got to experience it. That other little boy got

Question: Then we never have to worry about whether God accepts us and loves us?

BK: Never. What does the understanding that we are accepted into the mutual indwelling and communion with God remove from our hearts? Fear and hiding. Because of Jesus' knowledge of the Father's acceptance, which he shares with us, we now are free to let go of our racial and personal prejudices, and to love and accept one another, which leads to the freedom to know and be known, which leads to fellowship and mutual indwelling.

This is what the kingdom of the Triune God is all about. The kingdom is simply the life and love, the communion, the fellowship, the camaraderie and joy of the Father, Son and Spirit, being shared with us and coming to full and abiding and personal expression in us, in our relationships with one another and in our relationships with the whole creation, so that the whole earth is full of the Son's knowledge of his Father in the Spirit. □

Garden and wilde

The first Adam began life in an idyllic spot – in a paradise-like garden with plenty of food, vegetation, streams and friendly creatures. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, began his earthly ministry life in a barren, hostile wilderness with virtually nothing.

The tempter (also known as the adversary, accuser, satan, devil, enemy, and deceiver) tempted both Adams (the first and the last), primarily with regard to their identities and sufficiency.

This article examines how the two Adams handled the temptations and the lessons we can learn from them.

Garden temptations

God made Adam and Eve in his *image and likeness*.¹ They both bore his blueprint and DNA. He blessed them with everything they needed to live a good life. They lacked nothing.

The tempter challenged their *identities* and *sufficiency*.² He told them that they lacked something and implied that they were not *like* God. He coaxed them into believing that they could become like God if they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He persuaded them to believe that God was withholding this fruit because He didn't want them to be like Him – wise and knowing good and evil. And so, the deceiver seduced them, and they ate. In turning away from God and believing this lie, they became blind in their deception; they sinned and dragged all humanity with them!

How did they fall? They *doubted* their *identity* and *sufficiency* in God. They believed they were *not* like God when God had clearly told them otherwise (they were made in His image and likeness). They believed the tempter/deceiver instead of the God who had created them. They presumed that God was hiding/withholding some secret wisdom/knowledge that could make them like Him.

The tempter convinced them that they could *become* like God *without* God. All they had to do was eat the fruit from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which represented man's own understanding and his philosophy/religion of good and evil, right and wrong, and his own judgement about what is moral and immoral. The deceiver convinced them that their own religious judgement and philosophical understanding could make them like God, and that they simply needed to rely on themselves, and *not* God!

The truth is we cannot be *humans* by ourselves *without* God. We *exist* only in Him! God is our source; we originated from/in Him. We are created in His image and likeness, and so we can only be human in union (relationship) with Him. This is the essence of our being, and our truest reality!

What lessons can we learn from this story? God tells us that He, and He alone, is the substance of our being



by
Dr. P. Sellappan

(identity) and that our sufficiency is found in Him. Why do we doubt that? He tells us that we are His children, and that He is our Father, and that He loves us so much that He has forgiven us for this blindness, a blindness that persuades us to sin. God *loves* us so much He gave us His son Jesus, who has brought us back into seeing the LOVE we have always existed in, who convinces us once and for all that we have been fully accepted and adopted as co-heirs with Christ into God's glorious family! May we all be fully persuaded of this GREAT LOVE, and come to understand and believe that God is for us, and, if God is for us, who can be against us?



Wilderness temptations

Jesus was baptized in River Jordan by John the Baptist. He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (to make us righteous), and NOT because He needed to be since He was without sin. As He came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove and immediately a voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved son

ness temptations

in whom I am well pleased.”³ It was his Father’s voice. The entire Trinity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were involved in this profound and significant act, which was to save and redeem humanity from sin and death and to restore us to the abundant life we were always meant to live, a life of freedom and one lived in the Father’s LOVE and affection.

Jesus came as a human

Jesus came and lived as one of us, and was subject to all of our human limitations, NOT as some super human with supernatural talents and abilities. No, He came as one of us, as an ordinary human with all the human

into His death and raised in His resurrection. He came to forgive our sin and adopt us into His family. He came to destroy our sin (and our sinful nature) and give us His righteousness. He came to *recreate* us and give us a brand new identity.

Jesus was like us in every way except that He never personally sinned. He grew up and acquired knowledge and wisdom like us. He embraced our humanity so that we would see and know that He fully identified with us. This qualified Him to become our faithful and merciful High Priest.

The three temptations⁴

Immediately after his baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil/tempter. After fasting for forty days he was very hungry. He was physically at his weakest point when the devil challenged his *identity and sufficiency*.

The devil taunted him saying, “If you are the *son of God*, turn this stone to bread and eat it so you can save yourself before you go on to save others. After all, *you are God* and you can perform this miracle easily.” This was the catch: The devil wanted Him to use His divine power, a power He had voluntarily laid aside. If He had used His divine power, He would have disqualified Himself as our savior! How? By using His divine power, He would no longer be representing us as humans or be one who was fully identified as a human Himself. This total identification with our humanity was necessary to save us as clearly understood by His response, “I will trust my God to provide for me. I will not deny my *humanity*.”

Again, the devil tempted him saying, “If you are the *son of God*, go and jump from the temple top and God will send his angels to protect you from all harm.” Jesus answered, “I will not tempt my God willfully.” While God often protects His people from accidents and mishaps, He might not protect us if we deliberately throw ourselves off of a 30 storey building!

After failing twice in appealing to Jesus’ divinity, the devil now appealed to His humanity. He took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of this world. Then he tempted him saying, “I will give you all these kingdoms (representing power, fame, riches and pleasures) if you will just bow down and worship me (and my systems). You can have *everything you want*. As a human, you can do this easily as many are already doing it.” This was the catch: The devil promised all of these material blessings apart from God. He appealed to Jesus’ human tendency to rely on Himself; His own philosophical understanding and religious judgement, and implied that Jesus didn’t need God to have all of these blessings.

limitations. In order to identify fully with ours and His humanity, He gave up His omnipotence (all power), His omniscience (all knowing), and His omnipresence (present everywhere). He had only limited power, limited knowledge and limited presence.

Jesus came to represent us *vicariously*. He was baptised for us. His baptism was *our* baptism. We were baptised



Let's take a closer look at these temptations. Jesus came as God incarnate, as the God-man. As such, *he had to represent both God and man simultaneously*. He must fulfill both of these roles perfectly; His role as God as well as His role as man. As God, He was required to perfectly express God's unconditional love for ALL of humanity. As a human, He was required to perfectly submit in obedience and worship to His Father.

With the first two temptations, the devil appealed to Jesus' *divinity* and ignored His humanity. Being God, He certainly could have turned the stone into bread to satisfy His hunger, but He would have compromised His full trust in God's provision, and His own identification with Himself and us as humans. Similarly, He could have jumped from the top of the temple and called on His angels to protect Him, but He would be willfully tempting His Father and again compromising His own trust in His Father and His full identification with and as a man.

In the third temptation, the devil appealed to Jesus' *humanity* but ignored his divinity. The man Jesus could have certainly bowed down and worshipped the devil and the systems of this world (as many do). But then Jesus would have been living contrary to God's nature and character. Apostle John tells us, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes *not* from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever."⁵

In the first two cases (temptations), Jesus seems to be telling us that he doesn't want to be God by himself and for himself except in union with humanity. Remember, He was and is still, a human.⁶

In the third case, Jesus seems to be telling us that He doesn't want to be a man by Himself and for Himself, except in union with God. Remember, he was and still is God.

As God, Jesus *poured* out his life for humanity in *self-giving* love. He loved them and fully gave himself for them, withholding nothing. As man, He loved God and fully submitted to Him in perfect obedience, even to the point of death on a cross. Thus, He fulfilled His dual role as God and man perfectly. That is how He was qualified to become our perfect savior and high priest.

Lessons for us

As those made in God's image and likeness, *our origins are divine*. We are not *merely human*; we are connected to him, albeit mystically.

The devil challenged Jesus' *identity*. Jesus overcame by identifying himself as *both* God and man, as Son of God and as son of man. *He fully lived as God and fully lived as man. As God, he did not deny his humanity. As man, he did not deny his divinity.* That was how he overcame the devil's temptations.

With regard to our identities, the devil *still* tempts us, even today. He tells us that we are separate from God, and tempts us to live lives believing lies; untruths that are rooted in lack and disconnected from God. The enemy still *deceives* us even today, to rely primarily on our own philosophical understanding and religious judgement of who we think God is, of who we believe

we are, and who we believe others are like, rather than simply living loved, and loving others.

God asks us to overcome the devil by *relying on Jesus' faith and his finished work*.⁷ He has cancelled our sins and made us righteous, and has united us to God *permanently - eternally. We are in Him and He is in us*.⁸ *That makes us both human and divine.* This is our TRUEST identity! So let's *live in Christ* and participate in His joyful and dynamic life as His brothers and sisters.

Let's summarize: The devil tempted both Adams with regard to their identities. As the first Adam originated from God and bore his image and likeness, he could only be human in union with God. That was his truest reality, but instead of simply believing that, he sought to become like God without God! This is impossible, and that is why God had lovingly warned him of the death that would follow if he chose to eat of the fruit of that tree (of unreality). *There is simply no life outside of God.* We need to *wake up* to that reality and *choose to live in Christ who is our all in all*.⁹

Jesus, the last Adam emptied Himself, even though He was God, and came as a human in order to completely identify with us, with our humanity, and to save us from sin and death (blindness and life lived in unreality). He overcame His own temptations by living both as God and as a man (God-man) perfectly. *He chose not to be God except in union with man and he chose not to be man except in union with God. By doing so, he forged an unbreakable bond between God and humanity.* And He invites us to come and participate in His joy-filled and wonder-full life; a life lived in the freedom of knowing who we truly are... humans who are BELOVED of God.¹⁰ Why not go for it? ☐

- 1 Genesis 1:17
- 2 Genesis 3:1-4
- 3 Matthew 3:13-17
- 4 Matthew 4:1-11
- 5 1 John 2:15-17
- 6 John 1:14, Romans 5:15, 1 Corinthians 15:48-49, 1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 10:12
- 7 1 John 5:4
- 8 John 14:20
- 9 Ephesians 4:6, Colossians 3:11
- 10 1 Corinthians 2:9

Our faith can grow

Most of us begin our Christian experience wondering if God really does exist. We aren't any different from Abraham, Moses and other giants of faith who began their journey with God having little or no faith. But their faith increased, enabling them to serve God in dramatic ways. What about *our* faith? Can it grow? Yes, it can. Let's look at how faith develops from weak to mature faith.

Weak faith

When we examine the wonders of nature, or perhaps through prayer, or studying Bible prophecies that have been fulfilled, we may begin to believe in an almighty God. We might call this intellectual faith, or simple mental acceptance of God's existence. Many people have this kind of faith, some even from childhood, but unfortunately they may not nurture their faith, allowing it to stagnate. Consequently they miss out on many of life's blessings—never coming to know God's loving nature and receive the joyous life He wants us to have.

This "head knowledge" type of faith can also lead to spiritual problems, such as being burdened with a constant guilty feeling, or doubting God's true nature leading them to fret about their standing with God ("Has He *really* forgiven me?").

Or, like Adam and Eve, people with weak faith can easily be deceived. I know some who have drifted into legalism, and others who seem to focus solely on peripheral issues such as trying to determine when Jesus will return.

Our journey with God may begin with weak faith, but it doesn't have to remain there.

Wavering faith

A man came to Jesus asking Him to heal his son of a serious affliction. Jesus responded, "'Everything is possible for him who believes.'" The father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"¹

That is an appropriate expression of the up-and-down faith that many Christians have, and I suppose most of us occasionally experience. We believe that God is who He says He is: all-powerful, loving, full of grace, but in times of difficulty our faith may falter. We may think "If He truly loves me, why am I in this difficult situation?"

Aside from occasional doubts, many Christians never grow beyond a constantly wavering faith, seemingly living in constant anxiety, burdened with worldly cares and worries.

We can, and should strive to develop faith that never wavers.

Mature faith

God desires that we have full, absolute confidence that He will do what He says He will do—that His promises will *never* fail. Mature faith expresses itself in



by
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gladly accepting Jesus as our *personal* Lord and Savior. With full faith we rest assured that Jesus is guiding our lives, and no matter what may happen, He will work everything out for our ultimate good.

Mature faith leads us into a life of dedicated service. When we fully recognize what Jesus has done for us we can't help but respond with good deeds. James, the Lord's brother, expressed this kind of faith when he noted that faith and actions go together.

Developing faith

Our faith can and should blossom and become fruitful in our Lord's service. As Jesus said, faith starts out small like a tiny mustard seed, and grows into a fully developed plant.

We have a role in developing faith. Regular Bible study is vital. Faith also comes by hearing the Bible expounded.³ That means hearing Scripture explained by mature Christians in Bible studies or church services, and following up as the Bereans did by examining the Scriptures to see if what they heard was true.⁴

Continues on pg.17



- 1 Mark 9:23, 24
- 2 James 2:23
- 3 Romans 10:14-17
- 4 Acts 17:11
- 5 Luke 11:11-13
- 6 Romans 4:21

Conversations...Discerning His Presence - Face To Face

All theological language is an approximation, offered tentatively in holy awe. That's the best human language can achieve. We can say, 'It is like'... or 'it is similar to'..., but we can never say with absolute certainty, 'IT IS'... because we are in the realm of beyond, of transcendence, of mystery. We absolutely must maintain a fundamental humility before the Great Mystery; otherwise religion worships itself and its formulations instead of God." (Richard Rohr)

Up until the last few years, life for me had fundamentally become about ascertaining and remaining in a 'RIGHT' theology, and avoiding a 'WRONG' theology at all costs! It's only been recently that I'm coming to believe that it is our experience of Christ... in encounter... as in a mirror, that we are RE-FORMED; even as we awaken to this amazing God who first desired us... (Ephesians 1:4 Mirror) and who LOVES ALL OF US with an everlasting LOVE... It is only in seeing and believing this that we begin to RE-FLECT this 'Shekinah' so that others can also discover and find themselves as "located in the bosom of our Abba." (Andre Rabe)

As I shared in my article 'Reflections on Incarnation and Resurrection' (Jan-Mar 2017 issue), "A true mirror first receives an image and then RE-FLECTS it back truthfully - but now so that I can see myself too. The all important thing is that you find the right mirror that mirrors you honestly and at depth. ALL personhood is created in this process, and our job is always to stay inside this mirroring." (Richard Rohr) Might Jesus be that 'TRUE MIRROR'? And if so, what did His life RE-FLECT in His short time on earth? What was Jesus' theology, and how did His own language RE-FLECT a "humility before the Great Mystery?" In communicating His theology, was Jesus a man given to monologues? The dictionary describes a monologue as a form of communication that presumes singularity. Unfortunately, monologues, by their very nature, involve only one person and that one person might tend to dominate or monopolize, and disallow discourse, feedback or dialogue. Jesus seemed to me to be a man given to deep and vulnerable conversations where others were invited into new ways of seeing and believing, where they were encouraged to authentically participate and explore courageously, along side of Him and others. So, how can our own language and theology actually expand our conversations and allow for transmission, for impartation and revelation? How can we create loving spaces where we can mutually explore and discover God (LOVE) together - face to face?

After all, the language we speak that makes up our conversations is simply words strung together, and either spoken, or written, to convey ideas that are essentially made up of our viewpoints; limited ways in which we see, think, and interact with God, ourselves, and others. It is from this same language, and these conversations that we are forever constructing and deconstructing our 'selves', and trying to make sense of this bittersweet

by
Alyson Sousa

world we live in. Even God's conversation with Them (Trinity) expanded to create from Their language, Their very words spoken... As a result, the world... and WE came into being! (Genesis 1, 2) Thus, language is always creating and altering, re-creating and re-altering the very nature of what is possible! When we are seeing God, face to face (in each other), our conversations, which hopefully are made up of both listening and speaking, have profound power to collaboratively compose, accomplish, and help connect the dots for ourselves and for others. As mirror beings of God, we can be His instruments of imagination and inspiration! So, how can we enter into and abide in conversations where we encourage exploration and discovery; where communication is a creative force that alters the very nature of what is possible, where disagreement does NOT threaten vulnerable dialogue, but is seen as an opportunity towards greater understanding and mutual respect, and where fear is diminished and LOVE abounds?

Have you ever considered that perhaps even the scriptures were never meant to be read and understood as meandering monologues; but as "rich conversations that move to and fro, forward and backward with ideas that develop and regress" while entertaining the possibility that there just might be an overall movement and trajectory, a progressive and unfolding reality to be explored and mined for treasure? Discovering that the bible is made up of significant conversations between a PERFECT God and imperfect humans, and human to human; in different times in history (His-story)... in various relational contexts... and over a very long period of time... has felt to me a lot like coming into a wide open space... no longer limiting my experience of this WONDER-FULL God! We can see this in the bible in general, and in Genesis (Chapters 3 and 32) and in the gospels (Matthew 5, Luke 24) in particular, where God courageously and respectfully entered into our language, and even into our myths to make His TRUE self known! It is mind blowing to imagine the God who created it all vulnerably choosing to humbly enter and endure my choices, decisions I have made that often spring from conversations I've already had, or am having, shadow stories I've told and sometimes still tell; all the while refusing to overpower my free moral agency and still make His TRUE self known! He willingly enters into our dramas, and the darkness that we create in our own misunderstanding and confusion, and for the sake of LOVE, audaciously yields to us whilst still patiently allowing for genuine discovery to occur!!!

God always meets us at the point of our genuine need, and using the beauty of His divine LOVE, in a language we understand, He graciously begins to unravel all of our ideas about who we think He is, and who we think we are. The wonder of the scriptures and the reality of my own life reveals a God who painstakingly and patiently, albeit progressively, reveals Himself to people

just like you and me... so that we can understand the importance of our existence as humans made in His image and likeness. Truly, it is our humanity that shapes and influences our understanding of God. I believe that is at least one of the reasons why it was necessary for God to wrap Himself in flesh and live among us... as one of us!!! God Himself entered the conversation in the fullness of time... reconciling ALL that is in Heaven and ALL that is on earth to Himself. (Ephesians 1:10 Mirror)

When God reveals Himself in relationships where conversations unfold, and where language displays the nature of what we think of as reality, it is always to dismantle our illusions of reality, and overturn the lies of fear that enslave us, so that we can come to understand we are the ones who constructed these so called realities in the first place, and to help us awaken to LOVE... It is His desire that we actually walk in the freedom for which Christ died and begin to express ourselves vulnerably and daringly, so that our conversations draw us into deeper communion and levels of intimacy that previously seemed inaccessible to us. These kinds of conversations might be the difference between whether we are outwardly changed or utterly transformed, from the inside out... and brought back to that face to face encounter with PERFECT LOVE where "In Him every face is unveiled. In gazing with wonder at the loveliness of God displayed in human form, we suddenly realize that we are looking into a mirror, where every feature of His image articulated in Christ is reflected within us! The spirit of the Lord engineers this radical transformation; we are led from an inferior mindset to the revealed endorsement of our authentic identity! (2 Corinthians 3:18 Mirror) ☐



Continued from pg.15

We need to ask our Heavenly Father for more faith, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus' disciples asked Him about how to pray, part of His response was, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"⁵ Let's not hesitate to ask our Heavenly Father for more faith!

In Scripture we repeatedly see how God fulfilled His promises to numerous individuals who lived lives of faith. Sharing our Christian journey with other Christians increases our faith.

Even in my Christian journey, I've heard accounts from many who have had prayers answered, including miraculous escapes from danger, and dramatic healings. Our faith grows as we learn of how God has worked in people's lives, as well as in our own lives. I can see that the Lord has brought about some beneficial opportunities in my life, as well as blocking some of my plans that would have had unpleasant results. Thank you Lord!

Our faith, yours and mine, can grow from simply head knowledge into deep, whole, energizing "heart" knowledge that leads us into a productive Christian life that is pleasing to us and our Lord.

Let's strive to be like Abraham, the father of the faithful, who was "fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."⁶ And His promises are wonderful and numerous.

Father in heaven, we ask that you lead us into a life of faith that never wavers or worries, but fully trusts in you and in your gracious promises. In Jesus' name we ask, Amen.☐

Living in the Present



Many people live in the past, constantly lamenting what might have been. Instead of accepting what cannot be changed and moving on, they prefer to be held captive by things they can do nothing about.

Others put their lives on hold waiting for the future. As soon as all their preconceived needs are met, they will get their priorities straight and live the good life.

While it's true we can learn from the past and look toward the future, we live today. God lives in the present. His name is "I am" not "I was" or "I will be" or "I might have been." God meets our needs daily.¹ Our walk with God is a day-by-day journey. By not living in the present, we can miss what God has in mind for us today.

From a spiritual perspective, we live in the present by being open to God's presence in our lives every day. We seek a closer relationship with him.² We do not let the past drag us down or the worries of the future hinder our daily walk with God.

This daily walk with God is vital, but how we walk with him is also important.

"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present." —Bill Keane, creator of the "Family Circle" cartoon series.

Let's use the analogy of taking a nature walk. Since I'm not drawn to nature as many are, I could wander aimlessly down a trail unaware of surroundings. When asked what I saw I might not even remember. Others notice the chirping bluebird, the laughing child, the leaves changing color, a fish jumping in a pond or a vibrant sunset and realize all those things have

by
**Barbara
Dahlgren**

something to do with God. They are aware and alert to God's presence all around them. How I yearn for that!

Prayers of those living in the present become more than begging God to give them what they want. They want God's will revealed to them and his desires to be their desires. They pray throughout the day—some big prayers and many little prayers—of praise, thanks, and requests for immediate help to bring a thought or action back to where God would want it to be.³

Studying God's Word becomes more than just reading a few scriptures.⁴ They think about how those scriptures apply to their daily lives. They realize the Bible is a living book God uses to speak to them, so they ask God to help them understand it more fully. They want scripture written on their hearts so it comes to mind when needed in a given situation throughout a day.

Meditation becomes more than busy thought. They purpose themselves to think about God, his Word, biblical principles and how Christ would handle situations.⁵ They also learn to be still and know God.⁶ They dwell on God's goodness, mercy, love and grace.

This is their walk with God, and they will do this every day, all day long. When they wake up tomorrow they'll do it again because God's mercies and love for us are brand new every day.⁷ There is something new to be learned about God each and every day, but we'll miss it if we aren't living in the present. □

¹ Matthew 6:11

² Matthew 6:33

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

⁴ Acts 17:11

⁵ Psalm 1:2,
Joshua 1:8

⁶ Psalm 46:10

⁷ Lamentations 3:22-23

A transformed life

One night as I was driving back home after some errands I saw a man being attacked by a dog. Someone in the housing estate had forgotten to close their front gate and a dog from one of the houses had gotten out and was now going after the man. There was no one else around and the animal was ferociously chasing after the man. Immediately I drove my car in between the man and the dog to block its path but the relentless dog refused to back away. Again and again it attacked the man who was by now paralyzed with fear. Quickly I gestured the man to get into the car as there was no way for him to escape. He jumped in and thanked me for helping him. The man was on his way to the mosque for prayers. I dropped him off at the mosque and continued driving. A thought came into my mind. At times of distress, emergencies, disasters or harm does it matter what religion, race or social status people belong to?



by
Devaraj Ramoo

his love for humanity that reflected God the Father. Down through the centuries even violent people have been transformed when they read the gospel about him. Recently one individual, a terrorist, was so overwhelmed by Jesus' teaching to love our enemies, and to bless those who curse us that he forsook his violent ways.³ When we come to Jesus in faith we undergo a complete change, which under the power of God will find expression in character and conduct.

What exactly is transformation? It comes from the Greek word 'metamorphoo' which means to change into another form. From this comes the word 'metamorphosis'. An example is, when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. Those who receive Jesus Christ are transformed in character. Our hearts and minds will not focus on violence, prejudice or hate but rather on love, joy and peace. We will desire to be like Christ

as the spirit of God begins to guide us. Physically we will look the same but inwardly a transformation will begin to occur. The love of God will fill our hearts and minds and we in turn will touch others with the same love.

Sadly, some people are offended by the gospel and message of Christ. They fear that they are being coerced into conversion, that is, to discard their customs, cultures and religion to take up a new religion and practices. Transformation is something that we

allow to be done to us. It is not coerced or forced. Jesus never forced anyone to follow him. Neither did he condemn anyone who did not follow him. He gave his life on the cross for all humanity. His blood that was shed for the remission of sins was for all mankind. He invites us to spend time with him and see for ourselves who he really is, the Son of God.

The gospel of John relates the incident where two of his disciples first heard him speak and decided to approach him. They followed him as he walked. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?" They said to him "Teacher, where are you staying?" To this Jesus answered, "Come and see." ⁴ The same Jesus now invites you to come and see for yourselves the salvation he has for you. Won't you come and see? □

The essence of humanity is to realize that we all share the same existence in this world and experience trials and circumstances where we need the support and comfort of each other. We are so divided by our belief systems, politics, ethnicity and pride that we have compartmentalized ourselves in mindsets whereby we often ostracize others who do not conform to our ways. An attitude of belittling, condemning and insulting others who practice a different faith or who are a different



race seems to be growing in society today. Instead of developing closer ties with each other the opposite is growing. When Jesus was here on earth two thousand years ago he proclaimed the gospel or good news of the Kingdom of God. Wherever he went he served the ordinary people. Great multitudes came to him with the sick and those who were demon possessed. He healed them all.¹ Never once did he discriminate anyone. Jesus was filled with love and compassion for humanity. He even miraculously fed five thousand men and women who had gathered to hear him speak.² Those who decided to follow him were not coerced or forced to be his disciples. These people saw God in person.

When they met him they themselves were transformed. They were not drawn to his looks or personal appearance. Rather his approach to life and

1 Matthew 12:15

2 Matthew 14:14-21

3 Matthew 5: 43-44

4 John 1: 37-39

Concerning suffering, peace and hope

Because some of my dear friends are going through severe health trials, I've been thinking about suffering and the peace and hope that God gives us in times of suffering. I feel very deeply for these friends—concerned about the pain they are experiencing and the anxiety they must feel concerning what might be coming. When our loved ones suffer, we struggle to find words of reassurance and comfort. I'm sure you can identify with what I'm trying to say here.

All people desire a life that is free of suffering. That includes those who deny God's existence. Sadly, their worldview leaves them without assurance of God's help in times of suffering. But as Christians, we have a different worldview—we are blessed to know that God is alive and active and we cling to his sure promise to



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

makes no sense to unbelievers.¹ The apostle Paul, no stranger to pain and suffering, called it "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding."²

One of the ways God gives us peace is by reassuring us that he understands. Jesus has experienced fear, pain, suffering and death. Knowing that he was about to be tortured and then crucified, Jesus prayed with great emotion in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."³ Then the next day, hanging on the cross, in one of his last, tortured breaths, Jesus shared our angst and even our despair when he quoted from Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"⁴



always be with us—including in times of suffering and pain. We look to him for his gifts of supernatural peace and hope in the midst of suffering.

God's gift of peace

Some Christians wrongfully believe that if their faith is strong enough, they will never suffer. But that idea distorts the gospel. Jesus did not promise to airlift us out of all of life's troubles. Instead, he promised that, whatever our circumstances, God—Father, Son and Spirit—would never abandon us; never lose control of our situation. Jesus promised that when his followers suffer, they will experience God's gift of peace.

Even when we feel alone, God is right there with us—extending his friendship and support. Even situations that, humanly speaking, seem to be desperate are not beyond his reach. Our God is omnipresent and sovereign over all things, including eternity. This awareness—this assurance—allows us to have a sense of peace that

This anguished cry from the cross tells us that Jesus identifies fully with our pain, our suffering and our eventual death. Jesus is right by our side throughout all our trials. His assurance that he feels our pain and never leaves or forsakes us is not just a routine, "get well soon" tweet from the comfort and safety of heaven. He shows us, in his parable in Matthew 25, that he feels the pangs of those who are hungry, the loneliness of the prisoner, and the cry of the poor.

Jesus' involvement with our pain and suffering did not end at the cross. He is personally and actively at work here and now—suffering along with us through our every grief and heartache. His presence, though invisible, is real. He cries with us; aches with us. He is so close to us, that Paul could say that our suffering somehow is a sharing in Jesus' own suffering.⁵

As our "merciful and faithful high priest,"⁶ Jesus is at our side. He *never* leaves us—not even in the midst of our darkest nightmares.⁷ "Because he himself suffered

Getting Out the Speck

We've all experienced the discomfort of a speck of dirt in the eye. The last time this happened to me, I was able to locate and remove the little black dot giving me so much irritation. But I immediately experienced more pain when I blinked. Something was under my eyelid. I pulled, twisted and lifted but couldn't find anything. I splashed cold water into my eye. I did everything short of standing on my head to try and dislodge whatever was in there, but to no avail. I decided to wait it out and try not to blink or think about it, hoping it would work its way out. After 10 minutes, which seemed like forever, I blinked and it was gone! I spent another 10 minutes feeling thankful and relieved, marvelling at how amazing it felt to blink without wincing. We do take little things like blinking for granted.

I couldn't help but think of Matthew 7: "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye."

When the first speck was in my eye, I had to get it out. I knew it was there, I saw it and I took care of it. I couldn't think about or do anything else until it

by
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¹ Romans 12:2

was gone. The second one was different. I wasn't as disabled as I was with the first one. It only hurt when I blinked. I resigned myself to it as I had no idea when it would come out.

Even though we can never get used to a speck in the eye, we can unfortunately get used to the proverbial log, to the point we don't even know it's there. We can fall into bad habits of thinking or behaving, not realizing these habits may be harmful to others or ourselves, including judging, which was the point of Jesus' comments. He wasn't giving us a command or a prescription to remove all the sin from the lives of others or even our own. He knew we can't do either without his help.

We know it too. How many of us have wasted money on self-help books or seminars, only to find ourselves right back where we started, minus money and time we can't get back? And how many times have we tried to fix or correct others, only to cause hard feelings or chase friends or loved ones away?

What we *can* do is refrain from judging others or thinking we know better than they. We can give people the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions. And we can trust God through the Holy Spirit to transform us into the image of Jesus.¹ He's the one who does the heavy lifting of those logs. That's what grace is all about. ☐

Continued from pg.20

when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."⁸ We can take great comfort in this, knowing that he is willing and fully able to "empathize with our weaknesses."⁹

We get a better sense of Jesus' presence with us when we serve one another. I am always strengthened when I experience or simply hear of our brothers and sisters in Christ displaying true friendship by being at the side of those who suffer, or by simply assuring them that, "You are in my prayers." It is so important that we "bear one another's burdens."¹⁰ In doing so we somehow share in Christ's own giving of comfort to another person.¹¹

When we are confronted with death—our own or of a loved one—these promises become more than just pious words to be read at a funeral. Jesus actually did—actually does—share our humanity—all of it, from beginning to end. As a perfect substitute for us, he tasted death for all of us. But having tasted it, he, so to speak, spat it out. He showed that physical death was not the end of life. He elevated human existence to a place of spiritual union with the Father by the Spirit. The wonderful benefit of what Jesus did so long ago extends from the past, to the present, and right on into

- ¹ John 14:27
- ² Philippians 4:7
- ³ Luke 22:42
- ⁴ Matthew 27:46
- ⁵ Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24
- ⁶ Hebrews 2:17
- ⁷ Hebrews 13:5
- ⁸ Hebrews 2:18
- ⁹ Hebrews 4:15
- ¹⁰ Galatians 6:2
- ¹¹ 2 Corinthians 1:3-7
- ¹² Romans 5:10
- ¹³ Romans 8:18
- ¹⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:13

the future. "For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"¹²

God's gift of hope

I am not saying that we should have a parade of happiness when Jesus leads us through the valley of the shadow of death. Death is a great enemy, but it is the *last* enemy that we will ever face. It has been completely defeated by our Savior. Though knowing this does not remove all of our anxiety or pain, it does put it in perspective. That is why Paul wrote, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."¹³

Yes, we grieve—but not "like the rest of mankind, who have no hope."¹⁴ Indeed, we have great hope—a hope that is rooted and anchored in Christ Jesus.

I pray that we all will be comforted and encouraged by these words of wonderful truth..☐

Trinitarian vs. Unitarian worship

Review 2 of James B. Torrance's book:
Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace

Trinitarian worship

In chapter one, JB contrasts "Trinitarian worship" with what he refers to as "Unitarian worship." He emphasizes that Trinitarian worship is all about Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who through his high priestly ministry, grants humanity the "gift of participating through the Spirit" in his own "communion with the Father." In and with Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, we "draw near to God our Father" in worship that is Trinitarian in both form and substance. JB elaborates:

There is only one Mediator between God and humanity. There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours. It is the offering by which [Jesus] has sanctified for all time those who come to God by him.¹ There is only one who can lead us into the presence of the Father by his sacrifice on the cross.

[This] Trinitarian and incarnational [view of worship]... takes seriously the New Testament teaching about the sole priesthood and headship of Christ, his self-offering for us to the Father and our life in union with Christ through the Spirit, with a vision of the Church as the body of Christ. It is fundamentally sacramental, but in a way which enshrines the gospel of grace---that God our Father, in the gift of his Son and the gift of the Spirit, gives us what he demands---the worship of our hearts and minds. He lifts us up out of ourselves to participate in the very life and communion of the Godhead, that life of communion for which we were created.... The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the grammar of this participatory understanding of worship....

Trinitarian worship is thus *Christ-centered*, emphasizing the person of Jesus Christ as "the real agent of worship....the High Priest who, by his one offering of himself for us on the cross, now leads us into...the holy presence of the Father, in holy communion."

Unitarian worship

In contrast, "Unitarian worship" is *human-centered*--a "do-it-yourself-with-the-help-of-the-minister" form of worship that we do before God. It wrongly assumes that the only priesthood needed is our own. One of the sad results is a de-emphasis (even marginalization) of the sacraments, which in Trinitarian worship are "the supreme expression of all worship."

JB points out that in the sacrament of Communion (also called the Lord's Table and the Eucharist), the risen and ascended Lord "meets us...in the power of the Spirit, to bring his passion to our remembrance and to draw us to himself that we may share his communion with the Father and his intercessions for the world." Sadly, this reality does not find a central place in Unitarian worship.

Over the last 20 years, my own tribe (Grace Communion International) has followed the Spirit in transitioning from a legally-shaped, moralistic, Unitarian worship,

by
Ted Johnston

to a Trinitarian worship that is both grace-based and gospel-shaped.

What went wrong?

How is it that many Christians, in embracing a Unitarian worship, drifted from the ancient and orthodox Trinitarian, Nicene faith of the historic church? The answer is rather complex, but as JB notes, it has largely to do with allowing the doctrine of the Trinity to recede from its once central and foundational place in Christian faith and practice. By most definitions, to be Christian is to accept as primary the doctrine of the Trinity. The sad reality in many churches, though, is that if that doctrine were taken out of the statement of beliefs, essentially nothing would change in that church's teaching and practices. JB elaborates:

If [in diminishing the doctrine of the Trinity] we take our eyes off Jesus Christ, the only one who can lead us by the Spirit into communion with the Father, do we not fall back on ourselves and our own religious efforts...what Paul calls a false "confidence in the flesh,"² that we can meet God's holy requirements, the *dikaïomata* of the law?

Forms of Unitarian worship

Unitarian worship comes in several forms and JB examines two of them. The first is a *moralistic* form where Jesus is viewed primarily as a teacher of ethical principles. The second form is *individualistic*, emphasizing religious experience with a focus on personal encounter with God. As good as it might sound, this second form tends to reduce the gospel to "events" with an emphasis on the blessings of Christ more than on the divine-human person of Christ. As JB notes, this individualistic approach fails to recognize that "salvation is not simply through the work of Christ...but is primarily given to us in his person..." Though this second form of Unitarian worship rightfully acknowledges the God-humanward work of Jesus, it (sadly) tends to diminish or entirely overlook the human-Godward work of Jesus---substituting *our* work (and worship) for the ongoing work (and worship) of Jesus on our behalf. JB comments:

[The Unitarian approach] emphasizes *our* faith, *our* decision, *our* response in an event [oriented] theology, which short-circuits the vicarious humanity of Christ and belittles [our] union with Christ. For all that it may emphasize [about] the vicarious work of Christ on the cross to bring forgiveness and make our faith a real human possibility, it fails to see the place of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ as the *leitourgos*³ To reduce worship to this two dimensional thing---God and ourselves, today---is to imply that God throws us back upon ourselves to make our response. It ignores the fact that God has already provided for us that response which alone is acceptable to him---the offering made for the whole human race in the life, obedience and passion of Jesus Christ.... Whatever else

¹ Hebrews 2:11; 10:10, 14

² Romans 10:3, Philippians 3:3

³ Hebrews 8:2

Sayings by Richard Rohr

If it is true, then it has to be true everywhere.

When prayer is authentic, it will always lead to actions of mercy; when actions of mercy are attempted at any depth, they will always drive you to prayer.

Much of history has been recorded from the side of the winners except for the unique revelation of the Bible, which is an alternative history from the bottom, from the side of the enslaved, the dominated, the oppressed, and the poor, culminating in the scapegoat figure of Jesus himself.

As the "imperial mind" took over, religion had less to do with Jesus' teachings on nonviolence, inclusivity, forgiveness, and simplicity, and instead became fully complicit in the world of domination, power, war, and greed itself.

It's time to rebuild Christianity from the bottom up. If the foundation is not solid and sure, everything you try to build on top of it is weak and ineffective.

If God is Trinity—love and relationality—that creates a very different kind of humanity. It leads us to a different worldview, sociology, politics, and sense of belonging and purpose.

Christianity is meant to be a loving way of life now, not just a system of beliefs and requirements that people hope will earn them a later reward in heaven.

Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about

humanity. Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God.

Most religion begins with a transcendent God up there in heaven, and then we try to explain everything down here in relationship to that transcendent God. Jesus taught us to find God incarnate in this world, in our neighbor, in the Eucharist—that is, in the ordinary elements of this earth.

The Bible is the worst book when it is used for bullying and self-justification; it is the best book when it is used for the healing and transformation.

Jesus taught us how to see, what to emphasize, and also what could be de-emphasized or ignored. Jesus himself is our hermeneutic!

God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, in the now, in the concrete incarnations of life.

Jesus knows there is a bigger arc to the story—one that reveals a God that is compassionate and inclusive.

As in the Trinity, spiritual unity is diversity loved and overcome, never mere uniformity.

All of creation and each of us have received original blessing. Yet we have been conditioned to focus on the negative in ourselves and others.

The pattern of dynamic relationship is the very structure of the universe. It is a pattern of mutual giving and receiving: in a word, Love.

our faith is, it is a response to a response already made for us and continually being made for us in Christ, the pioneer of our faith.

Trinitarian worship: it's about relationship!

In contrast to these two forms of Unitarian worship, incarnational, Trinitarian worship has as its essential "grammar" the doctrine of the Trinity, putting at the heart and center of worship the unique *relationship* between the incarnate Son of God, Jesus and the Father, in the Spirit. JB comments:

[In Trinitarian worship] Christ is presented to us as the Son living a life of union and communion with the Father in the Spirit, presenting himself in our humanity through the eternal Spirit to the Father on behalf of humankind. By his Spirit he draws men and women to participate both in his life and worship and communion with the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world.

Incarnational, Trinitarian worship is about relationship--first and foremost between the Son and the Father, in the Spirit; and then between the triune God and ourselves: with the Father, in the Spirit, by and through Christ (our Mediator and High Priest). This relating between God and humanity is a "double movement of grace: God-humanward and human-Godward"---a

movement that in both its aspects is grounded entirely in the relational, "perichoretic being of God."

As JB notes, incarnational, Trinitarian worship is "a gift of grace [by which] the Father has given us the Son and the Spirit to draw us into a life of shared communion--of participating through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father--that we might be drawn in love into the very Trinitarian life of God himself".

This "deep intimate communion," is a relationship of "mutual indwelling" and "perichoretic unity." JB then concludes chapter one with this exhortation:

[Let us] return to "the forgotten Trinity"---to an understanding of the Holy Spirit, who delivers us from a narcissistic preoccupation with the self to find our true being in loving communion with God and one another--to hear God's call to us, in our day, to participate through the Spirit in Christ's communion with the Father and his mission from the Father to the world--to create in our day a new humanity of persons who find true fulfillment in other-centered communion and service in the kingdom of God....

And to that I say, Amen! ☐

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