



A MINISTRY SCHOOL OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF THE UPPER MIDWEST

Reality in Christ, Part III

Knowledge of the World

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"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

"All things were made through him [Jesus Christ], and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Rev. 1:8).

I. Getting Our Bearings, Gaining Momentum

- a. Jesus Christ is the archetype (pattern/model) and ultimate revelation of humanity.

The One who participates truly and fully—simultaneously and unreservedly—in the being and life of both God and humanity is not only the divine self-exposition of who God is, but of what it means to be authentically human.

Just as surely and truly as Jesus reveals God to us, he reveals us to us. Only in Jesus can we learn to stop confessing, "I think, therefore, I am," or "I feel, therefore, I am," or even "I do stuff, therefore, I am," and start confessing, "I am because you are; and because you live, I live in you, from you, and unto you."

"From now on we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:16-17).

"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:3-4).

Just as there is one God (Father, Son, and Spirit), there is one humanity (male and female).



"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

Humanity is *sexually dimorphic*, a *unifying complementarity of male and female*. Humanity is constituted male and female together, and only together are male and female the image of God. Think distinction without division or separation. One but not the same. Their irreducible, indelible distinction being necessary for true union with one who is ever other yet never alien.

Male and female are not interchangeable, and neither is redundant, or dispensable. And neither male nor female can be reduced to mere function/performance, as maleness and femaleness is a crucial characteristic of personhood and mission. Only as male and female together can we manifest the God-given identity and fulfill the God-given destiny of humanity.

Male and female he created them, and male and female he re-created them. Thus male and female is the God-given horizon on which we can rightly behold the total vision of man, the context in which we learn what it means to be and become authentically human by virtue of self-gifting—marked by procreation and martyrdom.

II. **Why is There Something, Rather Than Nothing (Except God)?**

"All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that 'God is love.' But they seem not to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at least two persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, he was not love."

~C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

"Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the Logic, the blueprint for creation. He is the one eternally loved by the Father; creation is about the extension of that love outward so that it might be enjoyed by others. The fountain of love brimmed over. The Father so delighted in his Son that his love for him overflowed, so that the Son might be the firstborn of many sons." ~Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*.

"God created the world for his Son, that he might prepare a spouse or bride for him to bestow his love upon; so that the mutual joys between this bride and bridegroom are the end of the creation."

~Jonathan Edwards, *Miscellanies*.



III. Seeing and Recognizing the World in Christ

The entire cosmos is from the Father through the Son, who is the agent and heir of all things. And we inhabit an ordered universe, not a jumbled multiverse, because all created existence is grounded in Jesus Christ, the eternal and uncreated *Logos*, the very logic of creation (1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2; 11:3).

We can speak rightly of the world only by speaking rightly of Christ, because creation has no reality of its own—no independent existence or true intelligibility—apart from the *Christ-reality*. Creation exists because of Christ and for Christ. Indeed, the world was made so that Christ could be born, so that Jesus could be not only the Alpha, but also the Omega, that selfsame Word who both called forth and consummates the cosmos (John 1:1; Rev. 1:8; 19:13; 21:6; 22:13).

God's creative activity, and thus aspects of the creation itself, are veiled in impenetrable mystery. Yet modern people—sometimes even modern Christians—tend to assume that because the “stuff” of creation is readily observable—visible, touchable, and testable—creation is open to exhaustive explanation. This assumption is *profoundly naïve*, to say the least.

What is more, creation is itself ambiguous, because it declares two things at once: 1) it *sings* to the glory of God (Ps. 19:1-4); and 2) it *groans* amid the tragedy of its brokenness and futility (Rom. 8:18-25).

“What the meaning of God the creator is and what is involved in the work of creation, is in itself not less hidden from us men than everything else that is contained in the Confession [i.e. the Apostle's Creed]. We are not nearer to believing in God the creator, than we are to believing that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. It is not the case that truth about God the creator is directly accessible to us and that only the truth of the second article [of the Apostle's Creed] needs a revelation. But in the same sense in both cases we are faced with the mystery of God and his work, and the approach to it can only be one and the same.”

~Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*.

There is one God and one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), ***and that mediator is not creation!*** Or to put it another way, “[T]heology is the confession of the truth, Christ himself, who does not stand subject to any criterion other than himself, the Lord of all creation and its history.”

~John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ*.

If knowledge of God or the world could be attained directly [in an immediate/unmediated way] from the world or ourselves, then the mediation of Jesus Christ would be superfluous. Lack of clarity on this point causes the church to [inadvertently] advance “the real cause of



secularism, which is ultimately nothing else but the affirmation of the world's autonomy, of its self-sufficiency in terms of reason, knowledge, and action.”
~Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*.

Our knowledge of the Truth begins with Christ and does not turn from Christ in turning to non-divine things. For we are no less beholden to the mystery of God in beholding the works of God, in that the latter are not subject to the mere free play of our natural abilities. Therefore, Christian theology is a standing rebuke of the world's autonomy and self-sufficiency. Jesus unmasks the modern myth that there are aspects of human existence where God can be ignored, evaded, or exiled.

Because God is not directly known and accessed *from* the world or ourselves, Christian theology is incompatible with *natural theology*—the notion that God can be merely discovered or conceived in unmediated fashion by our intuitive, experiential, and empirical observations of the natural order, no matter how perceptive. *At the same time*, it is certainly true that God is known and accessed *in* the world through Jesus, such that we are called to have a robust *theology of nature*—a rich doctrine of creation and theological perspective on the world (think Ps. 19 vis-à-vis Rom. 1).

In other words, can humans take their observations of creation and construct an accurate, intelligible body of divinity worthy to be called true knowledge of God? No. That which is of the flesh is flesh—there is no naturalistic knowledge that can impart knowledge of God. Creation is categorically not God, therefore creation's majesty is qualitatively not God's self-disclosure. *To affirm otherwise would be to invert the order of knowing we find in the gospel*. Humans do not arrive at true knowledge of God because they observe in creation the marks of his majesty (though the finger prints of God are all over his handiwork). Quite the opposite is true. ***Humans rightly understand the marks of God's majesty in creation because we obtain true knowledge of God on other grounds.***

Natural theology and a Christian theology of nature are quite different, and the differences are stark and momentous. Yet the primary issue is whether Jesus actually is, as ***he*** assures us, *the way, the truth, and the life*—the true logic and criterion of all truth. Karl Barth echoes the apostle Paul (Romans 1) when he notes, “when man has tried to read the truth from sun, moon and stars or from himself, the result has been an idol. But when God has been known and then known again in the world, so that the result was a joyful praise of God in creation, that is because he is to be sought and found by us in Jesus Christ.”

When God is sought and found in Christ, creation is revealed for what it truly is: the theater where all things great and small, extraordinary and mundane, reflect God's glory. Because the *Logos* gives Christian theology a distinct logic and unified frame of knowing, the church may live, move, and have her being in the Truth who is Christ, assured not only of the meaning of her existence, but also of the ground and goal of the world!



Knowing Christ as the ground and goal of creation frees us to ***duly value and truly enjoy earthly realities***. Not as ends in themselves, but as means of drawing us deeper into the one *Christ-reality*. Earthly realities are God-given gifts whose God-intended end is, as Alexander Schmemmann says, “that knowledge which is communion, and...that communion which fulfills itself as true knowledge: knowledge of God and therefore knowledge of the world.”

To contemplate the world in Christ is ***to gain true knowledge of both God and the world***, but to contemplate the world apart from Christ is ***to forfeit true knowledge of both God and the world***. Only communion with the reality of the God-man amidst the reality of the world reveals itself in true knowledge of God and the world—in true knowledge of the one *Christ-reality*.

The point: Jesus is not one Truth among others, but *the* Truth that creates and renders intelligible all other truths, because he is *the* Truth of God—that first and ultimate truth in heaven and on earth.

IV. Unmasking the “Powers”

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the true light that shines in the darkness—at once revealing the true meaning of the world, and unmasking the true character of what Scripture calls the *powers* (Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 2:1-2; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15).

These are the forces of darkness at work in this fallen world—manifestations of cosmic rebellion against God embedded in the cultural, ideological, socio-political structures of earthly existence. Together they constitute the spirit of the age—the world, the flesh, and the devil—that we must always and everywhere renounce and resist (1 Pet. 5:8-9; 1 John 2:15-17).

On life as a university student in Hitler’s Germany prior to the Second World War, Hendrik Berkhof recalls, “No one could withhold himself, without utmost effort, from the grasp these Powers had on men’s inner and outer life.... They acted as if they were ultimate values, calling for loyalty as if they were the gods of the cosmos.”¹ And lest we indulge that self-righteous pleasure of puzzling at the evil which all-too-conveniently assails other times and places, Berkhof adds:

“Nor should it be difficult for us to perceive today in every realm of life these Powers which unify men, yet separate them from God. The state, politics, class, social struggle, national interest, public opinion, accepted morality, the ideas of decency, humanity, democracy—these give unity and direction to...[many] lives. Yet precisely by giving unity and direction they separate these many lives from the true God; they let us believe that we have found the meaning of existence, whereas they really estrange us from true meaning.”²

¹ Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1977), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 32-33.