The background of the cover is a light-colored, marbled paper with subtle, vein-like patterns. Overlaid on this are several organic, elongated shapes in shades of brown and green, resembling fossilized plant matter or mineral inclusions. These shapes are positioned on the left and right sides of the cover, framing the central text.

God is a Life,
and not
merely a Being

Schelling

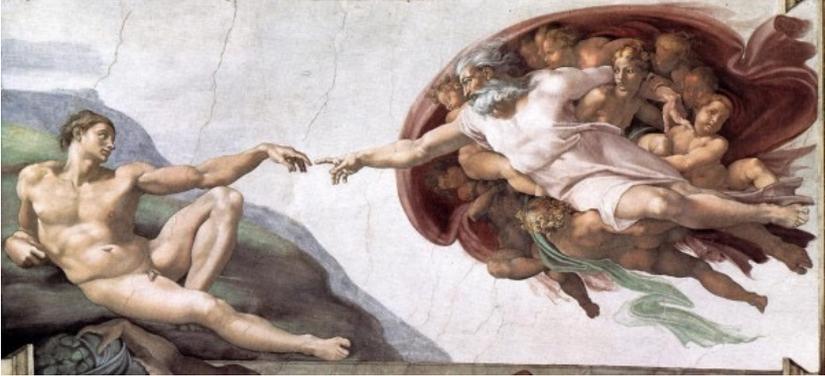
FRANK ARUNDELL

“God is a Life,
and not
merely a Being.”

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling
1775-1854

FRANK ARUNDELL

INTRODUCTION



The panel of The Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel must be one of the most known images in the world.

Completed by Michelangelo circa 1511, it depicts God the Father creating Adam, the first man, and was among the last of the panels to be completed telling the story of Genesis. The focal point of the episode of the Creation of Adam painting is the contact between the finger of God and that of Adam's through which life is transmitted. By not painting the finger of God and Adam touching and leaving a small space between the two, Michelangelo creates a tension, an anticipation of that wondrous moment, as we all wait for God to complete his Creation on the sixth day."

"Michelangelo's languid Adam was probably inspired by Ghiberti's Adam on his Doors of Paradise of the baptistery in Florence. Whereas in his, The Creation of Eve, Michelangelo borrows heavily from Jacopo della Quercia's version on the portal of San Petronio in Bologna. In the Eve panel Michelangelo did not use foreshortening, making the figures difficult to see clearly from the floor of the chapel. In the Creation of Adam, the great artist addresses this problem, with an obvious focus on the enlarged figures of God and Adam."

INTRODUCTION

“The painting of Michelangelo’s Creation of Adam only took two to three weeks to complete, while the actual painting of Adam took Michelangelo only four days. An admiring Vasari (1511 – 1574) gasped with amazement and said, “a figure of such a kind in its beauty, in the attitude and in the outlines, that it appears as if newly fashioned by the First and Supreme Creator rather than by the brush and design of a mortal man.”

We credit Michelangelo’s genius not only for his mastery of technique but also for his marvelous imagination bringing the Creator and the created into focus for us by using mortal man in both images. God and man are both depicted as human beings regardless of the fact that Jesus said “God is Spirit.” One wonders what Buonarroti Simoni would have done had Pope Julius II asked him to paint the Spirit in the act of causing life in the first cyanobacteria. You may be certain that he would have come up with a satisfactory visual.

“Jesus cried out and said, ‘Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me. I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: the word that I spoke, it will condemn him on the last day, because I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. So what I say, I say as the Father told me.’” Jn 12: 44-50

God is a Life, and not merely a Being

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It was Jesus who spoke of the Creator in human terms as his Father. He also referenced the fact that no one could come to the Father except through him, and made it quite clear that his Father was not readily available to human nature. Were that the case God wouldn't be God. John tells us *“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.”* Further, Jesus says that “God is Spirit,” giving us a good idea of just why God is not visible to humankind. Jesus also locates his Father by often prefacing him as a “heavenly” Father, and suggests that by knowing him (Jesus), we would know his Father as well. *“From now on you know him and have seen him.”* Jesus' whole purpose on earth was to do the will of the Father by proclaiming the Kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Evidently it was the Father's will to have him pay the price for the sins of “mankind” allowing him to be sacrificed on Calvary at the hands of the very people he had come to save— then to raise him from the dead proving the Father's graciousness by giving us the option of eternal life with the Father, through Jesus, the risen one, the long expected Messiah. The promises of Christ were gratuitously sealed by the Spirit sent to guide his

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followers in establishing *his* Church on earth lead by the Apostles, specifically Peter, making it one, holy and apostolic. To establish real credibility it is always best to let Jesus speak for himself in the gospels. This from John 22:

“Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying,

‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’

Jesus answered, ‘I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’

Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?’

‘We are not stoning you for any good work,’ they replied, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.’ Jesus answered them,

‘Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods”’? (Psalm 82:6) If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside— what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? Do not believe me unless I do the

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works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.'

Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp."

Theopedia gives us this: "Systematic theology is a discipline which addresses theological topics one by one (e.g. God, Sin, Humanity, etc.) and attempts to summarize all the biblical teaching on each particular subject. Sometimes called constructive theology or even dogmatic theology, the goal is to present the major themes (i.e. doctrines) of the Christian faith in an organized and ordered overview that remains faithful to the biblical witness."

We are living in a world of systemization. A system is characterized as something which works in a certain order and in a consistent manner. Science for instance proves things by systematic experimentation. When an experiment reveals consistency it is thought to be *proved* so there can be little doubt to its veracity. Since there are no absolutes in this world we know that science's claim to precision stands on the phrase "*proven good enough.*" Think about that the next time you fly to Bermuda or load up on new medications. There surely is a considerable amount of trust in everything we do, but so far not enough that one could ever call it certainty. The beauty in that thought is that there is just enough intervening doubt about everything to keep the process or system of learning moving forward. Can we know it all? probably not, but we're working on it aren't we?

It's quite a bit different with the gospels. We don't exactly experiment with them to prove them true. We consider the texts sacred because the events that were recorded were witnessed

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first hand by individuals who we have learned to traditionally trust. However, “the tradition was handed down in the community in the form of stories, parables and short sayings remembered for their teaching or for the light they shed on the the person or the message of Jesus. As to their date, scholars can only be sure that they all stem from the last forty years of the first century.” (Pocket edition NJB, Doubleday 1990.) Through the years, famous exegetes, many of them saints of the Church, have provided meaning or a rational for more difficult passages. All Christian belief stems from the Bible and the community of believers in the Body of Christ, the Church. No other work of art has been more scrutinized by experts than the Holy Bible for its veracity and historicity.

The message Jesus was delivering to the world about the Father, the Son (himself), and the Spirit was almost impossible for the people to grasp save for the grace of God. The concept that God could become a man was so extraordinarily difficult that even hearing it first hand from the miracle worker himself his closest friends were not able to entirely fathom it. It was his “works” that drew the crowds. It was their faith in him and the Father within him that he wanted the world to know about, and it was all for the purpose of glorifying the Father, the Creator of all things visible and invisible, whom they could only conceptualize through him, as the “Father” of the Christ in human terms.

“Philip said to Jesus, ‘Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the

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Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it.” John 14: 7-14

Saint Sr. Faustina put it simply: “Jesus, I trust in you.” Some may question the dear sister’s sanctity, but no one can deny her humble declarative sentence proven by her life of pure trust.

God was “known” in some form or another from pre-historic times. As philosophy and theology developed, particularly involving the Christian faith, many systematic schools of thought about the Deity have come and gone— punctuated and confirmed or rejected by the great councils of Christendom and guided, it is believed, by the Holy Spirit. The blood of the martyrs runs in the veins of all true believers since terrible mistakes have been made by human beings while discerning the differences between orthodoxy, heresy and political expediency resulting in the many so called wars of religion.

In our opinion, barbarism in the name of God can only be undone through the mercy and justice of the living God, in Christ. “Peace be with you,” he said. Peace in the hearts of humanity may be hoped for, prayed for and obtained remembering that: *“If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it.”* How many were ever convinced that by asking Jesus for anything their requests would be answered? Man has

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always had a problem of setting aside what he subjectively conceives reality to be. For the most part God the Father has been objective as Philip's remark to Jesus suggests. God's finger in Michelangelo's panel does not quite touch Adam's finger, leaving just enough room for serious contemplation.

Before including a few thoughts of our own to fill the space Michelangelo left open, It's good to have a better understanding of how Schelling could say; "God is a Life, not merely a Being." The following few paragraphs come from Larousse's Biographical Dictionary, by Alex Scott. Dr. Scott is the author of *The Conditions of Knowledge: Reviews of 100 Great Works of Philosophy*. His interests include ethics, semiotics, and the philosophy of language. A practicing physician, he lives in Baltimore, Maryland. Please bear with a few pages from Dr. Scott to at least get a partial grip on Schilling's thoughts.

"Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) was professor of philosophy at the universities of Jena, Würzburg, Erlangen, Munich, and Berlin. He had close friendships with Hegel, Hölderlin, Goethe, and with other important figures in the German Romantic movement. His major works included: (*Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* 1797); (*System of Transcendental Idealism* 1800); (*Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* 1809); (*The Ages of the World* 1811)."

"Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* is an explanation of how subjectivity may either be compatible or incompatible with objectivity. It is concerned with the question of how the self may become both subject and object for itself,

and it attempts to show how the mutual concurrence of subjective and objective viewpoints in consciousness may establish the unity of the ideal with the real. Transcendental idealism, according to Schelling, is a system for all knowledge.”

“A system may be a comprehensive set of rules or principles, which are logically structured and which are internally consistent. Knowledge of reality may be attained when there is a reciprocal concurrence of the self with nature, i.e. the subjective with the objective, and of the conscious with the unconscious. Idealism is a philosophy that the nature of reality is mental or spiritual and that the world consists of ideas. Thus, transcendental idealism affirms that a transcendental unity of the self and nature, of subject and object, and of the conscious and the unconscious is a condition for knowledge.”

“If nature is primary, says Schelling, then the self (or intelligence) must arise from nature. If the self is primary, then nature must arise from the self. Natural philosophy makes nature the primary reality. Transcendental philosophy makes the self the primary reality. From a subjective viewpoint, there is nothing in things other than what we attribute to them. Objective qualities or attributes of things would not exist unless the self could perceive them. Thus, the task of transcendental philosophy is to determine how subjective perceptions correspond to objects that are independent of them.”

“Acceptance of the premise that reality is subjective makes it difficult to assert that events are unalterably determined. If subjective perceptions may change, then so may the reality of the external world. Thus, **an important question that must be**

answered is whether our perceptions conform to the phenomenal world or whether the phenomenal world conforms to our perceptions.”

“If the conscious activity that is expressed by the will is identical to the unconscious activity that produces the phenomenal world, then the problem of whether our perceptions conform to the world or whether the world conforms to our perceptions is resolved. **Transcendental philosophy affirms the unity of the conscious and unconscious activity of the self. The conscious and the unconscious are unified by the creative activity of the self.** Nature arises from the self, and the self arises from nature.”

“Idealism, according to Schelling, affirms that **the boundary of the self is posited only by the self, but realism affirms that the boundary of the self is established by something other than the self.** Idealism and realism may mutually depend on each other. Just as natural science leads from realism to idealism, because it discovers laws of mind by investigating laws of nature, so transcendental philosophy leads from idealism to realism, because it discovers laws of nature by investigating laws of mind.”

“In the act of self-consciousness, the thinking subject may become the object of thought. However, **the self is not merely a thing or object. The self is the same as the act of self-consciousness, which is both ideal and real.** The self is ideal, because it is eternal and timeless, but it is real, because it may become an object for itself. The self is not only the source of all ideas but is the underlying principle of all reality. Self-consciousness may affirm a self that is both ideal and real, and

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it may establish a boundary between the self and the phenomenal world that is both dependent on, and independent of the self. **Self-consciousness may unify a subjective ideal with an objective reality.**”

“Neither pure subject nor pure object is the self of self-consciousness, says Schelling. **The actual self of self-consciousness is both subject and object simultaneously. The self and nature are a transcendental unity.**”

Alex Scott MD Ph.D

We often wondered whether Fr. Karl Rahner, one of the church’s great theologians of Vatican II got some of his ideas from Schelling. A quote we often use could easily be attributed to him.

“We are seeking to find a place of encounter between man and the God who may possibly reveal himself. This place is the transcendence of man in its specifically human character.”

Karl Rahner S.J.

On the contrary, the average secular determinist confidently holds that the mind cannot transcend itself because all reality is physical, i.e. matter is all there is. System is what everything is about. The systematic workings of the brain, human or otherwise, derives from natural selection through evolution. Most scientists are all but convinced that “mind” emerged from nature (matter). So far, no scientist has given us a concrete theory of Life. “Emergence,” in evolutionary theory, is the rise of a system that cannot be predicted or explained from preceding conditions; it is only one hypothesis. Ostensibly, chemistry is god and ethics takes the place of religion where

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enculturation makes the rules relying on the wisdom of civil law through elected and appointed officials. Man, of course, is “the measure of all things,” and that, obviously, stands to reason. All is quite systematic. In this scenario science must be the source of all of our knowledge and understanding based doctrinally on cause and effect; and that’s it; end of story. If not now, sooner or later “mystery” will become extinct.

We should add a few words here about “transcendence” as we see it. It is true that human beings have the capability of being in a trance, i.e., a psychological state of mind where the awareness of what is known as reality becomes fragile. A condition where voluntary action is poor or missing entirely. A trance can be induced by by hallucinogenic drugs or potions. Generally speaking, this a very unhealthy state for the mind/body to be in. To purposely separate the mind from its home in a wholesome body by upsetting its metabolic equilibrium is a dangerous and un-natural thing to do. There are surely enough diseases effecting the human mind without adding to them with external agents.

The criminal activities of drug cartels feed on the anxieties of the post modern world by providing addictive hallucinogens that keep people enslaved. This is a new world of slavery that has little to do with racism.

“Transcendent,” in terms of religion, on the other hand, simply means that one employs a personal philosophy or faith emphasizing intuition and spirituality above empiricism and materiality. We think it’s fair to say that all human beings *experience* intuitive notions more or less depending on the the individual, we are not zombies. I reckon this is what Fr. Rahner

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meant by saying transcendence has a specific human character. The question of what makes the difference between a Rationalist and an Empiricist has been asked for centuries. Prof. David J Yount Ph.D gives us the answer in a few words:

“Empiricists share the view that there is no such thing as innate knowledge, and that instead knowledge is derived only from experience. Rationalists share the view that there is innate knowledge; though differing in that they choose different objects of innate knowledge.” That is to say that human reason allows for “spirit” as a given in human nature. Spirit is not known by having been taught, but known by personal, subjective experiences.

Simply speaking, “spirit is the “vital principle” or the “animating force” in living things.” (Wordweb Pro) We could say that spirit is life. Stick yourself with a pin and see if you’re not alive. Experience your neural network in action. Ouch!

One person may see life as systematic spirituality– another, the result of systematic materialism by natural-selection in evolution. It is possible that they are both saying the same thing; Spirit being the artificer so to speak, and matter the art; or as the Apostle’s Creed tells us: *We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.* The incredible precise order that developed and sustains the universe seems to be a systematic consciousness a vital-force that would be the inevitable cause of earthly life as we know it, along with the materialism that accompanies it, i.e. the formal elements found in nature.

Before we jump to conclusions thinking that we have just inadvertently re-invented the “panpsychism” or “vitalism” of primitive times or the pantheism of Spinoza, let us see what

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Aquinas has written about God being “in all things” and “everywhere.”

ST, 1, Q8:

Article 1: St. Thomas says: “A thing is wherever it operates. But God *operates in all things*, according to Isaiah 26:12, “Lord . . . Thou hast wrought all our works in [Vulgate: 'for'] us.” Therefore God is in all things.” Thomas continues:

“God is in all things; not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident, but *as an agent* is present to that upon which it works*. For an agent must be joined to that wherein it acts immediately and touch it by its power; hence it is proved in Physics VII (Aristotle) that the thing moved and the mover must be joined together. Now since *God is very being by His own essence*,* created being must be His proper effect; as to ignite is the proper effect of fire. Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must *be present to it*, according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing, as was shown above (Question 7, Article 1). Hence it must be that God is in all things, and inner-mostly.”

*agent (n.)

late 15c., "one who acts," from Latin agentem (nominative agens) "effective, powerful," present participle of agere "to set in motion, drive, lead, conduct" (see act (n.)). Meaning "any natural force or substance which produces a phenomenon."

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*essence (n.)

late 14c., *essencia* (respelled late 15c. on French model), from Latin *essentia* "being, essence," abstract noun formed (to translate Greek *ousia* "being, essence") from *essent-*, present participle stem of *esse* "to be," from PIE **es-* "to be."

In Article 2 Thomas tackles the doubt about God being everywhere.

Article 2: It is written, "I fill heaven and earth." (Jeremiah 23:24). Continuing, he says"

"Since place is a thing, to be in place can be understood in a twofold sense; either by way of other things--i.e. as one thing is said to be in another *no matter how*; and thus the accidents of a place are in place; or by a way proper to place; and thus things placed are in a place. Now in both these senses, *in some way* God is in every place; and this is to be everywhere."

"First, as *He is in all things giving them being, power and operation; so He is in every place as giving it existence and locative power*. Again, things placed are in place, inasmuch as they fill place; and God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby excluded from it; indeed, by the very fact that *He gives being to the things that fill every place*, He Himself fills every place."

Now, Anselm, Aquinas, Augustine and many others inferred that "God is Being itself," let's see what Bonaventure says on the issue:

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“Being is most pure and absolute, that which is Being simply is first and last and, therefore, the origin and the final cause of all. Because eternal and most present, therefore it encompasses and penetrates all duration, existing at once as their center and circumference. Because most simple and greatest, therefore it is entirely within and entirely without all things and, therefore, is an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere.”

For quite a while now, at least for us, a “being” or even “being itself,” by necessity, must have life or spirit in a certain orderly way— *to be*. Maybe we’re mistaken and it’s only an issue of semantics that being means life and life means being, but systematically, being, for us, in reality, it is the *result* of spirit—and is merely matter without it; notwithstanding the fact that matter is only condensed energy. To call God “Being Itself,” as many great men have done, suggests “pantheism;” or God in all things. In other words, all things are essentially the Being of God. What peaked our interest with Schelling’s *Philosophical Investigations*, was when he said: “God is a Life, not merely a Being;” here he developed something we have also been thinking about for a long time. God is not just “a life” as one of many lives, but *Life* as opposed to a mere Being, or even Being Itself.

To say that God is in me as a “being” or even “being itself” would seem to objectify God. To say that I am in God’s Life is very different. If God is *Life*, then it is *his* life I share. Since the Spirit is the “giver of life” and God is Spirit in Trinitarian terms, I can keep my subjective self in God’s life by having the grace to recognize it. This is dependency with freedom. If

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sanctifying grace is “participation in the life of God,” I also have the freedom not to participate by choosing to center my existence on *my life* alone (existentialism). Even claiming life is entirely my own, I still remain ignominiously in the Life of God since God is Life. Maybe that’s what Teilhard meant when he said:

“The only thing that concerns God, the only thing he desires intensely, is the faithful use of your freedom, and the preference you accord him over the things around you.”

Along with Philip the Apostle we may ask the Master, “Show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” We have no doubt that his answer would be exactly the same, “*Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, [YOUR NAME HERE]? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?*”

For us he might even add, “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*” John.6.51

Most of theology over the centuries wants to unpack God with the exclusion of Jesus. We even have a Christology which can be studied separately. I suppose the human mind does tend to systematize and categorize by its nature. Generally, theology is a mind exercise, and most likely good for us since all of humanity has sought the Father since the very beginning. What many believers sometimes tend to forget is that, “*In the*

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beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Sixth Sunday of Easter
Gospel; John 14:23-29

“The Holy Spirit will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.’

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; yet the word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, ‘I am going away and I will come back to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe.’