

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

Chapter one of this study began by noting that I am no longer the person I used to be. Some time in the summer of 2000, a transition began to take place that led me to understand in a way I had not understood before what it meant to be embedded in Jesus Christ and to have Jesus Christ embedded in me through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. I felt as if I was in a maternal womb, united with the nature of my mother's life-blood inside of me, yet distinct from my mother's body outside of me. This new experience began to lavishly water my life from an artesian well deep within the recesses of my soul and quench my thirst for God in a way it had not been quenched before. Moreover, this water also began to pour forth from me and water the soil of my relationships in a mysteriously fertile way. I felt I was recovering some of the life of Paradise Lost in the way God had designed this life to be recovered by being embedded with Christ in the Father's nature through the refreshing advance installment of this nature in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter one further noted that my experience did not take place in a vacuum, but was part of a Reformed ecclesiastical culture that appeared to be characterized more by objective than subjective spirituality. Thus, Christianity appeared to be characterized more by objectively controlling the Word of God external to us than being subjectively controlled by the Word of God inside us through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit; more by intellectual assent to a propositional data base than by being relationally united with Jesus Christ in the Father; more by objective epistemology than subjective participation in the Father's nature; more by utilitarian programs, percentages and problem-solving than receptivity to the Father's nature in Christ through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit; more by emphasis on form, formulas, rules and regulations than by putting on the Father's nature of love through being embedded in the

Christ in this nature of love through the advance installment of this nature of love in the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, this chapter noted that what appeared to characterize my own Reformed ecclesiastical culture, also appeared to be true for contemporary Evangelical culture. This culture too appeared to be characterized more by a form of deistic detachment fostered by a theological paradigm that over-objectified the Person and work of Jesus Christ than the indwelling presence of the Father in Jesus Christ through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, this chapter noted two promising ecclesiastical developments. First, a movement among ministers in my former denomination in the Netherlands that is reflecting on a model for church growth that finds its integrative center first and foremost in living in union with Christ and not primarily in being purpose-driven, equipping, emotional health, mission, attractiveness, community, natural development or postmodernity. Second, a movement among Presbyterians in the United States that seeks to show how union with Christ ties together the church's confession regarding discipleship, authority, mission and church unity.

In the light of my own personal journey of the discovery of living an embedded Christian life with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit and these two promising ecclesiastical developments of the significance of living this kind of life for church growth, this chapter noted that this study seeks to offer some biblical-theological impulses towards cultivating an embedded Christian life.

Chapter two of this study listened to the voice of the Spirit in the Scriptures and identified ten characteristics of being embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. First, it identified that an embedded Christian life is an intimate covenantal relationship where God embeds Himself into the inner self or the soul of the members

of his covenant community through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. This advance installment of the Holy Spirit is the installment of the love the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father. Consequently God makes them partakers of his Father-Son love or divine nature. In doing so, God's covenant community feels the weight of this nature and is called to glorify or embody its weight by remaining dependent upon Him for its generation. God's covenant community is able to receive and embody this divine nature because God created its members with a soul that has a "plasticity and adaptability" or "openness to the world."

Second, chapter two identified that because God's covenant community did not want to receive and embody the weight of God's Father-Son love or nature by remaining dependent upon God for its generation, she willfully dis-embedded herself from this nature and sought to reflect the weight of its own nature and be dependent upon herself for its generation. Because this kind of self-generated living not only fails to receive and embody the weight of God's nature, but also leads to the dis-membering from God's Father-Son love for its generation, the Father sends his perpetually, generated Son to the world to re-embed his covenant community in Himself and become a partaker of his divine nature. This re-embedding into the Father and becoming partaker of his nature occurs by being a member of Jesus' body through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. This re-embedding is possible not only because Jesus became a member of the human race, but also because He undid the willful dis-embedding of God's covenant community from God's nature through faithfully remaining embedded in the Father's nature by being dependent upon Him for its generation through the bond of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Jesus undid or annulled this willful dis-embedding by stilling the wrath of the Father against this willful dis-embedding with his death on the cross.

Third, chapter two identified that in order for God's covenant community to receive and embody God's divine nature, her members need to remain embedded in God's nature or Father-Son love by personally embracing this love through repentance and faith. This receptive posture was also the posture that characterized Jesus' life. It is precisely through this receptive posture that God's nature or Father-Son love is received into one's inner being or soul. The soul is able to be receptive because it can function as the noticing mind that perceives and registers before it begins to think about what it has noticed, perceived or registered. Since the will is the mind acting upon thoughts and desires, when the soul thinks about what it has noticed and felt and acts upon what it thinks and feels, it functions as the will. This will is never uncaused or completely free because thoughts and desires are never uncaused or completely free. Accordingly, God regenerates human beings in a monergistic manner. In doing so, however, He does not violate the human will, but liberates it and gives it its true freedom.

Fourth, chapter two identified that the sacrament of baptism enriches the understanding of God's covenant community of being embedded in God's nature or Father-Son love because baptism declares that members of this community are embedded in a new order of life where, because of his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ is Lord. Because this new order of life is visible in God's covenant community, she is the sign or embodiment of this new order also known as the kingdom of God. However, baptism not only declares that God's covenant community is embedded in a new order of life where Jesus Christ is Lord, it also summons its members to affirm in faith what God has already declared to be true. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper enriches the understanding of God's covenant community of being embedded in God's nature or Father-Son love because it a multifaceted symbol of this love for God's covenant community in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Fifth, chapter two identified that when God's covenant community remains embedded in God's nature or Father-Son love through faith, it learns to move or dance with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit because it makes room for and is interpenetrated with the love of this divine, Trinitarian community. Consequently, as the divine love of this Trinitarian community is not focused on itself, but radiates out from itself, so too the love of God's covenant community is not self-focused, but other-focused as it radiates from herself and interpenetrates the different spheres of life.

Sixth, chapter two identified that—although revealed and made known in the Scriptures—being embedded in and interpenetrated by God's divine nature or Father-Son love through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit is a mystery that transcends human understanding. Instead of God's covenant community merging with Christ in the Father through the Holy Spirit in some sort of pantheistic, monistic manner, she remains distinct from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit even though she is united to them.

Seventh, chapter two identified that when God's covenant community remains embedded in God's Father-Son love and is interpenetrated by this love, Christ draws this community into his own life and work through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit so that where she is Christ is too. Thus, God's covenant community does things together with Christ and represents Him to the world.

Eighth, chapter two identified that when Christ draws God's covenant community into his own life and work through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit, she is embedded in Christ and Christ is embedded in her. This mutual indwelling parallels the mutual indwelling of the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father. It is through this mutual indwelling that God's covenant community is able to represent Jesus and be where He is. As a result, God's covenant

community participates in a new movement that is rolling towards the new heaven and new earth where all things will be made right and where Christ is all in all.

Ninth, chapter two identified that when Christ draws God's covenant community into his own life and work through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit, her noticing mind or "noticer" is changed so that she conforms to Christ's nature because she has the noticing mind of Christ. Being conformed to Christ includes being daily regenerated from receiving and embodying the weight of one's own nature through self-generated living by being dis-membered and dis-embedded from the Father's nature to receiving and reflecting the weight of God's nature through God-generated living by being re-membered and re-embedded with Christ in the Father nature through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. This is the heart of what living in covenant with God is about and is more characteristic of the new covenant than of the old.

Tenth, chapter two identified that the more God's covenant community is conformed to Christ's nature the more she learns to rest by being embedded with Christ in the Father and lie with Christ in the bosom of the Father. Lying in the Father's bosom by being embedded with Christ in the Father's nature not only is a reminder of the Sabbath rest enjoyed in the Garden of Eden, but also a foretaste of the Sabbath rest that will be enjoyed at the consummation of history. Thus, being embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit is living the eschatological life in the present.

Chapter three of this study listened to the voice of the Spirit in my own Reformed tradition as He spoke through John Calvin. It showed that being embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit or union with Christ is a central motif in Calvin's theology. Furthermore, it showed that what Calvin taught regarding union with Christ

or the embedded Christian life is consistent with what was discovered in chapter two regarding the Scriptural foundations for this kind of life.

Moreover, chapter three noted that what Calvin taught on union with Christ enriched this study's understanding of what was discovered in chapter two. Of particular interest is what he taught regarding believers becoming partakers of God's divine nature. According to Calvin, this is an ontological union with God's nature that is a sort of deification (*quasi deificari*) in which believers do not share in God's essence (*ousia*), but the properties of this essence. For Calvin, this is the greatest possible blessing a believer can receive.

Chapter three further noted that Calvin's understanding of deification is presupposed in what he taught about the image of God, union with Christ, engrafting, glorification and the Trinitarian life. Regarding the image of God, to have the image of God restored in Christ involves looking like Christ, for the imprint (*effigies*) of the Father's glory has been engraved in Christ's human nature, so that He can transform members of Christ's body or covenant community to this imprint. Regarding union with Christ, in the incarnation of the Son of God, God and humankind are united and re-membered. Regarding engrafting, because Christ was obedient and fulfilled the law on behalf of his covenant community in his human nature, it is through union with his human nature that the life of the Godhead or the divine nature flows into believers through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit since Christ in his humanity contains, as it were, the benefits of his obedience. Thus, when members of God's covenant community are grafted into Christ, they not only draw their vigor and nourishment from the life of Christ, but they also pass from their own nature to his nature. Regarding glorification, this involves God irradiating or shining upon the humanity of members of God's covenant community with the weight of his divine nature. Regarding the Trinitarian life, union with God is

fundamentally Trinitarian for it is union with the Father in Christ through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. The goal of this Trinitarian union is that God's covenant community may share in the life of the Trinity through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit and enjoy the same love that the Father and the Son have enjoyed from all eternity. This union of the human and the divine, however, is impossible without the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

In addition to this understanding of deification by Calvin, chapter three further noted thirteen related items. First, God's providence in the world advances the goal of union with the Father in Christ through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. Second, God engraved knowledge of this embedded life in the human soul through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. Thus, He made human beings theaters of his divine nature or glory that feel and embody the weight of this nature or glory. Third, in addition to making human beings theaters of God's glory, this embedded knowledge of God on the soul gives members of God's covenant community knowledge of God and knowledge of themselves. Fourth, God not only embedded Himself in the human soul, but also in creation, making creation too a theater of his divine nature or glory. Fifth, union with Christ includes deification and leads to deification. Sixth, when the mind is emptied of its own wisdom and idols and made teachable by the Holy Spirit, it will gradually be led to an increasingly deeper knowledge of the embedded knowledge of God's will. Seventh, faith is knowledge or confidence in Christ who teaches through an innate sense of divinity (*sensus divinitatus*) or belief producing mechanism that gives members of God's covenant community reliable knowledge about God through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. Eighth, members of God's covenant community are called to behold and contemplate the manifestation of the weight of God's divine nature or glory in his work of creation and feel the

weight of this glory. Ninth, God does not remove, cancel or suspend the will in his work of regeneration, but prepares the will to desire what is good. Thus, in his work of regeneration God does not change the structure, but the direction of the will. Tenth, the proclamation of Christ in the Word and sacraments is meant to lead to the contemplation of Christ in the Word and the sacraments for the sake of feeling the weight of Christ's glory and being transformed by this weight. Eleventh, the Holy Spirit is the One who mysteriously embeds God's covenant community with Christ into the Father and opens her eyes to this ontological embeddedness with Christ in the Father. Twelfth, it is beneficial for members of God's covenant community to contemplate the weight of God's nature or glory in the works of his creation and redemption every day, but especially on the Sabbath to remind themselves of their ontological origin, structure, direction and destination. Thirteenth, living embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit ought to be understood according to the Chalcedonian axiom of *distinctio sed non separatio*. Thus, on the one hand, God's covenant community does not pantheistically merge with God, but remains distinct from Him. On the other hand, she is not detached or separated from God, but united with Him.

Chapter three showed that the enrichment Calvin gave in understanding being embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit removed some of the moss and weeds that have that have grown over and obscured this beautiful teaching over the centuries. Consequently, it can function as a primary theological foundation for my own faith life and ministry as well as that of my congregation.

Chapter four listened to the voice of the Spirit in the catholic tradition of the church to see how the insights of representatives from various church families supported and developed the

understanding of this study that being embedded with Christ in the life of the Trinity especially with a view to this embedded Christian life involving deification and leading to deification.

This chapter first noted that Irenaeus, as representative of the second century Church, taught that Christ's human nature is the practical means for members of God's covenant community to be re-membered to and re-embedded into God's divine nature or to undergo deification or theosis. Second, this chapter noted that Palamas, as representative of the Orthodox Church family, taught that being re-membered and re-embedded into God's divine nature and undergoing deification or theosis involves becoming partaker of the divine energies of this nature and not its essence (*ousia*). Third, chapter four noted that Daniélou, as representative of the Roman Catholic Church family, taught that humanity's creational goal or *telos* of deification or theosis is experienced through supernatural grace or the presence of God in creation. Fourth, chapter four noted that Luther, as representative of the Lutheran Church family, taught that when one believes, Christ becomes the subject of faith and ontologically re-members and re-embeds this person with Himself into the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, deification or theosis is experienced through faith. Fifth, chapter four noted that John Wesley, as representative of the Methodist-Holiness Church families, taught that the human will needs to intentionally cooperate with God's prevenient grace in order to undergo theosis and grow in theosis. Sixth, chapter six noted that Clark Pinnock, as member of the Baptist Church family, taught that the Spirit is the source of deification or theosis

Chapter four further noted that since God's creational and redemptive goal or *telos* is that his covenant community embody and show forth the weight of the glory of his divine nature, that, therefore, theosis has its goal in God's covenant community increasingly becoming a finite expression of the infinite glory of God. Furthermore, chapter four noted that Augustine did not

bring the doctrine of theosis to an edifying end in the west and that therefore deification or theosis may rightly be considered part of the catholic tradition of the church. In addition, chapter four noted that since Evangelical and Reformed theology in general has concentrated more on the objective, forensic aspects of the Christian life instead of the relational, subjective aspects, it is beneficial for Reformed and Evangelical theology to cultivate a theotic spirituality of being embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. This will, however, be a theotic spirituality that looks more like that of Irenaeus and Calvin than that of Palamas.

Chapter five showed how what was discovered in the biblical-theological and historical chapters can be used to design a ten-week learning experience to help Christians move from an objective, forensic spirituality of ontological dis-embeddeness from Christ to a more relational, subjective spirituality of ontological embeddedness with Christ in the Father through advance installment of the Holy Spirit. It did so in the following manner. First, it identified the possible forms of dis-embeddeness or detachment and suggested possible reasons for this detachment. Second, drawing on what was discovered in the biblical-theological chapters of this study, it defined a biblical-theological solution to the experience of these possible forms of detachment. Third, it suggested learning activities to help people move from these possible forms of detachment to embracing a theotic spirituality of living embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. Fourth, it defined outcomes the learning experience hoped would occur and why these are the desired ones. The chapter was concluded with a description of how the ten-week learning experience was set up and processed.

Chapter six presented the findings of the ten-week learning experience. This learning experience was based on the general hypothesis that it appears that many Reformed Christians

not only do not experience what living a God-generated life of being embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit is, but also do not intentionally live this kind of life. Instead, they appear to live self-generated, dis-embedded lives. However, going through a ten-week learning experience meant to equip (young) adults to live this kind of life will serve as a stepping stone in moving them from self-generated, dis-embedded living to more God-generated, embedded living with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit.

In order for the general hypothesis to be verified or falsified, three research questions needed to be answered. First, “To what extent was or is the spirituality of (young) adults in my congregation and in a neighbouring congregation characterized by various forms of detachment or dis-embeddedness between Christ and themselves?” Second, “To what extent do Reformed Christians live self-generated, dis-embedded lives?” Third, “To what extent will going through a 10-week spiritual learning experience meant to equip (young) adults to learn to live a God-generated life of living embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit serve as a stepping stone to move Christians from living self-generated, dis-embedded lives to God-generated live of being embedded with Christ in the Father?”

Chapter six presented the findings of the ten-week learning experience. First it presented the results of each individual lesson and applied these results to the individual hypothesis of that lesson. Second, it presented the overall results of the learning experience and a breakdown of these results and applied these results and breakdown to the general hypothesis of this study. In both cases, evaluation and analysis of the data was done and conclusions were drawn. Charts and diagrams were used to visualize the findings. The quantitative and qualitative data was correlated.

Chapter seven showed how this study could consolidate what was discovered in the biblical-theological chapters, used to design a ten-week learning experience to help Christians move from dis-embedded, self-generated lives to God-generated lives of living embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit and field-tested in a ten-week learning experience. It did so by revisiting the ten aspects of living embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit and reshaping them with what was learned in the historical theological overview, the design of the workbook and the findings of the ten-week learning experience. As a result, the contours of a theotic spirituality of living embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit emerged. These contours indicated that a theotic spirituality of living embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit would be a communal, ontological, receptive, contemplative, public and subjective spirituality. Moreover, it would be an incarnational, embedded, God-generated and prepared spirituality.

In addition, chapter seven showed how this study inspired nine suggestions for further study. These suggestions for further study concern further study in how the embedded Christian life relates to the Trinity, tradition, culture, world religions, anthropology, gender, the church, spiritual formation and faith. Moreover, chapter seven explained why this study inspired me to continue to foster and develop a theotic spirituality of living embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit.

GLOSSARY OF THEOLOGICAL TERMS

Father-Son love

The love that the Father has for the Son and the Son for the Father. This Father-Son love belongs to the essence of what it means to be God. At the center of the universe is a relationship: Father, Son and Holy Spirit mutually inhabiting one another in a life of love. This divine, trinitarian life is the gravitational center of life. Jesus' prayer for the church is that she may increasingly learn to live with Him in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit and thus find her gravitational center with Him in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. Within this Trinitarian gravitational center of life, the Father has always been and always will be the Father of the Son and the Son always has and always will be the Son of the Father. Thus, the expression *Father-Son love* refers to the love the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father. Moreover, this Father-Son love belongs to the essence of what it means to be God. Consequently, John says that God's essence is love.

Advance installment of the Holy Spirit

Just as a down payment on a mortgage is an advance installment of the rest of the money that needs to be paid for a house, so the Holy Spirit is the down payment or advance installment of the fullness of Trinitarian life that awaits us when we go to be with the Lord at death and when we receive new bodies on the day of the Lord's return. This study intentionally speaks about an *advance* installment and not a *first* installment (although this is also correct) because *first* installment has a *temporal* emphasis while *advance* installment has an *ontological* emphasis. Thus, when this study speaks about the *advance* installment of the Holy Spirit it is intentionally highlighting this ontological aspect of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this intentional speaking of the *advance* installment of the Holy Spirit also helps in understanding that this advance installment was smaller in the old (administration of the) covenant than in the new (administration of this) covenant.

Ontological

Just as the being or essence of the mother is essentially or ontologically connected to the child in her womb by means of the umbilical cord, so the being or essence of God is essentially or ontologically connected to God's covenant community through the humanity of Jesus Christ by means of the advance installment of the Holy Spirit. Thus, one could say that God and his covenant community are ontologically in Jesus Christ connected through the umbilical cord of Holy Spirit. This metaphorical description is intended for clarification and insight and not to exhaust the mystery of ontological union with Christ.

God-generated

Just as the Father is eternally the source of the Son's life through the Holy Spirit, so the Father is continually the source of a Christian's life because she is embedded with Christ in the Father through the advance installment of the Holy Spirit.

Perichoresis

From *perichorein* meaning "interchange" when used in reference to the two natures of Christ and "interpenetrate" when used in reference to the actions of the three Persons of the Trinity. Some writers assert that *perichoresis* means "circle dance" and that the word "choreography" is in some sense related to *perichorein*. However, there is no existing philological warrant for this. Moreover, there is another Greek word for "to dance around," namely *perichoreuein*. It would appear that some writers have confused *perichorein* with *perichoreuein*. Furthermore, the Church Fathers used *perichoresis* for the Persons of the Trinity interpenetrating, co inhabiting, existing in one another. However, because of the current understanding of *perichoresis* as the three Persons of the Trinity dancing with one another, this study uses *perichoresis* to refer to both "interpenetration" and "dancing." In addition, when this study speaks about God's covenant community being drawn into this Trinitarian movement or dance, it is not referring to being drawn into the inner movement of the Trinity itself into which no human being can ever go, but the outer movement of the Trinity as this manifests itself in creation and redemption. The mutual indwelling of one another has been compared to our identities being constituted by our relationships with others so that others "dwell" in us and we "dwell" in them. It has also been compared to the past "dwelling" in the present and the future "dwelling" in the present.

Distinctio sed non separatio

If you add an "n" to the first and last word, you will know what the Latin words mean: there is a distinction between God and the world/humankind, but not a separation. This was an axiom formulated at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD that sought to safeguard the integrity of the two natures of Christ. His two natures were not fused or confused, but distinct; neither were they separated but united in one Person. Thus, when this study speaks about our union with God or deification as our human nature being penetrated with the energies of the divine nature, it means that our human nature remains a human nature, albeit an interpenetrated or deified human nature.

Deification or theosis

Being interpenetrated by the divine powers and energies of God. This begins with regeneration, continues with sanctification and finds its completion in the life of glorification.