

Creativity, Community, and Lordship: A Personal Statement of Faith

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I believe that the Christian account of God, humanity, and the world in which we live might be helpfully understood in terms of a threefold motif, “Lordship, Creativity, and Community.”<sup>1</sup> These terms provide focus and content for this personal statement of faith, which explicates the Christian faith as I understand, believe, and seek to practice it.<sup>2</sup>

### Prolegomena

Motif constitutes the first of two issues that fall into the category of prolegomena for this account of theology, and possible source material is the second. These issues set the conditions for theology, although I agree with Barth that in discussing these matters we already reveal something about the nature of our theology.<sup>3</sup> Prolegomena sets the course for the discussion of the rest of the material, but is also dependent on it.

### Motif

Lordship, Creativity, and Community form a threefold motif that I have chosen as a way of describing the Christian affirmation about God. While the main explication of how these three themes form a picture of the Christian story will be contained within later sections, it is appropriate at the outset to give a preliminary description of the terms and how they function as motifs from the Christian account of reality.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be understood from the beginning that the motif is not at all intended to be exhaustive for all the affirmations that the Christian Church makes about God, but is only a helpful way of providing direction for a presentation of the main body of those affirmations, and recognizing elements of thematic unity within those affirmations.

<sup>2</sup> Such a statement is perhaps necessarily provisional and highly contextual. It is provisional in that it can only represent a stage in the development of my faith and therefore may (or even should!) change over the course of time. It is highly contextual in that it represents my own personal faith, which has undoubtedly been deeply affected by numerous factors. While it is hopefully not extremely deviant of the main Christian tradition, it cannot claim to be representative of what all the church believes.

<sup>3</sup> In other words, in prolegomena we discuss the scriptures as a possible source for our affirmations about God, but in doing so are already affirming the belief about God that he has spoken reliably through the scriptures as his word. In Barth’s words, “In the prolegomena to dogmatics, therefore, we ask concerning the Word of God as the criterion for dogmatics. In so doing, and therefore already on the way, we give an account of the way which we tread.” Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. 1, pt. 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God, trans. Geoffrey Bromily, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 43. Even in this claim we can recognize the roots of Barth’s fideism, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.

### Lordship

This term refers most basically to the nature of the relationship between God and humanity. Calling God “Lord” recognizes God as a higher being of greater power than us, and who has authority over us. God’s lordship over us involves a claim on both our purpose as created by God and on our lives as ethical creatures. We are under the lordship of God in both a voluntary and involuntary sense. It is voluntary for the time being, while we live in a time in which God has given humanity a free choice to submit to his authority over us. However, the Christian affirmation is that God will at some point act so that even those who have not chosen to do so will be compelled to recognize God’s universal authority. As a motif, lordship shapes both the story of scripture and the ethical or religious mandates of the faith.

### Creativity

I intend the term creativity in a specific sense, meaning, “contributing to life as God has intended it.” In other words, we are creative in this sense not necessarily when we are being imaginative or novel, but when we actively join God in sustaining and renewing life. This carries with it the concept of purpose and the assumption that life as God intended it has certain qualities. Things that are creative in this sense contribute to life having those qualities, and things that are destructive contribute to their deterioration.<sup>4</sup> We also might think of creativity as being bounded and defined by God’s will, or as being submissive to God’s lordship. Creativity is a fitting motif to help us think of the nature of God’s benevolent relationship towards us, and also paves the way for a holistic understanding of redemption and the role a redeemed community is to play in the world.

### Community

Community is the sharing of life together with other persons, so that we may see community in varying degrees among humans, among the persons of the divine trinity, and between humanity and God. In selecting community as a motif, I affirm that God desires humans to actively share life together with each other and with God. However, those relationships have been broken or distorted by human sinfulness, so they do not reflect the type of community that God desires for us to participate in. I envision appropriate Christian community as being defined and bound by the two motifs described above. Hence, I envision the Church as a community of humans sharing life under the lordship of God, and working with God as a force for renewing life in the world. With

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<sup>4</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams has greatly contributed to the idea of how we might envision evil as destructive to life with her works regarding the problem of horrors, which she defines as “Horrendous evils are disruptive by definition, first and foremost of personal life. For they are evils, participation in which—whether as victim or perpetrator—constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant’s life could be (given their inclusion in it) a great good to him/her on the whole.” Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 203. For Adams, the problem is primarily existential, but it seems reasonable to assume that there are also concrete ways in which evil is destructive to life.

this threefold motif in my mind, we can proceed to a discussion of the sources to be used for theological reflection.

### Sources for Theological Reflection

Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience constitute four traditional sources for theological reflection, although the weight of each and the relationship between them have been heterogeneously understood throughout history and among contemporary theologians. Inasmuch as this paper reflects a personal statement of faith, the boundaries between the four blur, so that we might think of the relationships between the four in an abstract, formal sense but also in a concrete sense that has yielded the beliefs represented in the paper.

#### Scripture

I believe that the scriptures represent a reliable and primary source of information about God, being the testimony of God's people about God's interactions with them. Fundamental among these interactions for the Church is the interaction of incarnate God with humanity in Jesus of Nazareth. In the scriptures the early church testifies to Jesus' acts of power, his teaching, and his resurrection, which for the early Church all confirmed his identity as the Son of God and caused them to confess, "Jesus is Lord." It is by accepting their testimony in scripture as valid that I say with them that Jesus is Lord.<sup>5</sup> Within that confession I also necessarily give assent to another claim. This is the validity of the God that Jesus gave testimony about, the God of the Jewish people portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. Hence those scriptures become a valuable source of information about the nature of God, humanity, and the world in which we live.

For the New Testament, we must make a judgment about whether or not the reliability of their testimony about Jesus also implies the validity of the other parts of the New Testament canon and how they describe the community of Jesus' followers. I believe that just as the canon provides a reliable witness of the Lordship of Jesus, it also provides valid testimony to the appropriate nature of the community of those who profess his Lordship. Thus the whole canon together speaks authoritatively about the nature of God and the nature of humanity, both in its current state and as God would have it remade under the Lordship of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> If that is accepted, then I must also accept on the

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<sup>5</sup> A thorough attempt at apologetics would be necessary to substantiate the claim that the testimony in scripture about Jesus is in fact valid and fairly represents historical fact. This paper does not make that attempt, but instead seeks to describe the implications of that claim once the judgment is made. I might note here that in my own journey of faith the most compelling evidence in regard to the reliability of the witnesses is the willingness of the disciples to undergo suffering and execution for the sake of their truth claims.

<sup>6</sup> Here we have spoken about the canon and its witness as reliable, valid, and authoritative. These three words describe the position I am taking on the nature of scripture, which is that scripture is a trustworthy source for theology. This is not intended to be a strong inerrancy position, and allows for minor discrepancies within the text. I also affirm the Holy Spirit's role in the inspiration of the scriptures, but must leave a fuller discussion of that aspect to a proper discussion of Pneumatology.

authority of the texts themselves that on some level the Holy Spirit had a role in their creation through inspiration.<sup>7</sup> Scripture is therefore both the testimony of God's people and revelation from God, and therefore the primary source for knowledge about God.

### Tradition

I believe that treated with wisdom and prayer, we can appropriately use tradition and experience as secondary resources for reflection on the nature of God, humanity, and the world. Tradition can give us insight into how believers through time have interpreted what they found in scripture. Though we may correctly disagree with some of the interpretations of past generations, the body of church tradition still provides a resource for how we may interpret what we find in scripture. When we interpret scripture with an eye toward tradition, we do so as part of the community of believers throughout time. Tradition may also provide us with helpful language for thinking through the theological material we find in scripture.

### Experience

Similarly, we may find in our own experiences insight into the nature of the claims we make about God. This seems defensible when one looks at scripture, which seems to suggest that we are positively shaped through an experience such as suffering.<sup>8</sup> However, we must retain some suspicion about knowledge of God that depends on our experience independent of scripture. Otherwise, like Job's friends, we risk making mistaken assertions about realities that remain undisclosed to us.

### Reason

Finally, we have reason and the tools of human rationality to aid us in search of knowledge about God, but this too must be done with a note of skepticism and an awareness of the limitation of human wisdom. Otherwise, we risk being unaware of our own assumptions and prejudices and are vulnerable to the hubris of making God fit into our own conceptions. Rationality does complement well the knowledge of God that we have been given in scripture and may help us organize that knowledge and gain deeper insight into it.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it joins experience and tradition as resources for helping us understand what we have learned from revelation. With these four elements working together, with scripture as the primary guide, we are in a position to begin the discussion of Theology proper.

### The Doctrine of God

In thinking through the Christian doctrine of God, I think about God in terms of identity and attributes. To describe my beliefs along those lines, I will first describe my thinking about God's identity in terms of the doctrine of the trinity, and will then turn to describing various attributes of God that are central to my understanding of who God is.

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Tim. 3:16-17, 1 Cor. 4:17, 1 Thess. 4:2, 8, 1 Cor 7.

<sup>8</sup> Rom 5, James 1:2-5.

<sup>9</sup> Here we may recall Paul's admonition to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:7 to "reflect" on what Paul had said as an opportunity for the Lord to give greater insight.

### The Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the trinity is the result of two important facts for the Christian faith. The first factor is the Jewish affirmation that God is one, and the heritage of monotheism that accompanies that affirmation. The second is the recognition that God was also active in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and with the Holy Spirit that filled his disciples after his ascension. The early church held that these two beliefs could be simultaneously believed and formulated the doctrine of the trinity as language to contain these beliefs. The doctrine of the Trinity simply affirms that God is three persons, and one substance.

#### Three Persons

In affirming that God is three persons, I mean that there are three entities that make up what we speak of singularly as “God.” These three are represented by the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What is meant by this is not that each is only a part of God, as if the Father was a third of God, the Spirit another third, or that God only takes one of three different forms at different times, as in Modalism. Rather, I affirm that each of the three persons contains the entirety of God, so that wherever a part of God is, there the whole of God is. The relationship between the three might be thought of as a sort of mutual indwelling, and they experience loving relationship between themselves. Therefore, God exhibits in himself community, and his offer to humanity to participate in community is to join the divine fellowship that eternally exists.

#### One Substance

The other side of the trinity affirmation is that the three persons share one divine substance or essence. As per the discussion about whether the relationships within the relationship are best understood as hierarchical or egalitarian, I believe that in their common possession of this divinity they are equal ontologically, although the Son and Spirit functionally exhibit submission. The son is submissive to the Father in actual history not out of ontological priority but in love and in his own free will. Their common divine essence means that they all fully possess qualities such as being eternal beings, as well as the attributes described below.

### Attributes of God<sup>10</sup>

#### Creative

I believe that life originates in God, and that it is in his nature to desire to create life. When that life becomes threatened or corrupted by evil, God acts to redeem the life of that creature. The creative activity of God is not envisioned as a once-in-time event, but as God’s ongoing activity in relationship to the things he has made. God’s creation endows each creature with purpose, and he acts to redeem those purposes by interacting with his creation through various means. I believe that he exhibits that creativity in a particular way in humanity, offering them the gift of a sort of life which mirrors the divine life in that it is given as an offer of eternal existence, and carries with it a gift of freedom to choose or reject that life.

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<sup>10</sup> This list of attributes is of course not intended to be exhaustive, but represents the main emphases in my thinking about God.

### Benevolent

I believe that God is a benevolent being, possessing love and kindness towards his creatures. He does not desire ill to befall them, and does not cause evil to destroy their lives. I believe his love to be powerful enough of a force to cause pain in God, as he grieves when his creatures suffer or willingly allow evil to destroy their lives. I believe this is a truer conception of God's benevolence than one in which God distantly watches his creatures suffer and reacts without experiencing any kind of pain.

### Free

In saying that God is free, I mean that he is not under compulsion to act in any way, but chooses his actions as a volitional being. God's activity freely follows his nature, so that he chooses to act in ways consistent with his attributes and his own purposes. This does allow the possibility that God is affected by the world around him, contra the classical claim to divine impassibility. Rather, it affirms that God has ultimate freedom to choose how he will respond to such interaction.

### Powerful

In describing God as powerful, I affirm that he can act however he freely chooses, without limits of ability. God has the ability to create *ex nihilo*. Although he chooses to act consistently with his gift of free will, he has the ability to act upon his creation in whatever way he desires. I believe this power is the root of God's claim to lordship, giving him the ability to have authority over creation. I affirm that no being possesses greater power than God or that can compel him by a claim of authority over him.

### Omniscient

I believe that God is exhaustively knowledgeable about all factual knowledge concerning both the present and the past. I also believe that God has knowledge about the future, about both his own divine choices and the choices of his creations as well, although I have reservations about the latter. It seems at least worth questioning whether or not God's foreknowledge about human choice renders the human will determined,<sup>11</sup> but in the end I believe that God does in fact possess such knowledge, somehow without

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<sup>11</sup> The question seems to me that if God does in fact have knowledge about the future, then it seems possible that this possibly implies that the future is determined before humans make individual choices about their own actions. In other words, if the future is knowable, then in some sense it must already exist, even if only in the mind of God, and is therefore already determined. The question then would become what kind of meaning for freedom can we conceive of that would be consistent with that theory of determinism. These objections are held by many in the "Open Theism" movement, as represented by John Sanders The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Press, 1998) and by Gregory Boyd, "The Open-Theism View," in Divine Foreknowledge: 4 Views, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2001), 13-47.

impeding humanity's freedom.<sup>12</sup> Although we are limited in understanding the mechanics of such foreknowledge, it seems the best conclusion from biblical data such as the claim that Peter will deny Jesus three times, or the prophetic claims within the Joseph saga.<sup>13</sup>

### Transcendent and Immanent

The final two attributes I want to describe are understood as a continuum, and each aspect might be emphasized at different times in scripture and in history. I believe they co-exist in God in a both/and position. Transcendence refers to God's nature as being distant and wholly other than we experience on earth. In this sense, God is distant to us, and we only understand him in a very limited way. Immanence refers to God's nearness to us, which the Church affirms as evidenced in the incarnation of the Son and in the indwelling of the Spirit within his disciples. God is both near to us and distant to us, both revealed and hidden.

### Theological Anthropology

Under the rubric of theological anthropology, I want to look at how the motifs of lordship, creativity, and community can provide a way of thinking about the purposes of humanity, and then use these purposes to think about the story and status of humanity in theological terms. Together, this discussion of purpose and story will form a theological picture of the nature of humanity.

### The Purposes of Humanity

#### Community versus Selfishness

In general terms, the purpose of humanity is to give honor and glory to God while sharing in the life he has given us. I believe God intended us to live in relationship with him, as his children. Additionally, we must recognize that one of the earliest claims the scriptures make about humanity is that, "it is not good for a man to be alone."<sup>14</sup> From this affirmation of the need for companionship throughout scripture, there is an emphasis on humanity's need for healthy relationships. Whatever else we are, we are social creatures. This purpose becomes corrupted when a person becomes corrupted by

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<sup>12</sup> It seems that the best conclusion is to remain content to affirm that somehow God knows our choices before we make them, while not encroaching on the freedom he has given us. This is essentially the "simple foreknowledge" position outlined by David Hunt in "The Simple Foreknowledge View," in Divine Foreknowledge: 4 Views, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2001), 65-103. I have also been convinced by arguments from Alvin Plantinga. "On Ockam's Way Out," In The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader, ed. James Sennett (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 258-292. I also found Anselm helpful in De Concordia in Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 435-474, and to a lesser extent Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. Victor Watts, revised edition. (London: Penguin books, 1999). 124-137.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 22:34, Genesis 37, 40-41.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 2:18

selfishness and loses sight of the community. This represents the choice of selfishness, the first description of human sinfulness in our study of humanity. When persons choose to live solely for themselves or a limited segment of humanity of which they are a part, they reject the community of humanity and already are astray of the life God intends for them.

#### Creativity versus Destruction

In addition to being social in nature, humanity also possesses a potential for joining in the creative work of God. To claim that humanity possesses a purpose of creativity is to affirm that God intends for us to contribute to the life and well being of his creation. We might divide that purpose in two ways: first, in terms of our relationships with other humans as a specific part of that creation, and second, in terms of our relationship with of the rest of that creation. In terms of humanity, we can live in community as God intends only when we commit to the life of the others within that community. We align ourselves with this purpose of creativity when we make choices that contribute to their health—in physical, emotional, and spiritual ways.<sup>15</sup> The corruption of human sin, however, leads us to act in ways that are destructive towards the rest of humanity, and deny the possibility of creative community.

In terms of our relationship with the rest of creation, we have here a basis for a theological view of ecology. In our relationship with creation we are primarily to act as stewards, cultivating life on the planet. Alternatively, we have the choice to act in a destructive way towards creation, in a way that destroys life. There is an element of this part of sin that is now systemic, so that by participating in human culture we almost necessarily participate in it.<sup>16</sup> It will require much intentionality and intervention if it is to be reversed and we are to reclaim our purpose as stewards of creation.

#### Servanthood versus Defiance

Finally, the choice between servanthood and defiance, acceptance or rejection of God's lordship and claim of authority over humanity forms a third dynamic. This leads me to affirm that humanity is free. We have been given the opportunity to freely accept or reject relationship with God, which inherently must be one in which God is in a position of lordship over his creation. Acceptance of that lordship is an acceptance of the gift of life. However, when humanity rejects this Lord, it severs itself from the source of its life, and chooses death. The acceptance or rejection of this lordship is a choice between being willing servants of God and living according to his purposes or choosing to reject his purposes and to live for ends of our own devising.

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<sup>15</sup> This understanding of human health flows from an understanding of humans as possessing life that is physical, emotional, and spiritual. To focus on only the spiritual health of one of these categories would betray a dualism that is not within my vision of what humans are.

<sup>16</sup> Adams demonstrates that this is not only true ecologically, but with social/economic evils as well, 195-197.

## The Theological Story of Humanity and God

By choosing community, creativity and servanthood, humans fully live out what God intends for them. However, we live in such a time that the overwhelming tendencies of humanity are to choose defiance, selfishness, and destructiveness, so much so that it seems impossible for humans to be able to live out God's purposes for them by their own power. This is because of where we find ourselves in the story of humanity, a story of creation, fall, promise, and redemption.

### Creation

I believe the Christian account of God's creation of the cosmos attributes a special place in that cosmos for humanity. God gives humanity a position of co-regency wherein humanity stewards the earth God created, while participating in community with God. In the original created state of humanity, it fulfills the purposes stated above, so that humanity lives in communion with God and in creative community with each other, under the condition of voluntarily accepting God's Lordship.

### Fall

In short order, humanity chooses to defy the lordship of God and to disobey. In this defiant choice to live outside of God's will, humanity dishonors God.<sup>17</sup> In choosing defiance over servanthood, humanity also chooses a path of selfishness and destruction, resulting in a breach between humanity and its purposes. The dishonor brought to God and the separation from its purposes carry extensive consequences for humanity, as described in the curses pronounced by God in Genesis 3:14-19. The consequences can also be seen in the subsequent story of Cain and Abel, wherein community between humans is destroyed by the selfish, destructive, and defiant acts of Cain. Cain's fratricide carries with it the consequences of being separated from God and losing community with his fellow man, and it even creates a breach between himself and the land. Hence, even Cain's creative work of bringing life from the ground is taken away from him, so that Cain not only suffers the curses of Adam, but through his own sin he brings about further, intensified consequences.<sup>18</sup> Thus the story of humanity turns from an original state to a fallen state, wherein we suffer the consequences of our own sin and also suffer from the sins of others. Each of us is faced with the possibility of choosing to either live according to our God given purposes or not, but as time goes on and humanity becomes further distanced from those purposes, it becomes increasingly difficult for persons to choose to live within God's will without intervention.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Anselm, *Why God Became Man* in *Anselm of Canterbury: the Major Works*, Edited by Brian Davies and Gillian Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) I.11.

<sup>18</sup> Note that Cain's curse in 4:11-12 is an intensification of 3:17-19. Adam is told that it is through painful toil and that by sweat he will produce food from the ground. Cain is told, however, that even when he works the ground it will not yield food for him.

<sup>19</sup> For the sake of brevity, this statement must be left alone to represent my belief that even after the fall humans still retain free will to choose or reject God. This is not to deny the difficulty of such a choice in the fallen world that quickly lures us into

### Promise

God intervenes in this fallen state of humanity by giving humanity, through Abraham, a promise. Abraham is offered the opportunity to live in covenant with God and the promise that God will bless humanity through Abraham and his descendants. In this promise humanity can know that God can and will bless and live in community with humanity, as humanity comes to accept and live once again under God's Lordship. Thus Abraham is brought into covenant with God, and God begins to teach the world through Abraham and his descendants what it means to live under his Lordship. Although much is wrong with humanity, having dishonored God and separated themselves from their original purposes, God works toward a time when those things will be made right, a time of redemption.

### Redemption

The promise of God to Abraham points toward the redemption that comes when God, through Abraham's descendants provides a way for humanity to be redeemed. I believe that redemption has not fully been realized, but that it has been begun and secured in God's work in the person Jesus. It is ongoing through the power of the Holy Spirit in his body, the Church, to be finally completed at the time of his return.

### The Work and Person of Jesus Christ

Because of humanity's need for redemption, I believe God intervened in human affairs by sending the Son to become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, so that through his ministry, atoning death, and resurrection, humanity might be redeemed. This means that because of this intervention, it is once again possible for us to live in creative community with God and each other in a way that satisfies the Lordship of God.

### Incarnation

I believe in the incarnation, the historical event in which "the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what he is, God the Son, took into union with himself what he before that union did not possess, a human nature."<sup>20</sup> In the virginal conception of Mary, God the Son becomes human, or as the fourth Gospel says, "The word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us."<sup>21</sup> Jesus is fully human and fully God, the two natures existing together in one subject. It is because Jesus is the incarnate Son of God that his historical ministry, atoning death on the cross, and resurrection carry such great import.

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selfishness, destructivity, and defiance. My view is summarized well by Clark Williamson when he writes, "We are not born carrying a load of original sin, but we pick it up with remarkable quickness." From "The Human Question," in Essentials of Christian Theology, ed. William Placher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 177

<sup>20</sup> R.L. Reymond, "Incarnation," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 601.

<sup>21</sup> John 1:14.

### Historical Ministry

As God incarnate, Jesus' life takes on great import, as God himself demonstrates a human life without sin, one in which the choices of community, creativity and servanthood are fully expressed without the intervention of selfishness, destructivity, and defiance. Jesus announces the kingdom of God, in which God's authority and rule are realized in the world, against the destructive forces of evil. In other words, Jesus' announcements of the kingdom aim at a time (or a people) in which God's Lordship is properly recognized. In summary statements about his ministry, such as those given to John's disciples, we can see evidence of much creativity, wherein evil loses its destructive power.<sup>22</sup> "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."<sup>23</sup> Thus, as Jesus lives and works among the people of first century Palestine, he demonstrates the power to restore life threatened or diminished by various forms of evil.<sup>24</sup> He exhibits a healing of community against barriers such as social or religious stratification, and promotes in his teaching forgiveness and other actions critical to the development and sustaining of community. It is also interesting that he is both established as Lord and acts in humble obedience to the Father. He models servanthood in deferring to the Father's will, and by mighty acts of power demonstrates that he is worthy to be called Lord in respect to creation. In all of these dimensions, Jesus' ministry concretely brings about good and also teaches those who would be his followers to do the same.

### Cross

Although there is no definitive version of the mechanics behind the claim that Jesus' death on the cross works for our salvation, Christianity has been nearly universal in the claim that somehow this is the case. The biblical data seems to me to be most easily read as offering support for some form of a satisfaction theory of atonement, such as what found its classic exposition in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*.<sup>25</sup> I believe that human sin presents such a serious problem that God, in the person of Jesus, offered himself as an atoning sacrifice to remove the outstanding debt of honor due to God.<sup>26</sup> The cross then is the remedy for our defiance to God's Lordship and its consequent alienation from God.

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<sup>22</sup> This also seems implicit in Adams' understanding of Jesus' ministry. Adams, 99-100.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 7:22, See also Matt. 11:5, 4:23-24, Luke 4:16-21.

<sup>24</sup> Jesus' ministry to the hurting can be seen not only as acts of compassion, but as symbolic actions representing his willingness and ability to make right what has been distorted by evil in the world.

<sup>25</sup> Romans 3:22-26, 1 John 2:2, 4:10. Anselm, Why God Became Man in Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 260-356.

<sup>26</sup> I recognize that there are difficulties with any theory of penal substitution, as expressed by Leanne Van Dyk, "How does Jesus Make a difference? The Work and Person of Jesus Christ," in Essentials of Christian Theology, ed. William Placher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 205-218. Nonetheless, it seems to

The cross also offers a remedy in terms of our selfishness and the consequent alienation from relationships with our fellow humans. The cross stands against all selfishness, demonstrating the value of sacrifice for others, teaching us to “walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”<sup>27</sup> As recognized by Paul, the cross is an example to us as beneficiaries of sacrifice to live sacrificially ourselves.<sup>28</sup> It allows Jesus to appeal to us not as a distant God, but one who has already suffered deeply on our behalf, and experienced some of our deepest fears, thus earning the right to teach us a better way to live.

### Resurrection

Finally, in speaking about the work of Jesus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus offers us hope even in the face of death, the ultimate power of destruction that we know. In the resurrection even death is defeated, demonstrating that Jesus has power greater than our destructiveness. He experiences new life, and invites us into living new life as well. The Christian follows Jesus in claiming the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead as an aid in living a new kind of life.

### The Work and Person of The Holy Spirit

Just as God accomplishes his work through Jesus in the time of his earthly life, the Holy Spirit continues the mission of God from the time of Jesus until the time of final redemption upon Jesus’ return. In the gospels, Jesus was filled with the spirit and seems to discuss the Spirit as a distinct person, and in Acts, we might even think of the spirit as a major character in the story, or perhaps even the driving force behind the story.<sup>29</sup> The New Testament speaks of God revealing himself through the spirit, both in Old Testament times and in the first century.<sup>30</sup>

From Pentecost until now, the Holy Spirit has been at work establishing God’s Lordship and counteracting the forces of evil. The Spirit enables people who know the Lord to testify about him, and enables those who come to know him to recognize and confess Jesus as Lord.<sup>31</sup> Those who submit to the Lord and become believers receive the Spirit at baptism as a gift, and are then transformed through life as they seek to keep in step with the Spirit. The believer experiences new life as by walking in the Spirit they

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be at least one of the dominant ways in which the New Testament thinks about Jesus’ death on the cross.

<sup>27</sup> Eph 5:1-2. Also, Phil 2:1-11, Col 1:22.

<sup>28</sup> Also, the cross as offers solidarity to those who because of the consequences of sin find themselves suffering and isolated. Jurgen Molmann, Jesus Christ for Today’s World, Trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 38-40.

<sup>29</sup> Luke 11:13, 12:10-12, John 14-17; Acts 2:4, 6:10, 8:29, 8:39, 10:19 10:44, 13:2 15:28, 16:6, 20:22-23, 21:11.

<sup>30</sup> Mark 12:36, Acts 1:16, 4:25, 21:11, 28:25, Rom. 9:1, 1 Cor. 2, Eph 1:17, 3:5, Col. 1:9 1 Tim. 4:11, Heb. 3:7, 9:8, 10:15, 1 Pet. 1:12, 2 Pet. 1:21,

<sup>31</sup> John 15:26-27, 1 Cor. 12:1-3.

bear fruits of virtue and turn their back on wickedness.<sup>32</sup> Thus the Spirit provides believers with power for living creative lives under the Lordship of Jesus. The Spirit is also integral to the identity and function of the community in which believers of Jesus are united, the Church.

### The Church

Among other images associated with the Church is the picture of the Church as a temple of the one Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> It is also described as the body of Christ, the people of God, and the family of God. While each of these images carries important nuances, they all call to mind the concept of a unified community. The Church is a community of people who, through the atoning work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, have been formed together into a single body, family, or people. This unification into community is possible regardless of the individuals' ethnic, economic, or social status.<sup>34</sup> The Church proclaims the Lordship of Christ to the world, encourages growth towards maturity, and glorifies and worships God.

### Proclamation

Jesus instructed his disciples to “go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”<sup>35</sup> This mission, an extension of Jesus' own mission to “seek and save the lost”<sup>36</sup> permeated the mission of the early Church. The disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim God's kingdom throughout the world, and believers found ways within their everyday lives to participate in this mission. Wives and husbands sought to win over their unbelieving spouses, and slaves sought to make the gospel attractive even to their masters.<sup>37</sup> All believers were to live in such a way as to gain the respect of outsiders. In Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, he states that he declared to both Jews and Greeks that “they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”<sup>38</sup> Peter's sermon at Pentecost and in the temple courts proclaimed that Jesus had been made Lord and Messiah, and that he therefore had a claim on the lives of his hearers.<sup>39</sup> The Church still is responsible for proclaiming this truth, and each generation is a steward of the word for a time, passing on its faith to the next generation and spreading the word as well as it can until the time of Christ's return.

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<sup>32</sup> Gal. 5:16-25, Rom. 8:9-12, Tit. 3:5

<sup>33</sup> 1 Cor 3:16-17.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:28.

<sup>35</sup> Matt. 28:19-20.

<sup>36</sup> Luke 19:10.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Cor 7:16, Tit. 2:10.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 20:21.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 2:14-39, 3:17-26.

### Discipleship

In addition to proclaiming the Lordship of Christ in the world around us, the believers in the Church seek to help each other grow and mature in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This maturity takes several different forms, from shedding vice and growing in virtue to engaging in acts of creative service. It may include the discernment and usage of spiritual gifts through which other brothers and sisters are encouraged to greater maturity, and occurs through relationships and opportunities to help each other grow in knowledge. Ultimately, discipleship is the process by which believers grow to imitate Christ.

### Worship

From its inception the Church has gathered together regularly to worship. In worship, the Church glorifies God by praying, taking communion, celebrating the Eucharist, giving gifts to God, singing about and to God, and sharing the word of God with each other. I believe that the practice of the Church to worship regularly together, weekly, represents the commitment to make worship a part of our lives, and testifies to the effect worshipping God can have on our lives. When we regularly voice our submission and commitment to God, it works to shape and change us over time. In worship with the Church I am called back to my commitment to life under the Lordship of God, and find myself challenged to live out the new life that God has created in me by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, worship glorifies God and also has a creative function as a tool of discipleship, forming us into the likeness of Christ and spurring us on to “love and good deeds.”<sup>40</sup> In worship the Church offers a sacrifice of praise, but also renews its willingness to sacrifice all that it is to God.

### Community

The final role of the church that needs to be mentioned is that the church functions as a community, a place where people share life together.<sup>41</sup> The New Testament describes a people who, because of what they shared in Christ, loved each other dearly and rejoiced in each other’s company. They cared for each other, prayed for each other, and provided for each other. This community function is not peripheral to the church, but is critical to the kinds of things that are being formed in us as Christians. The church gives us an opportunity to learn to love by giving us a place to practice it, and the same with gentleness, patience, and the other virtues. While it is not the only place such virtues are formed, I believe God has shown great wisdom in providing the church as a means for such spiritual formation through relationships.

### Rituals of the Church

The church has many common practices through which it carries out some of these purposes. There are two specific rituals in which the Church engages that bear particular

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<sup>40</sup> Heb 10:24

<sup>41</sup> 1 Thess 2:8.

significance. They both carry rich symbolic meaning, and are rooted in the story of Jesus.

### Baptism

I believe that baptism in the Christian Church is one of our richest symbols, with multiple layers of meaning. Although they do not fully describe the significance of baptism, the motifs of creativity, community, and lordship can summarize important themes connected with the ritual. In submitting themselves for baptism, persons make a voluntary statement about their willingness to accept the authority of Jesus as Lord and commit to a life of service to him.<sup>42</sup> Also, they symbolically unite themselves with the story of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, claiming the promise of new life that comes with Jesus' resurrection. Thus baptism provides an opportunity for the believer to enact and experience God's creative power. Additionally, when one considers the prominent metaphor of rebirth and the connection between the giving of the indwelling Holy Spirit and baptism, baptism clearly carries great significance as a creative act in which the believer is given new life.

Finally, it should be said that in baptism, the believer joins a community of faith. Because a person has submitted to the Lordship of Jesus and accepted new life from his hands, they are joined with the redeemed people of God, the Church. Thus they have an opportunity to live in community with brothers and sisters who also share these things, and participate in Christ's mission as a part of his body. Baptism is, therefore, an appropriate symbol of initiation into the community of the Church.

### The Eucharist

The practice of the Lord's Supper also holds great meaning as a ritual for the Church. The bread and wine symbolically represent the body and blood of Christ, so that the believers who consume them experience the spiritual presence of the Lord Jesus, and are reminded of the actions that bind them together and provide for their new life. As Paul stated, in taking the Eucharist we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."<sup>43</sup> In doing so we not only celebrate the gift that comes through Jesus' body and blood, but also reflect on the reality of our lives before the Lordship of Jesus. In this confrontation we again experience the creative power of the spirit, as our gratitude for Christ's sacrifice leads us to conform our lives to the sacrificial love that is symbolized in the broken bread.

### Final Redemption

As mentioned earlier, the Christian story looks forward to a time of final redemption, when the outstanding wrongs of the world will be righted.<sup>44</sup> I believe that

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<sup>42</sup> I would connect forgiveness with this aspect of baptism, as a person recognizes their need for forgiveness from the one who has authority and ability to provide it. In baptism, the penitent sinner accepts the forgiveness the Lord offers. This is necessarily an act of submission.

<sup>43</sup> 1 Cor. 10:26.

<sup>44</sup> "Redemption," page 17.

the motifs described here provide a useful way of thinking about that redemption. First of all, the final redemption will occur at a time when Jesus returns to the earth to be recognized as the Lord. At this time even those who up to that point have not acknowledged his Lordship will be compelled to do so, as his glory is revealed and he delivers judgment.<sup>45</sup> In the condemnation of those who have defied his Lordship and in the vindication of those who have submitted to it, the great wrong of humanity's ongoing defiance will be righted.

I believe that the time of final redemption will involve a gathering of God's people from every tribe and nation, so that what we experience in part through communion with the Church now will be fully realized. God's people will then enjoy communion with God together forever, sharing in eternal life in his presence. This will correct the fractured state of community in which we now live, and unite God's people throughout time together with him.

Finally, it must be said that final redemption will involve a redeeming of the created world in which we now live. The created world eagerly anticipates redemption from its state of frustration and decay.<sup>46</sup> Although we must allow most of the nature of such a transformation to remain a mystery, we may trust that the one by whom the world was created will indeed be able to make all things new.<sup>47</sup>

Included in this picture of re-creation we might also envision the resurrection and transformation of our own bodies.<sup>48</sup> The resurrection of Jesus points us toward the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and assures us that the one who gave our bodies life will be able to give them new life by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

### Conclusion and Ethical Implications

I believe that the threefold motif set forth in this statement of faith not only provides us with a helpful way of structuring and describing the Christian faith, but that it also holds great promise as a vehicle for helping us live out the faith as well. There are clear ethical obligations to obey the Lord, be creative and not destructive, and to avoid selfishness, and I can see implications of these lines of thought in several areas. As a way of concluding the paper, I will describe three as examples.

#### Vocational Life

I believe that one of the important tasks of the Church today is to redeem the vocational life of believers. Today, because of how people compartmentalize their lives, people often feel as though their work belongs to a secular, godless sphere that is in competition with their religious life connected with the Church. The motifs outlined in this paper may contribute to a perspective that counteracts that thinking though, demonstrating that anytime we are truly productive, on the side of enriching life and not destroying it, we are doing kingdom business. Thus, a teacher who contributes to the intellectual life of her students, a businessman who provides livelihood for his employees

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<sup>45</sup> 2 Tim. 4:1, 1 Pet. 4:13, Phil. 2:9-11.

<sup>46</sup> Rom. 8:19-22.

<sup>47</sup> Rev. 21:5.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Cor. 15.

and the attorney working to protect people's rights can all view their vocational life as ministry, as doing the work of God in those places.<sup>49</sup> An accountant may begin to live out her relationships with co-workers with selfless service, seeking to redeem what has been lost in human relationships by investing in the lives of people around her.

#### Family Life

Likewise, in the family context a husband can take these perspectives and develop an attitude of service to his wife that focuses on sharing life together under God, and contributing to her well being and fullness of life. In love he may offer selfless service to her as to the Lord, and vice-versa. Parents nurturing these perspectives in children will encourage them to respect Christ as the Lord, but also to enjoy relationship with him and to find ways to join in ministry that is creative in the lives of others. They would have a basis for challenging their children to think about the impact of their actions on others. For adult children, these lines of thought might prompt radical, sacrificial service toward their aging parents. This perspective certainly calls attention to abusive or neglectful familial relationships as destructive to life.

#### Cultural Engagement

Finally, this perspective offers a basis from which the church might critique the culture in which it lives. It encourages the church to proclaim the Lordship of God and the repentance necessary to bring humanity back under that Lordship. It also allows the church to actively work to counter evil by taking action against all sorts of things that destroy or distort life. This broadens the range of possibilities for areas that the church might appropriately consider as ministry. For instance, the church might be active in financial counseling for the poor, helping them to avoid and escape debt traps, or facilitate the foster home or adoption processes. The Church might partner with organizations fighting disease, or host an art show for artists whose work highlights the life present around them. In other words, the Church might be free to broaden the spectrum of things in which it offers insight. It seems that such practices, when carefully done with an eye towards the reality of Christ's Lordship, will help the Church regain a holistic perspective. This will help Christians and the world see that the spiritual life is not confined to a short time on Sunday, but penetrates into the whole of human life. Thus the Church actually can be a force for helping God to reassert his Lordship over all the affairs of humanity, so that we might enjoy community unhindered by selfishness, and live life fully as it was intended by God to be.

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<sup>49</sup> It would be impossible to list all the applications of this line of thinking. Of course, there may also be vocations in which persons are engaged that actually work as destructive to life. This perspective would encourage persons in such fields to think critically about the work they do.

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