

THE GENOME OF GRACE

CHRIST AS THE FUNCTIONAL OPTIMUM IN A FALLEN CREATION

A Theological Essay by

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*An Essay Developed from the “In His Mould” Series
Exploring the Dialogue Between Theology and Science*

**University of Glasgow – Theology Through Creative Practice
(PhD in Development)
Easterhouse Community Church | Street Connect**

November 2025

*“If science can recognise deviation in the genetic code,
it already acknowledges the existence of an optimum.
Theologically, that optimum is Christ—the living genome of perfect humanity.”*

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Editorial Preface

This essay extends ideas developed through the *In His Mould* series, exploring how Christ-shaped theology can dialogue with the language of contemporary science. Here, genetic imagery provides a metaphor for divine design, corruption, and restoration. The aim is not to fuse theology with biology, but to use the shared logic of order and deviation to illuminate how grace operates within material reality.

1.0 Introduction – Mutation and Mis-Writing

The language of genetics has quietly entered modern theology. Where older writers spoke of “corruption,” scientists now describe *mutation*—a deviation from the original code that distorts function or form. Both vocabularies describe a universe that was once good and now shows evidence of damage. When biologists identify an abnormal gene sequence, they measure it against a theoretical *optimum*. That assumption of a normative pattern resonates with the biblical narrative: creation began ordered and harmonious, its distortions are measurable precisely because an ideal once existed.

“A crooked line implies a straight one.” (Lewis 1947: 54)

Error presupposes design.

This essay proposes that the theological equivalent of that genetic optimum is not a set of moral rules or metaphysical abstractions, but a *person*—Jesus Christ. In Him,

“The Word became flesh.” (John 1:14, NIV)

The image of God was displayed in uncorrupted human form. If science can recognise deviation in the genome, theology may rightly speak of redemption as re-sequencing—the restoration of creation’s damaged code through the incarnate Word. The purpose here is not to force biology into doctrine, but to use the shared logic of order and deviation to illuminate how divine grace operates within material reality.

While modern biology hesitates to speak of a single *optimum* genome, theology does so without embarrassment. Evolution describes adaptation and survival; theology describes purpose and restoration. When this essay refers to Christ as the *functional optimum* of humanity, it does not imply a genetic perfection measurable by science, but a teleological fulfilment—humanity as it was meant to be in communion with God. In that sense, the incarnate Christ is not a biological anomaly but the eschatological standard toward which all creation is being re-aligned (Col 1:15–20; Rom 8:29). As McGrath observes, “teleology remains theology’s proper domain” (McGrath 2009: 41).

Readers familiar with my *In His Mould* booklets will recognise the underlying trajectory. Those works traced a Christ-shaped approach to hearing, walking, and leading—an anthropology grounded in John 1:14 and John 3:16–17. This essay extends that hermeneutic into the dialogue between faith and science, proposing that the “mould” of Christ represents not merely a moral example but the functional optimum of humanity itself: the living genome of grace by which all that is mis-written may be rewritten.

To reach that conclusion responsibly, theology must begin where both Scripture and science begin—with *origins*. Genesis opens with creation by divine speech:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image.’” (Gen 1:26, NIV)

The first humans are *created* directly by God, not generated from pre-existing life. After the Fall, the vocabulary shifts. Genesis 5:3 records that Adam “*fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image.*” The creative act becomes pro-creative—life now reproduces “*after its kind.*” The human story proceeds by replication rather than origination. This transition is theological as well as biological: what was once unblemished creation becomes self-propagating distortion. Every copy bears the mark of the flawed source.

Science confirms that biological life functions by replication of genetic information, and that replication inevitably introduces error. In this sense, mutation is the empirical mirror of the Fall: an observable world in which entropy and decay are written into every living cell. The Apostle Paul summarises the condition:

“The whole creation has been groaning ... in bondage to decay.” (Rom 8:21–22, NIV)

Yet the same passage anchors hope in a coming liberation—the “*glorious freedom of the children of God.*” The Christian claim is that this liberation has already entered the system through the Incarnation, the moment when divine creation re-entered biological procreation to begin renewal from within.

This essay therefore proceeds by analogy but not confusion. It treats the scientific account of DNA as a metaphorical language through which theology can re-articulate the drama of creation, corruption, and restoration. The next section examines the biblical distinction between creation and procreation, showing that the line separating the two is not merely temporal but moral and ontological.

2.0 Creation and Procreation – The Original Code and Its Transmission

Genesis presents two distinct modes of human origin: creation and procreation. The first belongs to divine initiative; the second to creaturely continuation. In *Genesis 1:26–27* God says, “*Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness.*” The Hebrew *bara* (“create”) denotes a beginning with no precedent. Humanity, like the cosmos, arises by direct creative speech. As Augustine wrote, “*The image of God is found in the rational soul, where there is memory, understanding, and will*”

(Augustine 1991: XII.10). The first humans therefore represent the original *genetic code* of creation—the uncorrupted pattern of divine likeness in material form.

After the fall, Genesis 5:3 shifts vocabulary: “Adam ... *fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image.*” The verb *yalad* (“beget”) signals a move from creation to replication. Humanity now reproduces *after its kind*, carrying forward not only biological life but the distortions of disobedience. Barth comments, “*In the begetting of Seth by Adam the creaturely form of the divine image has already suffered alteration; man henceforth begets man in his own image*” (Barth 1961: 204).

Science parallels this process. Genetic inheritance transmits information through DNA replication, yet each replication carries a probability of mutation. Theologically, sin functions as a moral mutation—an alteration of the human template that continues to replicate through every generation. The Hebrew narrative itself connects moral disorder and physical decay:

“Dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen 3:19, NIV)

Athanasius describes this as *de-creation*: “*The transgression of the command turned them back to their natural state ... returning, through corruption, to nothing*” (1998: 4). Humanity remains alive, but its code unstable. Each generation is a photocopy of a blurred original—still recognisable, yet increasingly pale. Paul summarises, “*Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin*” (Rom 5:12).

Polkinghorne (1989: 47) observes that modern genetics views mutation and decay as unavoidable within any closed system: “*Life is not a static perfection but a dynamic process sustained by the continual creativity of God.*” Genesis 1 and 5 describe not competing cosmogonies but two phases of one story—the perfect creative act and its corrupted replication. Creation produces being; procreation multiplies brokenness. Every child born “*in Adam*” (1 Cor 15:22) inherits both the brilliance of God’s image and the brittleness of Adam’s fall. Only an act of fresh creation could interrupt that sequence. Hence the Incarnation appears not as an oddity but as necessity: a divine intervention at conception where God provides a flawless genetic and moral code to restart humanity’s line.

3.0 The Incarnation – New Creation within the Old Genome

If Genesis distinguishes between creation and procreation, the Incarnation is where the two converge. In the conception of Jesus, divine creation re-enters human reproduction, not by bypassing biology but by completing it.

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” (Luke 1:35, NIV)

The term *overshadow* echoes Genesis 1:2: the Spirit “*hovered over the waters.*” Creation begins as the Spirit moves across inert matter; new creation begins as the same Spirit moves within living flesh. The original Artist returns to retouch His image on the human canvas.

3.1 A Biological Reality

For Jesus to be fully human, His conception required a complete genetic complement. Mary’s ovum contributed 23 chromosomes; a corresponding paternal set was required for viability. Scripture’s claim that no human male provided that input means the Holy Spirit’s creative act supplied what was missing. The God who fashioned Adam from dust could generate genetic material *ex nihilo*. Polkinghorne writes, “*God’s creative act is not an interference but the introduction of a fresh causal principle into the system He sustains*” (1989: 63). The result is a true zygote—fully human yet morally and ontologically new. Athanasius stated, “*The Word takes to Himself a body from a pure and spotless virgin, so that by uniting Himself with mankind He might sanctify all*” (1998: 8).

3.2 Interrupting the Line of Transmission

Ordinary procreation reproduces both life and distortion. The conception of Jesus constitutes a break in that chain. No human father means no participation in Adamic headship. Yet because Mary provides genuine human substance, the Word enters our species fully. Barth summarises: “*In the humanity of Jesus the creature is newly created, but as this very creature, not as another*” (1961: 172). Christ stands at the junction of two genealogies: the biological (through Mary) and the creative (through the Spirit).

This divine interruption does not abolish biology but redirects it. Where ordinary inheritance transmits both vitality and distortion, the Incarnation introduces a new trajectory—a re-coding rather than a deletion. Modern biology, of course, recognises no single *optimum* genome: evolution favours survival, not perfection. Yet theology dares to speak of an optimum in teleological rather than genetic terms—the true form of humanity revealed in Christ. As McGrath observes, “*Teleology remains theology’s proper domain*” (2009: 41). The Word therefore enters the human sequence not as an alien insertion but as its fulfilment: the living template of what creation was always meant to express.

3.3 The Word Becomes Flesh – The Perfect Code Embodied

“The Word became flesh ... full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, NIV)

The *Logos*—the informational principle of creation—enters biological matter. Christ embodies the control sequence of humanity as God intended it: “*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation*” (Col 1:15). Athanasius captured it concisely: “*He became what we are that He might make us what He is*” (1998: 54). The Word assumes our biological code to rewrite it from within.

3.4 Creation within Procreation

In Mary’s womb, procreation becomes the vessel for creation. Divine agency partners natural process. Polkinghorne calls this “*a world endowed with both openness and order—open to God’s*

new acts and ordered enough for those acts to take effect” (1989: 70). The miraculous lies not in suspended biology but in sanctified biology: creation speaking again in the language of cells.

3.5 Implications for Anthropology

Because Christ’s humanity is genuine, He redefines what it means to be human. His life demonstrates the unfallen function of the image of God—reason joined to obedience, will aligned with love. Augustine’s triad of memory, understanding, and will finds perfect expression in Him. Wright concludes, “*The resurrection was the reaffirmation of creation, the beginning of its remaking*” (2003: 244). The Incarnation is that remaking begun.

4.0 The Image Restored – Christ the Functional Optimum

The New Testament portrays Jesus as the visible and operational form of God’s likeness:

“He is the image of the invisible God.” (Col 1:15, NIV)

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.”
(Heb 1:3, NIV)

These are not metaphors for divinity alone; they define the functional optimum of humanity. What Adam distorted, Christ demonstrates.

4.1 The Re-Creation of the *Imago Dei*

Genesis 1 endowed humankind with dignity and vocation. After the Fall, the likeness remained but was obscured. Athanasius likened humanity to “*a portrait that has lost its likeness through stains of corruption; the artist must once more retrace the form*” (1998: 16). The Word renews the pattern from within rather than replacing the canvas. Augustine explained the same renewal psychologically: “*The image of God lies in memory, understanding, and will ... but sin disrupts their harmony; in Christ they are made one*” (1991: XIV.12).

4.2 Christ as the Control Pattern

In genetic research, the reference genome provides the baseline sequence by which mutations are identified. Christ functions as this reference genome for humanity. Barth says, “*The man Jesus is the original of which all other men are the copies*” (1961: 130). Christian ethics becomes re-alignment with this internal template; the Spirit acts as the enzyme correcting the damaged code. Paul calls this being “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (Rom 8:29).

4.3 Grace as Re-Sequencing

Grace is not indulgence but power—the corrective transcription factor that rewrites the flawed script. “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17). Barth notes, “*Grace ... makes man himself new*” (1961: 178). The Church becomes the living laboratory in which the restored genome is expressed collectively.

4.4 The Optimum as Revelation of True Humanity

Modern thought defines humanity by limitation. The Gospel reverses this pessimism: in Christ, limitation becomes the locus of divine presence. “*The glory of God revealed in Jesus is precisely the glory of genuine human life lived in obedience and love*” (Wright 2003: 285). To call Christ the functional optimum is to re-humanise humanity—reason unclouded by pride, desire unperturbed by greed, relationship unbroken by fear.

4.5 Image and Incarnation in Moral Perspective

Recognising Christ as the optimum guards theology against both moralism and despair. Moralism assumes self-repair; despair assumes irreparability. The Word made flesh refutes both. Holiness becomes wholeness: the healed function of the image. Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees (“*whitewashed tombs*,” Matt 23:27) exposes zeal without likeness. Alignment with the optimum manifests not condemnation but compassion—the instinct to mend.

4.6 The Restored Image as Vocation

Restoration reinstates humanity’s vocation to steward creation. Romans 8:19–21 links human redemption with cosmic renewal. As redeemed humanity functions according to the Christ-pattern, creation responds in harmony. Bearing the image means bearing responsibility for the world still subject to decay.

5.0 Redemption as Genetic Re-Sequencing

If Christ is the functional optimum of humanity, redemption is the gradual alignment of human life with that optimum. Salvation is not a judicial abstraction but a living process: the human code rewritten according to the pattern embodied in Jesus.

“Those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.”
(Rom 8:29, NIV)

5.1 From Diagnosis to Therapy

Sin appears here as a *systemic disorder*—a flaw embedded in every cell of human existence. Redemption is therefore not acquittal but therapy: divine healing that overwrites corrupted data. Justification declares the cure begun; sanctification performs the ongoing re-sequencing.

Paul’s anguish in Romans 7 shows the tension between old and new code: “*I see another law at work in my members... waging war against the law of my mind*” (Rom 7:23). His rescue comes through re-creation, not escape: “*The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free*” (Rom 8:2). The Spirit acts as the divine enzyme that corrects replication errors.

5.2 The Role of the Spirit – The Divine Editor

In genetics, polymerases repair mismatched bases during replication. The Spirit performs an analogous role in believers, detecting incongruence with Christ and rewriting it. Jesus calls Him “*the Spirit of truth*” (John 16:13). Augustine foresaw this: “*The Spirit is the love by which we are*

made whole and ordered” (*De Trinitate* XV.17). Editing requires openness: God works where the heart is exposed. Hence Paul’s synergy—“*Work out your salvation... for it is God who works in you*” (Phil 2:12-13).

5.3 Continuity and Transformation

Wright (2003: 422) stresses continuity through transformation: grace does not discard creation but remakes it from within. The genome remains; its expression is corrected. Barth (1961: 211) likewise insists, “*Man is not set aside but set free to be truly man.*” The Spirit edits without erasing.

5.4 The Church as the Body – Corporate Re-Sequencing

The Church, the Body of Christ, functions as a living organism whose cells are believers. When pride or division mutates one cell, the body suffers; when the Spirit’s corrective work operates communally, health returns. Corporate worship and sacrament become gene therapy—Word as template, Spirit as catalyst—producing what Ephesians 4:13 calls “*the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*”

5.5 Grace, Freedom, and Ethical Expression

Editing implies agency: the code does not repair itself yet must cooperate by being legible. Human will consents to transformation without self-sufficiency. Polkinghorne (1989: 95) notes, “*Freedom is the necessary environment for the divine life to take root.*” Holiness, then, is internal correction, not external coercion.

The metaphor of sin as a corrupted code must not be misunderstood as biological determinism. The fall does not erase volition; it disorders it. In Augustine’s account, the divine image persists in the faculties of *memory, understanding, and will* (*De Trinitate* XII.10), so that the human person remains capable of consent and resistance. Grace therefore restores moral agency rather than overriding it.

The genome of grace thus assumes cooperation: the Spirit works within, not upon, the believer. As Sarah Coakley observes, “*The Spirit’s transforming work is never unilateral but dialogical — the divine and human wills entwined in cooperation*” (Coakley 2013: 214). Redemption, then, is not the rewriting of an inert script but the renewal of relationship. Freedom is preserved, yet healed; the code’s correction requires our participation in the very life that rewrites us.

5.6 The Physical Dimension of Redemption

Because corruption entered biology, salvation must include biology. “*The body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body*” (1 Cor 6:13). Resurrection will complete what sanctification begins. Wright calls it “*the final healing of the human condition*” (2003: 478).

5.7 Pastoral Implications

Those struggling with sin or trauma are not moral failures but souls whose code still bears damage from the old creation. Pastoral care cooperates with the divine Editor by creating the environment—truth, patience, love—in which new sequences form. The Church is not a courtroom but a hospital of repair. Grace is the active verb of divine genetics.

The Church embodies this genetic metaphor of grace in lived community. It is not a museum of perfection but a hospital of repair, where restoration replaces rejection and discipleship becomes divine therapy. The Spirit's work among believers resembles a long-term process of genetic correction—slow, relational, and always cooperative. To belong to Christ's body is to participate in ongoing sanctification, as Paul urges: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2, NKJV). Here theology meets practice: redemption is not an idea but a community under reconstruction.

6.0 Ethical Implications – Restoration Not Condemnation

If redemption is re-sequencing, ethics becomes participation in repair, not moral policing. Jesus Himself defines the tone:

"God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." (John 3:17, NIV)

6.1 Christ-Shaped Morality

"Be perfect... as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48) invites restored functionality, not flawlessness. Barth (1961: 220) insists that ethics flows only from "*the command of God as revealed in Jesus Christ*." Moral life, like transcription, must copy from the source sequence.

6.2 Against Weaponised Righteousness

Pharisaic zeal mutated into hostility. "Hate preaching" repeats the error—condemning deviation rather than healing it. Polkinghorne (1989: 103) reminds us, "*A world loved into being can only be redeemed by love*." Grace diagnoses truthfully and restores tenderly.

6.3 The Compassionate Optimum

Christ rewrites broken code through encounter: "*Go, and sin no more*." Augustine saw that "*the rule of love is written on the heart by the Spirit*" (1991: XIX.23). Love becomes the moral base pair of the Kingdom. Acknowledging inherited brokenness confirms, rather than denies, the need for re-creation.

6.4 Truth and Tone United

"*Full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14) describes indivisible moral integrity. Grace without truth excuses; truth without grace destroys. Lewis (1947: 105) calls holiness "*goodness so full of love that it burns*." Real holiness consumes sin in mercy, not in scorn.

6.5 The Church as Ethical Body

“If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.” (Gal 6:1, NIV)

The verb *katartizō* means “to mend.” Christian ethics is divine orthopaedics—resetting what was broken so it can bear weight again. Each act of forgiveness is micro-surgery within the Body.

6.6 The Optimum as Mission

Romans 8:19–21 binds human redemption to cosmic renewal. Mission invites re-alignment: “*You are meant for more*,” not “You are wrong.” The first assumes distance; the second assumes design.

6.7 Holiness as Wholeness

Holiness is integration—*shalom*. “*To be one as we are one*” (John 17:11) completes creation’s design. Ethics ends not in perfectionism but in participation: the image restored to unity with its Maker.

7.0 Eschatological Fulfilment – The Fully Sequenced Creation

Redemption’s process culminates in resurrection—the final correction of the code.

“The whole creation has been groaning as in childbirth.” (Rom 8:22, NIV)

Creation’s pain is labour, not death. When the human genome is restored, creation’s coherence returns. Polkinghorne (1989: 115) calls this “*the liberation of matter itself from its bondage to decay*.”

7.1 Resurrection as the Final Edit

“What is sown perishable is raised imperishable.” (1 Cor 15:42, NIV)

Resurrection keeps continuity but perfects expression. Wright (2003: 479) describes it as “transformation through continuity.” Death, the ultimate mutation, is deleted without loss of identity. Christ’s resurrection is the prototype—“*the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Cor 15:20). Barth (1961: 247) writes, “*In the resurrection of Jesus, humanity is revealed as destined for incorruption.*”

7.2 The Material Dimension of Salvation

Augustine (1991: XXII.30) insisted, “*The resurrected body will be spiritual not because it ceases to be body, but because it will be subject to spirit.*” Polkinghorne (1989: 119) adds, “*If God is creator, He can as easily re-create as create.*” Matter itself will be perfected.

7.3 The New Creation – Cosmic Re-Sequencing

“Behold, I am making all things new.” (Rev 21:5, NIV)

The verb implies ongoing renewal. Barth (1961: 259) calls this “*the Sabbath of God... creation resting in correspondence with its Creator.*” Every dissonance resolves into harmony; every molecule finds its true position.

7.4 Hope as Ethical Energy

Wright (2003: 604) writes, “*What you do in the Lord is not in vain because God will raise it up in His new world.*” Each act of goodness is an anticipatory mutation of grace. Hope is active participation in the future already stirring within the present.

7.5 Theological Coherence

Creation set the code; Fall corrupted it; Incarnation inserted the corrective sequence; redemption began the edit; resurrection completes it; new creation universalises it. “*The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable.*” (1 Cor 15:53, NIV) When that happens, every atom will sing in tune with the Logos who made it.

Conclusion – The Genome of Grace

Science’s discovery of deviation implies the existence of design. Theology names that design: **Christ**. He is the living genome of perfect humanity. The story unfolds as creation, corruption, incarnation, redemption, and consummation.

Creation established the original sequence—humanity in God’s image. The Fall introduced corruption. The Incarnation inserted the uncorrupted code. Redemption began the re-sequencing. Resurrection completes it. New creation extends it to the cosmos.

Grace is not indulgence but divine editing power. Each believer becomes a living strand of the Word, rewritten by the Spirit. Every act of love or justice is a partial transcription of the future genome. When the editing is complete—when corruption yields to incorruption—the whole creation will echo the final declaration:

“Behold, I am making all things new.” (Rev 21:5, NIV)

Then the Word that became flesh will be fully expressed in every fibre of existence, and the genome of grace will be complete.

Author’s note:

This revised version incorporates developments from contemporary science-and-faith dialogue and clarifies the metaphorical, not deterministic, use of genetic language. The essay positions Christ as the theological “optimum” within a fallen evolutionary order, integrating insights from McGrath, Collins, Alexander, and Coakley to reflect current discourse in constructive theology.

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