

Scripture for Christian Conversion

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The church employs its scriptures for the attainment of human authenticity in Christian conversion, conceived as both event and life-long process. Its pedagogy aims at the transformation of the cognitive and affective consciousness of human *subjects*, of the decision-making and activity of responsible human *agents*, in every sphere of their *relational existence* (intrapersonal, interpersonal, social, national, international). The theocentric and Christocentric process of self-transcendence in Christian conversion entails four complementary aspects: *metanoia* (transformation), *kenosis* (generosity), *diakonia* (service), and *koinonia* (friendship).

Scripture is both informative and above all transformative. The Old Testament is a call to theocentric self-transcendence in religious conversion. The New Testament is a call to Christocentric self-transcendence in Christian conversion. Christocentricity guarantees the authenticity of theocentricity in religious conversion.

Conversion entails the transformation of the human and its world in all the spheres of human intentionality and conscious operations. As *subjects*, our cognitive and affective consciousness undergoes a transformation in both the event and continuous process of conversion. The transformed or 'converted' subject has a new way of knowing and loving: it is no longer the center of its world. The theocentric self-transcendence of religious conversion becomes Christocentric when we are enabled by Jesus Christ to know as we are known and to love as we are loved (1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2; Gal 4:9). The theocentric self-transcendence of Jesus Christ enables our own, it transforms our cognitive and affective consciousness by making us sons in the Son.

Conversion entails the transformation of our lives as *agents*, responsible for decisions and actions. Conversion means a new way of deciding and acting in the light of our new way of knowing and loving, transformed by the grace and call of Jesus Christ for accepting new responsibilities. We no longer live for ourselves as our own little gods in a state of self-idolatry, but *for* God, accepting responsibility before God for our decisions and actions.

Conversion entails the transformation of every sphere of our relational existence: the intrapersonal world of our interior life, the interpersonal world of our family and friends, the social world of our

educational, political, recreational and other communities, the national and international worlds. Our transformed consciousness influences our decision and action in every sphere of our relational existence. We are summoned by the grace and demand of God to act responsibly in every sphere or context of our relational existence. To love God means accepting responsibility *to* God, seeking to learn and to do his will, in all our relational existence.

Scripture serves the pedagogy of the church both for *ascertaining* and *promoting* the authenticity of Christian life. The church attributes *canonicity* to its sacred writings because it deems them normative for ascertaining and fostering an authentically theocentric life in communion with the body of Christ and the temple of his Spirit. Scripture is affirmed to be the word of God's truth and love which invites us to share in God's freedom to love all as truly as God does (Jn 15:15). Scripture is the divinely inspired pedagogy of the church which serves to free us from the obstacles to that divine and universal love which is the transcendent destiny and fulfilment of all humankind.

Scripture promotes human freedom and authenticity in Christian conversion. Four New Testament concepts express four complementary aspects of this liberating event and life-long process. *Metanoia*, the transformation of our cognitive and affective consciousness or interior life, the source of decision and action in every sphere of our relational existence, implies that liberation from selfishness which enables us to share Jesus Christ's universal love and wisdom. *Kenosis*, the self-giving generosity of Jesus Christ, frees us to invest our lives in others in his Spirit. *Diakonia*, the self-giving that, devoid of self-interest, frees us to collaborate with Jesus Christ in making a genuine contribution to others. *Koinonia*, the culmination of the conversion process, is our communion in the communion of the Three Persons. The friendship, reciprocity, peace, and community of the friends of God is the sacrament of the Eternal Love/Life that unites the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. *Koinonia* is impossible without *metanoia*, *kenosis*, and *diakonia*. The self-giving of the Triune God enables these four aspects of our self-giving (See Acts 2: 42–48). The self-giving Father is known in the self-giving of the body of Christ and the temple of his Spirit. Christian conversion occurs wherever we are becoming community/covenant persons, giving our lives for others in the Spirit of Jesus and his Father. Scripture as God's word is a call to conversion; and that is always a call to communion or friendship with God and all others.

Scriptural Iconography for Christian Conversion

The community of faith employs its scriptural iconography as a matrix for Christian conversion. Believing, hoping, loving, deciding—all are fundamental activities at the heart of all human life. These activities involve human motivation. Vision is essential to human life, inasmuch as it is an orientation to decision and action. We cannot do what we cannot, at least in some way, imagine or envisage. In Johannine theology no one can come to Christ unless the Father draw him (6:44). Christ is the icon, the image through which the Father transforms each particular human life story. In the measure that our image/vision of Christ is in or out of focus, is more or less oblique, in that measure will we reflect explicitly or implicitly what is authentically human and divine. Our lives bear witness to a basic vision; this vision includes images of ourselves, others, the world, human integrity and failure, God, and so on. However unclear, distorted, or false our vision (or images), there is no human life story without it. Vision, including all the images associated with it, is integral to human motivation and action; it shapes our lives. Truly good lives imply true vision.

The life story, the humanity of Jesus, is the icon disclosing his God and Father to the world. To see him is to see the Father (Jn 12:45; 14:9). The life story of the crucified and risen Jesus is the paradigmatic image for Christian faith. Through its scriptural iconography, the community of faith calls us to communicate the likeness of God by sharing the likeness of Jesus in whom God is rendered visible, authentically imaginable, and imitable as our way, our truth, and our life. Inasmuch as we cannot do what we can in no way imagine, Jesus as the perfect icon of God, motivates faith to a new way of being-in-the-world-together-with-all-others. Inasmuch as motivation is commensurate with the concreteness and vividness and beauty of an image, the life story of the crucified and risen Jesus has proved a historically compelling image of God that has radically transformed the lives of millions through the centuries. It corrects, transforms, and educates our vision of God.

The biblical pedagogy of the church, its scriptural iconography recognizes that an authentic image of ourselves, others, and the world, implies an authentic image of God—the pure of heart shall see God, because they ‘see’ him as he really is in relation to the complexity of their lives as beings-in-the-world-with-others. A distorted image of self implies a distorted image of God.

The life story of Jesus and his parables reveal the coherence of his images of faith. They reveal his interpretation of life: his own life, the external life he encountered in the lives of others and himself. Christian conversion is the process by which the life of Jesus, the story told by his

life, so transforms our cognitive-affective core that our life stories become icons of the same God as his.

The parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30; cf. Mk 13:34; Lk 19: 11-27) throws light upon the coherence of our motivating images and the need for their transformation in response to the challenge of the Good News. The unproductive life of the wicked and lazy servant is explained in terms of fear—he believes his master to be a ‘hard man.’ His image of his master engenders fear and distrust that, in turn, render the servant’s life unproductive both for himself and for others. Failure to live with a true image of the master precludes sharing in his happiness. Without a basic trust and gratitude to his generous master, the servant abandons himself in vain to his own plan for being safe. Without what we might call a eucharistic disposition, the image of God disclosed by our life story will be at variance with the image we explicitly attempt to project in our prayers, our hymns, and our telling of the Gospel story.

The scriptural iconography of each evangelist enables us to see complementary aspects of God and his love in Jesus Christ. *Mark* sees in the suffering Messiah and Servant of God (10:45) the face of a loving God serving all humankind, giving his life for all. The self-abandonment of the crucified is the self-gift of God for all. *Matthew* affirms that Christ is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Messiah Son of God in whom God is present among his people (1:23). His Gospel of the Church affirms that God abides with his people in the person of Jesus, who is acting in their fellowship (28:20). If God is love, Matthew sees his face in the brothers and sisters of Jesus. *Luke* stresses the outgoing and universal compassion of God in Jesus Christ’s concern for outcasts, sinners, Samaritans and the poor. Luke sees the face of God in the universal outreach and compassion of Jesus, an all-embracing love without limits. *John* affirms that in Jesus Christ we share in the life of the triune communion. The mutual indwelling of Father and Son is communicated in their gift of their Spirit (14:15-16). John sees in Jesus Christ and his community of faith the indwelling community that is the eternal life and love of the Blessed Trinity. The indwelling love of the Three Persons for one another is manifest in the outgoing love of Jesus Christ and his community of faith. John sees in the reciprocal love of Christians both the indwelling and outgoing love of the Three Persons as the origin and ground and destiny or fulfilment of all humankind. The church is the sacrament/icon of the triune communion, the efficacious sign of the eternal love even now transforming human relationships into relationships of a friendship/love that not even death itself can terminate. The joy of that friendship/love is one that this world cannot take from us because it is not this world’s to give. The Good News of

what John sees in Jesus Christ is that the eternal friendship/love is both God and his will/destiny for us. The divine will for us is always the divine love for us.

The scriptural iconography of the evangelists implies that seeing God in Jesus Christ means seeing the whole Jesus Christ in the fullness of his interpersonal life: together with his brothers and sisters, no less than with his Father and Spirit. Whoever lives by the same life-principle is a part of his interpersonal life: 'For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother' (Mt 12:50). The interpersonal life of Jesus Christ is the matrix for the Christian vision of an interpersonal God in the triune communion of eternal love. The self-giving and sharing that is Jesus Christ's interpersonal life enables our vision/seeing/image of the self-giving and sharing Three Persons, creating and sustaining and drawing all human life to fulfilment within the triune communion. The Gospels symbolize the unrestricted nature of the triune God's love to which all humankind is constitutively oriented by presenting Jesus as God's revealing image, summoning us to communion in that love. The mystery of that love for us seen/imaged/envisioned in Jesus Christ generates the faith, hope, and love in both the event and lifelong process of Christian conversion. Such conversion means faith in the reality of God's self-giving love *seen* in Jesus Christ. Although the wisdom of the world deems the self-giving life and death of Jesus foolishness, the converted subject finds in the cross and resurrection both the strength to reject that wisdom and the firm hope that his or her self-giving will not prove futile. The authenticity of our response to Jesus' injunction to love God above all finds its verification in the decisions and actions by which we follow Jesus in costly self-giving love for the neighbour both within and outside the Christian community.

The revolutionary image of God in the crucified Christ identifies God as a participant in human suffering and death, willingly sharing the extremes of human limitation with a love that liberates us from all we most dread. Islam, in contrast, cannot imagine such a God who would allow a true prophet like Jesus to undergo public disgrace, atrocious suffering, and death. For Islam, therefore, the death of Jesus is a mere illusion created by an angel that takes his place at Allah's behest. Buddhists, similarly, cannot imagine Ultimate Reality choosing to participate in a condition that their religion seeks to avoid. The Greeks, for whose gods the human condition of suffering and death was little more than a spectator sport, were equally unable to entertain such an image of God. Although the Hindus are able to accept the notion of incarnated gods, their gods avoid the punishments for evil that are

suffering and death. For the Jews (and other religions) the notion of God incarnate is sufficiently blasphemous, to say nothing of their God participating in human suffering and death! The perfect image of God in the crucified and risen Jesus is at the heart of the Christian community's scriptural iconography and pedagogy for confronting the problem of evil in all its bewildering forms. Suffering, evil, and death cannot overcome the invincible love of the crucified and risen Christ in whose face the Christian community sees its God and proclaims that God is Love (1 Jn 4:7f.). The Christian community's vision of God in the crucified and risen Christ unites it in the conviction that the Spirit of the Son's invincible love given to us (Gal 4:6) will prevail over the powers of darkness and can achieve something of Christ's heroism in all of us, empowering us to meet the demands of that love in all the spheres of our relational life.

Jesus is the human image of the divine love at the service of all humankind. When he takes the role of the servant washing the feet of his disciples, he tells them that his role is paradigmatic of their own relationship to one another and to the kingdom (Jn 13: 14-15). His service is the sign/image of his living in the Spirit that is both his life/love given to the Father and his Father's life/love given to him. His service is in giving to all the Spirit that unites Father and Son in mutual indwelling love. The kingdom of God is coming where we welcome and serve each other in that same Spirit. The final words of this last supper scene are Jesus' call to sharing his service: 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them' (Jn 13:17). Conversion means living in that Spirit that is transforming our lives with the love that is the life of both Father and Son.

Mark's scriptural iconography is a literary and theological unit whose structure discloses the integrating center of Jesus' life in two ways that are normative for Christian conversion.

Jesus lives for divine rather than human approval. Mark structures his narrative to indicate that Jesus lives for God above all. Jesus' unpopularity is commensurate to the progress that he makes in fulfilling his Father's will. The hostility that Jesus encounters intensifies as the sphere of his activity expands. Religious leaders clash with him and decide that he must die (2:1-3:6). His family and relatives reject him (6:1-6). His disciples oppose him (8:32). The crowds turn against him (14:43; 15:14). The military mock him (15:16-20), after he has been condemned to death by the civil authorities (15:15). Disciples, friends, and family abandon him at Golgotha where some women are described as observing events 'from a distance' (15:40). Jesus dies alone. His life story culminates in obedience to his Father's will. He enjoys no human

solidarity or affirmation, but only mockery and contempt. The meaning is not clear of both his rebuke to Peter for thinking the way of men rather than of God (8:33) and of his affirmation that God alone is good (10:18).

Jesus lives to share his interior life with all humankind. Mark makes this clear by structuring his narrative around three authentic and full affirmations of Jesus' identity in which he implies that only the Lover (Father) authentically and adequately recognizes and knows the Beloved (Son). At the beginning (1:11) and during (9:7) the life story of Jesus, the Lover explicitly identifies Jesus as the Beloved. Only through the death of Jesus for 'the many' (10:45; 14:24) is the Gentile centurion, the archetype of the many, able to share the Lover's recognition of the Beloved. These three affirmations of Jesus' divine Sonship make up the beginning, the middle, and the completion of Jesus' life story. Jesus is fully aware of his God-given meaning and value, mission and purpose from the beginning to the completion of his life story. Aware of the Lover who has called him Beloved, Jesus is enabled to transmit to the 'many', symbolized by the Gentile centurion, the transforming and saving reality of that love. If the baptismal narrative reveals Jesus as the person whose very existence is that of being loved by God, the Transfiguration narrative reveals that love as constituting Jesus as the sacrament of God's love for all humankind. The transfigured humanity of Jesus is the outward and visible sign of the inward: and invisible favour that infallibly brings about that which it declares. Mark would not be writing the story of the Beloved Christ if he and his hearers had not already heard the voice that calls them 'my Beloved.' Mark is writing the story of the One who is the supreme Symbol (sacramental sign) of the Lover-Beloved relationship, the efficacious Symbol (*signum efficax*) that draws together (*symbollein*) all humankind to become what they contemplate.

Every life story requires an initiating vision; so the Marcan Jesus sees the meaning of his life's story in the moment he starts to tell it. Jesus' life and mission begin with the major statement of the vision from which all else springs. Mark presents Jesus' knowledge and vision of his own beloved Sonship as the energizing source and dynamic principle that binds the disparate elements of his life story together. We can in no way do what we cannot envision. The baptismal affirmation of Jesus as the Beloved Son of God gives Jesus the vision of who he is and what his story should tell. Mark structures his story so that the vision that initiates the life of Jesus is present throughout his entire life story. The appreciative voice of the Father is heard by Jesus throughout the length of his saving mission. It defines Jesus as one who at core is in

relation to the Father; it defines the character of the favour and authority he enjoys from heaven. The baptismal account seems to imply that it was Jesus alone who heard the voice; the voice testifies to the ontological basis of Jesus' ability to communicate the concrete goodness of being loved by God. It is because Jesus is the unique Beloved of God that he can make us beloved. It is from this that all else flows.

At the Transfiguration, the heavenly voice comes almost as a response to Peter's exclamation. Peter and heaven are represented as speaking. At the Transfiguration the representatives of the new people of God share the vision and hear the voice. Jesus is represented as transforming; the Beloved is making us beloved. The Transfigured transfigures. At the Transfiguration a command is added to the words heard at the baptism: '. . . listen to him' The Lover not only loves the Beloved but also demands that others listen to the Beloved. The Lover's authority is invested in the Beloved. It is witnessed by the Gentile centurion who stands for the many for whom Christ's blood was poured out (14:24). 'Truly,' he declares, 'was this man the Son of God' (15:39). This confession of faith represents for Mark a full confession of the Easter faith of his readers in the divinity of the crucified and risen Son of God.

The three affirmations of Sonship suggest a Markan model for the entire event and process of Christian conversion. The relationship of human persons to the Beloved Son moves from nonrecognition (baptism) through incipient recognition (Transfiguration) to full recognition (Golgotha). Mark's readers will experience the goodness of God's affirming love in their lives only as they allow themselves to be drawn to him along the Way of the Cross. In the self-gift of his Son, God wills to make us the locus of his own self-giving to the whole human race. In the measure that we allow ourselves to be totally receptive to God, in that measure can God make us the fountain from which his love will flow to our brothers and sisters.

Mark's scriptural iconography is an extended symbol of God's self-investment in his Son, the Beloved, a self-investing love that calls forth and creates love in all who receive the Spirit of the Son. Mark's Gospel summons each reader to hear the words of God: 'You are my Son, the Beloved. My favour rests on you.' Mark is engaged in the cognitive-affective transformation of his readers, a transformation that issues from the felt-meaning of God's loving self-investment in their lives. Mark wants his readers to accept as the integrating center of their lives the Supreme and Beloved Goodness whose life has been poured out for them. Letting God be God means letting him invest in our lives the fulfilling goodness of his Beloved Son and Spirit.

Conversion as Remembering

The psalmist believed that the dead inhabit the land of oblivion (88:13); they are in a state of spiritual amnesia. God no longer works wonders for the dead (88:11). They cannot remember God because their relationship with him has been severed. Sadness reigns in the world of the dead (Dt 34:8). The joyless state of the dead derives from their inability to remember God. They do not share in the joy of Israel's worship and praise of God (Ps 88:11; Is 38:18). The psalmist assumes that only where death reigns is there no praise of or joy in God; where there is life, there is praise and joy.

The church's biblical pedagogy is grounded in the divine and human remembering that is one of the forms that God's creative and transforming *love* takes. God's remembering his people is his loving/preserving/saving them. We exist and survive because God remembers us. God's remembering is his *self-giving*, always a gift (*gratia operans*), a divine initiative enabling our reciprocity (*gratia operans*) in self-giving remembering or communion with him. God's remembering is one of the forms that his *freedom* takes in securing both our freedom *from* oblivion/alienation and our freedom *for* fulfilment in communion with him. No one forces God to remember, to love, or to care for us. God's remembering is always his self-giving *call to communion* or *reciprocity*, enabling our *responsibility*. God reminds us to remember him; he calls us to recall him. God's remembering/loving is universal. God remembers/loves all humankind without exception. God's remembering/loving is the common good of the universe, the source and ground and fulfilment of all humankind. The unity of all in a 'universe' is rooted in God's remembering all together, loving all with his all-encompassing love, the common good in which all created goodness participates for its existence, development, and fulfilment. (Luke implies that God's love forgets nothing when he has Jesus recount three stories in chapter 15—of persons seeking what they have lost. 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' (Lk 23:42), the words of the Good Thief, also imply the loving/saving remembering of a God who forgets no one.)

Prayer, worship, liturgy—all are forms of theocentric self-transcendence in remembering God. Prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving express our remembering God's gifts. Prayers of petition are ways of remembering God's loving concern for our welfare. All true prayer expresses our remembering that God remembers/love us, implicitly affirming that God is good.

Our remembering God in the cognitive and affective self-transcending activity of prayer is, even now, an experience of our

ultimate meaning, perfection, and destiny/future. We are most fully ourselves when we are in prayerful communion with our divine Origin-Ground-Destiny. As relational beings, we most experience absurdity, meaninglessness, and frustration when we are out of touch with or oblivious to Ultimate Reality/God. Our remembering God is implicitly our experience of God's remembering us; for our prayer is always a response to God who is reminding us that he is our Creator-Sustainer-Fulfillment. The Spirit of God is where it is actively reminding us to remember "Abba, Father"; for God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts for this purpose (Gal 4:6).

God has given us the Spirit of his Son to do what we could not otherwise do: 'He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you' (Jn 14:26). Jesus' gift of the Spirit reminds us to forgive others and calls us to be reconciled with them (Jn 20:22). God's gift of the Spirit of his Son transforms human life, making all things new (e.g. Jn 1:30; Mt 3:16); he reintegrates our lives through his Spirit of reconciliation which enables us to do what would otherwise be impossible. God alone actually loves all persons. Apart from the gift of God's Spirit, it is humanly impossible to love all persons, especially our enemies. Peacemakers remind us of and recall us to the Spirit of God which renews and reintegrates all human life in Christ. The Lord's Prayer teaches us that we cannot know Our Father in the biblical sense of an intimate personal relationship apart from our willingness to be reconciled with all others. Our liturgical remembering both expresses and forms our identity in the triune communion where we learn to forgive others as God forgives us. It reminds us who we truly are and calls us to our real selves in the triune communion with all others.

Amnesia is an illness that involves an identity crisis. Individuals forget their past, their story, their relationships. Inasmuch as individuals are interpersonal and relational realities, amnesia deprives them of their identity. They forget who they are in the fullness of their interpersonal and social reality. Amnesia is, therefore, a form of personal disintegration in which persons lose or 'forget' themselves. Amnesia threatens communities and societies as well; for they can forget their story, their tradition, their identity. The liturgy of both Israel and the church is a form of remembering that both unites and preserves the community of faith. To forget their story of God, their common heritage, would entail their destruction as a people. Recounting the wonderful deeds of God for his people, Moses warns his people never to forget them (Dt 6:10–13). Remembering is the law of survival: 'Remember how Yahweh your God' (Dt 8:2); 'Be sure that if you forget Yahweh your God. . . you will most certainly perish' (Dt 8:19). The

Lord's Supper entails the same liturgical imperative of remembering for the life of the church: 'Do this in memory of me' (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24f.).

The leaders and priests of both Israel and the church must be able to remind their people to preserve them; they must know their story/tradition or spiritual heritage to communicate it in liturgy, evangelization, ministries and other forms of witness. Leaders and priests function as reminders of the people, recalling the story and its meaning in Scripture and tradition, proclaiming and manifesting its true goodness for all both in word and deed. Liturgical, catechetical and evangelical reminding is the task of priests as leaders of the ecclesial community. As servants of the poor in society, they remind the people of the mission of Jesus; they recall them to share in his life of service for the reintegration and salvation of all.

God reminds and recalls his people through the gift of his Son and his Spirit. God's reminding and recalling constitute the covenant community as a reminding and recalling community of faith with a mission of communicating the good news of God's love for all. The body of Christ and the temple of his Spirit, the sacrament of the triune communion, reminds all of the Father's love and calls all to welcome it. The church is the sacrament of the remembering and reminding Trinity. Its members participate in the priesthood of its remembering and reminding Lord, proclaiming and manifesting the true goodness of the triune communion as the origin and ground and perfection of all human life.

God has identified us with himself through his Son and his Spirit. He reminds us of our God-given identity and calls us to welcome it through and within the body of his Son and the temple of his Spirit, saving us from anonymity/spiritual amnesia for the discovery of our real selves in the triune communion. The Spirit of the Father and Son has been given to us to remind us of our God-given identity (Jn 14:26). Father and Son remember us and call/remind us to welcome our God-given identity in their gift of the Spirit. Idolatry, the apotheosis of created realities in the service of a human self-apotheosis, is always a rejection of our God-given identity within the triune communion. It is a form of spiritual amnesia or oblivion with regard to our true identity or real selves. Idolatry is the futile attempt to give ourselves an identity other than our real and God-given identity, Scripture and tradition are the church's response to the grace of God's remembering and the demand of God's reminding. They express the collective wisdom of the remembering community of faith in both the event and life-long process of becoming the friends of God. The collective wisdom of scripture and

tradition serves as a matrix for cultivating and educating the faith and hope and love of the divinely remembered and reminded people of God. The community of faith employs the resources of its collective wisdom for discerning the grace and demand of God for its maturation and fulfilment. God's gifts entail responsibilities to be discerned and met in the light of the church's wisdom tradition.

Scripture and tradition assure us that God is faithful to his promises. God remembers his promises or commitments. God is reliable, trustworthy, responsible. Love, divine and human, means remembering our promises, commitments, responsibilities, vows. Human existence, development, and fulfilment evidence God's remembering his promises, commitments. Authentically personal life, divine and human, entails the keeping of promises and commitments. The pedagogy of the community of faith in the service of Christian conversion teaches us that to become the friends of God, living in God's love, we must share his trustworthiness, reliability, and fidelity. The community of faith teaches us to pray for the Spirit of the Father and the Son in whose love we can overcome our proclivity to irresponsibility, untrustworthiness, infidelity, and aimlessness. That same community teaches that the Cross represents the communion of divine and human remembering/love in accepting costly commitment and responsibility. Christian conversion is always a call to communion, community, and friendship—divine and human—based on commitment, fidelity, the ability or will to keep our promises. Communion, community, and friendship disintegrate with our refusal to endure the limitations of others who do not fully gratify, support, or console us. The self-giving Spirit of the Father's patient love is revealed in his crucified Son's costly commitment to human fulfilment in the triune communion.

God remembers/loves and reminds/calls us in his word and image, Jesus Christ. The remembered/beloved and reminded/called community of faith has been called into existence and is sustained in its existence and development by that same word and image. Jesus Christ is the living word and image/embodiment of the Good News, the sign of the kingdom, manifesting what human beings are like when they are under the rule of God. Similarly, his body the church is the living word and image of the Good News, the sign of the kingdom, God's new society manifesting, however imperfectly, what the human community is like when it comes under the rule of God. The Good News of God's loving purpose for all humankind is manifested and proclaimed in Jesus Christ and his body the church where the Word of God becomes visible and the image of God becomes audible. God has manifested/imagined and proclaimed himself by sending his only Son: 'No one has ever seen

God, but God the only Son ...has made him known' (Jn 1:18). So Jesus could say: 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (Jn 14:9); and Paul could add that Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15). Similarly, the invisible God who made himself visible in Jesus Christ, continues to manifest/image himself in Christians when they love one another: 'No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made perfect in us' (1 Jn 4:12). To the extent that the body of Christ is transformed into a community of love grounded in truth, God visibly and audibly substantiates the credibility of his good news for all, opening the eyes of the blind and unstopping the ears of the deaf for the transformation of all humankind into a truthful and loving community.

The eucharistic community of faith thanks God for the gift of its life in the remembering Spirit of his word and image, Jesus Christ, the epitome of all communion between God and humankind. God's self-giving enables the eucharistic community to believe, to hope, and to love in its spiritual journey towards the fulfilment of God's promises in the kingdom. New Testament writers depict the community's response to the call of God in Jesus Christ and his Spirit as a life-long spiritual journey.

Creating Options: Shattering the 'Exclusivist, Inclusivist, and Pluralist' Paradigm

Ian Markham

Organization and classification of material is essential as an aid to effective communication. Good teachers and writers will use labels to organize material, which play a valuable role in simplifying a debate. They provide a way in for the student or reader. However, this organization and classification of material is not a neutral and objective enterprise. One's classification will hide certain basic decisions and options.

It is the argument of this article that the 'theology of religions' debate has been stifled by an over-emphasis on the standard threefold paradigm. I will be taking issue with John Hick's judgment: 'the