

# *The Church and It's Sacramental Life\**

(by Dean J Carter)

*. . . every authentic expression of the being and life of the church in the world has sacramental character, for it always rests on and represents the mystery of Christ and his Spirit, of his life for us and our life in him. This applies equally to the life of the believer: there too lies a hidden depth and a secret significance, for there too God in Christ is at work. It is in the divine call and promise in Jesus that our own identity is declared, and it is in response to that call and promise that our true life grows, grasped by the graciousness of the Father and made a testimony in the Spirit to his love in the incarnate Son. Each individual Christian life is essentially sacramental in its core, called and challenged and — however brokenly and fragmentally — empowered to be a sign and channel of everlasting mercy.<sup>1</sup>*

## INTRODUCTION

Can the Church engage in worshipping with angels, on the basis of Romans 12:1? The claim and guarantee to set the church aflame, or are they more ecclesiastical pyromaniacs, or even self-immolators? The rejection of Evangelical stress on Word and formall intellectual response to the Gospel, and sacramentalists formality and liturgy.

This raises questions about worship, what is spiritual, nature of repentance, etc.

*that the life of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) — of union and communion of holy love — is shared by the Church, as mediated by the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Word-Son, Jesus Christ; and that this life is expressed in its outward form in the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), while its inward form is the Communion of the Spirit.*

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\* I am grateful for the opportunity to present in this format and forum issues which have been raised in my thesis 'Unity and Reunion' in the *Ecclesiology of James Denney* (chapter 3: The Sacraments contain the Gospel in brief), and more recently in Alan J Torrance, *Persons in Communion* (T. & T. Clark: 1996), especially his final section in which he outlines as 'doxological participation' the nature and meaning of both the Trinity as Community, and the participation of the Church within that community. Torrance insists that full consideration be given to the epistemological implications of repentance and reconciliation: we have tried to do justice to his concerns through this paper.

I have also sought to acknowledge all sources cited through the paper. Where any may have been overlooked, I must apologise: circumstances beyond my control have complicated the preparation and production of this contribution to the Pastors' School handbook. I should also comment on the fact that I am dealing with the Sacraments in this paper, when the stated New Creation Teaching Ministry policy is clear that 'Whilst differences do exist in doctrine, views of prophecy and sacraments amongst all Christians, these issues are not raised.' New Creation Teaching Ministry Program 1996, page 4 (WHAT IS THE DOCTRINAL POSITION OF NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY?) The purpose of this paper is to present the Sacraments in a form which promotes unity, rather than divides, by seeing Baptism and Lord's Supper as dominical rites expressing outwardly the very life of the triune God, as mediated by the incarnate Son. Questions of sacramental mode and manner of administration are therefore avoided by the paper.

<sup>1</sup> Alasdair I C Heron, *Table and Tradition*, (Westminster Press: 1983), pages 157-158.

## PART I GOD AND THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

### §1. The Life of God as Trinity

#### 1:1 The Life of Trinity

##### 1:1:1 Persons in Communion

###### i. Perichoresis

###### ii. Proprium

#### 1:2 The Spirit as Member of Trinity

#### 1:3 The Trinity: the life of the Trinity as,

##### 1:3:1 Kenotic

##### 1:3:2 Ek-static.

Alan Torrance: *Persons in Communion*: (T. & T. Clark: 1996)

For rationale, of the life of God in Christ for the Church.

— by the action of the Gospel revelation we are incorporate into the very communion of the Trinity, not merely of the Church as community. We share in an 'epistemic indwelling'

— there is doxological participation in Christ in worship, with its essential *coefficient* of epistemic indwelling by the Logos. This is realised objectively in the union and communion of the High Priest in our humanity with the Father in the Spirit, and *subjectively* in Christ's union and communion with His Body in the Spirit. page 356.

— 'Ecclesial and sacramental life and thought repose in our being brought to share in that which is objectively and vicariously *given* and fulfilled in Christ.' page 360 This includes (i.) participation in *his* worship of the Father in the Spirit; (ii.) participation in *his* knowledge of the Father in the Spirit, and (iii.) participation in *his* mission from the Father to the world in the Spirit.

— This involves an *metanoietic* event as part of the new epistemic indwelling and communion of the believer in Christ.

### §2. The Living People of God

#### 2:1 Idolatry

Abraham, Covenant people, true worship  
Acts 7; Isaiah 6

#### 2:2 Incarnation of the eternal Word-Son

Full deity & humanity: Incarnation not merely instrumental.

#### 2:3 Christ's Earthly Ministry

##### 2:3:1 Calling of new Covenant community

**2:3:2 Son's humanity as objective basis for life in the Spirit**

**2:4 Transformed and Renewed Life**

Walking in new-ness of life (Romans 6:4): our life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:4).

**2:4:1 Death**

**2:4:2 Repentance**

**2:4:3 Living as 'new people'**

**2:5 The Life of the Church**

**2:5:1 Kenotic community**

**2:5:2 Ek-static community**

**PART II THE CHURCH'S SACRAMENTAL LIFE**

[For additional information about Christian Community, we refer the reader to the Anderson/Carter studies 'Christian Community and Ministry' which were presented in 1996 (Tuesday nights, in Term II). See especially Studies VI and VII on 'The Sacramental Life of the Church', and 'The Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper'. Further, we are not offering a view of the Sacraments in order to displace or obscure the ministry of the Word or Gospel: see the 1996 study, 'The Church's *Raison D'être* — the Proclamation of the Gospel'.]

Alan Torrance argues that for any complete and consistent understanding of both the triune communion and our participation in human communion, we need a proper view of a theology of worship, of sacramental participation and ecclesial existence as these relate to human personhood — that is, our participation in the New Creation, which is the goal of creation as a whole.<sup>2</sup> He continues, that at the very core of human personhood stands the ecclesial dynamic of grace — and this is inseparably linked to the *praxis* of the sacraments. By means of baptism the unconditionality of grace and our participation by that grace in the redeemed life of the New Humanity is indelibly stamped into our existence. That is, we are baptised into the very Body of Christ, apart from and prior to any possible satisfaction of conditions on our part. Further, in continuity with this, the communion of the Lord's Supper becomes a continually metanoietic ordinance, by holding and showing forth Christ's communing presence with and for us as our confession's sole Priest. The sacraments are then the means by which the fullness of the Son's personhood becomes ours by the Spirit. It is by this dynamic that we are created, recreated and transformed for fellowship in the glory of the trinitarian life of God — that New Creation to be realised in the *eschaton*.<sup>3</sup>

This second part of our paper will consider the nature of the sacraments to which Torrance refers, as well as the fellowship which the Church experiences as it participates in the mediated trinitarian life of God. But before we can undertake our investigation of the two sacraments — Baptism and the Lord's Supper — some preliminary remarks need to be made about sacraments. Only when these have been made can we consider the relation of Christ to the sacraments, and their specific meaning.

First, what is meant by the term 'sacrament'? Strictly speaking, the term 'sacrament' is not a Biblical term, nor is there a class of objects called 'sacraments', against

<sup>2</sup> A J Torrance, *Persons in Communion* (T. & T. Clark: 1996), page 365.

<sup>3</sup> A J Torrance, *op. cit.*, page 367.

which these may be tested, or compared. Here we must take heed to Berkouwer's salutary warning against making a general concept of 'sacrament', and then applying it to Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Scripture does not speak of sacrament as such, but only to those concrete actions personally directed by Christ.<sup>4</sup> He also reminds us that not all signs are sacraments: yet all sacraments are signs, dependent upon the ways in which God has chosen to act.<sup>5</sup> We may affirm that certain things are set aside or apart as sacred, and act as signs of the gracious action of God towards man in Christ, of God's faithful promise and fulfilment, made effective in the Church and believer by the Spirit of Christ, and the faith of and in Christ.

Second, what can we say in general terms about these two sacraments? While they are certainly human responses, yet are foremost the divinely appointed and provided means of response and worship. They signify our incorporation into the living Body of Christ, that we no longer have to fear our lack of acceptance, for Christ has effectively acted (this has been confirmed by the resurrection: Rom. 4:25), so in daily life we may exhibit the life and work of Christ. They witness to the unity of the human and divine, the spiritual and physical human life. For, in the sacraments and worship, we partake of the atoning life of the Messiah (cf. Rom. 5:11). And, as Robert Bruce asserted (in particular of the Lord's Supper), they are the means by which we get a

better grip of the same thing in the Sacrament than you got by the hearing of the Word. That same thing which you possess by the hearing of the Word, you now possess more fully. God has more room in your soul, through your receiving of the Sacrament, than He could otherwise have by your hearing of the Word only. . . . We get a better grip of Christ, for by the Sacrament my faith is nourished . . . we get Christ better, and get a firmer grasp of Him by the Sacrament, that we could have before.<sup>6</sup>

Third, again in general terms, what do these two sacraments mean, to whom or what do they act as signs? As their end or immediate goal, the sacraments have the creation of space, or better, the realisation in the present of the achieved victory of the atonement and the promised new creation.<sup>7</sup> Again, they are ways by which God the Spirit creates free human life. Further, they function as promise and pledge that the eternal Son takes and embraces us in his humanity, as counterparts of Christ's salvific solidarity (ie. both His person and work); the world/creation is waiting and longing for this same reconciliation, recapitulation and redemption. We can therefore affirm that — now — erected in human history (in space and time), is a person and work which actualises and assures us of the new creation. The sacraments attest to this, and Him, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **§3. THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

We are now in a position to turn to the two sacraments, and to Christ, to whom they both bear witness. Our first comment is that the sacraments bear witness that we receive not only the benefits of Christ's Cross complex, but also share in the purity and sanctity of His Incarnation through union with His humanity. There is for us, the union of Christ's Person and Work, and our participation in both.

Further, the sacraments 'are but visible, tangible modes of conveying the same gospel which is audible in the Word.'<sup>8</sup> The 'good news' is that we have received the gift of life in Christ, that we have been 'born from above' (John 3:3ff.). This new birth, effected by the Spirit and water (does this mean 'baptism' in John 3?), if offered by the incarnate Son, the Messiah. As Forsyth stated, 'our regeneration is not in the Sacraments but in the Christ Who gave the Sacrament to the creature He had not merely influenced but remade.'<sup>9</sup> He continued,

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<sup>4</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *The Sacraments* (Eerdmans: 1969), page 9.  
<sup>5</sup> Berkouwer, *op. cit.*, page 24.  
<sup>6</sup> Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper*, (James Clarke & Co.: 1958), pages 84-85.  
<sup>7</sup> C E Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement* (T. & T. Clark: 1988), page 184.  
<sup>8</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, (Independent Press: 1953), page 141.  
<sup>9</sup> Forsyth, *op. cit.*, page 210.

The main thing is not when and how we were reborn, but the fact that we are, that we have the reconciled regenerate life in Christ, that we have the life which new birth but began. It is no true faith that has its ground only in the past. It is the Spirit which makes the past present, it is the Spirit that quickens. The true nature of the regeneration at the beginning of the Christian life must be discerned by the true nature of its course.<sup>10</sup>

‘In Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, Jesus Christ himself is really and spiritually present, and acts as the sovereign Lord and Saviour.’<sup>11</sup>

### 3.1 Jesus Christ as Sacrament

The sacramental life is at its centre or font a *mystery*, which is the union of the human and divine in Christ (II Tim. 3:16). The visible counterparts and complements of the Word/kerygma are sacraments, whereby we have fellowship and participate in that same mystery: both sacraments are dependent on the Word — both Living and Kerygmatic — yet both Word and Sacraments are effective and enigmatic, are obligation and opportunity to repent.. The reality of the relationship of the divine and human is now actualised in the person and work of Christ (both fully God and man). Yet this remains veiled as mystery, discerned at present by faith (not sight).

We may therefore affirm, along with A I C Heron, that ‘Jesus Christ is *the* ‘sacrament’ in whom God and man are united, the Father’s purpose declared, and man’s true identity as the child of God affirmed. It is there that we must begin if we are to get our thought about ‘sacraments’ into sharper focus.’<sup>12</sup> First, he himself, as God’s Word made flesh, as true God and true man, is the place of meeting between God and man, the visible and the invisible, the natural and the supernatural. He is himself sign and pledge and reality of God’s presence with and for us. Second, from and through him in his person, history and destiny, is given to us the life that is his and in which we share. Here certainly it is better to think less in terms of ‘grace’ than of the Holy Spirit; for the power and energy of that life is the power and life of the Holy Spirit that came upon him and was released and sent through his cross and resurrection/ascension. Third, in that Spirit we are gathered together, incorporated with Christ, and in him offered to the Father, and by this the whole creation is recalled to its promised future under the sign of the reign of God. The uniting of God with man, the coming of God to man, and the raising of man to God: these are the three moments which combine in him as the outworking of the *mysterion* which he himself is. It is by reference to this ground and criterion that all ‘sacramentality’ is established and measured.<sup>13</sup>

The action or work of Christ is not only or solely that of an expiatory/propitiatory sacrifice: it is also the sanctifying and offering of our sinful human nature to God. On one hand he stands alone, yet the Eucharist also witnesses to our participation and incorporation in him and his vicarious work. As such we are united in and with him in what is now a ‘living sacrifice.’<sup>14</sup> This in no way either adds to or supplants Christ’s person and work, nor repeats it. What this means in relation to both sacraments may now be considered.

### 3.2 Baptism and the Gift of Life

‘Baptism is really the Sacrament of the new birth, . . . is the Sacrament of Regeneration’:<sup>15</sup> ‘baptism is kerygma in concentrated form, focused directly on the recipient.’<sup>16</sup>

Baptism is not a mere act of the Church, but of Christ who baptizes. It is the entrance and incorporation into Christ’s own baptism, which He continues by the Spirit in

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<sup>10</sup> Forsyth, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> S. Loudon, *The True Face of the Kirk*, (Oxford University Press: 1963 ), page 65.

<sup>12</sup> Heron, *op. cit.*, page 155.

<sup>13</sup> Heron, *op. cit.*, page 156.

<sup>14</sup> Heron, *op. cit.*, page 169-170.

<sup>15</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (Independent Press: 1953), page 209.

<sup>16</sup> J Fret, *Dynamics in Pastoring* (Eerdmans: 1986), page 64.

our experience of baptism.<sup>17</sup> As such, each act of baptism is not a mere point or incident on a historical space/time continuum, but on the Messianic trajectory through both Testaments, through the Cross to the eschaton. It is no mere ritual (ecclesiastical) or ethical act (individual obedience, as sequel to personal act of repentance). It relates not merely or solely to the death of Christ, but His whole Person and Work. It signifies incorporation into Christ, but the basis or ground for this is the prior incarnation of the Word-Son (John 1:14): this union provides the objective and subjective basis by the Spirit for our union with Him, and so others.<sup>18</sup>

Baptism includes cleansing, vindication through judgement, and the acknowledgement that in Christ all have died, and now live to God (as new creation: II Cor. 5:14-17): it testifies to death and judgment, as having passed away, and that the work of Christ was accomplished when we were helpless (cf. Rom. 5:6ff.) and hopeless. Its goal is therefore not merely the possibility but actuality of new life: so baptism may be seen as the ‘gift of life rather than as a sentence of death.’<sup>19</sup> For it

institutes a person into new set of personal relationships, in a community ordered around the justifying death of Christ . . . ordering its life by the forgiveness of sins. . . . The form of life which follows is that which takes shape from its movement between the past atonement and promised redemption. . . . to enter the church is therefore to enter a form of community in which the vicarious suffering of Jesus becomes the basis for a corresponding form of life, one in which the offence of others is borne rather than avenged.<sup>20</sup>

Here is the reconciliation, and re-establishing of human relations. This therefore provides the basis for new ethical action — justice established by the just Judge of the earth. Now a

<sup>17</sup> Jesus linked with those to/from whom he came. He identified himself with Israel under judgement [so see the work of M. G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, (Eerdmans: 1968)]. He discerned a definite anticipation of the Cross, as ‘baptism’ (Luke 12:50). This has communal significance as it points to all humanity, that by death and resurrection; the people of God are reconstituted by the Spirit.

<sup>18</sup> This citation from the Heidelberg Confession shows the clear Reformation stress on the sacraments as signifying our union with Christ’s *incarnation* (ie. His Person and Life), not merely his atoning death (ie. His Work). It is specifically seen in the assertion that we are made pure in his perfect purity in the incarnation and birth — as that which covers our original sin— or as sanctifying our human nature. That is, the Reformers did not allow any wedge to be driven between Christ’s Person and Work, His life and ministry: the whole of Christ is involved in the redemption and sanctification of humanity.

**THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, 1563**

*Q. 60. How are you righteous before God?*

*A.* Only through true faith in Jesus Christ; wherefore although my conscience already accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any of them, and that I am still ever prone to all evil, yet God, without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had a single sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ fulfilled for me, if only I receive such a benefit with a believing heart.

*Q. 61. Why do you say that you are righteous by faith alone?*

*A.* Not because I please God on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ alone is my righteousness before God, and because I can receive it and make it my own in no other way than by faith alone.

Note that the three terms ‘satisfaction, righteousness and holiness’ have formal or technical meanings or backgrounds:

i. *satisfaction*: this denotes the *passive* obedience of Christ’s atoning work, whereby He fully satisfied in personal suffering, in His soul, and death in His body on the Cross, so freeing us from our actual sins, and their punishment. Here Christ is the perfect Mediator between man and God.

ii. *righteousness*: Christ (with what the theologians call His *active* obedience) fulfilled the complete requirement of the Law, and more. All that the moral (and Mosaic) Law required — love of neighbour as the self — Christ completed, together with such love as is not required, the justification of the ungodly. In so doing, Christ has provided a perfect righteousness which interposes between humanity and God, thereby effecting by exchange a divinely appointed and provided reconciliation, dealing with our rebellion and defiance of God, and neglect and denial of our neighbour.

iii. *holiness*: the moral purity of Christ in His incarnation and birth covers our original sin and moral impurity, and sanctifies our human nature.

[see T F Torrance, ‘Introduction’ in *The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper*, J Clarke & Co., page 34-5.]

<sup>19</sup> C E Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement*, (T. & T. Clark: 1988), page 185.

<sup>20</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality*. . . , page 185-190. See too Wingren’s insistence that Baptism relates to the *whole* of life to its consummation is encapsulated in the meaning of Baptism (sanctification of all life). Baptism is therefore central (not merely secondary to the Eucharist) for both the Church, and the believer, and points back to the first advent, and looks forward to the second. The significance of the Supper may not eclipse that of Baptism. Wingren: *Gospel and Church*; (Fortress Press: 1964), page 14-15]

the life of baptism is to be lived in the worldly vocation of the Christian with all its drudgery and difficulty. It is here that our neighbour is to be served and here that praise and a readiness to make sacrifices are to be found. . . . The cross of the Christian’s daily work and the praise which he offers in the sanctuary are both aspects of the truth that death and resurrection are present realities to be experienced both in work and in worship. The Christian’s whole life and not just the hour of worship on Sunday abounds in an eschatological expectation which extends from the altar to even the most rudimentary of human occupations. Wingren, page 16-17.

new social order is grounded in the power of the weakness of God, and the wisdom of the folly of God (I Cor. 1:18ff.) For, ‘all human social life has its basis in redemption, whether it is prepared to acknowledge it or not.’<sup>21</sup> The Church may not necessarily re-organise the world, but it must bear witness, within the world, to its ground and goal. This also underscores God’s active faithfulness to the entire creation, not merely to a select group within humanity. And the Church acknowledges that it too lives under the judgement of God, for it has not yet reached perfection.

We ought therefore take seriously warnings against the dangers of (i.) individualism (esp. in Evangelical/Revivalist circles, notably in the pressures of ‘re-baptism’); (ii.) baptism as a prophylactic (entry into the ‘saved community’); (iii.) of dualistic divorce between inner and outer (something happens inside, without any observable or external change), and as applied by an authorised church official; and (iv.) of indiscriminate baptism.<sup>22</sup>

So, as the primary sign of being a member of the people of God, baptism shows that we are brought into a new relationship with Christ through the Church in this public/communal act. But what kind of community? It is *sui generis*, grounded within the Trinity (the one name of Father, Son and Spirit, Matt. 28:19). And the life which this new community experiences, is sustained by the second sacrament — of the Lord’s Supper. To that we now turn.

### 3.3 The Lord’s Supper and the Sustaining of Life

The Church shares the life of Christ in communion, or the Lord’s Supper, on the basis of prior union (Baptism) with Christ. As with baptism, it is no mere ritual (historical and traditional) nor ethical (neither Christ’s nor ours as sacrifice) act, but ontological and eschatological: it is also a mystery. At the table, the community participates in the wedding feast of the Lamb:<sup>23</sup> it is the community of the Spirit, of the age to come, both *instituted* by Christ, and *constituted* by the Spirit in time and space — ‘today’.

For the Church the supper is ‘the place where its community, in the image of the community that God is, is constituted by the Spirit who realises the presence of Christ anew in his world.’<sup>24</sup> As Gunton continues,

The incarnate Son pours out his life so that the Spirit may lift unredeemed life into communion with God. Jesus is thus at once the realisation of the communion of creator with creature and of creature with creator. [There is] a living echo of the communion that God is in eternity . . . the community that is created and called to be the finite embodiment of the eternal communion of Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>25</sup>

This Church also lives and speaks on behalf of creation at large. The first calling of the Church is to live and love in reconciled forms of community, for both the Church and wider humanity. For, ‘human community is the gift of the God who is himself communion.’<sup>26</sup> There is responsibility for the whole creation (of which bread and wine are but ‘random samples’, but also the ‘staples of life’),<sup>27</sup> for the creation to fulfil its mandate of worship (cf. Rom. 8:19ff.) in universal reconciliation. Here is linking of ecclesiology, eschatology and ethics of ecology.

The supper is also called ‘eucharist’:<sup>28</sup> this is a ‘whole way of being in the world.’ So, liberated from self-preoccupation, to know, honour and praise God, and each other.

<sup>21</sup> Gunton, *The Actuality* . . . , page 193.

<sup>22</sup> C E Gunton, ‘Baptism and the Christian Community’, in *Incarnational Ministry*, C. D. Kettler & T. H. Spiedell, eds., (Helmets & Hopward: 1990), pages 98-104. On the warnings, see pages 98-101.

<sup>23</sup> Gunton, *Actuality* . . . , page 195.

<sup>24</sup> Gunton, *Actuality* . . . , page 198.

<sup>25</sup> Gunton, *Actuality* . . . , pages 198-200.

<sup>26</sup> Gunton, *Actuality* . . . , page 200.

<sup>27</sup> See Wingren, ‘Christ is risen, and even now offers eternal life in the midst of the old creation through ordinary bread and wine.’ *Gospel and Church*, (Fortress Press: 1964), page 219.

<sup>28</sup> See Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (SCM: 1966), pages 376ff. on the ‘eucharistic Fellowship’.

This includes the first-fruits of the created order, which by grace become signs of the new creation.

The sacrament points away from itself and the Church to Christ as the living content, reality and power of the Eucharist: it is therefore thanksgiving of the Church through the Spirit. Yet this remains the Lord's Supper, not the Church's Supper. It is the form of the life of Christ to the Father. And as Paul testifies, in Galatians 2:20, it is that life which Christ forms as the life of worship, etc. of the Church. That life is one of self-giving and humility.

Christ comes as Host, Covenant Lord, Groom,<sup>29</sup> Priest: We are 'lifted up' by the Son and Spirit. Christ is present, not as One confined or contained in bread and wine, but as Sanctuary Minister. He offers the pledge of our resurrection, as both elements are related to the physical risen humanity of Christ. So there is also an eschatological element to be acknowledged.

Finally, the Lord's Supper is the 'most distinctive Christian act of praise . . . . This is the explosive nuclear centre whose Spirit powers all praise, and at the centre of this nucleus is the death and life in a sacramental way (open to many interpretations) and imprints its pattern on all Christian praise.'<sup>30</sup> And the praise prompted by the Spirit expresses the mystery of God and His union and communion with us, as Herbert sang —

Who knows not Love, let him assay  
And taste that juice which on the Cross a pike  
Did set again abroach; then let him say  
If ever he did taste the like.  
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine  
Which my God feels as blood, but I as wine.<sup>31</sup>

## §4. THE COMMUNION OF THE SPIRIT

We have argued that the *outward* form or expression of the life which the Church receives is *sacramental* — in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The complement of this outward form is the *inner* — *the communion of the Spirit*. This form is expressed in relation to both Christ and the Spirit, by union and communion. We will now deal with these in turn.

### 4.1 Union with Christ — 'the Living One'

The Church has no existence, identity or integrity apart from Christ. Yet this only occurs in Christ. Here both the ontological (ie. not only the Person) and the eschatological (yet now in His Person), coincide.

Rather, in union with Christ by the Spirit, they participate in a mutual and reciprocal communion with Christ and so the Trinity (so too, the fellow members of the Church). And such union cannot be under-estimated, for 'union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.'<sup>32</sup> For all that the believer and the Church look and hope for are found in Christ (no separation of Christ from His benefits may be allowed), who is revealed and made known to us by the Spirit, who comes in the name of the Coming One. The Spirit effects in the 'now' the fore-taste of the last things, and the New Creation: as Smedes aptly comments,

<sup>29</sup> Dietrich Ritschl, *A Theology of Proclamation* (John Knox Press: 1960); for the stress on the Lord's Supper as Easter victory and life, as well as Good Friday atoning death (with Christ as present Host, feeding His Bride Wife, see page 112.). For Christ as the Covenant Lord who chastens His people, see A R Millard, 'Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians' in *Apostolic History and the Gospel* ed. by W W Gasque & R P Martin (Paternoster Press: 1970), pages 242-248

<sup>30</sup> Daniel W Hardy & David F Ford, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*, (Darton, Longman & Todd), page 18.

<sup>31</sup> George Herbert, (1599-1633) in T. E. Jessop, *The Enduring Passion* (Epworth Press: 1961), page 91.

<sup>32</sup> J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Banner of Truth: 1961), page 161. [See also Anthony A Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Eerdmans: 1989), pages 54-67; Trevor Hart, 'Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as Participation in our Substitute in the Theology of John Calvin', in *SJT*, Vol. 42, pages 67-84; Dennis E Tamburello, *Union with Christ* (Westminster John Knox Press: 1994); Ronald S Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Eerdmans: 1961).]

In short, everything that the believer hopes for is located in Christ and everything he desires to be is what Jesus is. Both Christ and the Spirit are the present reality on earth of the future reality which is to come. The Spirit, then, is the down payment and first fruits of the life and existence that is embodied in Christ. He brings into reality within our lives nothing other than the reality of Christ. . . . The invasion of the future into the present is the invasion of Jesus the Lord into the present. The Spirit is the ascended Lord in His earthly action.<sup>33</sup>

And again, the Spirit brings those formed as the community of Christ to the appointed goal of total union with Christ. They experience as an eschatologically oriented people the freedom and fulfilment already achieved for them by Christ, and in them by the Spirit. To cite Smedes again,

Christians hope to be one with Christ in the final resurrection and their experience in the Christian community is a partial and anticipatory experience of that end. Their place in this eschatologically oriented community has been brought about by the achievement of Christ (hence the significance of the images of the body and of suffering), and it is realised constantly by the agency of the Spirit which is present as a guarantee or first-fruits of the end — *arrabon* and *aparche*.<sup>34</sup>

## 4.2 Communion of the Spirit — ‘the Lord, the Giver of Life’

This is more properly spoken of as ‘communion with Christ through the Communion of the Spirit’. It is the correlate of that union of God and man effected in the union of both in the whole Person and Work of Christ (as in 4.1 above, where there is a clear and explicit linking of Christ with the coming and ministry of the Spirit). This section seeks to clarify even more what is called the ‘communion of the Spirit’, as distinct from union with Christ.

The expression or term ‘communion of the Spirit’ is found in the New Testament (II Cor. 13:14 for ‘fellowship of the Holy Spirit’: cf. Phil. 2: 1 ‘participation in the Spirit’): both are in Pauline epistles. Such communion of the Spirit is not — the unlimited ‘spirit’ of the christians in fellowship within each other; nor — the fact that they all in some way have an experience of the Spirit. It is rather that fellowship as formed, established and maintained by *the Spirit*, not so much that with the Spirit. That is, the Spirit works to bring us into fellowship with the Father and His Son: as Paul writes to the brethren in Rome (Romans 8), the Spirit is the child trainer, the prompter of the ‘Abba, Father’ prayer, and the One who groans in accord with the Father’s mind/will (on behalf of the Church, and the whole creation). It is this Spirit who takes what has been objectively accomplished in Christ for us, and subjectively applies that in us.<sup>35</sup> This provides the basis of our hope of full salvation,<sup>36</sup> for the new creation — our view of eschatology.

But what are the implications, of this ‘communion of the Spirit’; how are we to understand this communion, in relation to our union with Christ? They are at least two-fold: there is a ‘carnal’ and a ‘spiritual union’ linking the Church to Christ by the Spirit. First, Christ is related to humanity by what is termed a ‘carnal union’.<sup>37</sup> There is full union

<sup>33</sup> Lewis Smedes, *All Things Made New*, (Eerdmans: 1970), page 68.

<sup>34</sup> Wesley Carr, ‘Towards a Contemporary Theology of the Holy Spirit’, in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 28, No. 7 1975, page 506.

<sup>35</sup> Adrio König, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology*, (Eerdmans: 1989). On eschatology, we refer the reader to Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History* (Baker Book House: 1979); Alan E Lewis, ‘Apocalypse and Parousia: The Anguish of Theology from Now till Kingdom Come’ in *Austin Seminary Bulletin*, April 1988, pages 31-45; Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Eerdmans: 1966). Of particular importance is Vos’ assertion that eschatology provides the basis and determinant for soteriology. C. D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (University Press of America: 1991).

<sup>36</sup> T. F. Torrance speaks of a three-fold union with Christ — carnal, cognitive and spiritual (on the basis of Romans 8:3; Phil. 2:5ff.; Heb. 2:14-15; I Cor. 2:12-16; Rom. 8; being filled with Spirit, etc.). The matter of ‘cognitive union’ is linked with the Christian *con-science*: not individual possession of believer, but shared with community of faith, especially with God, which is theirs by mutually knowing the divine will in the person and work of Christ, revealed by the Spirit through the Gospel: this is effected by what the apostle calls ‘the mind of Christ’ (I Cor. 2:16b.: what the Reformers would call the ‘cognitive union’ with Christ). This may not be seen as an autonomous principle (as in Renaissance humanism), nor provide any believer with warrant for individual opinions and actions (form of Pietism). [see T F Torrance, ‘Introduction’ in *The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper*, J Clarke & Co., page 31.]

with our humanity<sup>38</sup> in Christ's conception, birth, etc. So Christ sanctified fallen humanity, as Bearer of the Spirit (He received in measureless manner: John 3:34) to later mediate the Spirit (so as sequel to Ascension and Pentecost), and so give the certainty of life, reconciliation and righteousness (II Cor. 5:14-21). Second, the 'spiritual' union', which is not separate or secondary, but is rather a further expression of the unity of the person and work of Christ, shared with us by the Spirit: the Church receives the Spirit of Christ, of Jesus, of the Lord, and are so one with Christ, and each other (see Romans 8; Acts 2:33; John 20:22; I Cor. 12:13). That the eternal Word-Son as the incarnate Jesus of Nazareth received the Spirit, provides the objective basis and paradigm for our reception and experience of the Spirit, both personally and communally.

What is experienced as fulfilment in the Church intensively through the Spirit, is also fulfilled extensively through mankind, and all creation. This union is part of the mystery which had remained hidden for many ages, but now disclosed in the Gospel. This is brought to all creation by the Word.

Within this community of the Spirit, none lives to him/herself, but all share with each other, for all are now brothers for whom Christ died, and in fact has no relation to Christ apart from such brothers. Yet this very community knows tension in the world: it is both misunderstood and misrepresented by the world, and calls the world into question. It is separated from the world by Christ's self-consecration, yet is driven out into the world with the message of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18ff.) by the Spirit of Christ (who himself preaches peace: Ephes. 2:19ff.).

Coupled with this is our eschatological hope: the resurrection of the body, and liberation/reconciliation/sanctification of all things.

The dynamic force within this eschatological community is the Spirit, which creates the community and sustains it and at the same time gives to each person within the community his own individual personhood. . . . Thus the Spirit becomes for the believing community more the environment in which it lives than an object of its consciousness. In particular, the importance of the Spirit as an eschatological phenomenon reminds us that its relation is both to the risen Christ and to the community which is oriented towards God.<sup>39</sup>

The kingdom of God present in the world through the presence of the Holy Spirit, brings judgment upon those 'principalities and powers' (Rom. 8:38; Col. 2:10,15), bringing the ultimate power of God into the penultimate.

One aspect of the final consummation at the end is that of judgment, and the Spirit, an eschatological phenomenon, must therefore be associated with judgment. It stands thus in the present as a permanent question mark over all that Christians claim to do in the name of God. The question for the structuring of the Church is whether these witness to an awareness of the judgment of God. If the Church is to witness to this constant relevance of the future for its existence and to the breaking in of that future to the present in the act of God in Christ, then that witness must be substantiated in the structures of the Church. These structures need to be charismatic, i.e., they must reflect the Spirit both as formative force in the community and as representing the judgment of the end upon that community.<sup>40</sup>

## **§5. THE LIFE OF GOD AS THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

'A Church cannot, indeed live without sacraments, which are "essential means"; but still less can it live without sacramental souls . . .'<sup>41</sup> The Church, as the congregation of 'sacramental souls', lives by participating in the life of God. It is this community which

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<sup>38</sup> We note the stream in Scottish theology, following Calvin and Athanasius, that asserts that Jesus assumed our fallen humanity, without either compromising his sinlessness, nor his ability to justify and sanctify our humanity. The basis for such a position is to avoid any possibility of holding a 'docetic' Christology.

<sup>39</sup> Carr, *op. cit.*, pages 507-508.

<sup>40</sup> Carr, *op. cit.*, page 513.

<sup>41</sup> Forsyth, *op. cit.*, page 141.

lives and loves in the world. It is marked by love, unity, worship, holiness, service — as we have found to be so, for Christ, and for the triune God. Within this community, oriented to the future (or better, the advent of the Coming One)<sup>42</sup> and fulfilment,<sup>43</sup> we find authentic personhood and life. As Anderson sums up,

true personhood is community which participates in the life of God. Therefore, an ontology of community can only be explicated on a trinitarian basis. . . . Through the Incarnation, the transcendence of God made human community both kenotic and ek-static. Through Word and Spirit, God entered human community to the depths of its incapacity, and from that depth raised a response to God which completed community through a union of man with God. In this sense, the ontological structure of community can be said to be trinitarian.<sup>44</sup>

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions, and see whether our initial thesis has any foundation. First, following Alan Torrance’s argument, we can agree that love and communion, worship and service are not merely ‘activities’ of the Church or believers, but are intrinsic to both the life and ministry of the Trinity, and the Body of Christ. They are the continuous, spontaneous and ceaseless expressions of our real being — what it means to be persons in community. Second, in relation to the apostolic exhortation in Romans 12, the Church is urged to avoid being conformed to this world, in very ‘secular’ or practical ways. It is rather conformed to and by another (by renewal of the mind), and knowing the good will of God, is free to present and perform ‘reasonable worship’ (as is true for the triune God). This ‘logically’ leads into comments about the unity and diversity of the body of Christ (both in terms of perichoretic and proprium activity). So in daily life, as the apostle encourages, live this way as you respond to civil authorities, weaker brethren, and the united (Jewish-Gentile) Church.

Third, now, the Church is provisional and proleptic form of the universal and final people of God: then, we will have attained the fulness of Christ (Ephes. 4:13), coincident with the Kingdom of God filling the whole creation. So the Church can bear witness in song:

*Yet she on earth hath union  
With God the Three in One  
And mystic sweet communion  
With those whose rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we,  
Like them, the meek and lowly,  
On high may dwell with Thee.*

*Samuel J Stone 1839-1900*

<sup>42</sup> Jesus is the ‘prolepsis pf the eschaton’: so, Abraham Van Der Beek, *Why? On Suffering, Guilt and God*, (Eerdmans: 1990), page 250.

<sup>43</sup> As expounded by Jüngel, *God as Mystery*: page 389.

... the Spirit as the giving of a share in God’s own life. But this giving of a share in God’s own life is itself not merely something like the structure of a relationship with God, but rather a personal power which directly confronts us in an unmistakable fashion in that it comes to us as the power which opens up the future. The future opened up by the Holy Spirit is not empty but instead concretely and sharply contoured by the person of Jesus Christ. According to Paul, the Spirit is the *arrabon*, the ‘down payment,’ ‘deposit,’ ‘pledge’ for the “future of him who has come.” By relating us to this personal future, he validates in us what God does not want to be his goal alone without our becoming his goal as well. The Spirit of God, powerfully present in proclamation and confession, implements the fact that God in Jesus Christ has *reached* this his goal. The Spirit of God, through his inexpressible groanings, makes us understand that we have not yet reached that goal, that God then will still come to his goal. Thus the Spirit with his gifts enters into the moved and moving state of anticipation of faith, in which we for our part are oriented to the future out of which God is coming. The spiritual giving of a share in God’s own life means, then, the giving of a share in a future which God desires to have together with us and toward which we are going because we are already defined by it.

To believe in God the Holy Spirit means then to acknowledge Jesus Christ as our future and to rejoice in anticipation of it. God and man will have love as their mutual future. Faith in the Holy Spirit takes us along into this future by leading us now along the way of love. Whoever goes the way of love, however, exists in the paradox of intensely expectant wanderers. They advance with God the Spirit in this world and yet wait hopefully their salvation out of this world in God’s eternal love. For that is what faith in the Holy Spirit means, taken to its ultimate consequence: that God allows the negation suffered in the death of Jesus Christ to be perfected in our mortal bodies, our earthly life, as the victorious power of love, in that he makes a place for us to live within his own being. The Spirit provides us certainty that we shall be saved and kept alive in God, so that our life, too, is in the process of coming with God’s being.

<sup>44</sup> In that sense, faith in the triune God leads to a common life with the triune God.  
Ray S Anderson, *op. cit.*, pages 249-250.

Finally, on that last day there will be no need of Word and Sacrament, as the reality of our life is unveiled. Until then,

In the Church God would demonstrate to the world how he intended his creation to function: in harmony, in love, as one community of brothers and sisters who serve together in love in the Father's house and enjoy one another's fellowship . . . . In the Church a few lineaments of the basic structure of creation are once again exposed to view . . . . The Church lives by a law that accords with reality — or, rather, that will accord with the renewed reality.<sup>45</sup>

That 'renewed reality' will be revealed and, . . .

Then let it be that the single recedes  
Or finds its fullness  
In the communioned Three  
Who come as One  
Upon the disparate,  
Upon the shattered humanity  
In blood of reconciliation  
Until all Man is one  
Caught into the Tree  
Until *theosis* is complete ——  
Divine induction for eternity ——  
In the impassioned Triune Heart  
That is Love's mystery.<sup>46</sup>

We will participate in the full and final doxophany — with free and festive doxology.

When the doxology comes at last into unlimited display — then the doxology will also come into unlimited activity. . . . The self-revelation and self-glorification of God has its fulfilment in the resplendent perfection on the creation. God, who delights in plenty and greatness and beauty, builds himself a world to the glory of his name. . . . *The antiphony of universal history leads into a symphonic doxology.* At last God has attained the *telos* of his ways: the revelation of the *gloria dei* achieves its end in the hallowing of the name.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> A. König, *New and Greater Things* (University of South Africa: 1988), page 134.  
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