



A MINISTRY SCHOOL OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF THE UPPER MIDWEST

# Reality in Christ, Part I

## *Knowledge of God*

**DN. JOHN C. CLARK**

*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is in the Father's bosom, he has made him known (John 1:18).*

*He is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).*

*In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:9).*

*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Heb.1:3).*

## **I. Getting Our Bearings, Gaining Momentum**

### a. The Word in the Beginning

~The eternal Word, ever one with God as God, was, from the beginning, God's self-expression.

~This eternal Word/*Logos* **is not and was never an impersonal utterance or idea of God, but the eternally begotten, eternally beloved Son of the Father.**

~The Word who spoke all things into existence was present to creation from its beginning, such that the same Word who enacted the creation of the world enacts its re-creation, fulfilling God's purpose for the creation of the world in its redemption.

### b. The Word of Israel and the Old Testament

~This selfsame Word of God is the Word of Israel and the Hebrew Scriptures, meeting Abraham's and Sarah's offspring at the Red Sea and Mount Sinai, abiding with them amidst sojourn and settlement, and addressing them on the lips of priests and prophets.



“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Pet. 1:10-11).

~Through tabernacle and temple, law and liturgy, the Word dwelt *in their midst*, his visage slowly yet surely emerging. Then at last, from the womb of Israel, the Word came forth *in our flesh*, revealing the face of God in the face of Jesus. ***Jesus embodies the innermost reality of who God is as the selfsame Word who has ever resided at the Father’s bosom, who has ever resounded in the very heart of God’s being*** (Exod. 33:18-20; John 1:14-18).

c. The Word Made Flesh: Fully God, Fully Man

~To confess that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man means: (1) ***that he participates wholly and at once in the life of both God and humanity—that he forevermore lives out his divine existence in our human nature, so that in Jesus, God’s divinity forevermore includes our humanity.***

~To confess that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man means: (2) ***that Jesus personally unites in himself deity and humanity, Creator and creation, eternity and time, heaven and earth.***

~To confess that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man means: (3) ***that God the Son entered the world as the Son of Man so that God, humanity, and the world may have full and final, concrete and definitive, revelation in him.***

## II. Modern Fragmentation and Christ-ian Formation

a. Modern Fragmentation

~Loss of metanarrative—any sort of grand, unifying story that is able to incorporate and interpret our own stories.

~Solitary self as the datum point and controlling principle of knowing.

~Proliferation self and socially-constructed notions of reality—multiplication of perspectives without boundary markers or value assessment.



~The peculiar and pernicious “flat-earth society” that is modern secularism.

~Cartesian anxiety and the dogmatism (or romanticizing) of doubt.

b. Christ-ian Formation: The One Christ-Reality

“The place where the questions about the reality of God and about the reality of the world are answered at the same time is characterized solely by the name: Jesus Christ. God and the world are enclosed in this name.... We cannot speak rightly of either God or the world without speaking of Jesus Christ. All concepts of reality that ignore Jesus Christ are abstractions.... There are not two realities, but **only one reality**, and that is God’s reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world.... The reality of Christ embraces the reality of the world in itself. The world has no reality of its own independent of God’s revelation in Christ. It is a denial of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ to wish to be ‘Christian’ without being ‘worldly,’ or [to] wish to be worldly without seeing and recognizing the world in Christ. Hence there are not two realms, but only **the one realm of the Christ-reality**, in which the reality of God and the reality of the world are united.” ~Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*.

~Jesus Christ reveals not many realities nor one reality with multiple means of access. Rather, Jesus reveals one grand and glorious reality that can only be discerned relative to himself.

~Any outlook that fails to see and savor all things in Christ, and Christ in all things, is not a truly *Christ-ian* outlook on reality but an abstraction from reality—a fictitious, virtual reality.

“Myth is unmasked by the Word of God.” ~Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Scandal of the Incarnation*.

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, **that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**” (Col. 2:1-3).

### III. Jesus Christ and the Triune Life of God

“All that we know of the Trinity we know through the Incarnation.” ~Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*.



None other than Jesus himself placed the triune name of Father, Son, and Spirit forever upon the church's heart and lips (Matt. 28:18-20).

a. Jesus and the Father

Jesus is the Word ever one with the Father, ever in the Father as the Father is in him. ***So the Father sending the Son into the world is not the Father sending the Son away from himself, but the Father drawing near to make himself known in and through the Son.*** Jesus comes in the name of the Father to make the Father known, such that to behold the Son *is* to behold the Father (John 10:30; 12:44-45; 14:8-11).

“The Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son is the visible of the Father.” ~Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*.

b. Jesus and the Spirit

Jesus comes to make the Spirit known as well. Given that Jesus acts in the power of the Spirit, bestows the Spirit in his name, and discloses the ministry of the Spirit relative to himself, ***he is no less the visible of the Spirit than the visible of the Father.*** Jesus reveals that to behold the Son *is* to behold the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15).

“God is Christlike, and in him is no un-Christlikeness at all.” ~Michael Ramsey, *God, Christ, and the World: A Study in Contemporary Theology*.

c. In Him All the Fullness of God is Pleased to Dwell

Who God has ever been in his inner-triune life he now is and evermore shall be to us in Jesus Christ. True knowledge of Jesus is true knowledge of the Father and Spirit; thus knowing Jesus is what it means to know God, not just the first step towards or an additional step beyond knowing God. To see, hear, and receive Jesus is to see, hear, and receive God. ***For Jesus is Immanuel, God with us—the transcendent reality of God now and evermore with us as one of us*** (Matt. 1:23).

This means there is no search to undertake for God, and no appeal to make to God, over the head or behind the back of Jesus, because he is the outward expression of who God is in himself. In fact, that the Son is of the same divine reality as the Father and Spirit means the Father sending the Son in the power of the Spirit is nothing less, different, or other than the self-giving of God as God has ever been in his triune self.

d. Jesus is Lord!

This two-fold claim is the primary and principal affirmation of the church (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11).



First, this joyful exclamation specifies Jesus's relationship to the God of Israel and the Old Testament. For the apostles took the title *kyrios*—Lord—used to translate God's sacred name from the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, and applied it to Jesus throughout the New Testament (*e.g.*, Rom. 1:7; 5:1; 1 Cor. 1:10; 8:6; Eph. 1:2-3; 4:4-6; Phil. 3:8; Col. 2:6; Heb. 13:20; James 2:1; 1 Pet. 1:3; 3:15; Rev. 1:8). ***The apostolic confession that Jesus is Lord follows Jesus's own lead in equating himself with the God revealed to the Hebrew patriarchs as Yahweh, the great I Am*** (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58).

Second, this humble exclamation specifies exclusive faith and devotion to the One whose lordship is unique, unqualified, and universal. ***The apostles make no claim that Jesus is Lord among lords, some provincial deity of only certain people or portions of existence.*** So to confess that Jesus is Lord with the apostles means heartily affirming Jesus's own claim that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Matt. 28:18). It means rejecting all other lords in glad acknowledgment that the scope of Jesus's lordship is every bit as extensive as his creation and re-creation of the cosmos.

e. Jesus and the Trinity

From Jesus we learn that the Trinity is not some construct devised by the church that gives us a "handle" on God. No! God is actually and intrinsically triune, which means the God of the gospel—the God who Jesus proclaims—cannot be truly conceived except as triune.

***God's chief attribute/perfection is that he is Trinity.*** In other words, this attribute informs all others, in that the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that all other perfections of God (love, holiness, omnipotence, glory, etc.) are possessed by each person of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit. Contemplating God's perfections prior to/apart from God's triunity fortifies the mistaken tendency to think only of God the Father in connection with these perfections, suggesting a subordinationism of Son and Spirit, or a unitarianism of some undifferentiated, sub-trinitarian "god."

~Love

~Holiness

~Omnipotence

~Glory