



God, Christ, and All Things in 1 Corinthians 15:28

DAVID FREDRICKSON

*Luther Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota*

I. TRINITY AND CREATION

IN A RECENT ESSAY CONCERNING THE DEARTH OF TRINITARIAN INFLUENCE ON THE theology of creation, Colin Gunton argues that the only way of adequately articulating the relation of Creator and creation is to speak about Trinity and creation.¹ Since in the west the doctrine of creation has generally been formulated without the notion of personal relation on which the doctrine of the Trinity rests, the relation between God and cosmos has inevitably been misconstrued in one of two forms, both of which have unacceptable consequences. The first form, under Aristotelian influence, has God and world related as cause is to effect. In this way of thinking, the world's dependence on God is upheld, but this obvious truth is secured by the sacrifice of creaturely autonomy. In fact, this "God as cause" model, when pushed to its logical limit, results in pantheism. The second way of

¹C. Gunton, "The End of Causality? The Reformers and their Predecessors," in *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, ed. C. Gunton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997) 63-82. Gunton acknowledges the important insights of Robert Jenson in this matter. See Jenson's *The Triune Identity: God according to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

DAVID FREDRICKSON is associate professor of New Testament.

God's becoming "all in all" requires neither God's absolute sovereignty over all things nor the absorption of God into creation. In the New Testament, as in trinitarian theology, it is better understood as a way to speak of a personal relation between Creator and creation and between the Father and the Son.

speaking about God and creation conceptualizes the world as the emanation of God and the goal of creation as the return to God. Here the danger is the absorption of the creature into God.

As an alternative to the impersonal metaphors “cause and effect” and “emanation” for the God/world relation, Gunton argues that

the point of stressing a trinitarian way of construing the relation of Creator and creation is that it enables us to understand both the past and continuing creative divine agency toward the world without closing the space between God and created order. The doctrine of creation has to do, that is to say, with the establishment of the other in its own distinctive reality: not divine self-communication, but divine constituting of the world to be truly other, and so itself. If that be causality, then we can continue to use the concept, but only if that carries connotations of personal, willed, intentional, consistent, and loving agency.²

The trinitarian understanding of God offers the possibility of imagining the world and God in a personal relation in which both stability for creation and space for it to be an other to God are maintained.

Gunton appeals to the trinitarian theology of creation in Irenaeus, Athanasius, and the Cappodocians. He praises Luther, especially, and Calvin, with some qualifications, for reintroducing the language of personal relation into the doctrine of creation after many centuries of deterministic metaphors and tropes for emanation. The question this paper explores is whether the pursuit for an understanding of the relation between God and the world in personal terms, which also are appropriate for the relation between God and Christ, can be extended once again to the biblical writings themselves, and in particular, to Paul.

In order to focus the issues involved, I have selected 1 Cor 15:28, a verse which traditional exegesis believes deals fundamentally with the God/world relation. Even more significant, though, is the nearly universal opinion that this text also supports either pantheistic determinism or absorption of the world into God. Paul writes about the temporal order of events which has been initiated by Christ’s resurrection and will culminate with God becoming all in all:

Then comes the end when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

Traditional exegesis closes the path to Paul which Gunton has discovered from Luther to Irenaeus. While agreeing wholeheartedly with the traditional view that 1 Cor 15:28 goes to the heart of the issue, I will argue that Paul’s language of subordination and of God being “all in all” in the eschaton is actually his way of speaking about God and creation in terms of personal identity and friendship. Further, I will call particular attention to the fact that the key concept, subordination, does not in

²Gunton, “The End of Causality?” 81-82.

this instance have the sense of sovereignty. Here subordination does not have a deterministic meaning but designates both the personal relation of all things to Christ and the personal relation of the Son to God the Father. Thus the question about creation and God is at the same time a question about the relation between Son and Father as the Pauline text suggests. I will conclude that it is this common, identity-creating relation of all things to Christ and Christ to God that enables God to enter into a personal relation with creation, to become all things to all things.

II. Τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν: SOVEREIGNTY, ABSORPTION, OR A RELATION OF PERSONS?

We begin with the end (τέλος) of creation and of God in the Pauline account of what the future has in store. The ἵνα clause in 15:28 tells the reader that God is not now, nor is creation yet, in the relation in which they will find themselves in the future. This is the first thing to keep in mind: the relation between God and world named in 1 Cor 15:28 will be a new reality, not the perfection of an existing God/world relation nor the return to an original identity with God.

What, then, is the character of this future relation? Modern exegetes have followed ancient commentators in assuming that the choice is between τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν as the perfection of divine sovereignty over the cosmos or as a mystical absorption into the divine being.³ These have been the dominant approaches to the text since the patristic period.⁴ We must ask whether these alternatives adequately take into account the eschatological newness of the relation.

A faint note in the history of interpretation, however, deserves amplification. From Gregory of Nyssa and Luther we hear that Paul is speaking of the fact that, when God is all in all, God will directly fill all the needs of creatures.⁵ This interpretation of τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν fits very well with Gunton's concern described above that through trinitarian theology God and world should be characterized by a personal relation in which the creature has both stability provided directly by God and space to be the distinctive thing that it is. Is it possible to show that the interpretation of 1 Cor 15:28 offered by Gregory and Luther has greater claim to our assent than sovereignty or absorption?

Apparent parallels to τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν within the Pauline and deutero-Pauline corpus prove upon closer examination to be inexact and therefore not

³H. Conzelman (*1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 275) is bound by the "either/or" to which nearly all interpreters have submitted: "the final standing of God is defined in a phrase which in itself has a mystic sound: 'all in all.' Paul knows and uses phrases of this kind also elsewhere; in this context, however, the sense is no longer mystic. He does not say God and All (and therewith all believers) are identical, but that God once more directly exercises his total sovereignty."

⁴See E. Schendel, *Herrschaft und Unterwerfung Christi: 1. Korinther 15,24-28 in Exegese und Theologie der Väter bis zum Ausgang des 4. Jahrhunderts*, BGBE 12 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1971), and J. Lienhard, "The Exegesis of 1 Cor 15, 24-28 from Marcellus of Ancyra to Theodoret of Cyrus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (1983) 340-359.

⁵For Gregory, emphasis falls on the simplicity of the future life; see Lienhard, "The Exegesis of 1 Cor 15, 24-28," 349. Luther (*LW* 28:142) shares to some degree the expectation of reduced needs, but emphasizes in addition the direct relation between God and human creation: "In short, in place of whatever we must now derive from all creatures here and there singly and piecemeal—although this, too, comes from Him and is given by Him—we shall have him directly, without any flaw and without ceasing."

helpful for interpreting 1 Cor 15:28.⁶ There is a need then to search more broadly in Greek and Latin literature to determine what sense first-century hearers made of the phrase.⁷

An unlikely source for the illumination of a theological problem, a passage in Petronius's *Satyricon*, alerts us to the fact that the phrase was indeed widespread and often associated with devotion and love. We are informed of Trimalchio's recently acquired wife on whom he dotes:

And what was she a little while ago? You will pardon me if I say that you would not have taken a piece of bread from her hand. Now without why or wherefore she is queen of heaven, and Trimalchio's all in all (*Trimalchionis topanta est*). In fact, if she tells him it is dark at high noon, he will believe it.⁸

The Latin term *topanta* is obviously constructed on the basis of the Greek τὰ πάντα.⁹ This borrowing tells us that in both languages to be "all things" to someone was a proverbial expression for being the beloved. Furthermore, the fact that the transliteration of τὰ πάντα could enter the Latin language only minimally altered testifies to its currency in Greek in amatory contexts. This is easily confirmed by the description of the power of love potions provided by the second-century A.D. erotic novelist, Achilles Tatius:

I understand that you Thessalian women, when you fall in love, are able to conjure in such a way that your lover never inclines to any other woman, and is so firmly attached to the woman who has bewitched him that he considers her his all-in-all (ὡς πάντα νομίζειν ἐκείνην αὐτῷ).¹⁰

The love of the female philosopher Hipparchia for the Cynic Crates is also expressed in the language of the all:

She fell in love with the discourses and the way of life of Crates, and would not pay attention to any of her suitors, their wealth, their high birth or their beauty. But to her Crates was everything (παντ' ἦν Κράτης αὐτῇ). She used even to threaten her parents she would make away with herself, unless she were given in marriage to him.¹¹

Clearly, from these passages we can be sure that to be "all things" to someone was

⁶1 Cor 12:6 has God working all things in all things (ἐνεργῶν τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν) rather than being all things to all. In Col 3:11, Christ, not God, is the one who is all in all. Similarly, Eph 1:23 implies Christ as the subject. The only parallel to 1 Cor 15:28 within the Pauline corpus is 1 Cor 9:22. Here again, however, the subject is not God. See note 17 below.

⁷The bulk of the parallels discussed here were collected originally in the eighteenth century by Jacobus Wettstein. See his remarkable *Novum Testamentum Graecum*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Ex officina Dommeriana, 1752; reprint, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1962) 2:167-168. While usually quite illuminating, E. Norden (*Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte religiöser Rede* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1913] 246-250) is misleading in this instance, because the parallels cited concerning the relation of God and the all, which are very significant for other passages in the New Testament, are not keyed specifically to τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν.

⁸Petronius, *Satyricon* 37.

⁹See the entry in the Oxford Latin Dictionary.

¹⁰Achilles Tatius, *Clitophon and Leucippe* 5.22.2. See also Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 14.1; *The Syrian Goddess* 22.

¹¹Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 6.96.

understood neither as a matter of absorption nor of domination but of love and devotion. The phrase intends to speak of a personal relation.

So far the phrase πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν has been documented in erotic contexts. For the purpose of illumining 1 Cor 15:28, equally significant occurrences are found in the context of friendship (φιλία). As we will see, although erotic love and friendship are not the same, the same phrase worked well in both contexts.¹² On the borderline between friendship and erotic love, one of Alciphron's *Letters of Courtesans* illustrates what it meant for one person to be all things to another. The (most likely) fictional writer, Menander, writes to his beloved Glycera in stock friendship terms:

For what pleasure could come to me apart from you? What greater exultation could be mine than your love (φιλίας), inasmuch as, thanks to your character and your manners, even our extreme old age will to me always seem youth? May we be young together, may we grow old together too; yes, by heaven, may we meet death together.¹³

Later in the letter, Menander explains why he seeks her advice: "You have always been and now shall be my judgement and my council of the Areopagus and my Heliastic Court—aye everything, I swear by Athena (ἅπαντα νῆ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν, ἀεὶ γέγονας καὶ νῦν ἔση)."¹⁴

The ubiquitous motif of friendship in ancient letter-writing makes its appearance under the same phrase.¹⁵ The love of one's children (φιλοτεκνία) meant that they became all things to the parent.¹⁶ Finally, "being all things to all" was apparently a proverb for the adaptability of the person offering friendly advice or encouragement to diverse audiences.¹⁷

There was yet another situation in which the phrase was employed—to describe the way one person or thing fulfilled the needs of another.¹⁸ This category of occurrences should be seen in close relation to friendship, since it was a common notion that friends supply each other with all that they need. Speaking of the services a son renders to a father, Lucian uses the phrase as the climax in a series of terms drawn from the political and patronage systems: "I was a savior, a benefactor, all in all to him (καὶ σωτήρ καὶ εὐεργέτης καὶ πάντα ἦν ἐγώ)."¹⁹ There is a strong possibility that Lucian has patterned these words after a passage in Demosthenes: "Those vile Thessalians and those ill-conditioned Thebans regarded Philip as their friend (φίλον), their benefactor (εὐεργέτην), and their deliverer (σωτήρα). He was

¹²The earliest example is Euripides, *Orestes* 730.

¹³Alciphron, *Letters of Courtesans* 18.2.

¹⁴Alciphron, *Letters of Courtesans* 18.6.

¹⁵See Libanius, *Epistles* 62.4; 501.1; 1103.1; 1303.2.

¹⁶Lucian, *Tyrannicide* 4.

¹⁷Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 71.1; Libanius, *Progymnasmata* 6.1.7.

¹⁸According to Achilles Tatius (*Clitophon and Leucippe*, 4.12.1), the Nile is all things to the Egyptians. This usage is seen earlier in Thucydides (*Peloponnesian War* 8.95.2) and Herodotus (*Histories* 7.156).

¹⁹Lucian, *Disowned* 21. See also Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 7.12; Libanius, *Declamationes* 49.2.33; *Epistles* 1409.1.

all in all to them (παντ' ἐκεῖνος ἦν αὐτοῖς).²⁰ Whether or not literary dependence can be proven, the association of friendship with the fulfillment of needs is clear.

Two passages in the tradition of the early church, which reflect no dependence on 1 Cor 15:28, illustrate the theological application of the concept of the fulfillment of human need which may stand behind Paul's phraseology. The first is the opening of Peter's prayer on the occasion of the ordination of Zacchaeus as recorded in the third of *The Clementine Homilies*:

O Thou Ruler and Lord of all, Father and God, do Thou guard the shepherd with the flock. Thou art the cause, Thou the power. We are that which is helped; Thou the helper, the physician, the savior, the wall, the life, the hope, the refuge, the joy, the expectation, the rest. In a word, Thou art all things to us (σὺ ἡμῖν τὰ πάντα).²¹

The second, taken from the *Legatio* of Athenagoras, is even more instructive, because it employs the phrase to describe the way rulers and subjects are related (with an implied analogy to God and creation) and the way God relates to God's self. In both cases, the category of need is crucial. Here Athenagoras explains why Christians do not worship idols, even though the κόσμος is indeed a marvelous construction:

Not the world, however, but its Maker ought to be worshipped. Your subjects who come to you do not neglect waiting upon you, their rulers and masters, and run to the splendor of your lodging (for it is from you that they would receive their requests); they casually admire the imperial residence for its beautiful appointments when they reach it, but it is you they honour as all in all (ὅμας δὲ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν ἄγουσι τῇ δοξῇ). Now you as emperors adorn imperial lodgings for yourselves; but the world did not come into being because God needed it. For God is himself all things to himself (πάντα γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἐστὶν αὐτὸς αὐτῷ): inaccessible light, a complete world, spirit, power, and reason.²²

The category of need exemplified in the passages from *The Clementine Homilies* and Athenagoras further demonstrates πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν is neither a description of domination (although it is indeed applied to "rulers and masters") nor a slogan denoting mystical absorption. Rather, it denotes the completeness of the one for the continuation of the lives of others. Athenagoras's phrase describing the way God is all things to God's self, "a complete world (κόσμος τέλειος)," could just as easily describe the one who is all things to all.

The last category in our investigation of the phrase πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν is that of political leadership or military rule. When πάντα is employed without an indirect object ("So-and-so is all things"), the intention was often to speak of absolute sovereignty, even tyranny,²³ though this was not always the case, as Lucian's humorous account of Zeus complaining about his dip in popularity as king of the gods shows: "There was once a time when they [humankind] looked upon me as a prophet and a healer, and I was all in all (πάντα ὅλως ἦν ἐγώ); 'Yea, full of Zeus

²⁰Demosthenes, *De Corona* 43.

²¹*The Clementine Homilies* 3.72 (translation is *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 8:251).

²²Athenagoras, *Legatio* 16.1-3 (translation is W. Schoedel, *Athenagoras: Legatio and De Resurrectione* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1972] 33).

²³Achilles Tatius, *Clitophon and Leucippe* 8.9.10; Lucan, *The Civil War* 3.108; Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 1.474; Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus* 11.

were the streets/And all the marts of men.”²⁴ With an indirect object indicating in whose opinion someone is “all things,” however, the phrase always designated the popular leader, whose service for the people gained him limitless admiration. Josephus tells of the Jews freed of an oppressor: “By this time the people were also withdrawing, overjoyed and full of hope and pride because they had acquired self-government and no longer were under a master. Charea was everything to them (τὰ πάντα ἦν ὁ Χαιρέας αὐτοῖς).”²⁵

This exploration of the phrase πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν in the literature of the ancient world has made it possible for us to read 1 Cor 15:28 neither as the restoration of God’s sovereignty over the cosmos nor as the assimilation of creation to God. Rather, the fact that the phrase or its equivalent was regularly employed to describe personal relations of love, devotion, friendship, need fulfillment, and popular leadership suggests that Paul is claiming that in the eschaton all of creation will be related to God in a manner which these categories of relation entail.²⁶ We must now turn to the question of how God will bring about this state of affairs. How will God’s relation to Christ and Christ’s relation to creation be organized so that God might become creation’s “all in all”?

III. Ὑποταγή: SUBJECTION OR PERSONAL IDENTITY THROUGH PARTICIPATION?

Given the numerous instances of ὑποτάσσειν associated with sovereignty and obedience in Pauline writings, canonical, and extra-canonical literature, it is difficult to read 1 Cor 15:28 as anything but the hierarchical arrangement of creation subordinated to Christ and Christ subordinated to God. In this commonsense reading of the text, the relation between God and Christ, on the one hand, and Christ and creation, on the other, is one of “power over,” as a master was thought to rule slaves, husbands wives, and parents children.

Nevertheless, in spite of these numerous parallels, there is a way of approaching the text which avoids the problem of subordinationism posed to a theology which struggles to become truly trinitarian.²⁷ Simultaneously, there is a way to avoid the implied determinism in the God/world relation. We note that ὑποτάσσειν also carried the meaning “to classify under.” To be subordinated in this sense does not mean to take commands but to participate in the reality of something else and to have one’s identity established from that participation.²⁸ 2 Cor 9:13, where Paul employs the noun form ὑποταγή, illustrates this alternative ap-

²⁴Lucian, *Icaromenippus* 24. See also Pausanias, *Arcadia* 50.1.

²⁵Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.189. Livy, *History of Rome* 40.11.4; Herodotus, *Histories* 3.157; Polybius, *The Histories* 5.26.5-6. Appian, *The Civil Wars* 2.19.138.

²⁶For the importance of friendship between God and world in the Pauline doctrine of new creation, see my “Christ’s Many Friends: The Presence of Jesus in 2 Corinthians 1-7,” in F. Gaiser, ed., *The Quest for Jesus and the Christian Faith*, Word & World Supplement Series 3 (St. Paul, MN: Word & World, 1997) 163-174.

²⁷For the less than successful attempts in the patristic period to avoid the subordinationist implications of ὑποτάσσειν in this passage, see the works of Schendel and Lienhard cited in note 4 above.

²⁸See the entries in Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*. BAGD (Bauer/Arndt/Gingrich/Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*) indicates this only obliquely.

proach, although modern translations obscure this point by insisting on “obedience” and by mistranslating the prepositions in the phrase ἐπὶ τῇ ὑποταγῇ τῆς ὁμολογίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ. As the King James Version recognized (“for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ”), the subjection is not *to* the confession but derives *from* it, and the phrase εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“unto the gospel of Christ”) names the greater reality in which the church derives its identity.²⁹

In two other passages in the Pauline corpus, Phil 3:20-21 and Rom 8:18-21, ὑποτάσσειν conveys the sense of identity through participation. Furthermore, it is significant that these passages also share the theme of God’s eschatological relation to creation, a motif prominent in 1 Cor 15:28. The way these passages place ὑποτάσσειν in the context of the relation between God, Christ, and creation in the eschaton opens new possibilities for the interpretation of 1 Cor 15:28. Specifically, Phil 3:20-21 and Rom 8:18-21 broaden the scope of God’s relatedness beyond the human to encompass all things. Not only does a proper interpretation of the relation between God and Christ hinge on our understanding of ὑποτάσσειν, the scope and nature of God’s eschatological relatedness to creation as well is at stake in this investigation.

In Phil 3:20-21 Paul speaks of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the transformation that he will bring about in our bodies and in all things:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform (μετασχηματίσει) the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to (σύμμορφον) the body of his glory, by the power that also (καὶ) enables him to make all things subject to himself (ὑποτάξει αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα).

Does not the parallelism in this text between transformation of the human body to Christ’s body and the subordination of all things to him suggest that the process of subordination should be understood in terms of transformation? If so, this would mean that just as Christ will transfigure bodies so that they might participate in the reality of his body he also will cause all things to share in his nature.

There are good reasons to believe that this is the case. The text is clear that transformation and subordination will be made possible by the same power (κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν). Furthermore, καὶ should be translated “even” as the King James Version has it (“according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”). This emphasizes that ὑποτάξει is not a separate and distinct action but the same as transformation. Finally, treating subordination as a kind of transformation appreciates the underlying assumption of the text that “human body” is a subset of “all things.” Thus, the notion in Phil 3:20-21 that all things and human bodies have intertwined destinies corresponds closely with Paul’s discussion of resurrection and the subordination of all things to Christ in 1 Cor 15:20-28.

²⁹Paul describes his own ministry in the much the same way in 1 Cor 9:23: πάντα δὲ ποιῶ διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ἵνα συγκοινωνῶς αὐτοῦ γένωμαι (“I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings” [NRSV]). The greater reality, the gospel, defines Paul’s ministry.

Another close parallel to 1 Cor 15:28 is Rom 8:18-21. Paul uses the term κτίσις (creation), which is synonymous with τὰ πάντα, to designate what is subordinated:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed in (εἰς) us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility (τῆ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἣ κτίσις ὑπετάγη), not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected (τὸν ὑποτάξαντα) it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay (ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς) and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Note that the sense of subjection here is clearly not a matter of obedience. Creation is subjected to futility in the sense that it is found to be futile. Neither could it be said that creation literally is a slave to decay, but the phrase “from its bondage to decay (ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς),” means that creation is characterized by its liability to death and decomposition. Subordination in this instance means to gain identity from participation in something else.

Rom 8:18-21 not only illustrates how we should think about the meaning of subordination in 1 Cor 15:28, it also affirms the shared destiny of all things with the human body in Christ’s body. In order to link the destiny of human bodies and all things, the text personifies creation. This is not simply a figure of thought. Creation is said to possess emotion (“eager expectation,” 8:19), will (“not willingly,” 8:20), orientation to the future (“await,” 8:19), and the potential for sharing in the freedom of the children of God (8:21). The last item in particular underscores Paul’s belief in the eschatological participation of all of creation in the Son’s relation to the Father. Creation’s participation in this relation will be mediated by the adoption of humans as children of God: “The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay (ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς) and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

IV. ALL IN ALL

1 Cor 15:28 has been interpreted to be Paul’s vision of God’s future relation to the world. This relation has been conceptualized in terms either of God’s absolute sovereignty over all things or the absorption of creation into God, out of whom it had once emanated. The sovereignty interpretation has the added feature of being able to explain with one idea the subordination theme and the statement that God will be all in all: both signify God as the all-determining force. In spite of the economy of thought this interpretation provides, the damaging effect of the sovereignty motif on trinitarian doctrine itself and the theology of creation is profound. The Son’s divinity is trivialized and creation’s relation to God in otherness to God is nullified.

This essay has shown that there are concepts other than sovereignty or absorption to explain Paul’s vision of God and creation in 15:28. Our investigation of “all in all” and the seldom noted meaning of ὑποτάσσειν has demonstrated that Paul utilizes the category of personal relation to describe both the Son’s relation to

the Father and creation's relation to God through its subordination to Christ. Exactly what this means for the doctrine of the Trinity and the theology of creation is not yet easy to say, but it does represent an advance beyond determinism and absorption. I conclude with an attempt to read personal relation back into 1 Cor 15:28. The Son's eschatological subordination to the Father is to be understood in terms of the generation of his identity through his participation in the Father. When all things have been subordinated to Christ—that is, when all things receive their identity from their participation in the Son—then there will be no barriers for God to be in direct and personal relation with all of creation as the Father is directly related to the Son. In other words, God becoming all things to all is made possible by the participation of all things in Christ, whose identity is generated in his filial relation to the Father. ⊕