

**SYSTEMATIC
THEOLOGY
502
DISTANCE**

UNION

THE REV'D T. L. HOLTZEN, PH.D.

UNION WITH GOD

Salvation as Union with God

- The idea of union with God is ontological. In this understanding of salvation the human person is united to God in a spiritual manner. Not all church Fathers would agree on the nature of this union. However, one thing that is clear is that this union is not simply a moral union. Union with God is not forensic or legal either. Rather when one is united to God there is a fellowship and participation with God. There is a spiritual fellowship or communion that takes place through the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Two types of union with God: Adoption & being Born of God
 - Edward Schillebeeckx sums up the distinction, “we find two models which both present the same Christian experience: the more *juridical* model of adoption and the more *ontological* model of being born of God.’
 - Adoption or Sonship is Pauline
 - Being born of God is Johannine



UNION WITH GOD BY THE SPIRIT

The Gift of the Spirit

- The eschatological prophecy of the gift of the Spirit in Joel 2:28 that God would “pour out my Spirit on all flesh” is fulfilled according to Peter in Acts 2:17. Reception of the gift of the Spirit signifies a participation in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ) and therefore participation in the New Covenant. Paul asserts that to have possession of God’s divine πνεῦμα is to be ἐν Χριστῷ:
 - ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . But if you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.’ (Rom 8:1, 9-11)
- There is a Mutual Communion in Christ and in the Spirit
 - Paul uses the idea of being “in Christ” and “in the Spirit” interchangeably (Rom 8:9-10, 14:17). This interrelation of Christ and the Spirit can be seen in a number of conceptual parallels as well:
 - righteousness in Christ (2 Cor 5:21) and in the Spirit (Rom 14:17)
 - justification in Christ (Gal 2:17) and in the Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)
 - rejoicing in the Lord (Phlm 3:1) and joy in the Spirit (Rom 14:17)
 - love in Christ (Rom 8:9) and in the Spirit (Col 1:8)
 - sanctification in Christ (1 Cor 1:2, 30) and in the Spirit (Rom 15:16)
 - baptism in Christ (Gal 3:27) and in the Spirit (1 Cor 13:13).



SONS IN THE SON

We are sons and daughters of God in the Son of God, sons in the Son (*fili in Filio*)

- Christ is a Son by Nature

- Christ is the 'only begotten Son of God' (John 3:16). Christ is the “μονογενῆ” (*monogenēs*) or “only-begotten” son of God as stated in Scripture and the Creed.
- Christ is divine by nature, eternally begotten of the Father, pre-existing the incarnation in his divinity, only taking on flesh in the incarnation

- We are sons by Grace

- Christ's divine sonship is by nature and ours is by grace according to both St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Whereas Christ is a divine son by nature (hence his is described as born of the holy *theotokos*), we become sons and daughters of God by grace. He is eternally the Son of God, we are adopted sons and daughters of God.

- Union by Grace

- *sketikos* (σχετικός) meaning incidental or nonessential is the word “used by the fathers with reference to the union of believers with God by grace and, pejoratively, with reference to the Nestorian view of the union of the two natures of Christ.”



PAULINE SONSHIP BY ADOPTION

Sonship

- One of the ways that St. Paul describes union with God is through the idea of adoptive sonship. The gift of the divine πνεῦμα is the gift of “sonship” (υιοθεσία). In Rom 8:15 Paul refers to receiving the Spirit as having ‘received a Spirit of sonship’ (ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα υιοθεσίας). When the Spirit is received by faith one is a son or daughter of God in Christ (Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).
- To have the Spirit is to be a son (or daughter) of God)
 - ‘But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir. ‘(Gal 4:4-7)
 - ‘For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of adoptive sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ’. (Rom 8:14-17)
- Adoption as Sons Completed when Christ comes Again
 - ‘we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies’. (Rom 8:23)



JOHANNINE UNION WITH GOD

Johannine Rebirth

- The Johannine idea of rebirth is summed up in the phrase '*sperma pneumatikon*' or rebirth by the 'seed of the Spirit'
- The idea is that a person is born anew by the 'seed of God' (*sperma tou Theou*)
 - 'No one born of God (*gegennēmenos ek tou theou*) commits sin; for God's nature (*sperma*, i.e., lit. seed) abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.' (1 John 3:9)
 - 'By this we know we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit.' (1 John 4:13)
 - "'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" . . . "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (*gegennēmenos ek tou theou pneumatos*)."' (John 3:5, 8)



OTHER IDEAS OF UNION

Partakers of the Divine Nature

- 'His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.' (2 Pet 3-4)
- Sin is understood in terms of corruption from passion.
- God's divine power grants freedom from the corruption of the passions (*apatheia*)

Members of the Body of Christ

- Union with Christ is understood in ecclesial terms, i.e., when a person is united to Christ they are made a member of his body the Church
- 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.' (Eph 4:4-6)



UNION RESULTS IN COMMUNION

The result of union with God through Christ and the Spirit is a communion (κοινωνία) with God.

- Scriptures speak of:
 - a 'communion with the Father' (1 John 1:3; 1:6)
 - a 'communion with the Son' (1 Cor 1:9; Col 2:6; 1 John 1:3; 2:24);
 - a 'communion with the Holy Spirit' (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1; Heb 4:6).
 - a communion with other people in the Spirit (John 17:11, 21f; 1 John 1:3, 7).
- This communion is ontological
 - The gift of the Spirit dwells in our being
 - The gift of the Spirit changes our being
 - Since it is by grace our being does not turn into God's being.
 - This communion with God is by grace, not nature
 - Through the Spirit we are 'in Christ' and thus made a son or daughter of God.

