Trinity and Creation

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INTRODUCTION

My thoughts on the relationship between the doctrines of the Trinity and of creation grew out of my doctoral research, which was essentially an attempt to develop a Christian perspective on the environmental crisis. Accusations of Christian culpability in that crisis[1] led me to look at the history of Christian attitudes to natural world. What I found was a long history of ambivalence towards the natural world: theologians and spiritual writers paying lip service to biblical affirmations of the goodness of the created order while denigrating its material and temporal aspects.[2] In the course of those investigations, I became convinced that the doctrines of creation and the Trinity are inseparable.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the end product of a long process of faith seeking understanding: seeking to articulate a coherent account of God that faithfully reflects God's self-revelation in Scripture as the One who becomes the man Jesus, who overcomes death and sin, and who saves a people for himself; as the One who called Israel out of Egypt and who created all things; as the One who indwells the Church and every Christian; and as the One who calls creation to perfection/fulfilment. And seeking to do this in face of competing views of God from classical philosophy (especially Neo-Platonism and Stoicism); from the mystery religions (notably Mithraism); from varieties of Gnosticism.

The Christian doctrine of creation is another product of this process. The early church fathers were faced with competing understandings of how the world arose and how it is related to God. Was it fashioned from pre-existing matter? By a demiurge? Is it the mutable, imperfect image of a perfect, rational archetype? And they had to hold together and make sense of a variety of scriptural assertions about the physical world: It is

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1 Famously those of L. White, e.g. 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155 (1967), 1203–07.

2 See my PhD thesis ('The Kingdom of Nature: God's Providential Care for the Nonhuman Creation', PhD thesis, University of London, 1989) but also H.P. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

somehow an act of God (Genesis 1); it is proclaimed good (Genesis 1); God actively cares for the non-human as well as the human creation (Psalm 104; Job 38–41); Christ has a mediatorial role not just in salvation but in creation itself (Colossians 1). They also had to reconcile a number of apparent tensions within Scripture: Paul's talk of a natural body versus a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15); John's contrast between love of the world and love of the Father (1 John 2); the contrast between this world, which is passing way (1 John 2), and the vision of a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21). In short, they were seeking a coherent understanding of this world and its relationship to the God they were gradually coming to see as triune. So the distinctive Christian understanding of the world as creation emerged from a growing understanding of it as the handiwork of the triune creator. And at the same time, our understanding of God as triune emerged in part from understanding God as creator.[3]

But let's step back for a moment. Why is there something rather than nothing? All faiths attempt to answer that question. And, in part, the Christian doctrine is also an answer to that question (though it is much more besides). Setting aside for a moment the Christian answer, there are only three possible answers.

> **Option 1:** The universe accounts for itself in some way; it is in some sense continuous with its source. This is the answer of the many varieties of pantheism, emanationism, and panentheism, but also of the materialism and biological determinism of the new atheists.
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> **Option 2:** The universe is the product of an external agent. There is no continuity between the world and its source. This is the dualistic option, and it almost always presents this world negatively as a realm of time, change, decay, and matter in contrast to eternal reason, mind, or spirit.
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> **Option 3** is the mediating option. God and the world are utterly different but are somehow related by a hierarchy of being between this world and its source.

It is clear from this summary that different understandings of the God–world relationship produce very different answers to the question of origins and very different answers to the question of our relationship to God on the one hand and the natural world on the other.

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[3] C. Gunton offers a useful overview of the Patristic development of the doctrine of creation in *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), chs 1–4, highlighting in particular the contributions of Irenaeus and Basil of Caesarea.

Something of that variety is also visible within the Christian traditions. There is a clear correlation between our understandings of the Trinity and our understanding of the created order, particularly our relationship to the natural world. A convincing demonstration of that correlation is beyond the scope of this article. Instead I will briefly point to two theologians whom one might have expected to display very similar attitudes to the natural world because they were both Franciscans: St Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus.

It is generally accepted that Francis of Assisi introduced (or perhaps reintroduced) the Western Church to a much more positive view of the created order. One has only to think of his *Canticle of the Creatures*. And in the decades following his death the Franciscan movement spearheaded a remarkable flowering of natural philosophy in the universities of Western Europe.[4]

Bonaventure was the seventh minister-general of the Franciscan Order and its first great theologian. While he was personally committed to the ideals of St Francis, his theological roots were firmly in the Augustinian tradition of the day. His approach to the doctrine of the Trinity was a conservative Augustinian one,[5] and this became the organizing principle not merely for his theological system but for his entire worldview. In spite of Francis's well-known love of nature and belief that other creatures are of interest to God in their own right, and of Bonaventure's commitment to the Franciscan way, he was quite clear that the rest of the created order exists only for the sake of humanity:

> all corporeal matter was made for human service so that by all these things mankind may ascend to loving and praising the Creator of the universe whose providence disposes of all. This sensible machine of corporeal things is finally a certain home built by the supreme Artificer for man until he comes to the home not made by hands, but in heaven.[6]

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4 See e.g. L. Osborn, 'The Franciscans and Natural Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century', in *Augustine and Science*, ed. by J. Doody, A. Goldstein, & K. Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 69–81.

5 E.g. All divine operations *ad extra* proceed from a single divine principle; use of the Anselmian logic of perfection to account for the necessity of a triune God (because of infinite self-diffusiveness); the Holy Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son; and a striking reliance on the psychological analogy for Trinity.

6 Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, trans. E.E. Nemmers (St Louis: Herder, 1947), 2.4.5.

Now contrast Duns Scotus. While he also stands within the Augustinian tradition, he makes some crucial modifications to that tradition, specifically he moves away from the Augustinian emphasis on God as supreme rationality to God as creating will. According to Antonie Vos, 'broadly Scotist means in particular Augustinian, in combination with a *will*-based doctrine of God, including *true contingency* and a central position for *will*, *individuality* and *freedom*'.[7] If the unifying theme of Bonaventure's work was the Trinity itself, that of Duns Scotus's work is the concept of creation with a particular emphasis on the question why God created.[8] The answer he offers to that question is simply because God loves.[9] And, for Scotus, with the shift in emphasis from divine intellect to will, it follows that a creation that flows from divine love must be contingent.[10] On the one hand, it must be God's free choice rather than something God was constrained to do by God's nature. On the other hand, every creature is the result of a particular divine decision to bring that aspect of creation into being. And that divine choice implies that every creature is of intrinsic value. Duns Scotus expresses this particular dignity of creation through the doctrine of *haecceitas*, the 'thisness' of every creature.[11] The concept of *haecceitas* has a dual function: it guards the uniqueness of each individual,[12] and it differentiates it radically from every other individual. A slight change in approach to the Trinity has resulted in a very different view of the natural world.

A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO THE TRINITY

In what follows I shall offer one particular approach to the doctrine of the Trinity and expound the doctrine of creation that flows from it.

My starting point is that Scripture reveals the man Jesus to be fully God. And Jesus is unequivocally a person in the same way that we are.[13] Then, in the Gospels we read of Jesus addressing another as Father. It follows from this that his source (and ours), the God of the Old Testament,

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7 A. Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 7.

8 D. Horan, OFM, 'Light and Love: Robert Grosseteste and John Duns Scotus on the How and Why of Creation', *The Cord* 57 (2007), 243–57 (p. 251).

9 Horan, 'Light and Love', p. 252.

10 Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 118; Horan, 'Light and Love', p. 252.

11 Horan, 'Light and Love', p. 253.

12 Indeed, because of his doctrine of haecceity, Duns Scotus argued that even God could not duplicate an individual.

13 N.b. 'Person' must be interpreted in light of Christian anthropology rather than the modern sense of the term.

the creator of Israel and of all things, is a person in the same sense as the Son. And in John 14:16,[14] Jesus promises a third, another of the same kind; the Holy Spirit who comes upon the Church at Pentecost; another who is capable of being grieved; another who in the traditions of the Church has been regarded as one whom we may appropriately address;15 another who is a person in the same sense as Jesus.

So, as they reveal themselves to us, all the Persons of the Trinity are fully personal. They are not merely roles or modes of being of the one God. Nor are they merely identities of the one God.[16]

Further, this revelation of God as three Persons is a true and sufficient transcription of the immanent life of God. As God works, so he is.[17] God *is* these three Persons—coeternal and coequal. Thus in Scripture and Christian experience God reveals himself as the transcendent will that called creation out of nothing (God the Father); as the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth (God the Son); and as the personal power that, coming to the Church, enables us to participate in the future of the Father and the Son (God the Holy Spirit).

How then are these three one? Because Scripture is insistent that these three *are* one. Traditionally we speak of *one substance*. But what can this mean when we no longer see the world through Aristotelian lenses?

For the Cappadocian fathers, the basis of the Trinitarian unity is the Father: he is the fount of the Trinity. In a sense, the Father is the cause of the other Persons. But 'Father' is a relational term: it is defined by reference to Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore the causality of the Father cannot be understood apart from the simultaneous existence of the other Persons. The concept that most fully expresses this personal unity of interrelationship is that of *perichoresis*. This asserts the complete mutual interpenetration of the hypostases. They are distinguishable only by their relation to the others: they cannot be defined by their roles in the divine economy.[18] In other words, the hypostases are ontologically inseparable.[19]

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[14] καὶ ἄλλον παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν.

[15] 'Come Holy Ghost, Our hearts inspire . . .'

[16] Cf. R. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

[17] This is a necessary implication of the assertion that this God can be trusted unequivocally.

[18] Gregory of Nyssa, 'An Answer to Ablabius: That We Should not Think of Saying There Are Three Gods', in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. by E.R. Hardy, Library of Christian Classics, 3 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), pp. 256–67 (261f., 263).

[19] It should be stressed that ontological inseparability does not imply epistemological inseparability. The doctrine of perichoresis does not rule out a

How does this understanding of the hypostases and their unity affect the concept of the divine *ousia*? As Gregory of Nazianzus pointed out,[20] the coeternity of the hypostases implies that the divine substance has no existence apart from the Persons. Gregory of Nyssa reinforces this by asserting that *ousia* is not a name signifying divine nature.[21] On the contrary, it signifies a divine operation.[22] In effect, they reject the Hellenistic concept of *ousia*, insisting instead on God's unboundedness. There is no common substance underlying the three Persons. Rather, their relatedness is their being. And the divine unity must somehow be a function of the interrelationships between the Persons.

It follows that God can longer be seen as static divine substance. On the contrary, God is boundless life, activity, or event. And all the usual incommunicable attributes of God follow from this (though perhaps seen a slightly different light): The God who is boundless life is clearly infinite, incomprehensible, unlimited by time or space,[23] unlimited by other causes or agents (i.e. omnipotent), and inexhaustible.

This has important implications for the development of a Christian understanding of being in general, a Christian ontology. To begin with, it implies that enduring realities need not be substances. This contrasts with the major Hellenistic traditions that have informed Western thought.[24] Instead of rooting being in the past by seeing persistence as its inherent characteristic, we might instead (with Robert Jenson) understand being in terms of structural openness to the future. Thus the endurance of any entity is dependent upon the identity of the future. In other words, it is

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Trinitarian analysis of the divine activity (J. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985], p. 129).

20 Gregory of Nazianzus, 'The Fifth Theological Oration: On the Spirit', in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. by E.R. Hardy, Library of Christian Classics, 3 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), pp. 194–217 (§4).

21 Gregory of Nyssa, 'Ablabius', p. 259.

22 Gregory of Nyssa, 'Ablabius', p. 261.

23 Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 166. For example, God's eternity might be reinterpreted as follows: If God is boundless life, it is no longer appropriate to characterize divine eternity as timelessness. God is not sovereign over time because he himself is timeless, the very negation of life. On the contrary, his sovereignty is one of fullness and fulfilment. God is sovereign over temporal existence because he makes it possible, frees it from mere persistence, and brings it to its ultimate fulfilment.

24 For any intellectual system with a cyclic view of time (or even a simple linear view), being entails persistence of the past. This is assured by equating being with substance.

determined by the character of the *eschaton*. For the purposes of creating the basis of such a Trinitarian ontology, Jenson defines future (or *eschaton*) as the inexhaustible act of interpreting all prior events in the light of the love of Jesus Christ. The future is divine activity. Flowing from this is his definition of time as 'a reaching back in anticipation'.[25] Finally, it allows him to offer a definition of being as interpretative relatedness across time.[26]

By way of summary, if the being of God is rooted in the relationships of the Persons, then quite generally to be is to be in relationship.[27] One might also say, to be is to be addressed.

CREATION AS SPEECH-ACT

And that's my cue for linking the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly to the doctrine of creation. What makes the biblical accounts of creation (both in Genesis and John) strikingly different from the origin myths of the ancient Near East (or Graeco-Roman culture or even of our own day) is the assertion that creation is a divine speech-act: all things have their being because of the divine address.

Because it is the result of a speech-act, the created order is external to God. But unlike deistic concepts of creation, there is a continuing positive relationship between creator and creature. Deism implies an essentially impersonal creation: the handiwork of a divine watchmaker who ceases to have any interest in the machine he has created as soon as it is complete. Unsurprisingly, such a deistic concept of God fits neatly with the Newtonian/Cartesian worldview of the early modern period: a dead, impersonal material cosmos operating by strictly deterministic physical laws and spirit as its polar opposite, the ghost in the machine.

'God said . . . and there was': the created order is the result of a speech-act, rather than of the shaping of pre-existing matter. And the uniquely Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is intended to highlight this. The triune God is the exclusive cause of all created being. God does not fashion pre-existing matter or primordial chaos into the cosmos. Nor, contra Moltmann, does he create a void within his own being as a kind of matrix or womb of creation.[28]

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25 Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 177.

26 Ibid.,, p. 182.

27 Ibid., p., 182.

28 E.g. he presents the creation of Nothingness as a preparatory work of deity brought about by 'a withdrawal by God into himself' (*God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, The Gifford Lectures 1984–85 [London: SCM Press, 1985], p. 86).

Clearly the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* rules out a range of theories about world origins. Specifically, it contradicts the ever popular metaphors of diffusion, overflow, or emanation. Creation understood as emanation would no longer be a personal act; rather, it would be an uncontrolled and arbitrary event. If creation were the impersonal overflow of divine substance then God could not be in control of himself let alone be sovereign over that overflow. If so, the world would essentially be alienated deity and we would have to reinterpret redemption as the quest for victory over this alienation that is creatureliness. Pantheism and Gnostic hatred of matter are two sides of the same coin, and both are contradicted by the entirely personal Christian characterization of creation as a speech-act.

Again, creation understood as a divine speech-act underlines the sovereignty of God. Brueggemann says of the speech formulae in Genesis 1, 'God creates by speaking. Creation is to listen and answer. Language is decisive for the being of the world.'[29] The use of speech as a metaphor for the divine activity of creation suggests something voluntary, effortless, and rational. And it rules out any understanding of creation in terms of divine self-fulfilment.

Creation as a triune act. If creation is a personal, sovereign, and rational act of the God who has revealed himself in Christ Jesus, it is an act of the triune God. Creation, understood as a personal act, must be an act of the divine Persons rather than of the Being. The Father creates, the Son creates, and the Spirit creates: and this does not mean merely that the one God creates in a way that may be understood under three purely symbolic headings. There are three personal agents of the act of creation. And, since the Persons are inseparable, we may not ascribe creation exclusively to one of the Persons (contra Moltmann[30]). Thus, Gregory of Nyssa could say that,

> We do not learn that the Father does something on his own, in which the Son does not co-operate. Or again, that the Son acts on his own without the Spirit. Rather every operation which extends from God to creation and is designated according to our differing conceptions of it has its origin in the Father, proceeds through the Son, and reaches its completion by the Holy Spirit.[31]

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29 W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 18.

30 J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 112.

31 Gregory of Nyssa, 'Ablabius', p. 261f.

Or again, dealing specifically with the notion of God's providential activity,

> the principle of the overseeing and beholding power is a unity in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It issues from the Father, as from a spring. It is actualised by the Son; and its grace is perfected by the power of the Holy Spirit. No activity is distinguished among the Persons, as if it were brought to completion individually by each of them or separately apart from their joint supervision. Rather all is providence, care and direction of everything, whether in the sensible creation or of heavenly nature, one and not three.[32]

Clearly the Cappadocian understanding of the Trinity rules out any understanding of creation that fails to distinguish the different roles of the three Persons in the one act of creation. Such failure would, of course, betray an indifference towards the inner-trinitarian distinctions. In summary, we may say that the work of creation is a single divine act that is the joint work of three agents whose roles in the one work are distinguished in a manner analogous to and deriving from the inner-trinitarian distinctions of the Persons.

Three agents, one act: a combination that critics of the social Trinity suspect of being inescapably tritheistic. And it is certainly true that our modern understanding of agency and individuality is such that we tend to see a multiplicity of agents as a multiplicity of individuals: three divine agents should imply three gods. But that criticism is rooted in the modern understanding of freedom as autonomy. Direct treatment of that criticism is beyond the scope of this article; instead, I will try to demonstrate how all three Persons of the Trinity are involved in every aspect of the act of creation.

What sort of speech-act is creation? First, I want to reiterate that precisely because it is a speech-act it entails a divine decision to be related to the created order in some way. It entails a divine commitment to creation and it implies a divine capacity for such relatedness (which suggests that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is already implicit in the Genesis account of creation).

So let's look more closely at what Genesis 1 tells us about the divine speech-act of creation. Westermann sees a clear command and fulfilment structure in Genesis 1: 'let there be . . . and there was'.[33] But I'm not so sure that we can simply characterize it as command and leave it at that. Walter Brueggemann points out that we can read the 'let there be' as a giving of permission: in his words, 'God gives permission for creation to be. The

[32] Ibid., p. 263.

[33] C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1984), p. 85.

appearance of creation is a glad act of embrace of this permit'.[34] At the same time, the divine word of command or permission offers the gift of being, being in relation to the triune God. Speaking is an act of self-giving (we cannot know another unless that other speaks to us), so the words 'let there be' contain within them the promise of God's very self.

The emergence of the created order in response to that word is the joyful acceptance of that gift and promise. In light of that acceptance, the created order is judged very good and blessed with fertility. This is a moral judgement,[35] an evaluation of the creatures' correspondence to the divine purpose.[36] However, it also carries the connotation 'beautiful'.[37] The creature is good and beautiful by virtue of its standing in appropriate relationship to its creator.

That divine assessment of the created order embraces aspects that have often been denigrated within Christian spirituality. Specifically, God judges both the materiality and the temporal structure of the created order and sees that they are very good. Existence in time is very good. Not only that, but the divine purpose for creation is worked out in time.[38] Furthermore change, decay, and death as a purely physical reality are integral to temporal existence: they are not the consequence of human disobedience.

So what does it mean to understand creation as the promise of the triune God? The Father is the source of the promise, the one who makes the primordial commitment to the creature, the creator of heaven and earth. The Son is the mediator of the promise, the one who, before time and in time, enables the promise to be fulfilled, the one through whom all things were created. The Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of the promise, the one for whom the Son makes straight a path, the Lord and giver of life.

(1) The created order has its source in the Father, but not as law, not as detailed blueprint set out from the beginning departure from which entails defection. Casting creation in terms of a promise – a commitment of oneself to a course of action intended to achieve some end on behalf of an other or others – it is first and foremost God's gracious giving of

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34 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 30.

35 B.W. Anderson, 'Creation and the Noahic Covenant', in *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition*, ed. by P.N. Joranson and K. Butigan (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co., 1984), pp. 19–44 (31).

36 G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 52.

37 C. Westermann, *Creation* (London: SPCK, 1974), p. 63.

38 A transhistorical *eschaton* such as is looked for in the Augustinian tradition is fundamentally incommensurable with this hymn to the creator.

himself to his creation: it is a divine self-commitment.[39] Thus it involves God's acceptance of responsibility for his creation, and hence provides a basis for a doctrine of God's providential care for his creation.

In making the promise, God proposes created structures to which he may appropriately commit himself. And, characterizing creation as promise rather than command suggests that these structures are better thought of as open to the working out of God's purposes rather than originally posited in their final form. Indeed, since there is no preceding structure to be overcome, it suggests an entirely contentless initial state: the mere possibility of subsequent finite ordering.

The Father's promise is a divine commitment to this void: a commitment to the maintenance and fulfilment of its structures, and to the evocation of ever more complex sub-structures within it. This personal giving of himself to creation entails a commitment to guide the development of its structures so as to enable its appropriate response. But he makes the promise as the Father of the Son and Source of the Spirit, so they are implicated in the promise and committed with the Father to its fulfilment.

(2) The promise is mediated by the Son. The divine self-commitment to creation entails a commitment to maintain it. The God who has once acted to create a finite contingent order remains faithful to that order and the individuals therein. God maintains created being in and through time: sustenance is the continuation of creation.[40] Negatively, it is the maintenance of creation against the threat of dissolution into non-existence. Positively, it is maintenance towards a specific end: there is a dynamic, developmental (even, progressive) element within the doctrine. Sustenance is not a mere continuation, not a mere maintenance of the status quo but a nurturing, a bringing to maturity.

In the beginning, the promise. At the end, the fulfilment. And in between, an active mediation between origin and *eschaton*. Christ is the

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[39] L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Acta seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis XXV (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1965), p. 86.

[40] I use the term 'sustenance' (G.C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952], pp. 50–82) to maintain the dynamic dimension of the doctrine while avoiding the dangers implicit in *creatio continua*. It also avoids the negative connotations of preservation and conservation (see J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* [London: Duckworth, 1980], p. 73). This organic metaphor maintains the dynamic nature of conservation without suggesting that the end in view is external to the object of sustenance.

one who shapes creaturely existence.[41] He it is who preserves what has been originated, maintaining it against the threat of dissolution. However, there is also a positive aspect to this creative work of Christ. His shaping of existence is no mere preservation of past structures. On the contrary, an essential dimension of sustenance is the evocation of new dimensions, new levels, of order and complexity. Thus with Paul we can speak of Christ as the one who overcomes the futility to which creation has been subjected (Rom. 8:20, 21).

Sustenance may not be *mere* continuation, but it is also a continuation of original creation. Therefore it must be understood in the light of that act of origination. Creation is an act of loving communication based upon a divine decision: 'To be is to be addressed' by the Father.[42] But this address did not occur once and for all. We cannot accept the deistic notion of creaturely persistence as merely the immanent unfolding of a past divine act. On the contrary, the Father continues to address his creation.

The content of that address is the history of Jesus. The Son is the Word of God addressed to all creatures and not merely humanity. Thus it is that, through Jesus the Son, 'all things hold together' (Col. 1:17). This implies a striking affirmation of the biophysical universe. God addresses his creatures by entering into creation.[43] Creation itself and not some transcendent realm of ideas is the divinely appointed locus for the encounter between God and the creature.

Implicit in this view of sustenance is a denial of contemporary secular eschatologies based on the indefinite extrapolation of our present understanding of the physical universe. Instead, divine sustenance constitutes an affirmation of genuine creaturely freedom and implies divine resistance to any tendency for the universe to degenerate into a deterministic state. Hence Pannenberg's insistence that Christ's work in relation to creation should be seen as reconciliation rather than determination.[44] Just as in overcoming sin, he reconciles us to himself, so in overcoming the futility to which all things have been subjected (Rom. 8: 20, 21), he reconciles all things to himself (Col. 1:20). Thus Christ shapes creaturely existence but not as an archetype. Creation is set free to be a unique contingent and historical reality.

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41 D.W. Hardy and D.F. Ford, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), p. 119.

42 R. Jenson, *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel about Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 134.

43 E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1976), pp. 2–3.

44 W. Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 395.

What of the eschatological aspect: the cooperation between the Son and the Holy Spirit in the activity of sustaining created being? Without this, sustenance would degenerate into preservation; the history of creation would be become a mere maintenance of the status quo laid down in the act of origination. It is the eschatological call of the Holy Spirit that distinguishes creation from the static harmony of the Hellenistic cosmos. He is the perfecting cause of creation; the agent of its consummation.

One aspect of sustenance is the movement towards this consummation. The pneumatological aspect is to be found in the liberation of the creature from bondage to history; from the persistence of the past. As Robert Jenson puts it, 'To be, says the gospel, is not to persist; it is rather to be surprised, to be called out of what I have and might persist in, to what I do not have'.[45] This is basic to Jenson's anthropology, but, in the present context, it may be extended to cover the novelty that is observed to be a real part of creation history. To the extent that sustenance is the maintenance of a history that is progressing in this way, it is an activity of the Holy Spirit. It follows that the Spirit's activity of consummation is not restricted to an absolute future beyond the bounds of history. On the contrary, moments of partial consummation (steps towards the *eschaton*) are to be found within creation history.

Looked at in this light, the incarnation is a prefiguring of the *telos* of creation. The historical localized embodiment of God in creation points towards the eschatological universal embodiment of God.[46] In other words, the hypostatic union of God and creature in Jesus of Nazareth both prefigures and evokes an eschatological hypostatic union between the triune God and creation.[47]

God is thus the ground of novelty: continually evoking new structures in a manner that 'diverges' towards the *eschaton*.[48] Ultimately such a God is not limited by the limitations of his creation at any historical epoch. On the contrary, the God who revealed himself in the histories of Israel and of Jesus has revealed himself to be essentially one who is able to create new possibilities in every situation.

(3) The created order is brought to its eschatological fulfilment by the Spirit. He is the one who stands at the end of history and calls creation

45 Jenson, *Story and Promise*, p. 138.

46 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 244.

47 J. Meyendorff, 'Creation in the History of Orthodox Theology', *St Vladimir Theological Quarterly* 27 (1983), 27–37 (36).

48 I might have used 'converges', but this could suggest a determinate end-state towards which God is manipulating all things.

through the near infinite maze of possibilities to the *telos* for which God purposed it.

And what can we say of the eschaton? First, it is the unbounded fulfilment of all things. It is the ultimate and inexhaustible interrelating of all events with each other and with God. Alternatively, it is the complete relating of all events to the history of Jesus.[49] In other words, all events will participate in the life of God.[50]

That Jesus is God imposes a particular character on this temporal infinity. It implies that the *eschaton* must be characterized by the love that has been enacted in the history of Jesus.

That the Father is God also imposes a particular character upon the *eschaton*. It indicates that the *eschaton* must be thought of in personal terms.

Second, we can deduce something about the *telos* of creatures. It is not rational contemplation of God as in Plotinus, Augustine, etc. Rather, it is active participation in the unbounded life of God (*theiosis* to use the Eastern Orthodox term).

According to the Nicene Creed, the most fundamental title of the Holy Spirit, the role that determines all his other roles, is *zoopoioun*: the Giver of life. For twentieth-century thought, this title conveys an irreducible mystery since life, in spite of the importance of the concept, has never been adequately defined.[51]

Although many Christians have understood this role of life giver in purely soteriological terms, the New Testament itself is not so restrictive. For example, Paul clearly relates life-giving spirit to the breath of life (1 Cor. 15:45). In so doing, he makes a clear connection between spirit as the new existence in humankind and the Hebrew (and Greek) conception of spirit as the universal source of life. While, in Genesis 1, the gift of life is presented as the adornment of the orders of creation. Both presentations point to the responsiveness of creation towards the creator. Thus the gift of life is intimately related to the *telos* of creation.

What understanding of consummation do we arrive at if we revert to a Hebrew view of life? In Hebrew thought, the chief characteristic of life is activity. For example, the activity of running water is sufficient to warrant the description 'living' (Gen. 26:19). The vivification of the cosmos is also its activation: its transformation from passivity and inertia to responsive-

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49 Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, p. 177.

50 This says nothing about *how* events participate in the divine life. It certainly does not entail the adoption of universalism.

51 J. Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 16–18.

ness. This is not to be understood in terms of a simple linear progression. Since its origin, the cosmos has harboured elements of both passivity and activity. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate (or final) source of all created activity and life (understood as that which tends towards the eschatological activity of the cosmos).

There is a clear connection between the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the giver of life and the doctrine of the Son of God as the one who reconciles the cosmos to himself. We have already seen how the Christological dimension of creation may be developed in terms of resistance to entropy (i.e. static equilibrium) and evocation of novelty (which implies ever increasing complexity). The creative activity of the Holy Spirit may be seen in precisely parallel terms. Just as in traditional soteriology, the Son reconciles and the Spirit redeems. The work of the Holy Spirit is the necessary consequence of the Son's reconciliation of all things to himself. With the Son, the Spirit is the agent of novelty. Specifically, he is the beautifier of creation[52] and the agent of fulfilment.

And how does vivification relate to the image of *eschaton* as ultimate Sabbath? Moltmann has done much to develop the doctrine of the Sabbath in the context of an ecological doctrine of creation.[53] He claims that rest is the fulfilment of activity, being is the completion of doing. However, in the process he has succeeded in presenting rest as opposed to activity. The general impression that one is left with is that rest fulfils activity by being its negation (just as in much classical thought eternity is the fulfilment of time by virtue of being its negation).

In contrast to that, I would suggest that activity and rest are not direct opposites. The Sabbath rest is an active rest typified by the Temple worship. Other biblical metaphors for the *eschaton* also bring out this emphasis on an active rest. Among these the most notable is perhaps the vision of the Kingdom as a place of feasting and enjoyment. The Sabbath rest is the active enjoyment of God and his blessings. In other words, the rest that characterizes the *eschaton* is not passivity but the active rest in which all creation joins together in the praise of God. It is thus the unbounded fulfilment of the partial jubilation already audible in creation.[54] This is the vision behind the final stanza of the Philippian hymn:

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52 J. Edwards, *Observations Concerning the Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption, Treatise on Grace and other posthumously published writings*, ed. P. Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1971), pp. 108ff.

53 See e.g. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp. 278–87.

54 A possible physical metaphor would be that of sympathetic vibration and resonance. God has called creation into being—not an arbitrary chaos or a static cosmos but a world with the potential to respond to the divine call. Subsequently God has spoken his Word to creation with a view to evoking the

> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9–11)

And this again reminds us of the essential Christological dimension that is not lost even in the ultimate fulfilment of all things. If the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers this eschatological song of creation, the Son is its theme, and the Father its original composer.

And to return finally to *theiosis*, the eschatological Sabbath is a time when God is able to give himself fully to creation, and creation is able to respond fully. It represents the complete participation of creation in the triune life of God.

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appropriate response. The first stumbling responses are met with renewed divine address encouraging a stronger response and so on ad infinitum. The *eschaton* corresponds to the to-us-incomprehensible state of completely unbounded divine address and creaturely response: an infinite spiral of blessing and praise.