

AN ANTITHESIS TO A SPIRIT-LESS CONFORMATION OF HUMANITY TO THE IMAGE OF THE SON: READING ROMANS 8:28–30 WITH THIRD ARTICLE THEOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

Romans 8:28–30 (along with much of the rest of the chapter) has drawn immense attention and study throughout Christian thought and its history. Much good has come out of the study of this beautiful text. Christian interpreters have offered many good and beneficial perspectives concerning it. However, it is very possible that the general kind of interpretation of the relationship between the nature of the Son's image and the nature of believers' "conformation" to that image in 8:29 lacks a key theological element.

It is the contention of this theological interpretation that an understanding of believers' conformation to the image of the Son in Rom 8:28–30 without specific attention to the Spirit's role in the life of Christ and the image of God in humanity is deficient. Put in a more positive light, Third Article Theology (viewing the text through Spirit) provides the ability to see the church's conformation to the image of the Son in Rom 8:28–30 in a more relational and holistic way, due to it being the Spirit who theologically enables this transformation to take place. This interpretive methodology can lead to a more beneficial understanding of what believers' conformation to the image of the Son, all things working together for good, and glorification mean (8:28–30).

Of course, it is likely Paul did not intend the specific interpretation of his words in Rom 8:28–30 that this essay posits theologically. However, it is not the goal of theological interpretation to merely understand what Paul intended. The goal of theological interpretation is to "look along" the text of Scripture, taking its "hermeneutical cues ... from Nicaea or Chalcedon" and being informed by other extra-biblical Christian texts and interpretations.¹ Despite having said this, it is also the contention of this essay that the theological assertions being made are in general alignment with Paul's theology—especially apropos of themes such as Paul's own Adam Christology in Romans 5.

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

Christian interpreters have offered their perspective on 8:28–30 throughout history. For the purposes of this essay, a select few interpretations will be engaged with. These interpretations are assembled and discussed below according to whether they interpret 8:28–30 with specific reference to the Spirit or not.²

¹ Myk Habets, "Theological Theological Interpretation of Scripture," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 23 (2021): 15.

² Interpretations of 8:29 are the specific focus.

Without the Spirit

The Reformer John Calvin did not explicitly connect the Spirit with 8:28–30.³ He wrote that the correct interpretation of 8:29 involves understanding two decrees. God determines who will “bear the image of Christ” so that “he might teach us that there is in Christ a living and conspicuous exemplar, which is exhibited to God’s children for imitation.”⁴ This decree is “inseparable from the other decree, which determines that we are to bear the cross.”⁵ For Calvin, Christ is “given to us as a pattern” for us to follow who become part of the family which Christ sustains.⁶ The emphasis is on the present experience of believers. Calvin did not link the conformation process to the Spirit specifically but attributes it to God generally.

Writing in contemporary time, Douglas Moo believes that in these three verses Paul has “moved away from his focus on the Spirit.”⁷ For him, the main point of 8:28 is best exemplified in the translation “all things work for good on behalf of believers,” with this “good” being linked with the eschatologically complete conformity “to the image of Christ and the glory that will then be ours.”⁸ Moo believes this is according to God’s purpose that “believers should become like Christ and share in his glory,” which is never in doubt.⁹

Moving on, Moo believes 8:29–30 is a specific support of God’s “purpose” rather than the whole verse or another part of it.¹⁰ He posits that the conformation of believers to the image of the Son occurs eschatologically with God “predestining us to future glory, that glory which Christ already enjoys,” and which will characterize the family of God.¹¹ This ties in closely with 8:30 where he believes Paul is “looking at the believer’s glorification from the standpoint of God.”¹² Once again, this interpretation does not involve specific attention to the Spirit.

With the Spirit

Quite differently to these interpreters, Abraham Kuyper interprets 8:29 with the conviction that the Spirit’s work and person is inseparable from Christlikeness. Speaking of this in relation to sanctification, he writes that it is because of the Spirit’s presence in believers that “we become more and more conformable to the image of God” which is “Christ’s image.”¹³ For Kuyper, in this whole process, the “indwelling Spirit is the actual Worker.”¹⁴

³ Chrysostom did not either. See Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans* (NPNF¹ 11:452–453).

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 318.

⁵ Calvin, *Romans*, 318.

⁶ Calvin, *Romans*, 318–319.

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 528. See also Mark J. Keown, “Notes of Hope in the Face of Suffering (Rom 8:18–39),” *Stimulus* (2020): 23–24. On the surface at least, this claim is undeniable.

⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 529.

⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 531.

¹⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 531.

¹¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 534–35.

¹² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 536.

¹³ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 548–49.

¹⁴ Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 458.

More recently, James Dunn also presents an interpretation with a more specific reference to the Spirit. Apropos of 8:28, similarly to Moo, he believes that “everything contributes toward good” has an eschatological emphasis—the result for those who have common faith.¹⁵

Progressing on to 8:29, Dunn differs from Moo by emphasizing the Jewish understanding of a relational knowing as part of God’s “divine purpose whose outworking was already clearly envisaged from the beginning.”¹⁶ Concerning the conformation of believers to the image of the Son, Dunn believes the emphasis to once again be on the eschatological result but acknowledges that “a process is involved.”¹⁷ He also believes that an Adam Christology is present here, with Christ being “the image of God which Adam was intended to be,” though with the resurrected Christ specifically in view.¹⁸ This image is “shared by all who have received and are led by the Spirit (vv14–17).”¹⁹ Dunn implicitly connects conformation to the image of the Son with being led by the Spirit.

Lastly, concerning 8:30, Dunn believes the glorification of believers is the climax of 8:18–30. For him, Paul is communicating that “from the perspective of the end it will be evident that history has been the stage for the unfolding of God’s purpose, the purpose of the Creator fulfilling his original intention in creating” which involves humanity sharing in the glory of God.²⁰

Evaluating the Options

The above scholars’ contributions are beneficial interpretations of Paul’s words in Rom 8:28–30. For the purposes of this theological interpretation, Dunn and Kuypers offer the most fruitful interpretations of the text for two reasons. Firstly, Dunn makes the necessary link between Paul’s view of Adam Christology in relation to the image of God. This is faithful to the wider context of Romans, especially 5:12–21. Secondly, Dunn and Kuypers make specific reference to the presence and work of the Spirit in the lives of believers in the conformation process in 8:29.²¹ In doing this, they avoid the mistake of scholars who exclude discussion of the Spirit from 8:28–30, who has been a key focus up until this point in the whole chapter.

While noting the beneficial nature of these interpretations, it is the contention of this essay that they are all perhaps missing something or do not go far enough.²² Namely, these interpretations are missing a satisfactory understanding of how believers are conformed to the image of the Son and what this means theologically and ontologically. Left alone, this kind of interpretation makes believers’ conformation to the image of the Son something closer to a static character change than a dynamic interaction with the triune God—a true ontological change.

¹⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, vol. 38A of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 2008), 481.

¹⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 482.

¹⁷ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 483.

¹⁸ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 483, 495.

¹⁹ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 485.

²⁰ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 486, 495. Wright agrees with this. See N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans* (London: SPCK, 2004), 156.

²¹ Keown’s work is similarly promising. Mark J. Keown, *Romans and the Mission of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming, 2021), np.

²² Dunn is writing a Bible commentary on the text specifically, so his attention to the Spirit in these verses does not go as far as the contention of this theological interpretation.

The above understandings of Rom 8:28–30 are valid, orthodox, and beneficial to the church's theology. However, if left to be the sole views of believers' conformation to the image of the Son, they lead to a static and un-relational understanding of the process of transformation and the reality and experience of the "large family" in 8:29. This is certainly not the experience Christ had in his relationship with the Father and the Spirit (John 14:1–31).²³ Furthermore, regarding God's action in the world, it seems biblical to understand the Son and the Spirit as the "two hands of God," which leads to the theological conclusion that Paul's words in Rom 8:28–30 must indeed theologically concern specific members of the Trinity rather than simply the triune God "generally."²⁴ This theological interpretation does not view the above interpretations in a harshly negative light, but does contend much more can and should be theologically affirmed.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIRD ARTICLE THEOLOGY

Even though the Spirit is not mentioned in direct connection with the conformation of believers to the image of the Son in 8:28–30, it is the contention of this essay that this connection is a theological reality and therefore aids in interpreting this part of Scripture (which does not go against the Spirit-filled context of the preceding verses in Rom 8). This connection can be arrived at through Third Article Theology (TAT).

Third Article Theology is firstly an approach, a methodology rather than a system of content. It is theology done "from the perspective of the Spirit."²⁵ TAT is a theological method which "starts with the Holy Spirit," looking "*through* the Spirit," complementing other article theologies, and is rooted in the "life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."²⁶

A theological interpretation of Rom 8:28–30, utilizing the lens of TAT may provide a fuller understanding of the theological reality regarding how believers are conformed to the image of the Son. Furthermore, it is a staple of orthodoxy that *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*—the external works of the Trinity are always one and undivided. With concern to the Son specifically, "wherever the Father's Son is revealed to be savingly at work, there too the Spirit is working."²⁷ This last aspect leads directly to the contribution of Spirit Christology, which is vital for interpreting the image of the Son from a TAT perspective.

²³ In Carson's words, "The love relationships within the Trinity ... are logically prior to the love of God for the world." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: IVP, 1991), 509.

²⁴ Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 129 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 65.

²⁵ David Coffey, "The Method of Third Article Theology," in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, ed. Myk Habets (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 27.

²⁶ Myk Habets, "Prolegomenon: On Starting with the Spirit," in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 14–18.

²⁷ Laytham, "But If ... by the Spirit of God," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 12 (2018): 26.

Spirit Christology

It is not the purpose of this essay to establish Christ's divinity or humanity. It is clear Jesus' "human life was the human life of God."²⁸ However, it is important to briefly discuss the achievements of Spirit Christology in understanding how the two natures of Christ coexist in unity because these achievements have a theological bearing on how Romans 8:28–30 can be more fully interpreted.²⁹ Coffey describes Spirit Christology well when he writes, "[Spirit Christology] assigns a key role to the Holy Spirit in the incarnation itself ... This role is that the Spirit having participated with the Father and the Son in the creation of the sacred humanity, sanctifies it and unites it in person with the preexistent Son."³⁰

Spirit Christology is important because since "Spirit and Jesus are intimately related, we would do violence to split them apart either in our conceptions or our theology."³¹ This approach is intentionally complementary to Logos Christology. It seeks to understand Christ and his work "from the perspective of the Holy Spirit."³² Therefore, as will be evident below, Spirit Christology has a bearing on the way believers are conformed to the image of the Son because Christ is who he is in connection to the work and person of the Spirit.

A Chalcedonian Spirit Christology

Therefore, a Chalcedonian Spirit Christology has something to add to this discussion. Liston makes two significant propositions by which this relationship between the Son and the Spirit in the Incarnation can be understood well theologically. Firstly, Jesus is "uniquely the person of the Son and fully and uniquely anointed by the Spirit."³³ Jesus' person cannot be fully understood without his relationship to the Spirit.

Secondly, in the person of Jesus the "identity and missions of the Son and the Spirit are logically and chronologically synchronous (without priority), distinct (without confusion), and interdependent (without separation)."³⁴ Without this understanding, either the Spirit or the Son's role in the Incarnation is theologically lacking and therefore understandings of both are unsatisfactory. It is the Spirit's work that enables Jesus to be both fully God and fully human. Without the above logical affirmations of synchronicity, distinctness, and interdependence, the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus do not make theological sense as truly being united.³⁵ A Jesus without the Spirit is not truly human. This significantly links with interpreting the image of the Son in relation to the image of God in Rom 8:29.

²⁸ Gerald O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 232.

²⁹ Spirit Christology (though chronologically subsequent) is discussed before the image of God because Christology is the heart of theology. Habets, *The Anointed Son*, 10.

³⁰ Coffey, "The Method of Third Article Theology," 27.

³¹ Habets, *The Anointed Son*, 5.

³² Habets, *The Anointed Son*, 5.

³³ Greg Liston, "A 'Chalcedonian' Spirit Christology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 81 (2016): 76. See also Mark Cortez, "Idols, Images, and a Spirit-Ed Anthropology: A Pneumatological Account of the Imago Dei," in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 279.

³⁴ Liston, "A 'Chalcedonian' Spirit Christology," 80.

³⁵ Liston, "A 'Chalcedonian' Spirit Christology," 84, 88–89.

The Image of God

It seems best to understand this language and theology of the image of the Son (in 8:29) in relation to the original image of God in the creation narratives. Upon its creation, this human image of God was declared “very good” (Gen 1:31). Humanity was meant to be the collective image through which “God manifests his presence.”³⁶ However, humanity did not live out this image faithfully, with “pride and striving to manipulate both God and others” being “the primary cause of human downfall and evil.”³⁷

Linked closely with this, one theological way of understanding what humanity lost in its fall in Gen 3 is right relationship with God. Sin is perhaps primarily “the violation of a relationship, that between God the Creator and his human creatures.”³⁸ Human beings are not genuinely human due to their relationality with each other, although “none of us is an *independent* person.”³⁹ Rather, humanity finds its identity in relationship to God who determines humans as relational beings.⁴⁰ This relationship is inherently pneumatological, it is “essential to the very meaning of the image” of God.⁴¹

Within Scripture, humans are pictured as unitary beings.⁴² There is language in reference to body and soul, but these are not understood as being independent entities. Instead, analogous to the “two natures of Christ,” what makes people human is the soul and body being “animated and held perpetually together by the Holy Spirit.”⁴³ This image of God should not be understood without reference to the Spirit.

Briefly looking ahead, Paul employs *eikōn* for “image of the Son” in 8:29, the same word used to describe the “image” of God in the LXX version of Gen 1:26–27.⁴⁴ Linking this back to Spirit Christology, it seems theologically clear the “image of God is fully recovered in Christ.”⁴⁵ The “image of Christ is the only way in which human beings are enabled to recognize their created destiny as the image of God.”⁴⁶ It is evident from Paul’s wider thought that he would agree with this claim that Jesus (the incarnate Son) is the image of God, because he made the claim himself in various letters (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). A Third Article Theology approach to the image of God supports the idea that this relationship is only possible through the Spirit, which Jesus’s person and ministry exemplify.

A Third Article Theology Conclusion Concerning Jesus’ Person

Therefore, it can be theologically affirmed that Christ was genuinely and perfectly human because he (1) was incarnated by the Spirit, (2) lived by the power of the Spirit, and (3) was in right relationship with God

³⁶ Cortez, “Idols, Images, and a Spirit-Ed Anthropology,” 281.

³⁷ James D. G. Dunn, “Spirit-Speech: Reflections on Romans 8:12-27,” in *Romans and the People of God*, ed. N. T. Wright and Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 91.

³⁸ Christoph Schwöbel, “Human Being as Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology,” in *Persons, Divine and Human: King’s College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. Colin E. Gunton and Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 141–65..

³⁹ Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 40.

⁴⁰ Myk Habets, “The Turn to Relationality: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology” (No Date): 5–6.

⁴¹ Cortez, “Idols, Images, and a Spirit-Ed Anthropology,” 282.

⁴² Myk Habets, “Naked but Not Disembodied: A Case for Anthropological Duality,” *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 4 (2008): 48.

⁴³ Habets, “Naked but Not Disembodied,” 50.

⁴⁴ Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuagint with Logos Morphology*, Electronic. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979). This is not to say the theological connection is based on this same word being used, but it provides evidence for the theological link being claimed here.

⁴⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Discovering Romans: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (London: SPCK, 2016), 182.

⁴⁶ Habets, “The Turn to Relationality,” 9.

through the Spirit. Christ could not be genuinely human, in right relationship with God, without the power and close relationship to the Spirit. Consequently, Christ can be rightly claimed to be the perfect image of God.⁴⁷

THROUGH THE SPIRIT: THEOLOGICALLY INTERPRETING ROMANS 8:28–30

Putting much of the above wider theological themes and conclusions to use in interpreting Romans 8:28–30, it is clear there is much more to be seen and affirmed here than one might first conclude. Utilizing Kuyper's assertion of the Spirit's vital role in the sanctification of the humanity; Dunn's assertion of the link between the image of the Son and the image of God; TAT's perspective on both the image of God and Christology; and Paul's wider thought enable a theological interpretation of Rom 8:28–30 to come to life with significant implications.

Context Immediately Prior

Paul has spent much of Romans 8 writing of the Spirit's relationship to believers' present lives, and experiences of suffering, hope, and future glory (8:1–25). Leading into 8:28–30, Paul mentions the Spirit's role in our weakness and intercession on our behalf (8:26–27). These words obviously have the Spirit in view, but Spirit Christology has something relevant to add to the meaning and purpose in believers' experience of weakness.

Jesus's person and life were permeated by the power of the Spirit. Even in the dark moment in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–42; Matt 26:36–46),⁴⁸ not to mention hanging on the cross itself), Jesus persevered with the mandate purposed by both himself and the Father (John 3:14–18), which undeniably involved both joy and suffering. This was all for a purpose, achieved through the Spirit's power in the Son's Incarnation. Therefore, believers can be genuinely assured that although we experience suffering, the Spirit is there with us and there is even a purpose for enduring such an ordeal which the Spirit enables us to live through in our weakness.

Context Immediately After

Following 8:28–30, Paul goes on to affirm the confidence believers have in God's love (8:31–39). Despite the suffering of the present experience, he communicates his own strong conviction that no matter what happens, believers' union with Christ ensures nothing will separate them from this love. Neither general creation nor spiritual powers are exceptions to this claim. Once again, parallels to Jesus' own life can be drawn in interpreting this (John 14:20–31).

⁴⁷ Cortez, "Idols, Images, and a Spirit-Ed Anthropology," 267.

⁴⁸ Luke's account in 22:43–44 would perhaps make an even stronger point. However, as Metzger explains, it is likely not original. Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition*, 4th Rev. (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 151.

Romans 8:28–30

Putting this theological interpretation together apropos of Rom 8:28–30, all things do indeed work together for the good of those who love God, because of the Spirit. The Spirit is inseparable from this reality, for without the Spirit of God one cannot truly love God and be united with Christ (Rom 8:9–10; 1 John 4:7–16). Furthermore, it is the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, and the same Spirit works for the good of believers to the same resurrected end (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:12–57). In a similar fashion to Jesus’ own life, the purpose of God calling believers involves both suffering and joy. This enables believers to realize that there is even purpose in the details and suffering of their existential reality. The Spirit cannot be separated from the good outworked in the lives of both Jesus’ and his body (12:1–14; Gal 5:13–26; Rom 8:1–17).

Romans 8:29 is the key verse in this theological interpretation, due to the *ὅτι* (the “marker of cause or reason”) denoting the reason Paul can state what he does in 8:28.⁴⁹ The good that Paul envisages is possibly this transformation into the image of Christ.⁵⁰ If believers are being conformed to the image of the incarnate Son, then the statements concerning good and glorification for believers are almost certainly best interpreted through a Third Article Theology perspective on Christology and the image of God. As Cortez states, if “the *imago* is thoroughly christological, and if Jesus cannot be understood apart from the Spirit, then the *imago* should be thoroughly pneumatological.”⁵¹ As believers with the Spirit, we are already in some sense conformed to the image of the Son, due to the reality that to be in right relationship with God requires a Spirit-ed restoration of relationship.

The Son is the firstborn within a large family (8:29). If Jesus was the truly exemplary (not merely functional but also ontological) portrayal of the image of God, by the perfect relationship he had with the Father through the Spirit, then for humanity to be conformed to his image is for them to likewise be in right relationship with the Father through the Spirit. It is by the Spirit that Jesus and believers are enabled to be truly human. Therefore, if believers are to be Jesus’ siblings by being conformed to his image (the perfect image of God), then it is a necessity that they too share a right relationship to the Father beside the Son through the Spirit. The full Spirit-empowered experiential reality of this theological truth may not be the current experience of believers, but its fulfilment is not in doubt—which leads directly to Paul’s words in 8:30. The church is being conformed to the image of Christ by the Spirit as the church “suffers and obeys, or better, as she suffers in obedience” (John 15:1–25).⁵²

This is why believers need the Spirit’s help in weakness and enduring creation’s groans (Rom 8:18–26) as Christ lived and endured through the Spirit; it is through “our Christlike suffering and obedience that we are moulded and conformed to Christ’s image.”⁵³ Things working together for good towards conformation to the image of the Son (8:28–29) occurs not because of a triumphalist reality, but because of the power of the Spirit to obediently endure both the joys and sufferings of life.

⁴⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 780.

⁵⁰ David A. DeSilva, *Transformation: The Heart of Paul’s Gospel*, ed. Michael F Bird (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 14.

⁵¹ Cortez, “Idols, Images, and a Spirit-Ed Anthropology,” 281.

⁵² Greg Liston, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 147.

⁵³ Greg Liston, “The Church’s Journey through Time: Toward a Spirit Eschatology,” *Pneuma* 41 (2019): 432.

Those whom God has predestined to this conformation are those he has also glorified (Rom 8:30). This glorification (an aorist) should not be interpreted to mean an already accomplished reality. Paul is viewing this process (or event) “from its end point and completion” which he mentioned earlier in 8:17.⁵⁴ Elsewhere in his letters, Paul states that believers “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).⁵⁵ Although humanity failed to give God glory (Rom 1:21), God bestows the glory intended for humanity (Ps 8:5; Heb 2:8–10) on believers in Christ through the Spirit.⁵⁶

Summarizing the reality described in Rom 8:28–30 in trinitarian terms, the Father restores humanity to the image of God by sending the Son by the power of the Spirit to vicariously reunite humanity with divinity. This reunion enables the Spirit to dwell in humanity who can now, as the collective image of God, participate in the love and community of the triune God, glorifying the Father by the power of the Spirit alongside the Son.⁵⁷ As siblings of Christ (8:29,) in right relationship with the Father by the Spirit, believers experience and live out the love of the trinity (and the Father’s work) by the power of the Spirit in the image of the firstborn Son.⁵⁸

All things do work for the good of those who love God (8:28) because the Spirit conforms believers to the image of the self-sacrificial Son (8:29) and the Father gives them the glory (8:30) of the true image of God—constituting a truly relational and loving family (8:29). Believers’ image bearing lives are theologically permeated by the Spirit whether they are aware of it in their experiences of suffering and joy or not. Hopefully a theological interpretation such as this heightens an awareness of this beautiful reality.

CONCLUSION

This theological interpretation of Rom 8:28–30 has posited that the Spirit conforms believers to the image of the Son. It is the Spirit who effectively sees that all things work together for the good of believers. It is the Spirit through whom believers are called, justified, and glorified, by enabling the Incarnation of the Son. This claim is not only valid, but theologically necessary. A Third Article Theological interpretation of Rom 8:28–30 enables a greater understanding of the theological reality of the Spirit’s role in the church’s transformation and future glorification than might otherwise be able to be affirmed and understood. An understanding of the church’s relationship to the likeness and “image” of Christ without reference to the Spirit, though not necessarily wrong, is a deficient one.

⁵⁴ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 485–486.

⁵⁵ We will one day be vessels of glory, but for now the church are vessels of clay formed by the Spirit (2 Cor 4:7). Frank D. Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2021), §Introduction: Beyond Machines of Salvation. For a discussion justifying interpreting 2 Cor 3:18 referring to the Spirit see Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 317–18.

⁵⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 485.

⁵⁷ See Myk Habets, “Spirit, Selfhood, and Salvation,” in *Being Saved: Explorations in Soteriology and Human Persons*, ed. Mark Hamilton, Mark Cortez, and Josh Farris (London: SCM Press, 2018), 143–56.

⁵⁸ Gregory J. Liston, “Where the Love of Christ Is Found: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology,” in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 337–39.