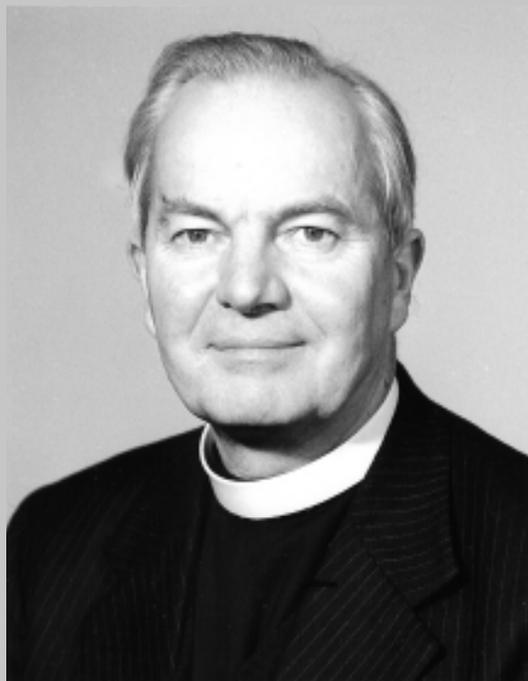


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Participatio
Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance
Theological Fellowship



Vol. 5 (2015)

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ISSN: 1932-9571

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ARTICLES

HE HAS SEEN THE STARS . . . FOR US: THE VICARIOUS HUMANITY OF CHRIST, THE PRIEST OF CREATION

Christian D. Kettler, Ph.D.

Professor of Theology, Friends University

kettler@friends.edu

Abstract: *"They have not seen the stars," writes Ray Bradbury of the non-human creation in his poem of the same name. Of all the creatures in the world, humanity is privileged to know what it is seeing, to give voice to mute creation, to be priests of creation, as the patristic and Orthodox theologians often speak. What if we consider Christ in his humanity as the priest of creation in terms of T.F. Torrance's doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ? For Torrance, it is not simply the death of Christ that is vicarious, on our behalf, and in our place, but the entirety of his life is atoning, on our behalf and in our place. In three theses Christ the vicarious priest, the intercessor for and advocate of creation, is presented as, 1) the one obedient hearing human word of God, with perfect trust, joy, and worship (Luke 10:21), 2) the intersection between creation and redemption, and 3) the affirmation of creation, yet maintaining its distinction from God.*

"They have not seen the stars," speaks Ray Bradbury of the non-human creation in his poem of the same name. Of all the creatures in the world, humanity is privileged to know what it is seeing, to give voice to mute creation. So also, patristic and Orthodox theologies speak frequently of humanity as the priest of creation. What if we consider Christ in his humanity as the priest of creation in terms of T.F. Torrance's doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ? For Torrance, it is not simply the death of Christ that is vicarious, on our behalf and in our place, but the entirety of his life is atoning, his vicarious humanity that intercedes for us. Intercession is needed because "we do not know how to pray as we ought" (Rom 8:26). Intercession is not just an act of divine *fiat* but that which God takes from the side of our human nature, knowing our inability, in Jesus' vicarious

faith, obedience, service, and prayer. This is God living a life of *advocacy* for us.¹ Such advocacy is that which reflects the trinitarian relationship of the Son before the Father, as the Son takes upon our human nature as our worship and prayer before God in both substitutionary and representative ways, recognizing our total need. As Torrance remarks, "That identification is so profound that through the Spirit Christ's prayers and intercessions are made to echo in our own, and there is no disentangling of them from our weak and stammering and altogether unworthy acts of devotion."² Barth reminds us to keep our eyes on Christ who prayed for us on the cross, not on our abilities to pray.³ It is also a life of an eternal *offering* before the face of the Father, of which the incarnate life and obedience unto death is a mirror.⁴ Offering is a part of the continuous intercession. "The offering is itself a continuous intercession: the continuous intercession implies the offering is a present thing."⁵ As such there is a fusion between his divine and human life, a *continuing* life of Jesus Christ that lives before us, and all of creation, always. The *advocacy* of Christ has *ontological* content in the vicarious life of Christ and our union with him.

Key to the continuing life of Christ in our midst are the pictures of Jesus praying in Gethsemane, the Last Supper, the High Priestly prayer of John 17, and, of course, the Lord's Prayer, in which we "overhear" Christ pray so that he, in turn, may place these prayers in our mouths, not just as representative, but as substitute for our desperate neediness in prayer: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).⁶

Not least among these priestly ministrings of Christ is his *benediction*, his blessings, most of all, in the Holy Spirit, the blessing of the ascended Christ (Acts 1:5; 2:33), recalling Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham (Gen 14:19, 20) and the Aaronic blessing of God's people (Num 6:24-26). "He ascended in order to fill all things with his person and bestow gifts of the Spirit upon men."⁷

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of "Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf," who has entered the sanctuary of the temple, "having become a high priest" (6:20). This

1 T.F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes: Paternoster and Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 275.

2 Torrance, *Atonement*, 275.

3 Karl Barth, *A Karl Barth Reader*, ed. Rolf Joachim Eiler and Reiner Marquard, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 104.

4 Torrance, *Atonement*, 115.

5 Ibid., 116.

6 Ibid., 117.

7 Ibid., 118.

priesthood lasts forever, so "he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (7:24-25). "Holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens" (7:26), yet he was "like his brothers and sisters in every respect" (2:14), one who can sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15). This priest is the Son (7:27-28), whose "more excellent ministry" than Moses is as "the mediator of a better covenant" (8:1-6). In the "high priestly" prayer of Jesus in John 17, Jesus prays, "I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth" (John 17:19), the One for the Many. There is no other sanctification apart from the sanctification of the Son. So there is no other human response apart from the human response of the Son. Therefore, Torrance can say, "Jesus Christ *is* our human response to God. Thus we appear before God and are accepted by him as those who are inseparably united to Jesus Christ our great High Priest in his eternal presentation to the Father."⁸ As the one genuine human response, he "thereby invalidates all other ways of response."⁹ Hence, we participate in the response of Jesus in union with him, "one derived from, grounded in, and shaped by the very humanity of the Word which originally gave him being as man and continues to sustain him in his human nature and spontaneity before God as well as in his engagement in the world of things and persons to which he belongs," that is, creation.¹⁰ He is the priest of creation, including human beings.

"Like his brothers in every respect"! How far is this true? Is he really the priest that Karl Barth and T.F. Torrance speak of, that even assumed fallen human nature, who reconciled even the human mind, in contrast to much of "evangelical" and religious rationalism of all ages?¹¹ How far then did God identify with his creation, in all of its "groanings" (Rom 8:23)? For only in plunging into the depths of the alienation of creation itself will there be its salvation. God's grace in creation will be his willingness to "get dirty" with his creation run amuck.

The challenge of possible ecological disaster and the problem of human culpability is rarely related to Christology. Regardless of the debates about the extent of human responsibility, for example, of global warming, no one would deny the fact that human beings, including human sin, affect the wider world around us, socially, physically, and spiritually. Often left with a social ethic that either restricts creation to a question of origins (on the right) or that all problems

8 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), 80.

9 Torrance, "The Word of God and the Response of Man," in *God and Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 145.

10 Ibid., 146.

11 Torrance, "Epilogue: The Reconciliation of Mind," in *Atonement*, 440-41, 446.

in nature can be solved by human ingenuity (on the left). We will not give answers to those questions here. But perhaps we can give a “prolegomena” to a theology of nature based on a Christological view of creation. Can we speak of Christ, the vicarious priest of creation, who can lead us to a better way? From a Christian perspective, does Jesus know something about creation that we do not? Is it significant, therefore, to speak of Christ as the vicarious priest of creation?

Three theses are presented here: Christ the vicarious priest of creation is 1) the one obedient Hearing Human of the Word of God, with perfect trust, joy, and worship (Luke 10:21), 2) the intersection between creation and redemption, and 3) the affirmation of creation, yet maintaining its distinction from God.

First, Christ the vicarious priest of creation is the one obedient hearing human being of the word of God, with perfect trust, joy, and worship towards the Father. Kevin Vanhoozer and Douglas John Hall characterize the essential nature of human beings as speech agents. Yet if Christ is the revelation, not just of God, but of what it truly means to be human, then the obedient Son to the Father in the Gospels is not just the Word of God but also the Hearing Man.¹²

The vicarious obedience of the Son is first of all portrayed in the baptism of Jesus. Taking our human nature from us, Jesus’ baptism is a sign of viewing the doctrine of baptism as one baptism, not just baptism as our response.¹³ There is one “baptism,” Torrance contends, that includes “the whole historical Jesus Christ from his birth to his resurrection and ascension,” all consisting his vicarious humanity, in which we participate.¹⁴ So baptism should not be seen as either simply a ritual or ethical act, but a participation in Christ’s baptism.¹⁵ Torrance refers to this “dimension of depth” as an imperative to “look away from ourselves.”¹⁶ Yet this does not leave our individual reality behind, because “as Jesus Christ is, so we are in the world.”¹⁷ Since we are ontologically involved in his priesthood, we cannot avoid him. That is the glory, and responsibility, of baptism.

The baptism of Jesus is one portrayal of the obedience of Jesus to the Father that is a reality for the entirety of his life — “the whole course of his obedience”

12 Kevin Vanhoozer, “Human Being, Individual and Social,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 175, and Douglas John Hall, *Imagining God: Dominion as Stewardship*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 204-205.

13 See T.F. Torrance, “The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church,” in *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 82-105.

14 Ibid., 82.

15 Ibid., 83.

16 Ibid., 89.

17 Ibid., 89.

and “the whole life of Christ,” as Calvin states — while reserving the “peculiar and proper” place to Christ’s death.¹⁸

Prayer, obedient prayer, begins with the Lord’s Prayer, the “Our Father,” which is Jesus’ prayer to the Father that he enables us to pray with him. Apart from him we cannot pray to the Father in obedience. There is a substitutionary element in prayer that is often neglected but can be seen in the vicarious humanity of Christ lived obediently for us. Torrance portrays this vividly: “While sinners we are unable to pray to the Father as we ought, yet the Lord Jesus Christ in his self-submission and self-offering to the Father, has put his prayer, *Our Father*, into our unclean mouth, so that we may pray through him and with and in him to the Father . . . ”¹⁹

As Ray Anderson suggests, the Word of God creating Adam is the sole source of Adam and Eve’s “response-ability.”²⁰ The speech of God creates the hearing human. Is the sinful human predicament not so much our lack of speaking but a lack of silence for the sake of hearing? Having heard perfectly the word of the Father, Christ the priest of creation is then able to articulate the cries of creation, just as the priest represents the people. His difference is in the vicarious element. Not only does he represent the people, but because of the sin of humanity, he takes their place as the perfect priest, for the sake of all creation, especially abused creation such as nature and animals (and abused women and children, one may add). Origen, taught by Paul that “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” had been reconciled by Christ (Col 1:20), declared that Christ is “the great High Priest not for the sake of humankind alone but for every being, offering himself as a sacrificial offering once and for all” (*In Ioannem* 1.40, PG 14.93).²¹

As priest, Christ in his unique humanity (*enhypostasia*), rather than overriding our will, frees our humanity for genuine human decision and human response in relation to the truth of God’s grace.²² The crucial question, as a young T. F. Torrance observed, is whether we are going to see our humanity through Christ’s

18 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.16.5. Cf. T.F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 138-39; Heinrich Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G.T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 458-59.

19 Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 306.

20 Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 82-83.

21 Gerald O’Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 72.

22 T.F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 218.

eyes or not, "unless we exercise our will through the Will of Christ."²³

What does it mean for Christ to be the obedient human being who hears the word of God? On behalf of all of creation, including humanity, his objective confession of faith becomes the basis for our confession of sin. In Torrance's words, "Jesus' confession before Pilate and on the cross is the counterpart to his heavenly confession before the Father."²⁴ He is also the one who in solidarity with us vicariously confesses our sins in his baptism (Matt 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22). This objective confession of Christ the priest is given its subjective counterpart in the subjective confession in the worship and confession of the church.²⁵ Yet this is never done without the living continuing life of Christ, the ascended One who, exalted by the Father, has poured forth his Spirit (Acts 2:33). Therefore, the "perfection" of creation is done by the continuing presence of Christ, not by a "perfection" of Christ. He and his work do not need to be perfected. But Christ does continue to unveil (*apocalypsis*) the healing that has already happened ontologically in himself, as when he touched the lepers and they were made clean (Mark 1:42).

Christ is the priest who is truly human on behalf of creation and becomes a judge of our inappropriate domination of creation. Only God can create the capacity within us to hear and know him, a "human co-efficient" to make us partners with him.²⁶ This "two-way" relationship is inevitably an anthropomorphic model, yet does not have to be anthropocentric, Torrance argues, if God is on both sides of the relationship in the vicarious humanity of Christ. In Christ the priest God gives himself to us in our categories, in order for us to be lifted up in our humanity and adopted to him, renouncing ourselves, if we are truly to follow and love him.²⁷ This unavoidable anthropomorphic does not absolve the human knower of the need to be self-critical and self-corrective of all "inappropriate anthropomorphisms."²⁸ In fact, one might even say that Christ the priest, who proclaims the word as well as provides the perfect response, in his true human obedience to the Father judges our false attempts at being priests of creation,

23 T.F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 90; cf. Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), 116.

24 Torrance, *Atonement*, 90.

25 Ibid., 91.

26 T.F. Torrance, "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 124.

27 Ibid., 127.

28 Ibid., 128.

often reflected as patronizing attempts to “save” nature. (Why do we think we know best?)²⁹

The epistle to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as both “the apostle and high priest of our confession” (Heb 3:1), one who was “faithful to the one who appointed him as Moses was also faithful in all God’s house” (Heb 3:2). “Confession” here obviously is connected with “faithfulness,” tying together “apostle” and “high priest.” Jesus’ life is that of one sent from God (apostle) but also a life of response to God on behalf of humanity, as their priest (high priest) in the “double movement” of the incarnation, the second movement being that of the vicarious humanity of Christ.³⁰

As our high priest, Christ’s confession enables us to “hold fast to our confession” (Heb 4:14), and to “approach the throne of grace with boldness” (Heb 4:16), that is, the *hilasterion*, the mercy seat of the holy of holies, with the sprinkled blood of the covenant of the priest who himself has now become the victim.³¹ Christ’s confession has become our confession, his answer to the Father has become our answer. “It is therefore the confession of our hopes, for all our hope rests upon the obedience of Christ and his vicarious confession before the face of the Father.”³² We give voice on behalf of all of creation to those hopes in our worship of thanksgiving and praise.

Central to the implications of the confession of Christ for creation is this: as Torrance puts it: “the very voice that condemns us is also the voice that freely forgives us.”³³ The possible staggering cosmological implications of this should not be missed. Is there judgment on creation? Does the cosmos need to be forgiven? We do not know. Short of saying that God (or Satan) “caused” natural evil (and what we do know is that what God creates is good — Gen 1), we must remain ignorant of the origin of creation’s “groanings” (Rom 8:22). We only know that there is something wrong. Creation needs an Advocate. Yes, the *Cosmos*, especially the ordered creation, needs an Advocate. The one who condemns is also the one who forgives. There is no doubt here, no separation of justice and love. The cosmic harmony is in the heart of God. The confession is made in ontological, not just functional, connection to our humanity. As Ray

29 See David A.S. Ferguson, *The Cosmos and the Creator: An Introduction to the Theology of Creation* (London: SPCK, 1998), 72.

30 Torrance, *Atonement*, 89. Cf. T.F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church, Volume II: The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 69.

31 *Ibid.*, 91.

32 *Ibid.*, 91.

33 *Ibid.*, 92.

Anderson expresses it, "this means that the relation of Jesus as obedient Son to God as loving and sending Father has its origin within the very being of God's existence."³⁴ The implications are profound if we take Christ's confession as the basis for our confession in order to approach the throne of grace with boldness (Heb 4:14-16): "Only if the incarnation provides an ontological and not merely functional relation to God through the life of this man will we have assurance of God's gracious provision for humans to share in God's own divine and eternal life."³⁵ To speak of Jesus as only a "parable" of God will not do! A priest has an ontological relation, at the level of being (*ontos*) with both his people and creation, not just a functional relation.

Reconciliation with humanity and the cosmos comes even at the depths of God-forsakenness, as we know from the cry of abandonment from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt 27:46). Does this mean there was a split in the being of the Godhead? No, there is never a disharmony between the Father and the Son, for the Son goes willingly to the cross, led by the Spirit. But he does go to the depths of our forsakenness. He is the priest who becomes the sacrifice. That is the depth of his assumption of our humanity.³⁶ The "wondrous exchange"³⁷ that we even celebrate in the Lord's Supper, Calvin says, is done by God himself. That is the meaning of *reconciliation* in the Bible: *exchange*, a substitutionary, vicarious word, meaning an ontological reality. "Christ so one with God that what he did God did, and so one with us that what he did we did."³⁸

The obedience of Christ is not limited to the first century. His obedient, priestly life continues today, and neglecting that can lead to a mishandling often of the text of the New Testament, Torrance contends. In fact "the basic text" of revelation is not the New Testament but "the obedient humanity of Jesus Christ."³⁹ Apostolic tradition functions rightly when it recognizes the continuous life of Jesus Christ, his living priesthood, and the New Testament text as an indispensable yet relative "glass" or "window" into the living humanity of Christ. "The New Testament is the inspired secondary text" is the way Torrance puts it.⁴⁰

34 Ray S. Anderson, "The Incarnation of God in Feminist Christology," in *Speaking the Christian God*, ed. Kimel, 307.

35 Ibid., 308.

36 Torrance, *Atonement*, 150.

37 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.2

38 Torrance, *Atonement*, 152.

39 Ibid., 340.

40 Ibid., 340.

The important point is that Christ the priest uses the New Testament text himself in an active way. He is not just the object of the text. He has a priestly ministry in reading Scripture, in effect.

As the Fathers, Eastern Orthodox theologians, and T. F. Torrance stress, humanity has that unique role as "priest of creation," able to articulate that which nature cannot express.⁴¹ We actually see the stars, as Ray Bradbury rhapsodizes. However, as with Spider-Man, with great power comes great responsibility! The descent and ascent in the incarnation (see Phil 2:5-11) is one that God makes. The human tendency is to bypass the hearing, speaking, and confessing of the Son and to present our ascent to God as the condition for God's descent, as in the spiritual tradition of ascending the mountain found in Gregory of Nyssa.⁴² By contrast, T. F. Torrance strongly argues for the teaching of Athanasius: Christ "became Mediator between God and men in order that he might minister the things of God to us and the things of ours to God."⁴³ "The things of ours" are presented by Christ the priest, reflecting the precursor in the levitical priesthood, in which all Israel enters into the sanctuary in the person of the High Priest, confessing the sins of the people (see also the baptism of Jesus).⁴⁴ The ascended Lord, Calvin teaches, "leads our songs and is the chief composer of our hymns."⁴⁵ In addition, Jesus prays, on earth and in heaven (Heb 7:5: "he lives to make intercession").⁴⁶ As the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann comments, "Only in Him can we say Amen to God, or rather He himself is our Amen to God . . ."⁴⁷ In the Scottish

41 Oliver Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era and Commentary* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1993), 77.

42 Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, in Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, eds., *Documents in Early Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 12-17. See the criticism in T.F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 39-40. Cf. Christ as confessor in Hebrews (3:1; 4:14; 10:23) in T.F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, 12, 39-40, 46, 56.

43 *Contra Arianos*, 4.6, cited in T.F. Torrance, "The Paschal Mystery of Christ and the Eucharist," *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 110.

44 James B. Torrance, "The Priesthood of Jesus: A Study in the Doctrine of the Atonement," in *Essays in Christology for Karl Barth*, ed., T.H.L. Parker (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 169-170. Cf. John Calvin, *Comm. Hebrews*, 6:19.

45 Calvin, *Comm. Hebrews*, 2:12, trans. and ed. by John Owen, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 22 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), pp. 66-67, cited by James B. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Priesthood of Christ in the Theology of John Calvin," *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor*, Wilhelm H. Neuser, ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1979), 69-84. .

46 Karl Barth, *CD*, II/2, 178. Cf. Origen, *On Prayer*, 10-11.

47 Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 29.

theologian John McLeod Campbell's words, Christ uttered "a perfect amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sins of man."⁴⁸ Hearing, speaking, confessing, singing and praying all belong to Christ, on our behalf, and on behalf of creation. Christ reveals the fulfillment of the human being as created to be priest of creation, although we fail so badly at that task, often disabling nature's praise of God: the hills and the valleys shouting and singing together with joy (Ps 65:12-13). Through Christ, nature sings again.

The Fathers and Eastern Orthodox theologians frequently speak of humanity as a "microcosm" of creation, the creation in miniature, implying that human beings are mediators for the sake of creation.⁴⁹ So also T. F. Torrance speaks of the rational articulation that humanity as priestly is meant to give for creation. Maximus the Confessor prefers to speak of humanity as "macrocosmos," in order to stress their responsibility to comprehend the cosmos, a reflection of their being in the image of God.⁵⁰ Barth resists speaking of humanity as a microcosm of creation. For Barth, this is to confuse anthropology with cosmology and place the totality of creation's meaning with humanity.⁵¹ One manifestation of the hubris of humanity is a self-image that ignores the wider cosmos. Barth contends that the creation exists for humanity, "the sun by day and the moon by night shine for him."⁵² The human is, in fact, as with Maximus' "macrocosm," "the object of God's purposes for the cosmos."⁵³ Whether as "microcosm," "macrocosm," or as "the object of God's purposes for the cosmos," how easily can the hubris of humanity develop an arrogance against the rest of creation.

48 John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Edinburgh and Grand Rapids: The Handsel Press and Eerdmans, 1996), 118.

49 Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 53-55; George Kehm, "Priest of Creation," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 14 (December, 1992), 129-130; Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations*, 38.11.

50 Andrew Louth, "The Cosmic Vision of Saint Maximus the Confessor," *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World*, ed. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 186-187; Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Vol. 1, The Experience of God* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), 4; Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 77; Origen, *Fifth Homily on Leviticus*, 2; Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 74; Maximus the Confessor, "The Church's Mystagogy" in *Maximus the Confessor, Selected Writing*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 196-197.

51 Barth, *CD*, III/2, 15-16.

52 Barth, *CD*, III/4, 573.

53 Barth, *CD*, II/2, 16.

Barth, however, can surprisingly speak of Christ as a “cosmic being,” in the sense that his humanity exists for others, a vicarious humanity.⁵⁴ “In light of the man Jesus,” Barth contends, “man is the cosmic being.” Perhaps the distinctiveness and value of humanity can be affirmed in terms of Christ the vicarious priest. Christ’s vicarious priesthood is a priesthood first of all for humanity, but for the purpose that humanity would not ignore the whole of God’s creation. Indeed, the irony is that the hubris of humanity necessitates its priority in Christ’s redemptive concerns, for the sake of the wider creation. The eucharistic joy of the only One who truly gives thanks to the Father (Jesus rejoiced . . . and said, “I thank you, Father . . .” Luke 10:21) is an invitation to participate in his thanksgiving for nature, animals and the glory of God’s creation.⁵⁵

The Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, argues for humanity as priest of creation yet criticizes what he perceives as Torrance’s overly rationalistic definition, centered on scientific endeavor. The creative nature of human priesthood of creation is that which will save us from ecological woes, according to Zizioulas.⁵⁶ A scientific, and therefore technological, worldview is the source of much of our problems for Zizioulas. Torrance, however, possesses a much more subtle perspective than just a pragmatic or instrumentalist view of science. For him, genuine science does not involve an outdated Enlightenment view of mastery over nature, but a respectful attitude, allowing that which you seek to know to disclose itself to you, whether that be nature, human beings, or God.⁵⁷ In Torrance’s words, “Man acts rationally only under the compulsion of reality and its intrinsic order, but it is man’s specific vocation to bring it to words, to articulate it in all its wonder and beauty, and thus to lead the creation to its praise and glorification of God the Creator.”⁵⁸

Christ “recapitulates,” “sums up” the entirety of humanity, in Irenaeus’ words — a priestly act — including the intellectual as well as the creative aspect through the scientific and medical endeavor of restoring order and creating

54 Barth, *CD*, III/2, 208.

55 See Barth *CD*, III/2, 214. Cf. Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 54.

56 John Zizioulas, “Preserving God’s Creation: Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology, III,” *King’s Theological Review* 13 (1990), 5. Cf. Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 120-121.

57 T.F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1980).

58 T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 26-27. Cf. “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,” *Modern Theology* 4, no. 4 (July, 1988), 322.

reconciliation.⁵⁹ David Bentley Hart is right that “Christ must retell” the true story of the world, but wrong in his belief that Christ’s recapitulation is predicated upon an analogy of being between God and humanity.⁶⁰ Christ the priest interrupts any such search or need for an analogy that does not insist on the total need of humanity in its hubris for the priest who is not only a representative but a substitute. Christ’s “retelling” is substitutionary, but not to be restricted exclusively to a penalty for sin.⁶¹ The Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us of the uniqueness of Christ’s priesthood: He is the priest who is also the sacrifice; not just representing the people, but becoming their substitute in every way. Otherwise, his offering is only another form of religion, our attempts to be our own priests.⁶²

Harold H. Oliver and H. Paul Santmire criticize twentieth century Protestant thought for ignoring a theology of creation for the sake of redemption.⁶³ Indeed, a theology that speaks of God and human relations alone is judged by Christ the priest of creation.⁶⁴ In Schmemmann’s words, Christ reveals the essence of priesthood as love, not religious control.⁶⁵ The articulation of creation by Christ allows creation to become itself, not to be exploited, much less to be destroyed. Scientific duty can then become a deeply religious duty before God.⁶⁶

Second, Christ the vicarious priest of creation is the intersection between

59 T.F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 130-131; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.18.7; 5.1.

60 David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 269: “In God desire both evokes and is evoked; it is one act that for us can be grasped only by analogy to the constant dynamism within our being that comprises the distinct but inseparable moments of interior and exterior splendor. Cf. 325.

61 T.F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 116; *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 133-134.

62 Graham Redding, *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 298 n. 31; T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 167-168.

63 Harold H. Oliver, “The Neglect and Recovery of Nature in Twentieth Century Protestant Thought,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60 no. 3 (1992), 379, 381; H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

64 T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 25-26.

65 Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 93.

66 Cf. T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 26-27: “Man acts rationally only under the compulsion of reality and its intrinsic order, but it is man’s specific vocation to bring it to words, to articulate it in all its wonder and beauty, and thus to lead the creation in its praise and glorification of God the Creator.”

creation and redemption. The doctrine of creation out of nothing is upheld by the Priest who is also the Word of God by whom all things came into being (John 1:3). William Dyrness is right to argue for the integration of creation and redemption.⁶⁷ Yet is he tempted to hold to a priority of creation before redemption, of nature before grace? Kathryn Tanner repeats the characteristic objection to Barth's Christocentrism. For Barth, according to Tanner, "Revelation in Christ seems to be not just one place where the gracious prevenient initiative of God is manifest, but the only place."⁶⁸ A consequent devaluation of ordinary experience is the result, in which God is absent. The vicarious humanity of Christ is dominant in many ways throughout Barth's theology, but an emphasis on the exalted and ascended humanity of Christ the priest, neglected in Barth, as T.F. Torrance points out, could provide a response to such objections.⁶⁹ Christ the priest argues against a "naked" theology of creation that does not presuppose grace. In Christ, grace is not the perfection of nature, as in both medieval theology and Federal Calvinism, but its fulfillment. The promise of humanity as microcosm/macrocosm has been fulfilled, not just perfected. Otherwise, nature becomes the standard that defines grace.⁷⁰ Christ the priest reveals that grace is the word even before the event of the cosmos. Creation and redemption are wedded together because of the priority of grace seen in the vicarious humanity of Christ.

Justification by faith, therefore, is not disconnected from the doctrine of creation. The priestly work of Christ tells of an eloquence about the cosmos that needs to be heard because Christ has seen something we have failed to see. The same is true of human inability to save ourselves, to give meaning to life and rescue from death. The *ex nihilo* of creation is, as Colin Gunton suggests, language that speaks of God acting without any source from outside of himself, a radically different kind of cosmology from others in the ancient world.⁷¹ Creation out of nothing means that creation is utterly dependent upon God. The same is true for salvation. Faith, according to Hilary of Poitiers, is an acknowledgment of

67 William Dyrness, *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 27.

68 Kathryn Tanner, "Jesus Christ" in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Gunton, 266.

69 See T.F. Torrance on Barth and ascended humanity of Christ: "My Interaction with Karl Barth," in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 62; *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 134.

70 James B. Torrance, "Introduction" to John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 6.

71 Colin E. Gunton, "The Doctrine of Creation" in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Gunton, 141-142.

our incompetence to apprehend the inexhaustible God.⁷² Sarah's barrenness in the Genesis story becomes the occasion for faith.⁷³

Christ the priest offers and proclaims the *ex nihilo* by which both creation and redemption occur. His priestly action, therefore, includes neither leaving nature to its fate nor assuming that human ingenuity can create a utopia. The genuine scientist, T.F. Torrance reminds us, seeks to know things according to their natures ("nature is to be respected and courted, not imposed upon"),⁷⁴ and therefore is dedicated to a moral agenda: working towards how things ought to be.⁷⁵ In Pauline language, creation is "groaning," longing to be "set free from its bondage to decay" (Rom 8:21). Christ the priest is working on behalf of his creation, obtaining "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). According to Torrance, reconciliation — the unifying of soul and body, the sensible and the intelligible — happens in the articulate obeying of the Son, the Priest.⁷⁶ This offering of his humanity to the Father is continuous, although the shedding of his blood is a once and for all event.⁷⁷ Thus, Zizioulas must be questioned when he refers to Christ's priestly role as having now been "assigned to the Church," though the church offers "through the priestly action of Christ."⁷⁸ Even though the church is his body, the church is not the head. As Gunton points out, Zizioulas' emphasis on humanity as priestly in terms of creative ability may overstress human activity.⁷⁹ The vicarious priesthood of Christ warns against this and stresses first of all the relatedness between the Father and the Son, not simply human creativity as the essence of the priesthood of humanity.⁸⁰

72 Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 2.11.

73 Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 43-51.

74 T.F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 10. Cf. Jeremy Begbie in regards to creativity and art: not a movement from the artist to the world, but "a sense of the priority of reception over imposition," based on the vicarious humanity of Christ. *Voicing Creation's Praise* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 1991), 257.

75 T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989), 53.

76 T.F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 337. Cf. "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," *Modern Theology*, vol. 4, no. 4 (July, 1988), 322.

77 Redding, *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ*.

78 Zizioulas, "Man the Priest of Creation," in *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World*, eds. Andrew Walker and Costa Carras (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 184.-185. Cf. the liturgy: "Thine of thine own we offer unto Thee."

79 Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, 120.

80 *Ibid.*, 121.

Third, Christ the vicarious priest of creation is the affirmation of creation, which yet maintains its distinction from God. What difference does the vicarious priesthood of Christ make for creation? Is a harmonization or reconciliation of creation predicated upon a kind of panentheism in which the world is God's "body," a part of God (process theology)? Does maintaining a distinction between God and creation (Reformed theology) inevitably communicate an aloof, transcendent God and a creation that can be exploited and abused?

Religious fatalism and secular utopian confidence both fail to do justice to Jesus Christ in his continuing ministry as priest of creation, fulfilling the human destiny as made in the image of God to enable creation to know itself. Only human beings can see the stars and know what they see.⁸¹ This is not a "rationalistic" mastery over nature (as Zizioulas criticizes Torrance), using creation for an alien end, a "tormenting of nature," which Torrance rejects, but is rather an articulation of nature as "pregnant with new forms of being." Christ the priest is the Son of the Father, so he is doing this in harmony, in relationship with the Father, not in a brash activity of capricious creativity. Nor is he compelled by his interactions with creation in a panentheistic sense. The Son acts in freedom because he is *homoousios* with the Father, of the same substance, participating in the only genuine freedom of the personhood of God.⁸² Creation and humanity can become free because God is free, as Barth comments.⁸³ Christ the priest continues to freely offer the creation to the Father in the Spirit and is always a judgment on our attempts at priesthood apart from him.

Christ's continual ministry as priest, the ascended Lord through whom the Father sends the Spirit, does so in terms of a community, his body, the church. The tendency at times to restrict his priesthood to only a celestial omnipotence ignores the presence of Christ the vicarious priest in his continual offering in the eucharist, the offering of thanksgiving, as first of all, his offering, not ours, one we are invited to join together in with him.⁸⁴ "The ministry of the community," Barth contends, "is Christ's ministry of both speech and action."⁸⁵ "The Christian community exists as He, Jesus Christ, exists. It does not exist merely because

81 T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 26.

82 Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 35.

83 Barth, *CD*, III/1, 13-15.

84 Josef A. Jungmann, "The High Priest and the Eucharist," in *The Place of Jesus Christ in Liturgical Prayer*, trans. A. Peeler (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 254, 257. Cf. Redding, *Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ in the Reformed Tradition*, 72.

85 Barth, *CD*, IV/3.2, 862. Barth cites Matt 9:35; Luke 4:43f., 24:19; Acts 10:28.

He exists."⁸⁶ The disciples were not meant to pass on their own witness but the "self-witness" of Christ. This involves the action of Christ the priest as not only offering, but also speech. In the Levitical priesthood, the priest was the teacher of the law, so the priesthood of Christ does not exclude this voice, articulating for humanity and creation what they are unable to say or do.⁸⁷ This articulation includes the priestly blessing of Num 6:24: "The Lord bless you and keep you . . ."⁸⁸ The point here is that this is a living ministry, through the church, but not "assigned" to the church. In the vicarious humanity of Christ, Jesus fulfills as well as gives the promise, a challenge to both the neglect of nature and secular self-salvation.⁸⁹

Christ the vicarious priest continues his "remedial and integrative activity," in T. F. Torrance's words.⁹⁰ This includes the whole of creation, but beginning with the whole human being. Athanasius sees this as the significance of the incarnation: "The Saviour having in very truth become man, the salvation of the whole man was brought about ... Truly our salvation is no myth, and does not extend to the body only — the whole man, body and soul, has truly received salvation in the Word himself."⁹¹ The vicarious priesthood of Christ, both as representative and substitute, reaffirms this expanse of healing and salvation, even beyond humanity to all of creation, as in Paul's theology, for whom God through Christ "was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven" (Col 1:20).

The "groanings," the despair of the cosmos, are brought to the Father by the One who cried from the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" Creation is not to feel guilty because it "groans" (Rom 8:22!), for its High Priest cries out in abandonment. Alan Lewis reminds us that a theology of Holy Saturday means that the church, as the body of Christ, participates in his buried, Holy Saturday body.⁹² The suffering church is the "holy priesthood" of 1 Peter 2:5, made "a kingdom, priests serving [their] God and Father" (Rev 1:6; cf. 5:10; 20:6), not any cause for triumphalism. These priests only share

86 Barth, IV/3.2, 754.

87 James B. Torrance, "The Priesthood of Jesus," 169.

88 Murray Rae, "Justice for the Earth," 7; Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 53-54.

89 Barth, *CD*, III/4, 196, on baptism.

90 T.F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 130; Cf. *Royal Priesthood*, 37.

91 Athanasius, *Ad Epict.* 7; cited by T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 152.

92 Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 201, 388, 398.

in Christ's priesthood.⁹³ But they do share. They are not inactive. They are active as he continues to be active. They are not to be nervous in their activity, for they first participate in the prayers of Christ the High Priest, prayers in the midst of mission, not as incidental to mission.

The mission of the "holy priesthood," therefore, is not to be separated from its nature as community, certainly as a reflection of the triune God, but also as a reflection of the vicarious priest. As John Macmurray reminds us, the infant is absolutely dependent on the community as one comes in to the world.⁹⁴ Human existence at its core can be seen as vicarious existence. Christ the priest is creating communities that reflect dependence on God as the creative possibility of genuine, not neurotic, dependence on one another.⁹⁵ Therefore the necessity of the church as a liturgical community is deeper and broader than we might think, as Ray Anderson suggests. This may include hospitality, acts of forgiveness, Sabbath rest, and other rituals that reinforce personhood.⁹⁶ Priestly intercession may even involve interceding for those abused in our society (the intercessor as advocate).⁹⁷ This should be the holy priesthood's existence until the Lamb takes the place of the light of the city of God, of even the created lights, so that Christ the priest, in Barth's words, "will be His own witness" (Rev 21:23f.; 22:50).⁹⁸

93 *Lumen Gentium* 10, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1975), 361.

94 John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1991), 49-50.

95 Cf. Barth, *CD*, I/2, 385, 421, 431.

96 Anderson, *On Being Human*, 181f.

97 Ray S. Anderson, *Self-Care: A Theology of Personal Empowerment and Spiritual Healing* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint, 1994), 137-138.

98 Barth, *CD*, III/1, 121. A previous version of this paper was given at the March 5, 2006 Southwest meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Dallas, Texas.

THE FALLEN HUMANITY OF CHRIST: A PNEUMATOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION OF THE THEOLOGY OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE¹

Myk Habets, Ph.D.
Head of Carey Graduate School
myk.habets@carey.ac.nz

Abstract. *Thomas Torrance's account of the Incarnation contains a central axiom, namely, the assumption of fallen human nature. Not without precedent, Torrance's christology has been critiqued as incoherent, unbiblical, and unorthodox. When the pneumatological elements nascent in Torrance's christology are examined, Torrance's theology offers a more biblical, coherent, and orthodox theology than its opponents have yet acknowledged. Such a clarification of Torrance's theology, one in which the work of the Holy Spirit is more prominent, offers a dogmatic and pastoral advantage over most text-book approaches to theology, and it also provides a way in which to address the critique Torrance's doctrine of the non assumptus has attracted.*

1. Introduction

While interest in the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is as old as the Gospels themselves; contemporary Christology shows a decided concern with the specific issue of the humanity of Jesus, and with it, a reconsideration of his human nature. Thomas F. Torrance is no exception in this wider discussion. While not interested in the psychology of Christ or entering into the history of the "Quests" for the Historical Jesus (something he is highly critical of), Torrance is concerned to highlight the reality of Jesus' humanity and its *theological* consequences. Torrance presents the most robust and developed

¹ This paper was originally delivered as the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship Annual Meeting Lecture, American Academy of Religion, 21 November 2014, San Diego, USA. I am grateful for the critical discussion and feedback on the contents of the paper at the Annual Meeting, and subsequently from Paul Molnar and the blind peer reviewer.

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doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ yet provided, and does so around the conceptual linchpin of the contentious and often debated argument that Christ assumed a fallen human nature in order to redeem fallen humanity.² The central issue I address here is how Torrance's dogmatic account of the fallen humanity of Christ might be clarified in light of recent criticisms, by further developing the pneumatological insights implicit in Torrance's work and by drawing upon more recent, constructive accounts offered from within the field of Spirit Christology.

It is clear from a reading of the history of Christian doctrine there has been consistent and universal belief in the personal sinlessness of Jesus, as the Scriptures attest, and yet for soteriological reasons there has been an equal emphasis on the fact that Christ had to assume a real human nature, like ours, in order for atonement and reconciliation to occur (an anti-Apollinarian argument). It is at this point that disagreements arise, some of the main being: first, was his human nature like ours post-lapsarian or pre-lapsarian? Second, if it was a post-lapsarian nature that was assumed then how would Christ not incur personal guilt? With the exception of John Owen and Edward Irving, few theologians have been able to provide a substantial explanation as to how Christ could assume a sinful human nature and yet remain sinless.³ Torrance wades into this debate with his usual enthusiasm and theological acumen arguing, for example, that "perhaps the most fundamental truth which we have to learn in the Christian Church, or rather relearn since we have suppressed it, is that the incarnation was the coming of God to save us in the heart of our *fallen* and *depraved* humanity . . ." ⁴ Torrance claims to find this doctrine "everywhere in the early Church in the first five centuries"⁵ and takes up Gregory Nazianzen's maxim "the unassumed is the unhealed" in support. According to Torrance, this doctrine is central to the presentation of the Gospel in the New Testament.

2 For example: Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ: Auburn Lectures 1938–39* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 121–130; "The Atonement: the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. N.M de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 237–239.

3 Many others have argued for the *non assumptus*, of course. See Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Savior: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Human Nature of Christ in Relation to Original Sin, with Special Reference to Its Soteriological Significance* (London: Epworth, 1962).

4 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 39.

5 Ibid.

2. Torrance on the *non assumptus*

In his 1938 Auburn Lectures, Torrance addressed this question specifically and framed it in this way: "does not the Lord Jesus in his vicarious humiliation take upon himself *our* humanity, *fallen* humanity, and yet without sin?"⁶ Torrance's reply is an assured "yes:" yes Christ did assume the fallen humanity of the human race, not some pristine humanity like that which existed before the Fall. Torrance states this plainly 54 years later in his 1992 lecture to Princeton Theological Seminary students when he said,

. . . we must not flinch from the statement of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (8:3) that the Son of God came among us in the concrete likeness of sinful flesh . . . Nor must we try to water down St. Paul's statement that Christ was made sin for us, although he knew no sin (2 Cor 5:21) . . . many people in the West have found this soteriological principle rather difficult and have preferred to think of Christ as having taken upon himself human nature as it came from the hand of God before the fall, but that is to separate the incarnation from reconciliation, the person of Christ from his saving work.⁷

According to Torrance, "flesh" in the Pauline sense of the word often refers to the actual form of our humanity under the fall, and Scripture asserts that Christ assumed human, fallen, and sinful flesh.⁸

That must mean that the flesh he assumes is not to be thought of in some neutral sense, but as really *our* flesh. He has come to redeem *us*, to destroy our sin in human flesh; and therefore he becomes what we are that he might raise us up to where he is.⁹

Torrance is appealing to the patristic notion of the "wonderful exchange," whereby Christ becomes what we are so that we may become what he is.

6 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 121.

7 Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 58–59.

8 See his brief New Testament survey in Thomas F. Torrance, "The Atoning Obedience of Christ," *Moravian Theological Seminary Bulletin* (Fall 1959): 67. Torrance is here supported by such exegesis as is found in C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 379–382; C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 119–120; Joseph Fitzmyer, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. Born, J. Fitzmyer, and R.E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 822; and Vincent P. Branick, "The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God (Rom 8.3): A Key Image of Pauline Theology," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 246–262.

9 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 121.

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Such an understanding necessitates for Torrance that we understand the Son's assumption of a fallen human nature. Torrance referred to this fallen, sinful flesh as the "House of Bondage" which Christ's obedience turned into the "House of God," the place where God dwells.¹⁰

In order to make sense of this point we must, along with Herman Ridderbos, insist that "in approaching the Pauline doctrine of sin, we must not orient ourselves in the first place to the individual and personal, but to the redemptive-historical and collective points of view."¹¹ In light of such Pauline texts as Rom 8:3, 2 Cor 5:21, 2 Cor 8:9, and Phil 2:6, we must view sin as the supra-individual mode of existence in which one shares before we see it as an individual act. By viewing sin in this Pauline way we can more fully see how it was that Christ could "be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21), that is, assume a sinful human *nature*, and yet remain a perfectly sinless *person*. This goes some way to countering the oft-heard charge reflected by Oliver Crisp, for example, that the notion that Christ had a fallen but not sinful human nature is incoherent.¹² By "sinful human nature," it is clear that Crisp means the person is sinful and thus guilty. This is clearly *not* the way Torrance uses such language.

In Christ's own body, specifically his "body of flesh," God's redemption and reconciliation take place. It is God who reconciles the world to himself "in Christ" (2 Cor 5:18-19). Christ is not only the *agent* of redemption but also the *place* of redemption because in himself he redeemed humanity from the curse and subjection to the Law. This provides the force of Paul's definitive statement, "If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17).¹³ There is something about the now risen and now holy human nature of Christ which is essential for salvation.

In discussing the sinlessness of Christ, Torrance makes it clear that as God, Jesus Christ could not sin. Torrance recognizes a real temptation, but at the same time the assurance that victory was bound to be won. Christ assumed human nature, not a human person (*anhypostasis*). He assumed the possibility

10 Torrance, "The Atoning Obedience of Christ," 73-74.

11 Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 91.

12 Crisp, "Did Christ Have a *Fallen* Human Nature?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 no. 3 (2004): 271-272.

13 Branick, "The Sinful Flesh of the Son of God (Rom 8:3)," 260. Branick overstates his position when he posits a case for the Gnostic language of the "redeemed Redeemer" (260-261). It would be better to say that "Christ here is *not only* the agent of redemption *but also* the place of redemption because he himself was redeemed from the curse and subjection to the Law."

of being tempted but he did not assume the corrupted personality spoilt by Original Sin, that is, the necessity of falling in temptation. In agreement with a Cyrillian soteriology Torrance affirms:

There can be no thought here of the Son of God becoming contaminated by our sinful flesh, for while he certainly assumed sinful flesh from the lump of our fallen humanity, he healed and sanctified it at the same time, by condemning sin in the flesh and by imparting to what he assumed the virtue of his own holy life.¹⁴

Which of the traditional positions is then to be adopted concerning Christ, *posse peccare* ("possible to sin"), *posse non peccare* ("possible not to sin"), *non posse peccare* ("not possible to sin"), or *non posse non peccare* ("not possible not to sin")?¹⁵ Like the Alexandrian Christology from which Torrance draws upon so often he finds the answer to lie in a true consideration of the *person* of Christ. The person of Christ is divine and hence what pertains to God eternally applies to Christ temporally. In what would become a hallmark of his theology, Torrance adopts an *a posteriori* approach to this question as early as 1938–39 and concludes that Christ "was not able to sin because we see that he did not sin."¹⁶ This immediately excludes one option: *non posse non peccare* ("not possible not to sin"). Two other views are also immediately ruled out by Torrance, *posse peccare* ("possible to sin") and *posse non peccare* ("possible not to sin"), as they both indicate that Christ approached sin neutrally. This is clearly not the case if the divine person of the Mediator is to be taken seriously (*enhypostasis*). God is not neutral in the face of sin, but is wholly opposed to it!¹⁷

14 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in the East and West* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 169 (see n.3 for bibliographical details to Cyril's work).

15 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 125. For definitions see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 136–138, 176; 200, and 230.

16 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 126. Wiles shows how the Greek Fathers worked with this same methodology specifically in formulating this phrase: "The logical connection is presumably that 'assuming' is a necessary causative factor in producing 'healing;' but in at least its initial employment in theology, the epistemological order was the other way round. It was rather the conviction of full salvation which came first and which (on the basis of this principle) led on to the conviction of the divine Son's assuming a full humanity." Maurice Wiles, "The Unassumed is the Unhealed," *Religious Studies* 4 (1968): 48.

17 Torrance points out that a neutral freedom would amount to caprice. Torrance also includes at this point a brief discussion on the "freedom" that bondage to God brings and entertains a Reformed perspective on the freedom and bondage of the will. Torrance, *The*

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Only one option remains possible according to the logic of Torrance's argument, *non posse peccare*, that Jesus was unable to sin: "not only because he did not sin but because he was of such a nature, in being One with the Word, that he would not have sinned."¹⁸ Sin is a turning away from God, it is rebellion against the love of God, and it is the autonomy of self in contradistinction to reliance on the Creator.¹⁹ As Jesus is the Word Incarnate, and God cannot turn against God, so the Son cannot be autonomous from the Father or the Spirit. Hence, according to Torrance, the temptations of Christ were real, indeed more real than for any other human being, but the victory was certain.²⁰

Up to this point the Spirit has been mentioned in relation to the virgin birth, and briefly in contradistinction to the theology of Edward Irving, but not in relation to the doctrine of Christ's sinful humanity.²¹ To date Torrance has relied solely on the Athanasian-Alexandrian line of reasoning that the divinity of the person of the eternal Son is holy and sinless and so this is how Christ could assume fallen humanity and yet remain personally sinless.

Torrance consistently maintains, with Cyril, that Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" but not in sinful flesh. By such a statement he does not mean to imply that Christ's identification with fallen humanity is merely external or accidentally related but rather, the Son took up *our* human nature into a real or physical and hypostatic union with himself so that "it was precisely one who was unlike us who was made like us, so that in being made like us he remained one who is also unlike us."²² Christ became one with us (*henosis*) in the depths of our fallen human condition yet without ceasing to remain perfect

Doctrine of Jesus Christ, 127–128.

18 Ibid., 128.

19 For Torrance, autonomy of the self is the very antithesis of humanity. It is inhumanity. As Jesus was the True Human, the Real Man, then rebellion and sin has no place in his being. The same thought is offered by Daniel M. Rogich, *Becoming Uncreated: The Journey To Human Authenticity* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing, 1997), 168, when commenting on Palamite Christology. He writes, "Jesus does not have to sin in order to prove his metal as a human being. To sin means that a human being is inhuman, not more authentically human."

20 Similar conclusions are drawn by such eclectic sources as Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 208; Leon Morris, *Lord from Heaven: A Study of the New Testament Teaching on the Deity and Humanity of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 51–52; and John F. Walvoord, "The Impeccability of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 118 (1961): 195–202.

21 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 118–122.

22 Torrance *Theology in Reconciliation*, 169. This answers some of the criticisms of this phrase and its development put forward in the latter half of the essay by Wiles, "The Un-assumed is the Unhealed," 47–56.

in his divinity in order to make us one with the Father as Christ is one with the Father.²³

Torrance incorporates into this discussion a specific stress on the notion of an incarnational atonement, as we would expect, when he makes explicit the link between incarnation and atonement.²⁴ Torrance argues strongly that if the incarnation of the Son was not an assumption of sinful, fallen human nature, then it has no salvific power. At best, if the Son assumed a perfected or "ideal" human nature, then the doctrine of atonement could only be formulated in terms of an "external transaction of a merely judicial and legalist kind."²⁵ This is the result, if Torrance is to be believed, of an instrumentalist reading of the incarnation in which the vicarious human life of the Word is discounted or given minimal treatment.

I believe that it is very crucial for us to hold this truth, that the Savior took our fallen Adamic humanity upon him, but we must add that in the very act of taking it he was at work redeeming and sanctifying it in himself . . . Hence we must think of his incarnating and atoning activities as interpenetrating one another from the very beginning to the end of his oneness with us. Otherwise the humanity of Christ has to be thought of only in an instrumentalist way, and the atonement can be formulated only in terms of external moral relations or legal transactions.²⁶

This view can be seen, according to Torrance, throughout Latin theology, the view that in the incarnation the Son took, not our actual nature, but a human nature untouched by sin and guilt, which gave rise to the notion of the Immaculate Conception, and to a doctrine of atoning transaction thought out in external terms.²⁷ Torrance has committed himself to rooting out any merely external or wholly forensic categories in his Christology, and this discussion is no exception

23 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 173, and Thomas F. Torrance, "Incarnation and Atonement: *Theosis* and *Henosis* in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism," *Society of Ordained Scientists*, Bulletin No. 7, Edgware, Middlesex (Spring 1992): 8–20.

24 Crisp's real difficulty with the notion of the Son's assumption of a fallen human nature is found in his rejection of the idea of an incarnational/ontological atonement. See Oliver D. Crisp, "Kathryn Tanner (1954–): On Incarnation as Atonement," in *Revisioning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 111–132. Such an *a priori* commitment necessitates Crisp's rejection of any notion of the Son's assumption of a fallen human nature.

25 Torrance, "Incarnation and Atonement: *Theosis* and *Henosis* in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism," 13.

26 See Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 59.

27 Torrance labels this a dualistic, anti-Pauline approach. Torrance, "The Atonement the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross," 238–239.

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and in fact provides a good framework from which Torrance can launch his attack upon "the Latin heresy."

Greek theology, according to Torrance's reading of the tradition, rejected all notions of an external or instrumental atoning transaction and took to heart Paul's non-dualist approach insisting that in the incarnation the Son of God took upon himself our actual sinful existence and redeemed and healed it from the inside out, so to speak. "In Christ our fallen Adamic humanity was recreated and through his vicarious obedience as the Son of God become man it was restored to perfect filial relation to the Father."²⁸

What Torrance asserted throughout his career is that the incarnation and atonement inhere in one another completely.²⁹ If this is truly taken seriously, then the Word had to have assumed an identical human nature to the heirs of Adam *after the Fall*. This results in the saving work of Christ being seen in a two-fold way, as the act of God *toward* humanity, and as the act of humanity *toward* God but, and this is crucial, within the *one person* of Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God. It is this that compels Torrance to forcefully assert the Son's assumption of a fallen human nature.

In order to explain the humanity the Son assumed Torrance writes:

He was very man, our Brother. In him the Holy Son of God was grafted on to the stock of our fallen human existence, and in him our mortal and corrupt human nature was assumed into union with the Holy Son of God, so that in Jesus, in his birth and sinless life, in his death and resurrection, there took place a holy and awful judgment on our flesh of sin, and an atoning sanctification of our unholy human existence. It was through such atonement that God in all his Godness and holiness came to dwell in the midst of mortal, sinful man.³⁰

The assumption of a fallen human nature is considered to be essential to a full doctrine of atonement. Because union with God is through the human nature

28 Ibid., 238.

29 In this Torrance is at once being thoroughly patristic and thoroughly Reformed. In his essay "For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 43 (1998): 281–316, Bruce L. McCormack helpfully surveys the history of Reformed thought and shows the parallels between 16th and 17th century Reformed Christology to that of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and patristic Christology. While heavily reliant on Barth, McCormack's one reference to Torrance could have been multiplied many times to highlight the same point. Torrance undoubtedly understands and stands within Reformed orthodoxy, perhaps nowhere more strongly than in his articulation of the implications of the anhypostasia/enhypostasia, and the two natures–one person doctrines within Christology.

30 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 241.

of the incarnate Christ, then Christ's nature had to be fallen in order to redeem fallen nature for human persons to participate in him. This is possible, according to Torrance, because of the atonement that took place in Christ, for having redeemed fallen human nature the Holy Spirit may dwell in the midst of mortal sinful humanity. "This is the way that the divine love has taken to redeem man, by making him share in the holy power in which God lives his own divine life."³¹ Finally Torrance introduces the Holy Spirit into the discussion, but at this point only as an appendix in the traditional fashion, to assert that the Holy Spirit applies to us what Christ won for us in his life, death, and resurrection.

It will be recalled that Torrance adopts the patristic soteriological axiom "The unassumed is the unhealed."³² By this phrase Torrance intends that Christ assumed a sinful, fallen humanity and redeemed it in his life, death, and resurrection. The question to be asked is this — has Torrance interpreted this phrase correctly? While the phrase is common among the early Fathers of the Church, for example, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Origen,³³ it was Gregory Nazianzen who gave it its classical and definitive form.³⁴ By means of this axiom the Church has consistently proclaimed and defended the full humanity of Christ. Originally a defense against Apollinarianism, the phrase states that Christ took upon himself a true material body, human soul, mind, and will.³⁵

Apollinarianism rejected the idea that Christ possessed a human will, for the will or mind was thought to be the controlling seat of sin. By rejecting Apollinarianism Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Torrance himself contend that Christ assumed a human will subject to the fall and redeemed the human mind by means of this

31 Ibid.

32 Torrance, "Incarnation and Atonement: *Theosis* and *Henosis* in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism," 12. Torrance treated this again in another 1992 publication, "The Atonement the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," 237–239; and in his 1996 work *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 250. In addition, Torrance works this theological phrase into numerous articles and chapters, especially *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 103–105, 160, 202–205, and 231–234.

33 See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1 (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 52, 115, 148.

34 See *Epistolae*, 101, and *Orations* 1.13; 13.21. The phrase was of course used by Athanasius and after him Cyril of Alexandria. Torrance provides extensive references to all these thinkers throughout chapter four of his *Theology in Reconciliation*, 139–214.

35 Torrance makes much of the mind of Christ especially in worship. See his 1972 lecture to the Church Service Society of the Church of Scotland, "The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy," in Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 139–214.

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assumption.³⁶ The conclusion Torrance comes to is that this can only equate to a sinful or fallen human nature being assumed by the eternal Word. The Word became all that we are in order to make us all that he is.³⁷ The comment by Stephen Holmes on this phrase is certainly reflective of Torrance's own position, ". . . the derivation from this of Christ's assumption of fallen human nature is uncomplicated."³⁸

In response to the claims of Apollinaris that the Logos became flesh without assuming a human mind, for a human mind is the locus of sin, Athanasius contended that if Christ did not have a human mind then he had not assumed complete or real human nature for it would deprive Christ of our human experiences of birth, growth, death, pain, anguish, distress, and temptation.³⁹ This would disqualify Christ from being a priest and so his mediatorial office is undermined if not utterly contradicted. Athanasius also considered this to be a rejection of the *homoousion* doctrine — if Christ was not man in the wholeness of our humanity then he was something else and as something else could not atone for our sins.⁴⁰ Torrance is convinced that in rejecting Apollinarianism Athanasius, by means of the phrase we are considering, affirms that true emancipation from sin and the power of death were taken up into Christ and so were defeated and atoned for.⁴¹

36 Torrance traces this idea immediately back to Barth to whom he attributes this as one of the most significant contributions which he reintroduced into evangelical theology. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, 104, 202–205, citing in support Barth, *CD*, I/2, 151.

37 Torrance considers the Cappadocians as taking even more seriously than Athanasius the Pauline teaching that Christ took upon himself fallen human nature, "the flesh of sin," "the body of death," while at the same time sanctifying and recreating it. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 155.

38 Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 137.

39 This is all developed in Athanasius, *Contra Apollinarium*, 1.2, 5, 10, 15; 2.8, 17.

40 Torrance is so committed to an incarnational atonement that he can write of Christ's assumption of a human soul and mind that "it is indeed precisely in this area that the essential work of redemption took place, where the inward and outward man are one and inseparable, and where Christ's redeeming work was no less a work of his soul than a work of his body." Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 149.

41 Torrance insists that Christ did not assume original sin on the predication, I believe, of a certain view of what original sin is, namely, an Augustinian view that equates to original guilt. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 122. This is not, however, the only definition available to us. On various notions of original sin see Crisp, "Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?" 272–84. Crisp rightly maintains that any articulation of Christ's assumption of a fallen human nature necessarily entails a reformulated doctrine of original sin that accounts for the place of original guilt. Torrance never enters into the details of this aspect

Torrance considers Apollinarianism, both ancient and modern, to be “another gospel,”⁴² primarily because it cuts away the atonement as the “reconciling exchange” of Christ.⁴³ That is, Apollinarianism is nothing other than a rejection of salvation according to Torrance, and the consequence of this rejection is the destruction of true worship because there is no real relation between God and the human soul, or between the will of God and the will of humanity, in and through the rational soul and will of Christ. Torrance summarizes the situation as follows:

In allowing no room for the mental and moral life of Jesus as man and in denying to him authentic human agency in his saving work, it left no place for the vicarious role of the human soul and mind and will of Jesus in the reconciling ‘exchange’ of like for like in the redemption of man. And by destroying his representative capacity, it had no place for his priesthood or human mediation in our worship of the Father, and by the same token it took away the ground for any worship of God with our human minds. A mutilated humanity in Christ could not but result in a mutilated Christian worship of God.⁴⁴

What Torrance sees as evident within patristic Christology is that the phrase “the unassumed is the unhealed” equates to the following: to be healed is to be deified, therefore humanity must first have been “assumed” into special hypostatic relation with the Word and in that act divinized.⁴⁵ The phrase is intimately linked to the doctrine of *theosis* in the early church and was seen as a central formula for accounting for how *theosis* occurs. The logic runs as follows: divinization is thought to be the ultimate goal of humankind⁴⁶ and thus provide an understanding of salvation in terms of which it can be shown that a prior divinization of human persons by the assumption of humanity itself into a relationship with God of a distinct, hypostatic nature in Christ is a logically

of the argument, however, it is clear that, according to Torrance, Christ did not inherit or assume any original guilt, just original corruption in his human nature. For a complementary account of original sin see Myk Habets, “‘Suffer the little children to come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven:’ Infant Salvation and the Destiny of the Severely Mentally Disabled,” in *Evangelical Calvinism: Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church*, ed. Myk Habets and Robert Grow (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 287-328, especially 308-315.

42 Torrance *Theology in Reconciliation*, 148.

43 Ibid., 150. Torrance is reliant upon a theological exegesis of Athanasius’ work, especially *Contra Apollinarium*, I.17.

44 Ibid., 150.

45 This is the conclusion Wiles, “The Unassumed is the Unhealed,” 55, comes to in regard to the patristic theologians.

46 Torrance, “The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy,” in Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 139-214.

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necessary first step.⁴⁷ This is precisely the way Torrance constructs his accounting of salvation as the following highlights:

If the incarnate Son through his birth of the Virgin Mary actually assumed our flesh of sin, the fallen, corrupt and enslaved human nature which we have all inherited from Adam, then the redeeming activity of Christ took place within the ontological depths of his humanity in such a way that far from sinning himself, he condemned sin in the flesh and sanctified what he assumed, so that incarnating and redeeming events were one and indivisible, from the very beginning of his earthly existence to its end in his death and resurrection.⁴⁸

In his early theology, Torrance maintained that Christ has entered sinlessly into our corrupt and fallen humanity in order to redeem us. He maintains that there are not two *separate* persons in Christ (a Nestorian mistake), there are two natures, but they are united *hypostatically* in the one incarnate Person.⁴⁹ As a result, the human nature of the incarnate Word is Holy, and not in any sense corrupt. So while the human nature was derived from Mary, from the stock of fallen humanity, it was a *vicarious* humanity that Christ assumed. "In this Union the flesh of Christ becomes Holy though it is a member of humanity under the curse of the law, under the ban of God's wrath. Thus we are to think of Christ's flesh as perfectly and completely sinless in his own nature, and not

47 Wiles, "The Unassumed is the Unhealed," 47–56, recognises the logic of this early Christology but rejects its use today arguing that *φάρμακον* or healing/medicinal imagery is merely one of a number of analogies used for salvation and as an analogy it is useful, but only to a point. Analogies he briefly mentions other than the medical include the juridical and the sacrificial. Wiles does not appear to give enough weight to the uniqueness of Christ and his relationship with both God and humanity and so the vicarious and mediatorial ministry of Christ is downplayed. For a contemporary elaboration on the analogy of healing as salvation see John de Gruchy, "Salvation as Healing and Humanization," in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance*, ed. T.A. Hart and D.P. Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981), 32–47.

48 Torrance, "Incarnation and Atonement: *Theosis* and *Henosis* in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism," 12.

49 This form of reasoning has a long history within the Reformed tradition, arising out of the initial debates with the Lutheran construction of a *communicatio idiomatum*. As with the best of Reformed scholarship, Torrance knows the distinction between persons and natures and how to hold the two together in a thoroughly Chalcedonian way. McCormack is helpful here in presenting two points about Reformed orthodoxy: "The first is that for a Christology to be 'Reformed,' it must affirm the principle that the two natures remain distinct and their properties unimpaired after the union . . . Secondly, we have established that the Subject who worked out our redemption is the God-man in his divine-human activity." McCormack, "For Us and Our Salvation," 294.

simply in virtue of the Spirit as Irving puts it.”⁵⁰ Here Torrance clearly eschews Irving’s unique contribution to this discussion — the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit on Jesus completely at conception, without reference to the Logos who assumes human flesh in the first place. We also witness an affirmation that Torrance would later repudiate, that the assumed nature of Christ is Holy and “not in any way corrupt.” In his later theology Torrance will argue that the humanity assumed by Christ was corrupt, but due to the vicarious assumption of the flesh, this does not make Christ a sinner nor does it incur guilt. It does require, however, a stress upon the sanctifying work of the Spirit throughout Jesus life.

According to Torrance, Christ did not have original sin because his *person* was Divine. That means, he was not a sinner and had no guilt that needed to be atoned for.⁵¹ However, he entered fallen humanity, and chose to live within the confines and conditions of corrupt humanity: in other words, he did assume a human nature affected by original sin.⁵² He freely came under the same judgment and condemnation as we are, not because he sinned, but because in his union he loved us even unto death and did *not* sin. On the surface this appears to be a contradiction, namely, that Christ does and does not have original sin. At this point Torrance is not sufficiently clear. In order to clarify

50 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 122.

51 Crisp’s otherwise excellent article, “Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?” 270–288, limits discussion to *natures* rather than opening it up to *persons*. Torrance’s construction of the doctrine moves from nature to person and it is this movement which lends coherence to his thought and distinguishes his own point of view from that of Irving.

52 Once again, Torrance is echoing a staple of Reformed orthodoxy, that “to be made sin” in 2 Cor 5:21 means that the sin and guilt of the world is *imputed* to the Son, a judicial act whereby the God-man is made liable for our sins and judged in our place. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.5–6. While Torrance would not stress the juridical aspects of this exchange, the imputed or vicarious nature of it is certainly highlighted.

Luther himself asserted in more direct fashion that Christ assumed a sinful human nature, not some neutral humanity. He spoke of Christ as the “greatest sinner” (*maximus peccator*) because he bears the sins of all human beings *in a real manner* in the human nature he has assumed. Luther goes beyond Reformed orthodoxy at this point and insists that the real manner equates to more than a mere imputation of sins to Christ but his real assumption of these sins. While Christ himself is innocent, he assumes the sins of all humans. Corresponding to Christ as the greatest sinner is the corollary, Christ as the “Greatest Person” (*maxima persona*). Christ is every sinner. This leads Luther to posit Christ as the “only sinner,” an idea which is foundational for his doctrine of atonement. See Luther’s *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, *Luther’s Works*, 25:277; 40 I, 433, 26–434, 12. Cited in Tuomo Mannermaa, “Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective,” in *Union With Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. C.E. Braaten, and R.W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 29–31.

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his position we might say that Torrance's argument hangs on the concept of a vicarious assumption of human nature in its fallenness and sin. Christ did not, according to this logic, inherit sin *personally* (as the human nature assumed by the Word was anhypostatic). However, through an assumption of human nature in its post-lapsarian condition, Christ remained guilt-free while still *vicariously* assuming a fallen and sinful human nature which existed under the conditions of original sin.⁵³

If we adopt this as Torrance's position, Jesus Christ incurs no guilt and is not therefore, at enmity with God. However, the *person* of the eternal Son took to himself a post-lapsarian human *nature*, and he did so freely and vicariously, and lived under the conditions of corrupt humanity (with a human mind, will, and emotions), and in that very humanity, like ours, he redeemed the flesh, defeated the curse, and restored human nature to a right standing with God in the power of the Holy Spirit. This stress on vicarious assumption is an innovation in the debate that Torrance contributes and one which has little weaknesses in its basic orientation. It is also the point that is not addressed in critical accounts of the issue offered by recent works including that of Kevin Chiarot.

Torrance further articulates how Christ remained sinless despite vicariously assuming a fallen human nature in his 1976 work *Space, Time and Resurrection* when he writes:

Although he assumed our fallen and corrupt humanity when he became flesh, in assuming it he sanctified it in himself, and all through his earthly life he overcame our sin through his righteousness, our impurity through his purity, condemning sin in our flesh by the sheer holiness of his life within it.⁵⁴

Torrance goes on to say that this is precisely why death could not hold him, "for there was no sin in him which allowed it to subject him to corruption. Death had nothing in him, for he had already passed through its clutches by the perfection of his holiness."⁵⁵ In short, "He triumphed over the grave through his sheer sinlessness."⁵⁶ He then concludes with the clear statement that "The

53 Torrance is here thoroughly patristic and in-line with the Fathers when he attributes sin to the person-hypostasis, not as Augustine (and the Western tradition since) did, to essence or nature. This accounts for why Christ could assume the likeness of sinful flesh (nature) and yet remain sinless (person). Again the *an/enhypostatic* couplet is playing its part in the hinterland of Torrance's Christology.

54 Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1976), 53.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 53–54.

resurrection is thus the resurrection of the union forged between man and God in Jesus out of the damned and lost condition of men into which Christ entered in order to share their lot and redeem them from doom."⁵⁷

In Torrance's theology, atoning mediation is understood to be achieved first within the hypostatic union itself and then applied to fellow human beings. We participate in what Christ has already achieved, not independently of him. Christ is not simply a moral trailblazer, or external example, but the Mediator, Immanuel — God with us and us with God.⁵⁸ Christ "took upon himself our twisted, lost, and damned existence, with all its wickedness, violence, and abject misery, and substituted himself for us in the deepest and darkest depths of our perdition and godlessness, all in order to save and redeem us through the atoning sacrifice of himself . . ." ⁵⁹ At this point in Torrance's essay he again echoes the *mirifica commutatio*: "And such is the astonishing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor that we might be made rich in him — the blessed reconciling exchange summed up in the New Testament term *katallage*."⁶⁰

3. Critique

The doctrine of the *non assumptus*, and Torrance's specific theology on this, have not escaped criticism. In a study on Torrance's theology, Kevin Chiarot believes there are "critical problems in Torrance's presentation of the doctrine that call into question its intelligibility."⁶¹ While I think that is too strong, nonetheless his interaction with Torrance is well-worth considering given it is the only book length study of the doctrine as utilized by Torrance. Specifically, Chiarot drafts a number of objections which I have grouped together under four interrelated heads.

Torrance's biblical exegesis is questioned, especially around a reading of Romans 8:3.

57 Ibid., 54.

58 This is the common theological tension between the One and the Many. See for instance Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

59 Torrance, "The Atonement the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," 236–237.

60 Ibid., 237. For a Reformed background to the link between incarnation and atonement on the one hand, and the *mirifica commutatio* and theosis on the other hand consult McCormack, "For Us and Our Salvation," 281–316.

61 Kevin Chiarot, *The Unassumed is the Unhealed: The Humanity of Christ in the Christology of T. F. Torrance* (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 21.

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Chiarot is unconvinced that in Torrance's account, Jesus isn't a sinner.

Chiarot questions the utility of Torrance's contention of an abstract human nature; a human nature that Christ assumes in the incarnation.⁶²

Chiarot shares Kelly Kopic's reservations around the conceptual clarity of Torrance's dogmatic exposition on the *non assumptus*; specifically regarding what he sees as an inadequate definition of theological anthropology — especially the exact nature of Christ's humanity.⁶³

In Chiarot's opinion, Torrance's use of enhypostasia is "devastating for the non-assumptus. It means that no concrete *personal* instance of fallen humanity is assumed, only fallen human 'nature' — whatever that is — dissociated from fallen human persons."⁶⁴

The status of Jesus' humanity after the virginal conception is, in Chiarot's mind, ambiguous.

His silence on the nature of 'initial' sanctification in the decisive moment [of] the virgin birth results in a lack of clarity about the fallen nature of the assumed humanity . . . this raises the question of the clarity of the state of Christ's will.

That is, precisely how does the fallen human will of Christ get 'bent back' into conformity with the divine will by the vicarious *humanity* of Christ?⁶⁵

Torrance's theology of a sanctifying of the human nature at conception is found to be in ambiguous relation to his equal stress on the dynamic and gradual sanctifying of the humanity of Christ throughout his life, especially as that culminates in the ultimate struggle over sin at Gethsemane as precursor to the cross.⁶⁶

Taking a specific example of Torrance's Christology — the will of Jesus — Chiarot illustrates the basis of his critique of Torrance's theology, if, as Torrance contends, the will of Christ is perfectly obedient, perpetually condemned, progressively sanctified, and increasingly in conflict with the will of God, then it is incoherent.⁶⁷ In relation to Torrance's account of the cross of Christ Chiarot concludes, "While we would not accuse Torrance of trithelism (two human wills, plus one divine), much of his account of Jesus' human obedience being personally resisted, of his obeying where we are disobedient, or *in the midst* of our impurity, casts a shadow which, particularly at the cross, begs for clarification."⁶⁸

62 Ibid., 160.

63 Ibid., 159.

64 Ibid., 163.

65 Ibid., 102.

66 Ibid., 161.

67 Ibid., 202.

68 Ibid., 220.

Chiarot sees implicit and, as a fundamental result of Torrance's Christology, the Nestorian heresy (and by implication, therefore, an equal and opposite danger of Docetism). Either the incarnate Son is a different person from the Logos (Nestorianism), or the humanity the Son assumes is not personal, hence not real (Docetism). Either way Chiarot sees the *non assumptus* as theologically unacceptable and Torrance's account as incoherent.⁶⁹

At the heart of each of these points of critique is an underlying issue — namely, that in Chiarot's reading of Torrance, the idea of a universal ontological solidarity with all humanity is a fiction, and that even if such a thing were possible, it could not be rendered intelligible, especially if such humanity is fallen, thus Torrance's theology at this point, in Chiarot's words, "gives us reason to doubt the coherence of the non-assumptus . . ."⁷⁰ Chiarot's 'solution' to these problems in Torrance's account is to move the whole discussion back into forensic categories with ontological implications, rather than the ontological account Torrance presents, which have forensic implications. Clearly, Torrance scholars will not want to follow Chiarot's direction, for fear of what Torrance called the Latin Heresy. So if forensicism is not the way forward in making more coherent Torrance's contention of the *non assumptus*, what is?

In an article addressing the imbalances of both Alexandrian Christology and attempts to find the "Historical Jesus," Colin Gunton made the statement that "the need is for an incarnational christology which will yet do full justice to the historical particularity of Jesus and the detailed lineaments of his story."⁷¹ His solution: "I want to suggest that the area where we should look is our understanding of the place of pneumatology in Christology."⁷² Bruce McCormack suggests the same solution when he writes: "The 'sin nature' each of us has is a function of our primal decision to agree with Adam's rebellion. Through his life of obedience, Christ refused to make that primal decision his own. That he did not do so cannot be explained on the basis of the hypostatic union alone; the work of the Spirit has to be appealed to in order to make the conception fully coherent. That is, the Spirit who brought together divine and human nature in the Virgin's womb was the One who continually empowered the God-man in his life of obedience."⁷³ Gunton and McCormack couldn't have been more correct.

69 Ibid., 162.

70 Ibid., 164.

71 Colin E. Gunton, "Two Dogmas Revisited: Edward Irving's Christology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988): 361.

72 Ibid.

73 McCormack, "For Us and Our Salvation," 314, n.53. McCormack sees in the theology of Karl Barth this understanding of Christ's assumption of a fallen human nature. It is

This suggestion is not to displace the Word with the activity of the Spirit but, rather, to provide a more comprehensive account of how the Word and the Spirit participate in the life of Christ in ways appropriate to their distinctive properties.

While I can accept much of Chiarot's criticism above as having *some* validity, it is only because Torrance himself doesn't develop the pneumatological dimensions of incarnation and atonement which lie implicit in his Christology. Athanasius and Torrance both make significant space in their respective theologies for the Holy Spirit at the trinitarian level; however, they fail to fully develop their pneumatology into Christology and soteriology; all the pieces are arguably there, but they need to be put together. It is in this direction I suggest Torrance scholarship must move — towards illustrating something like the Spirit Christology implicit in Torrance's work, and then to defend a more robust form of this Christology against its major objections. The following thus rehabilitates Torrance's implicit Spirit Christology and then uses that theological trajectory to address some of the more trenchant criticisms put up against the doctrine of the *non assumptus*. In the process, deficiencies in Torrance's own theology will also be addressed.

4. A Pneumatological Clarification

Having already pointed out some deficiencies in Torrance's account of the life of Christ, we should not conclude that Torrance's Christology neglects the Gospel portraits of Christ's life and ministry, or that his theology is devoid of the Spirit. In his narrative of the life of Christ, in fact, we find some of the more suggestive areas of his Christology. In Torrance's theology we read of the dynamic human life of Christ, of his assumption of a fallen, twisted, and perverse humanity under the conditions of the curse, of Christ's sinless personality, and of the internal battle that rages throughout Christ's public ministry. In our fallen flesh we read that Christ "condemned sin in it; he overcame its temptations, resisted its downward drag in alienation from God, and converted it back in himself to obedience toward God, thus sanctifying it . . ."74

Torrance speaks often and with great passion about Christ "bending back" our fallen will into conformity with the will of God.⁷⁵ It is here that Torrance puts

precisely the weakness of Torrance's own theology that he did not allow enough space for a consideration of the place pneumatology should play. Had he followed his *Doktorvater* Karl Barth in this matter also, his position would have been more coherent and convincing, despite the fact that even Barth did not go far enough either!

74 Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic/Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 205.

75 Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, 104; "Karl Barth

to good effect Luke 2:52 (NIV): "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man," in which Torrance translates "grew" or *proekopten* as "beat his way forward," blow-by-blow as it were. Jesus learned obedience through the things he *suffered*, and such suffering was not limited to the physical but was the internal struggle of bending fallen human will back to obedience to the Father.⁷⁶ Christ thus "cut his way forward" through the vicissitudes of life, turning humanity back to the Father in the ontological depths of his being.⁷⁷

In order to make sense of such an account of the life of Christ Torrance, as one might expect, turns to pneumatology to flesh out his account. In a précis of the life of Christ by means of what I have elsewhere termed the Messianic *kairoi*, or disclosure episodes in the life of Christ, Torrance explains the virginal conception, his baptism in the Jordan, his ministry, gethsemane, and the cross of Christ all by means of the working of the Son and Spirit in the incarnate constitution of Jesus.⁷⁸ The baptism proves especially significant in this narrative, as, from the baptism onwards, Jesus lived only as the Son of Man — that is, he lived as true man in utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹ We are told that "we must never think of the Word apart from the man Jesus, with whom the Word is forever united, and from whom the Word is never apart."⁸⁰ Torrance uses the *communitio gratiarum* — the communication of graces — as a way to make sense of this.⁸¹ He tells us that from conception to baptism the communication of the properties of his divine and human natures entered into operation step by step with his developing human life — that is knowledge, will, and power. After the baptism, Jesus thus lived only in dependence upon the Spirit and never out of his divine nature *simpliciter*. Immediately after baptism Jesus is tempted by Satan in the wilderness with a temptation supremely not to be man; and all resistance of temptation is achieved by the man Jesus (the Word incarnate), full of the Spirit.

and the Latin Heresy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 476; *Theology in Reconstruction*, 126, 157, etc.

76 Torrance, *Incarnation*, 64, 106.

77 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 132.

78 See especially Torrance, *Incarnation*, 135–37.

79 Torrance is explicit that from his baptism onwards Jesus lived "only as the Son of Man," in Torrance, "The Atoning Obedience of Christ," 76. While Torrance is inconsistent on this point (a critique Chiarot rightly makes), he argues that after his baptism Jesus lived "not simply as Son of God but as Son of God become *man*, as Son of Man, that is to live it out from beginning to end within the limitations of our creaturely humanity, and within the limitations of our humanity in the house of bondage," Torrance, *Incarnation*, 123.

80 Torrance, *Incarnation*, 220.

81 *Ibid.*, 225.

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Torrance's Christology turns on the fact that there is a vicarious reception of the Spirit by Jesus which ranges across his entire life. His Spirit conception, Spirit baptism, Spirit-anointed ministry, Spirit given power for miracles, for oracles from God, and for death, and ultimately resurrection. In a comprehensive citation we read:

Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary into our human nature through the power of the Spirit; at his Baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon him and anointed him as the Christ. He was never without the Spirit for as the eternal Son he ever remained in the unity of the Spirit and of the Father, but as Incarnate Son on earth he was given the Spirit without measure and consecrated in his human nature for his mission as the vicarious Servant. He came through the temptations in the wilderness clothed with the power of the Spirit and went forth to bring in the Kingdom of God by meeting and defeating the powers of darkness entrenched in human flesh. He struggled and prayed in the Spirit with unspeakable cries of agony, and bore in his Spirit the full burden of human evil and woe. Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to the Father in sacrifice for sin; according to the Spirit of Holiness he was raised from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of the Father to receive all power in heaven and earth. There he attained the ground from which he could pour out the Spirit of God upon all flesh.⁸²

In short, Jesus' advance in obedience as he turns back our fallen human flesh — its knowledge, will, and power; Jesus' *prokope* — is an operation of the Spirit, says Torrance, "for since he came to share our human nature and we are united to him through the Spirit which he gives us, it is through the power of the same Spirit that we participate in *prokope*, and so rise through the Son to true knowledge of, and communion with God the Father."⁸³ Thus there is a vicarious activity of the Spirit which matches the vicarious work of the Son, such that the Spirit unites believers to Christ enabling them to participate in what he has accomplished once for all in the incarnation — the healing of fallen humanity.⁸⁴

82 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 246.

83 *Ibid.*, 39.

84 Torrance uses the language of the vicarious activity of the Spirit in numerous places, but does not develop the theme at any length, other than to be clear that the work of the Spirit is not separate to that of the Son. See The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 56, "The Vicarious Activity of the Holy Spirit," Lecture to The Edinburgh Theological Club, June 7, 1978, 1–5; and in *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 249–250, where Torrance speaks of the "vicarious activity of the Spirit" which corresponds to the vicarious work of Christ in relation to Romans 8.

Chiarot, as with critics of a Spirit Christology, aver at this point that “this would seem to leave only the Spirit, and not the divine nature of the Son, as the means by which the human will of Jesus is ‘bent back’ into obedience.”⁸⁵ Likewise, Oliver Crisp offers an appreciative critique of Spirit Christology (specifically of Owenite Christology, but it applies to all Spirit Christologies), a critique which applies in part to Torrance’s Christology as well, structured as it is around the *non assumptus*. Thus Crisp’s work is especially apt to focus on in this section as it is representative of other critiques and offers the most robust challenge to date.

Crisp’s central objection against a Spirit Christology is “that it introduces a theologically damaging cleavage between God the Son and his human nature.”⁸⁶ More specifically, this form of Christology “. . . seems to generate a distinction between [sic] God the Son and his agency ‘in’ or ‘through’ his human nature at all moments after the first moment of the assumption of human nature in the very act of becoming incarnate.”⁸⁷ For Crisp, this seems theologically dubious. According to Crisp’s analysis, a Spirit Christology of this kind threatens the integrity of the hypostatic union as it posits the necessary agency of the Holy Spirit in addition to that of the Son, the one who assumed the human nature in the first place being one step removed from it.⁸⁸

Crisp considers the likely counter-argument, that an endorsement of the principle *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* negates the lack of proximity of the Son in the incarnation given the united work of the Trinity in all actions *ad extra*. But this is not convincing either, for Crisp, for the reason that a human’s actions are personal, not merely instrumental, thus the Son would have to act immediately in all incarnate actions.⁸⁹ If this is correct, then on Crisp’s account “there appears to be no metaphysical room for the interposition of another divine person between the intentions of God the Son (i.e. his agency) and the intentional actions brought about in his human nature.”⁹⁰

Furthermore, according to Crisp’s critique, Spirit Christology (especially that of John Owen) amounts to a denial of the efficacy of the Son’s assumption

85 Chiarot, *The Unassumed is the Unhealed*, 177.

86 Oliver D. Crisp, *Revisioning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 92.

87 Ibid., 100.

88 Ibid., 100–101. Crisp uses a thought experiment to illustrate his point: the case of the relationship between an astronaut and their spacesuit.

89 Ibid., 103–105, relates this to both a substance-dualist conception of being human and to a Cartesian approach to illustrate his point.

90 Ibid., 105.

of human nature and appears to posit a cleavage between the immediate agency of the Son and his human nature such that the hypostatic union itself is threatened.⁹¹ Crisp's central critique is that a Spirit Christology is untenable on the grounds that once the Son has assumed human nature he steps back and lets the Holy Spirit act in all future works. The direct agency of the Holy Spirit is then thought to trump the agency of the Son, and this is what is finally unacceptable in such accounts.

I concede Crisp's point here, *if* this is what Torrance is suggesting. To replace the Son with the Spirit as the active *subject* of the person of Jesus Christ would be a denial of the incarnation of the eternal Son. And of course, Torrance is clear that it is the Word that has assumed fallen human flesh, so he doesn't wish to make this move. But given his argument that all subsequent acts of the Son on the human nature are voluntary and mediated by the Spirit, at least from the Baptism in the Jordan onwards, is Crisp correct in his central critique were we to focus this upon Torrance's theology?

Contemporary proposals for Spirit Christology which are conducive to Torrance's theology affirm that in the one simple being of the triune God all three persons mutually indwell the other such that the threeness of the persons is the oneness of the essence (*perichoresis*). The doctrine of personal subsistence clearly articulates the relational being of God as involving three co-equal persons in one undivided (relational) substance. In the immanent Trinity the Father begets the Son in or by the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit simultaneously proceeds from the Father as the one in whom the Son is begotten.⁹² The Father too is simultaneously personed in the begetting of the Son (in the Spirit) and the spiration of the Spirit (through the Son). In the economy, the missions of God are coordinated with the eternal processions such that we might be led to think that while the Son is the *subject* of the incarnation, this is not without the Father and the Spirit.

Personal agency in God is more complex than it is with human creatures, and especially so when the actual human being we are considering — Jesus Christ — is unique in having two natures “unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably” (as per Chalcedon).⁹³ Add to this the actual scriptural accounts of

91 Ibid., 107.

92 This trinitarian account is drawn from Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995); Weinandy, “The Filioque: Beyond Athanasius and Thomas Aquinas: An Ecumenical Proposal,” in *Ecumenical Perspectives on the Filioque for the 21st Century*, ed. Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 185–197.

93 Here Chalcedon has to be interpreted through the dynamic Christology of Cyril of

Jesus' life lived in the dependence of the Spirit — his conception, baptism, vocation, passion, exaltation — and a more complex picture emerges than that of simply a Logos Christology. In fact, Christ's mission is specifically situated within the prior mission of the Spirit and can only adequately be understood in that light.⁹⁴

A contemporary Spirit Christology in accord with the Torrance's theology makes clear that the divine agency in the incarnation is that of the Son *and* the Spirit, in their respective ways. The Son is the active willing subject, if we might speak that way; the Spirit is the active *paraclitos*, no less personal or involved. Philip Butin speaks of Calvin teaching a "perichoretic empowerment of the Son by the Spirit," in his commentary on Matthew 3:16, where Calvin writes: "in the fullness of time, to equip [Christ] for the fulfillment of the office of Redeemer, he is endowed with a new power of the Spirit . . . He comes forth as a divine man, under the royal power of the Holy Spirit. We know that he is God, manifested in the flesh, but his heavenly power is also to be thought upon in his Person as a minister, in his human nature."⁹⁵

It is just this kind of theology which prompts David Coffey to speak of an "incarnation of the Holy Spirit" in the incarnation of the Son.⁹⁶ While the language is clearly wrong — there simply was no incarnation of the Spirit

Alexandria. The argument is too big to rehearse here but see Anthony N. S. Lane, "Cyril of Alexandria and the Incarnation," in *The Spirit and Christ in the New Testament and Christian Theology*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, Volker Rabens, and Cornelis Bennema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 285–302.

94 Outside of the gospels, Gunkel noted long ago that "the teaching regarding the *nveupa* did not arise under the influence of Paul's teaching about Christ. Rather, the teaching about Christ is the peculiarly Pauline expression of what the apostle is contending for in his doctrine of the *nveupa* which is borrowed from the views of the Christian community." Hermann Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit: The Popular View of the Apostolic Age and the Teaching of the Apostle Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 115. Earlier Gunkel had made the fascinating observation that "Paul's first pneumatic experience was an experience of the Christ," *idem.*, 114. While Son and Spirit may have distinct missions, they are in an inseparable relationship nonetheless.

95 Philip W. Butin, *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin's Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 65–66, in Telford C. Work, "Jesus' New Relationship with the Holy Spirit, and Ours," in *Christology Ancient and Modern: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 180, n.32.

96 David M. Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 39. Admittedly, Coffey speaks of the "incarnation" of the Spirit in inverted commas, but this is still too much. Coffey's views have been robustly refuted by Paul Molnar, "Deus Trinitas: Some Dogmatic Implications of David Coffey's Biblical Approach to the Trinity," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 67 (2002): 33–54.

— the intent behind the unacceptable language can be said to *approximate* Torrance’s talk of the vicarious activity of the Spirit. It is not the case that after the assumption the Son walks away, steps back, or is not intimately involved in the incarnation. I concede that would be absurd. Human persons are suffused with Spirit, they are spiritual beings. After the eternal Son takes to himself a human nature (*anhypostatic*) and becomes a *human* person (*enhypostatic*), it is the Holy Spirit who is now active in mediating human nature to the eternal Son in a *communio idiomatum*.⁹⁷ If the Son acted on his human nature immediately, then it would not be an incarnation, one would not be dealing with God *as* man but God *in* a man, as Athanasius was fond of saying.⁹⁸ In short, without this understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation we would simply be back to a Logos Christology, with all of its Docetic entrapments.

Crisp is concerned that all such accounts of Spirit Christology posit agency to the Spirit to the mutual exclusion of the Son.⁹⁹ For Crisp, this is an insurmountable objection to all such Christologies, and of Torrance’s by implication. But has Crisp got it right? It is clear from Torrance’s work that he is not suggesting anything like the thought that the Son takes a back seat to the Spirit in the incarnation. He is, rather, providing an account of the incarnation in which there is dual agency at work, that of the Son and the Spirit, and both in personal and appropriate ways.

Ian McFarland helpfully outlines the sort of pneumatic Chalcedonianism Crisp is after, but does so in a way which is compatible with an orthodox Spirit Christology as is being argued for here through Torrance. McFarland recognizes that Jesus has to be a genuine human, but that he is nonetheless *unlike the rest of us* in some way (he is sinless for one thing and has a Divine

97 A Reformed account of the *communio idiomata* (communion of properties) differs substantially from a Lutheran account of a *communicatio idiomata* (communication of properties), in that in the former, the idioms of each nature are now true of the one Person of the incarnate Son, whilst in the latter account, attributes of the two natures are transferable across those natures. In a constructive attempt to retrieve Spirit Christology, Telford C. Work suggests an alternate way of interpreting Chalcedon by rejecting any notion of a *communicatio idiomata/idiomatōn koinōnia* in favour of a “concurrency of divine and human relations (“Jesus’ New Relationship with the Holy Spirit, and Ours,” 171–183). While highly suggestive and deserving a fuller treatment, the proposal still looks to be Nestorian-like in its orientation as it posits two person-like entities in the incarnation, and Adoptionistic-leaning in that it elides the place of the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in favour of his baptism being a quasi-ontological event. Torrance’s account is more accurate. Torrance, *Incarnation*, 209–210; 221–29.

98 Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*, 3.29 (NPNF, 2nd series, vol. 4. pp. 1002–3).

99 Crisp, *Revisioning Christology*, 107.

nature for another), and framing the Spirit's role in Chalcedonian terms does a better job of honoring the integrity of Jesus' humanity than non-Chalcedonian alternatives. In the terms of Spirit Christology, this is an account which seeks to complement Logos Christology with Spirit Christology, even if the emphasis is given to inspiration. McFarland's contention is that "an emphasis on the incarnational role of the Spirit enables this Chalcedonian insight to be developed more consistently than has often been the case by allowing Christ's humanity to be construed holistically: as a complete nature that, although at every point moved and shaped by the Spirit, remains in both being and act utterly distinct from divinity."¹⁰⁰ And this is, I believe, what Torrance is after in his own account of Christology, as long as "distinct" means that and not "independent" or "separate." The human nature does not literally act independently of the eternal Son, as that would deny the hypostatic union.

A Chalcedonian Christology has to maintain that Christ's human nature is exactly like that of other humans, Christ fully shares our human nature, but he is a different *hypostasis*, a different person, and therein lies his uniqueness. According to Chalcedonian logic, Jesus' divine hypostasis is not the power behind his human attributes, something tantamount to monothelitism, a single divine will or monergism, a divine mode of activity. Whereas Crisp can't see how the Holy Spirit can have personal agency in the human acts of Christ, it would appear that McFarland thinks this is actually necessary according to catholic Christology. The Holy Spirit, however, is not an impersonal field of force through which the eternal Son acts on the human nature. Rather, the *perichoretic* being of the triune God is equally at work in the incarnation as Word and Spirit work together on the human nature. Thus the Word is the subject who wills and acts, but does so within the conditions of human nature, and that necessitates that he works by or through the Holy Spirit. This is merely another way of saying that the economic activity of the Spirit in the incarnation of the Word needs to be emphasized as much as the economic activity of the Word; something that has not often been the case.

Truer to Chalcedonian Christology, McFarland argues that "the confession that the Word is the *subject* of Jesus' thoughts and actions . . . must be distinguished from the claim that the Word is the *cause* of Jesus' human operations . . . On biblical no less than Chalcedonian terms, however, it is much more profitable to ascribe this divine activity to the Holy Spirit."¹⁰¹

100 Ian A. McFarland, "Spirit and Incarnation: Toward a Pneumatic Chalcedonianism," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014): 144.

101 *Ibid.*, 153.

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McFarland might rightly be accused of going too far in the assertion of an exclusive work of the Spirit here, whereas, a more nuanced expression of the case might be to say that the coordinated activity of the Word and the Spirit in the incarnation needs to be acknowledged, but due to an oversight on the part of classical theology of the Spirit's unique work in Jesus, his vicarious activity needs to be emphasized in order to correct the ballast. In short, this is the claim of contemporary Spirit Christology and is a way to make full sense of Torrance's Christology.

With Torrance, and the growing host of contemporary advocates of a trinitarian Spirit Christology, McFarland not only highlights the biblical veracity of this account of the incarnation but also shows the practical benefit this Christology offers, namely, "the role of the Spirit in Jesus' life is parallel with other human beings rather than something which distinguishes him from them. Whether the person in question is Jesus, the Word made flesh, or the least distinguished of the saints, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit rather than any intrinsic property of human nature that makes possible human life active in faith and love."¹⁰² As long as this is predicated upon the miracle of Pentecost, in which the risen and ascended Christ sends the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, into the world as a new action of God upon the community, and it is this presence of the Spirit of the Son which is the enabling condition of human faith and love, then there can be no suggestion that such a theology espouses the view that human nature itself acquires an intrinsic ability, apart from Christ and the Spirit, to rightly respond to God.

The eternal Son is the active subject of the incarnation, but as true man he also had to learn obedience in the power of the Spirit. Commenting on McFarland's work, Oliver Davies makes the comment that this "opens a space for the Holy Spirit to be the dynamic presence of God within the human life of Jesus Christ himself. It is the Spirit who is the point of contact between the divine hypostasis and the humanity of Jesus . . ."¹⁰³ This does not have to mean that the Spirit is the *only* point of contact, for we do want to insist upon the fact that in the incarnation the Word assumes human nature. It is to affirm, however, that the assumption of a human nature by the Word such that the Word lives as a man, is not without the Spirit, and when the role of the Spirit in the hypostatic union and in the life of obedience lived to the Father is considered more precisely, a clearer explanatory account of the

102 Ibid., 155.

103 Oliver Davies, "Holy Spirit and Mediation: Towards a Transformational Pneumatology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16 (2014): 165.

Incantation results. As with other believers, Jesus' life is lived in dependence upon the Spirit of God; it is not a mere appearance of humanity.¹⁰⁴

Such a clarification of Torrance's theology, one in which the work of the Holy Spirit is more prominent, offers a dogmatic and pastoral advantage over most text-book approaches to theology; and also provides a way in which to address the critique Torrance's doctrine of the *non assumptus* has attracted.

104 As Crisp admits, this is where several of his own analogies for the hypostatic union break down. Crisp, *Revisioning Christology*, 100–101. While the human nature the Word assumed is *anhypostatic*, once assumed it is *enhypostatic*: Jesus is the person of the eternal Son.

“RENEWAL THROUGH UNION”: THOMAS F. TORRANCE ON THE NEW BASIS OF ETHICS

Christopher Holmes, Ph. D.
Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology,
Theology and Religion, U. of Otago
christopher.holmes@otago.ac.nz

Abstract: *Thomas F. Torrance is a rich resource for theological ethics. Over and against those who argue that Torrance’s “soteriological suspension of ethics” displaces ethics, I argue that Torrance’s theology is ethically rich, locating ethics as a fruit of union with Christ, “the inner content of justification.” I discuss the doctrinal promise of such a move, arguing that it lies in its Trinitarian reference. By grounding ethics in the divinity of Jesus Christ, Torrance ensures ethics deliverance from pelagian assumptions to its ultimate ground of order in the being of the Trinity.*

1. Introduction

Thomas F. Torrance is a rich resource for theological ethics. This might well be a seemingly odd thing to say, given that Torrance argues, following Kierkegaard, for “a soteriological suspension of ethics.”¹ Is Torrance displacing ethics’ importance by arguing for such? I think not. In this article I will take up this phrase, investigating its function so as to see where, doctrinally speaking, Torrance locates ethics. Not surprisingly, ethics is a fruit of union with Christ,

1 I have located two instances of this phrase in Torrance’s corpus. First, in *The Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 118, wherein Torrance speaks, following Kierkegaard, of a “teleological suspension of ethics,” and second in “The Atonement: The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and Moral Order,” in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1992), 252, wherein he describes “a soteriological suspension of ethics.” For Kierkegaard’s unfolding of this point, see “Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?” in *Fear and Trembling*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 54ff. Kierkegaard argues that the ethical is not the highest concern; rather, service of God, that is “God’s sake” is the highest concern. (59)

what Torrance calls “the inner content of justification.”² I will discuss the doctrinal promise of such a move, arguing that it lies in its Trinitarian reference. By grounding ethics in the divine being of Jesus Christ, Torrance ensures ethics deliverance from pelagian assumptions to its ultimate ground of order in the being of the Trinity.

2. The New Basis for Ethics

Although Dietrich Bonhoeffer is rarely cited in Torrance’s work, a little known essay of Torrance’s in *God and Rationality* — “Cheap and Costly Grace” — indicates Torrance’s deep sympathy with Bonhoefferian themes, especially when it comes to the ground of the moral life.³ Torrance’s essay helps us to see that he is not indifferent to ethics or neglectful of ethics. Quite the opposite: Torrance is only indifferent when ethics eclipses its foundation, namely Jesus who in the very depths of his person is our justification and sanctification.⁴ Torrance writes, “It is thus that justification involves us in a profound moral revolution and sets all our ethical relations on a new basis, but it happens only when Christ occupies the objective centre of human existence and all things are mediated through His grace.”⁵ To think truthfully about ethics is to recognize that it involves a revolution that issues from justification. Jesus Christ is not only the subject of justification but also the agent of justification. He is our justification and brings about our justification. Following Bonhoeffer’s language of “centre,” Torrance reminds us that Christ is “the objective centre of human existence,” including our ethical existence. This is a centre which is far from inert. Indeed, this centre — Jesus Christ — “sets all our ethical relations on a new basis.”⁶ It is this new basis that Torrance would have us take absolutely seriously.

The doctrinal locus with respect to thinking theologically about ethics is, for Torrance, justification. Does justification denote the declaration of righteousness or does it in some other sense denote the making righteous or perhaps both? It is

2 Thomas F. Torrance, “Cheap and Costly Grace,” in *God and Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 64.

3 Ibid.

4 See 1 Corinthians 1:30.

5 Torrance, “Cheap and Costly Grace,” in *God and Rationality*, 63. For Bonhoeffer’s discussion of the “centre,” see Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, ed. Victoria J. Barnett and Barbara Wojhoski, “Lectures on Christology,” in *Berlin: 1932–1933* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

6 Torrance, “Cheap and Costly Grace,” in *God and Rationality*, 63.

a matter of both, for in justifying us by his grace, we are renewed "through union with Christ [which] belongs to the inner content of justification."⁷ Justification by grace involves renewal by grace. The moral life issues from Christ "who came to make Himself responsible for us."⁸ The justification that he is, is the basis for our renewal. Christ frees *from* sin and "for spontaneous ethical decisions toward God and toward men."⁹ That spontaneity, however, does not ever float free of Jesus Christ. Ethics, as with Christ's saving work, is grounded in his person. A strict asymmetry must be maintained. The rooting of ethics in Christ's person, in his filial relationship with God the Father, means that we are never forced back upon ourselves but rather only Christ — the only begotten Son of the Father — and "His active obedience."¹⁰

The language of "active obedience" demands explanation.¹¹ It is a matter of taking "the power of the cross of Christ and his substitutionary role seriously."¹² It is Jesus Christ who obeys in our place, who is faithful where we were and are faithless. He renews all of us. He "became what we are in order to make us what he is."¹³ His whole life, to say nothing of his passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly session, make us over in his image and redeem. This is the basis from which ethical relations, "the whole moral order," proceeds.¹⁴ In all things, Jesus Christ *is* what we *ought* to be but cannot be because of our alienation from him. Thus our relationship with Christ is no longer governed by what Torrance calls an "external legal relation."¹⁵ Rather, it is a matter of Gospel all the way down. No more are we "governed by the imperatives of the law."¹⁶ Instead, we are governed by "the indicatives of God's love."¹⁷

One can begin to see how Torrance's re-casting of the relationship between the "is" and the "ought" mirrors his recasting of the "Law" and "Gospel" relationship. The Gospel is a matter of what is — the indicative. The Law is a matter of what

7 Ibid., 64.

8 Ibid., 72.

9 Ibid., 62.

10 Ibid., 78.

11 Ibid., 78.

12 Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 37.

13 Torrance, "The Atonement," in *Universalism*, 238.

14 Ibid., 249.

15 Ibid., 252.

16 Ibid., 253.

17 Ibid., 253.

ought to be — the imperative. In Christ are they one. Christ who in his very person atones for sin “transforms the fundamental moral framework of thought and constitutes the very parameters within which it is rightly to be understood.”¹⁸ The moral order only makes sense within this framework. Put again, the Christ who is Gospel includes Law. But the Law he is, is a form of the Gospel, for he enables us to become who we are in him. “You are the light of the world.”¹⁹ To anticipate the ground we will traverse in the third section of this paper, this is a matter of “the translation of the Son/Father relation in Christ into the daily life of the children of God.”²⁰ It is a matter of his Gospel being established in us. Expressed differently, the Gospel does not abolish the Law but re-establishes it, thus setting it on a new foundation.

The atonement, following Torrance, generates a new moral order. That order is not independent of Christ. Rather, it is intelligible only in relation to his person. Because Christ is our substitute, the one who takes our place, in and through him are we “radically transformed . . . we become truly human and really free to believe, love, and serve him.”²¹ Human acts and relations are in him placed upon new ground. In him are we able to act in accordance with who and what we are declared in him to be — his children. No longer is there a gulf between what ought to be and what is the case, for “Christ in you, the hope of glory” reigns (Col 1:27). Sin has been put to death in his person, and therefore are we free to act in accord with who we are in him, that is as those justified by his grace.

If we follow Torrance, we learn the extent to which justification by grace is applicable to our ethical relations too. As Paul Molnar notes, “he [Christ] displaces us from the center in order that we may have our rightful place as those who act not in our own names but solely in his name and on the basis of what he has done for us.”²² “This,” Molnar avers, “is the practical sense of justification for T. F. Torrance.”²³ Molnar could have just as well said “the ethical sense” of justification. Only when this point is appreciated, can one begin to make sense of Torrance’s appeal to Kierkegaard regarding the suspension of ethics. Torrance does not champion the abolition of ethics — by no means. He does abolish, however, the notion that our ethical relations, indeed the moral order, can be

18 Ibid., 254.

19 Matthew 5:13.

20 Torrance, “The Atonement,” in *Universalism*, 254.

21 Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 37.

22 Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 185.

23 Molnar, *Torrance*, 186.

established independently of the justification, forgiveness, and renewing grace of Jesus Christ. The moral life must not be detached from Christ. Rather, it is derivative of his grace, overcoming and overtaking us as "a *fait accompli*."²⁴ Having said that, Torrance does not think that justification reaches us with a kind of thud. Jesus Christ always acts from our side, bringing his faithfulness and obedience to life in us, from our side. But that he can and does so is because he is God. Torrance only thinks that ethics needs to be suspended in order that we might learn its true origin in Jesus Christ, our righteousness.

It is his divine being that qualifies him to act as our substitute. Torrance puts it this way: it is a matter "of God's providing a righteousness from the side of humanity which perfectly and obediently acquiesces in the fulfillment of God's righteous judgment against sin."²⁵ That righteousness is provided in and by Jesus Christ. He is the substance of our justification, and he achieves his new humanity in us through the powerful working of his Spirit. If such is the case, then, Torrance's point about the "suspension" of ethics is a fairly simple and straightforward one. Ethics is to be suspended until it can be placed within Jesus Christ. In being placed in him, our sin and unbelief is conquered from within. We are given, moreover, "a new human righteousness."²⁶ That righteousness is the forward-looking dimension of justification. Accordingly, it is not merely a pardon but rather a matter of being born into the true human, the one whose resurrection is the first fruits of the new humanity.

These promising moves, doctrinally speaking, rest upon something more primal. That is Jesus' divine being. By the resurrection of his person from the dead, "justification has that new humanity with its new divine-human righteousness as its very substance."²⁷ Ethics is a matter of forms or patterns of life congruent with how things really are with respect to humanity. Humanity's new substance is this "divine-human righteousness." It is no longer "I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). I am united to and with him "apart from law." My actions no longer establish me, for I am established in Christ. He has "got at my sin and guilt from within."²⁸ What qualifies the Christian community and me to live righteously, is Christ, the new humanity. He makes this possible because he is God. His divinity, which is of course never abstracted from his humanity, is what enables him to achieve the new humanity. He acts as God because he *is* God,

24 Torrance, *Atonement*, 118.

25 Ibid., 123.

26 Ibid., 133.

27 Ibid., 133.

28 Ibid., 126.

together with the Father and the Spirit. And he acts as man because he is true man. But He exists as true man because he is God. His obedient humanity exists in his divine person.

There is a clear pneumatological dimension to all of this. While often implicit in Torrance's work, he makes it clear that "the Holy Spirit, the very breath of the Father and the Son, is given to the church to breathe into it the breath of the new humanity in Christ."²⁹ The animating principle of the new humanity in Christ is the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit are we enabled to share in Christ's offering of himself to the Father; by the Spirit is the real and substantial union with Christ realized in us. Moreover, by the Spirit do we share in Christ's mediatorial ministry before the Father. This is not to suggest that we are intrinsic to it. Rather, it is to say that because we are united to him, our life is to be testimony to his ongoing ministry.

Voices otherwise sympathetic to Torrance, such as David Fergusson, understand that "the divine-human relation [in Torrance] tends to be largely a private one. . . . The important relations and movements in Torrance are, as it were, vertical rather than horizontal."³⁰ I do not think that this is an entirely accurate reading of Torrance. Given Torrance's rich account of grace involving all of humanity, I do not think that the language of "private" hits the mark. There is no longer any private realm, for Jesus Christ has become what all of us are — sinners — "in order to make us what he is."³¹ The whole of humanity is the object of this action. Vertical in origin, it takes shape across the horizontal, indeed embraces the whole of the horizontal.

What Torrance offers is, I think, a moral ontology. Although his focus is not on moral particulars per se, he is hardly indifferent to describing the shape of the new moral life that flows from grace.³² He cannot describe the contours of that life apart from Christ, for Christ is our life, and ever more shall be when he comes again in glory. Torrance's Christology, inclusive as it is of his account of Christ's atoning mediation, is universal and cosmic in nature. It pertains to all peoples, in all places, and in all times. Christ actively obeys once and for all. He is justification — and that is true for all peoples. The ethical relations of humanity are placed on a new basis through him who makes "Himself

29 Ibid., 135.

30 David Fergusson, "The Ascension of Christ: Its Significance in the Theology of T.F. Torrance," *Participatio* 3, 106.

31 Torrance, "Singularity of Christ," in *Universalism*, 238.

32 Torrance's piece on "The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child" attests this. Paper presented at the Scottish Order of Christian Unity in Edinburgh 1997.

responsible for us."³³ But that he can and does make himself responsible for us is because he is God. To Torrance's explanation of Christ's divinity as the source and origin of his mission and ministry do we now turn.

3. First Principles

Torrance's moral ontology is alert to Trinitarian first principles. That is where its chief promise lies. Explanation of the work these principles undertake is necessary. Throughout his corpus, Torrance grounds the saving work of Christ "ontologically in His divine being."³⁴ His divine being is the being he receives from the Father as the Father's only begotten. This is what *qualifies* him to do what he does. His work arises on the ground of his being. Because he is divine, together with the Father and the Spirit, is his obedience on behalf of all people possible. His "inner filial relation to God the Father" not only constitutes his person — he is the being begotten by the Father — but also grounds the reality of our moral life.³⁵ He by the Spirit accomplishes his inner filial relation to the Father in and among us. In Christ are we those who by the Spirit call "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6) Herein lies the great strength of Torrance's theological ethics. At no point does he think that Trinitarian metaphysics is irrelevant to the new basis on which we are set through atonement. Atonement's actuality has to do with who the Son is. Its ground and ongoing effectiveness lies in him.

The divine being of the Son has further implications downstream. Just as what Christ does is anchored in his being, so too is the Law grounded in Gospel. The relations are irreversible. This is worth thinking about. Many are seemingly happy to talk about what Christ does — his benefits — without adequate attention to who he is in relation to the Father and the Spirit. Similarly, many are happy to talk about what Christians ought to do but far more reticent to talk about who Christians are in relation to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Torrance reminds us that the "profound moral revolution" that is justification has a source, and that source is the being of the one who justifies — his being as the Father's only begotten.³⁶ The filial relation that the Lord Jesus enjoys with the Father from eternity structures and gives shape to what he does among us. In fact, what he does among us expresses his procession. Put differently, his mission as the

33 Torrance, "Cheap and Costly Grace," in *God and Rationality*, 72.

34 *Ibid.*, 78.

35 Torrance, "Singularity of Christ," in *Universalism*, 252.

36 Torrance, "Cheap and Costly Grace," in *God and Rationality*, 63.

reiteration of his origin in time is Gospel. Gospel happens because of who he is. And as Gospel it includes Law. But Gospel and Law coinhere in him. The Law — the command of God — is good news — is gift. Just so, it conforms us to the law of our being, Jesus Christ and his cross.³⁷

There is no disjunction between who he is and what he does, whereas with us, of course, there is. This warrants explanation. Christ's being and act inhere, whereas ours do not, at least not until he comes again in glory. But Christ's being and act are not conflated with one another. Christ reveals himself as sovereign over his actions. His being — who he is with the Father and the Spirit from eternity — is revealed in his acts; but this is not to say that he does not have "life in himself."³⁸ In coming among us, the Lord Jesus acts as he is, the Son of the Father. His filial relation with the Father has a term among us. His person not only guarantees his acts but is their principle of intelligibility. The goal of theological ethics — indeed of the Christian life — is that what is true of him becomes true of us, namely that in him we become those in whom being and act cohere. In other words, we learn to act in harmony with who we are — his children. Just so, being and act are no longer externally legally related in us but rather "replaced by inner filial relation to God the Father."³⁹ If such is the case, then, it is not a matter of us making ourselves Christian, of us making our acts correspond to our being. That is far too pelagian a way of thinking. Instead, it is a matter of us submitting to Christ's atoning mediation wherein our acts become derivative of our being in him. Just as is the case with God, so too with us: acts derive from being.

With respect to the old man, the old Adam, we try to secure our being and identity through our acts. Therefore, we distort our being. We cannot make our lives or ourselves. Instead, we must freely receive in relation to Christ. Christocentric existence means that we too receive our being just as does the Son from the Father and the Father from the Son, insofar as the Father is never Father without the Son (or Spirit). The promise of Torrance's efforts lies in his recalibration of the being and act relationship, not only with respect to God but also with respect to ourselves. Such a re-casting has profound implications for the Gospel and Law relationship. Let me explain. The good news of the atonement transforms all that humans say and do. It is profoundly generative,

37 In this connection, Bonhoeffer writes, "Discipleship as allegiance to the person of Jesus Christ places the follower under the law of Christ, that is, under the cross." Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr, vol. 4, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). 85.

38 See John 5:26.

39 Torrance, "Singularity of Christ," in *Universalism*, 252.

establishing a new moral order out of nothing. And this is the case because of the Son/Father relationship. The moral revolution entailed in justification is the translation of that relationship "into the daily life of the children of God."⁴⁰ Atonement, and the fundamental moral framework that arises from it, derives from the Trinitarian being of God. The Christian community, through the power of the Spirit, is learning to live in communion with God the Father in a relationship of love and delight that attests the Son's eternal love of the Father and the Father for the Son.

The coinherence of being and act entails the coinherence of the is — the indicative — and the ought — the imperative. Just as God's being is inclusive of God's act — God acts as God is — so too with respect to justification is the "split between is and ought" transcended.⁴¹ By being in Christ, by receiving his new righteousness, do we share in his triumph over the split that so bedevils us. Mercifully, the "ought" is arrested from our hands. It is no longer our concern. If it were, our relation with God becomes refracted, taking "the form of ethical or legal relation."⁴² In Jesus Christ, however, we become who we ought to be. We are made new in him. Nomistic forms of existence are no more. "The reality of the new man" begins to shine through the old.⁴³

The is and the ought begin to cohere, but again only because of Jesus Christ. Involved as we are "in his vicarious self-sanctification, it still waits for the full actualization of redemption in its physical existence."⁴⁴ The full actualization is of course his business; it is not in our hands. We cannot reconcile the is and the ought. In fact, left to ourselves, we will only promote their estrangement. But in Christ's new righteousness are they one.

The antecedent condition by which the imperative and the indicative are one is a matter of the Father/Son relation. Because of the surety of that relation, they are and will always be one. In Christ, and by virtue of his self-sanctification, do our acts over time begin to correspond and become transparent to his redemption. Herein we see another strength of Torrance's treatment. The Creator/creature distinction is always left intact. In fact, it is established anew in Christ. We become those who by the Spirit learn to allow Christ's cross and substitutionary

40 Torrance, "Cheap and Costly Grace," in *God and Rationality*, 63; Torrance, "Atonement," in *Universalism*, 254.

41 Torrance, "Atonement," in *Universalism*, 253.

42 Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 97.

43 *Ibid.*, 100.

44 *Ibid.*, 101.

role to determine all of our believing, praying, and worshipping.⁴⁵ As the risen one, Christ continues to act as our substitute, generating trust in him, thereby rendering our faith into a form more transparent to his. We do not cease to become creatures, but only really become human in him. He establishes us as humans, indeed humanizes, radically transforming our humanity in such a way that it more nearly corresponds to the new creation. Intrinsic to being a creature is recognition of what Torrance calls “an ultimate ground of order and of a transcendent source of information” that cannot be derived from us.⁴⁶ Our humanity as true humanity is set upon the new ground tilled and cared for by Jesus Christ. He is its principle of intelligibility. Only through a ground outside of itself, namely God’s Spirit, is the creature able to live in agreement with God’s relationship to it.

There is another important dimension to all of this. It pertains to the language of “event.”⁴⁷ Torrance likes to use this term when describing the justification or atonement of Christ. It is to “be acknowledged and believed as a real event that has in the amazing grace of God actually overtaken us.”⁴⁸ Describing it as an event helps us to grasp something of its uncatchable character. We are, after all, encountered by a living person. Ethics, as with discipleship, is a following *after*. It is a matter of being conformed to what *is*. What is — reality — has to do with a living person. Accordingly, a rich recognition of his liveliness is absolutely crucial to understanding the shape of life before him. We are bound to a living person who has given himself to us “in perfect love and peace” and continues to give himself.⁴⁹ Moreover, our response of love to him is what he achieves in us. Ethics is to be suspended, teleologically speaking, because Torrance does not want us to put the cart before the horse. Atonement is “*enhyposstatic*.”⁵⁰ Ethics understood as our response to Christ is a fruit of his saving us, his believing and acting in our place. But even the response does not float free of him, for he acts from our side by the Spirit, displacing our faithlessness in the favour of his faith. Atoning mediation is therefore an ongoing reality. It does not have simply to do with the events of AD 1–33. It is contemporaneous with us. Christ continues by his and the Father’s breath to get “at our sin and guilt from within.”⁵¹ He

45 Torrance, *Preaching*, 37.

46 Torrance, “Soul and Person,” 2.

47 Torrance, *Atonement*, 118.

48 *Ibid.*, 118.

49 *Ibid.*, 119.

50 *Ibid.*, 123.

51 *Ibid.*, 126.

continues to live the Christian life for us, calling us to be reconciled to God in all things.

4. Where does this leave us?

Torrance does not forsake ethics. What he does forsake is the terms on which much discussion of ethics takes place, that is in abstraction from atoning mediation in Jesus Christ. Ethics' intelligibility lies outside itself. Indeed, ethics is to be suspended until it recognizes that the ground on which it traditionally proceeds has been graciously pulled out from under its feet. Justification involves a very serious clearing of the decks. That clearing entails "a profound moral revolution."⁵² Intrinsic to that revolution is a "renewal through union with Christ."⁵³ In him does our moral life proceed on a different basis. That basis is the justification of Christ that sanctifies, what Torrance calls "atoning mediation."⁵⁴

What makes Torrance's treatment of the "moral revolution" entailed in justification so potent is its anchor in the triune life.⁵⁵ It is not just Christ's divine being that grounds and is the ongoing principle of his work. More fundamentally, it is a matter of "the translation of the Son/Father relation in Christ into the daily life of the children of God."⁵⁶ It is that relationship that grounds and is the spring from which the activity of the Son flows. One of the chief fruits of this move, is that it recasts the relationship of the "is" and the "ought," the Gospel and Law. The latter in both cases is intrinsic to the former. What ought to be — a life of obedience before God's command — is the achievement of the Lamb who by his Spirit establishes his life in us. Accordingly, what is always true for God — the coherence of being and act — becomes in a provisional sense true for us. Although we wait for redemption's full actualization, glimpses come to be of a renewed humanity who allows the whole of its being to be referred to Christ and his substitutionary role.

52 Torrance, "Cheap and Costly," in *God*, 63.

53 Ibid., 64.

54 Torrance, "Atonement," in *Universalism*, 252.

55 Torrance, "Cheap and Costly," in *God*, 63.

56 Torrance, "Atonement," in *Universalism*, 254.

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL SUSPENSION OF THE ETHICAL IN THE THEOLOGY OF T. F. TORRANCE

Todd H. Speidell, Ph.D.

Instructor in Theology, Montreat College

Editor, *Participatio*

todd_speidell@tftorrance.org

Abstract: *T. F. Torrance, contrary to his critics who claim he “neglected ethics,” intentionally suspended autonomous ethics as a human attempt to justify ourselves through moral law, effort, and virtue. His critics miss that he did implicitly include a trinitarian-incarnational ethic of grace throughout his entire theological and scientific corpus. He also explicitly articulated a Christian ethic based on Christ’s atoning work in our place and on our behalf. Finally, he did occasionally address concrete moral issues, and I will include as evidence his views on women in ministry, God-language, abortion, telling and doing the truth, and juridical law in light of modern physical law. His critics have failed to perceive his theological ethic as integral to his entire work, which proclaims the personalizing and humanizing mediation of Christ in all realms of life — including not only the private or personal dimension of human life but also the social, historical, and political structures of human society and even of the cosmos itself. Torrance’s critics themselves, in short, have neglected the central role in Torrance’s theology of a Christian ethic rooted in God’s grace, which encompasses, sustains, and transforms the entire human and created order.*

Introduction: Critique of Torrance’s “neglect of ethics”

T. F. Torrance’s theology reflected his broad concerns as a churchman, professor, author, editor, and minister of the Gospel.¹ John Webster et al., however, have levelled the charge that he neglected ethics. I will argue that this criticism is

1 For a brief introduction, see my “What Scientists Get, and Theologians Don’t, About Thomas F. Torrance” in *First Things* 6.26.13. Also see John Webster’s excellent biographical essay on Torrance in *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, XIII, 2014, 417-36.

wrong for three reasons: Torrance 1. intentionally suspended, not neglected, "ethics" — especially as an autonomous field of study and a human attempt at self-justification through morality, and yet one can read his entire theology as an ethic of reconciliation; 2. clearly articulated a Christian ethic logically grounded in the incarnation and atonement and understood as a reconciliation of all things in Christ — not only human relationships with God but also reconciliation with others and even of the very space-time structures of the polis and the cosmos; and 3. specifically addressed concrete matters of personal, social, and political responsibility, such as women in ministry, abortion, God-language, truth-telling, and law — and whether or not one agrees with his conclusions, he concerned himself with these issues as human and theological concerns.

David Fergusson's essay, "The Ascension of Christ,"² criticizes "the relative absence of the ethical and political significance of the ascension, not least given its greater prominence in Barth. For Torrance, the divine-human relation tends to be largely a private one," with only occasional hints of a "wider socio-political significance . . . Yet the important relations and movements in Torrance are, as it were, vertical rather than horizontal . . . His occasional excursions into Christian ethics tend to be confined to areas of private rather than social morality — for example, marriage and abortion. There is little about social justice, human equality, or the peaceable kingdom. The focus is generally doxological rather than ethical, whereas the royal Psalms and Jesus' teaching of the kingdom point to ways in which these can be integrated."³

During the original presentation of his paper, Fergusson cited John Webster's criticism that Torrance "neglected ethics." As Webster himself avers, the doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ evacuates humans of their own humanity: "To talk of justification is to talk of the way in which our being lies beyond us in the true man Jesus."⁴ Webster levels two criticisms of the vicarious humanity of Christ, which is a cardinal doctrine in Torrance's theology and will be the basis of my reply to his critique: "The first concerns the adequacy of an account of justification which does not underline the primacy of the moral . . . A second question concerns the conception of the vicarious humanity of Christ . . . Stated very simply, the vigorous affirmation of *solus Christus* may well threaten rather

2 "The Ascension of Christ: Its Significance in the Theology of T. F. Torrance" (a lecture delivered to the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship at the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta, November, 2010, and published in *Participatio: The Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, Vol. 3 [2012], 92-107).

3 Ibid., 106.

4 Eberhard Jüngel: *An Introduction to his Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 102, and see n. 49, which extends his critique of Jüngel to Torrance.

than validate man." He concludes: "The question poses itself: does Christ's fraternity with the human race validate or invalidate our humanity?"⁵ We will revisit these themes throughout this essay: "the primacy of the moral" (in which case of course T. F. Torrance did "neglect ethics"!); and whether the vicarious humanity of Christ "may well threaten rather than validate man" or his "fraternity" with and for us might somehow "invalidate our humanity" (which is precisely the opposite of Torrance's clear and explicit view of the vicarious humanity of Christ on behalf of our humanity).

Webster's early criticism of Torrance's view of the vicarious humanity of Christ appears in two essays on the concept of the imitation of Christ.⁶ Webster asks: "If Christians are what they are by virtue of their participation in the benefits of God's saving acts in Christ, then what room is left for human ethical activity in our account of what makes a person into the person he or she is?" (Webster here blurs the issue of our identity in Christ before God with our psycho-social identity that we forge for ourselves through personal agency and moral action.) The New Testament imitation motif "may help us hold together the derivative character of human morality and its character as a human project involving choice, conscious allegiance and deliberation."⁷ He charges certain Protestant theological ethics (of which Torrance is a prime example) with the claim that "the subject as agent with duration through history all but vanishes, displaced by the sole agency of Christ." (Here he fails to grasp that the vicarious humanity of Christ renders our own faithfulness and obedience both possible and necessary: we *may* and we *must* live in faithful obedience, both *in union with him*.) "The core of the debate," he rightly summarizes, "is thus whether we allow any intrinsic connexion between Christological-soteriological affirmations and affirmations about human morality."⁸

Webster notes the Protestant anxiety and criticism that an emphasis on *imitatio Christi* fails to "root ethics in soteriology," but he counters that "Christ's action is more than vicarious: it is evocative, it constitutes a summons to a properly derivative mimesis." He cites Karl Barth's view that the actions of persons in Christ "'correspond' to Jesus Christ's own acts . . . [B]ecause of their gracious participation in God through Christ, Christians are enabled to act in such a way

5 Ibid., 102-3.

6 "The Imitation of Christ" in *Tyndale Bulletin* 37 (1986) 95-120 and "Christology, Immutability and Ethics" in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39:3 (1986) 309-326.

7 "The Imitation of Christ," 95-6.

8 Ibid., 105, 107.

that their acts correspond to the acts of the Saviour.”⁹ Such action is derivative but nonetheless analogous, enabling “policy-formation for those whose lives are bound up with that of Jesus Christ” and explicating the “*kinds* of divine activity” in concrete circumstances that humans should imitate through “individual choice obedience, and action.”¹⁰

In these two early essays, Webster begins his criticism that Barth’s theology deals more adequately with ethics than does Torrance’s. In a later essay,¹¹ he makes explicit the contrast between Barth’s and Torrance’s treatment of human agency by noting Torrance’s critique of Barth’s view of believer’s baptism, which Torrance considers “deeply inconsistent” with “the vicarious character of Jesus’ obedience in his own baptism.” Torrance views “the acts of Jesus as solely vicarious,” Webster avers, whereas “Barth sees them as representative acts which are nevertheless more than simply completed events containing proleptically our involvement: they are ‘really an imperative’ (*CD IV/4:67*).” Webster concludes that Barth’s view of grace “does not furnish us with excuses for inaction . . . a kind of dependence where our actions make no significant contribution to the fabric of our lives.”¹²

Webster then establishes a substantial treatment of Barth’s moral theology in two monumental books.¹³ In *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, he summarizes the contrast he sees between Barth and Torrance on human agency and ethics:

Though at many points Barth will say similar things, his real divergence from Torrance concerns the covenantal character of the relation between God and humanity, which Barth sees as ethically fundamental (in that it affirms

9 “Christology, Imitability and Ethics,” 313, 321, 323.

10 Ibid., 324-6.

11 “The Christian in Revolt. Some Reflections on The Christ Life,” in *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth’s Birth*, ed. Nigel Biggar (London: Mowbray, 1988) 119-44.

12 Ibid., 126.

13 *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995) and *Barth’s Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth’s Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Even Alister McGrath, brilliant biographer of *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), cites these two works by Webster as self-evident proof that “Barth addressed some issues on which Torrance has not chosen to focus in depth, such as the foundations and structures of Christian ethics” (112. n. 1). While Barth did develop more specialized discussion of ethics in relation to dogmatics, this essay will prove that the whole of Torrance’s theology concerns itself with this exact foundational and structural issue: Christian ethics is grounded in Christ’s reconciling work, not in our own human morality, which means that we may obey God from the heart with gratitude throughout our entire lives. Torrance’s evangelical ethic is deeply grounded in God’s grace in fundamental agreement with Barth, contrary to Webster’s overstated contrast between Torrance and Barth.

the inalienable difference-in-relation of God and humanity), but which is obscured in Torrance's exclusive stress upon the vicarious character of Jesus' being and act in relation to humanity. In Torrance's account of the matter, Jesus' humanity threatens to absorb that of others; in Barth's account, Jesus' humanity graciously evokes corresponding patterns of being and doing on the part of those whom it constitutes.¹⁴

Paul Molnar better captures, however, the basic similarity and essential agreement of Barth's and Torrance's Christian ethic without posing these odd dichotomies embedded in Webster's reading: "For Barth and Torrance there is only one possible choice that is enabled and required by the risen Lord himself, and that is to choose him and thus to exercise free obedience. . . . While Torrance does not develop his thought on this subject explicitly with respect to Christian ethics in any sense as thoroughly as Barth has, he nonetheless would agree that true human knowledge and action are possible because they find their meaning outside themselves and only in Christ."¹⁵ One should note that, unlike Karl Barth in Basel, T. F. Torrance in Edinburgh taught theology and not ethics, the latter being relegated to New College's Dept. of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology — a dualism that no doubt bothered Torrance more so than his critics!¹⁶ Nonetheless, Torrance does share with Barth a thoroughly integrated theological ethic (contra-Webster), which relativizes autonomous ethics by the vicarious humanity of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ. How Webster's assertion, "Christ's action is more than vicarious," criticizes Torrance's theological ethic is not entirely clear, given that for Torrance *Christ's vicarious humanity, his faith(fulness) and obedience, both permits and thus obligates us to be who we are and are becoming in him.*

Torrance's understanding of God's grace, contra-Webster, commits us unequivocally to action. At the same time, we acknowledge that Christ's vicarious humanity means he has already rendered human covenant-obedience to the Father in our place and on our behalf. As we cling to Christ, we participate in

14 Ibid., 171.

15 Paul D. Molnar, *Incarnation & Resurrection: Toward a Contemporary Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 150. Also see his excellent book *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009). Dr. Molnar, Prof. of Systematic Theology at St. John's University, New York, gave generously of his time to help clarify and confirm my thesis that Torrance articulated a clear Christian ethic based on the vicarious humanity of Christ.

16 Alasdair Heron made this point to me as a practical, albeit secondary, explanation for why Barth's explicit treatment of ethics (e.g. *Church Dogmatics* III/4) exceeded Torrance's. David Fergusson, Prof. of Divinity in New College Edinburgh, confirmed Heron's claim and also provided gracious and helpful comments on my essay.

him and his work as we live in union with him; we all the more, not less, act as God's children. God's grace toward us never renders our participatory obedience superfluous, as is clear throughout Torrance's entire theology and life.

Webster does cite and quote from what he correctly calls "a magisterial essay" by Torrance (in Webster's discussion of canon, but he curiously misses that this passage directly and explicitly relates to Torrance's ethic too):

Jesus Christ is God's self-address to man, but this self-address in order to achieve its end had to penetrate, take form and domicile itself within the address of man to man, as the Word of Christ abiding among men. *The reciprocity established between God and man in Jesus Christ had to create room for itself within the reciprocities of human society, and the Word of God which had come 'plumb down from above' had to deploy itself in the horizontal dimensions of human existence in order to continue its speaking and acting throughout history.* This involved the formation of a nucleus within the speaker-hearer relations of men, corresponding to and grounded in the communion between God and man embodied in Jesus Christ, as the controlling basis among believers for the extended communication of the Word of God, and the translation of the self-witness of Christ into witness to Christ, answering the normative pattern of His obedient humanity, as the specific form for the proclamation of God's Word to all men.¹⁷

This essay by Torrance, "The Word of God and the Response of Man," will begin my introductory response to the curious critique of Webster. Jesus Christ, for Torrance, is both God's Word to humanity *and* the perfect human response to God because Jesus is both one with God and one with us. Because Jesus acts as one among us and for us, we actually do share in his vicarious humanity as we participate and live in union with him by the presence and power of his Spirit. Rejecting Fergusson's charge that Torrance's theology accents the "vertical rather than horizontal," what is "private rather than social," I will argue that these antinomies are instead integrated throughout his entire work Christian theological ethic of reconciliation, including his occasional essays on concrete ethical issues. Irrespective of whether one agrees with his moral stances or conclusions, his view of the vicarious humanity of Christ does not "invalidate our humanity" or provide "excuses for inaction." I will argue that Webster's summary critique of Torrance — "The core of the debate is thus whether we allow any intrinsic connexion between Christological-soteriological affirmations

17 *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 33-4; n. 54 cites Torrance's "The Word of God and the Response of Man" in *God and Rationality* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), 151f. Emphasis added to underscore key counter-evidence to the Webster-Fergusson thesis.

and affirmations about human morality” — fails to understand Torrance’s unitary theological ethic.¹⁸ The remainder of this essay will function as a critique of the critique by presenting a positive case for Torrance’s trinitarian-incarnational ethic of grace, which pervades the whole of his theology and is as radical, thorough-going, and inclusive as our reconciliation in Christ. Torrance’s theology, in short, does not divorce the “spiritual” and the “social” but includes them as an integral whole of Christ’s atoning work.

Torrance’s Entire Theology as an Ethic of Reconciliation

The whole of Torrance’s theological ethic is informed by what he calls a “soteriological suspension of ethics,” alluding to and playing on Kierkegaard’s “teleological suspension of ethics” in the transition from a merely moral to a religious situation before God.¹⁹ God himself acts personally and ontologically within the depths of our human existence in its estrangement, hurt, and violence

18 R. Michael Allen badly overstates the Webster critique in *The Christ’s Faith: A Dogmatic Account* (London: T&T Clark, 2009). I’ll note a few examples (with italics added to highlight his overstatements): Torrance has “so emphasized the work of Christ for us, vicariously, that the place of Christ’s faith as *any* sort of ethical norm seems *displaced*” (19), including “the *opposition* Torrance places between Christ’s activity and that of Christians” as a “*unilateral* emphasis” (19, n. 58). He ends up “*denying any* discernable (sic) moral space for Christian ethical action” (197). Allen cites Webster’s argument that “Torrance flattens the relation of Christ and Christian to vicarious representation and *nothing else*” (197), but in the process he himself compresses and flattens Webster’s critique. He complains of Torrance’s “*vacuous* moral ontology” and “his denial of *any* imitative function of the Christ’s faith” (198), which is another overstatement with no textual support from Torrance himself. He concludes with a final instance of his bald critique of Torrance: “soteriology cannot be *simply* conflated with Christology” (213). The more recent book by Nathan Hieb, *Christ Crucified in a Suffering World: The Unity of Atonement and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), likewise repeats the misinformed criticism that the “spiritual” overshadows the “sociopolitical” in Torrance’s theology. In his words: “In a mirrored one-sidedness [to Sobrino’s liberation Christology], Torrance rarely refers to liberation but speaks of the salvific effects achieved by Christ in overwhelmingly eternal and spiritual terms that cause him to miss the direct relevance of the cross to the temporal, material dimension of human life. Torrance employs a two-level view of reality in which the eternal, spiritual dimension trumps temporal, material reality, rendering insignificant the daily struggles of sociopolitical life” (241). It is telling that Hieb’s Bibliography includes none of Torrance’s explicit essays on ethics, but even more significantly, that Hieb uncritically perpetuates Webster’s criticism that misses Torrance’s whole ethic of reconciliation of all things in Christ, which permeates his unitary and integrated theology. For a more informed assessment of Torrance’s implicit social theology, see Eric Flett, *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

19 Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 160, including n. 50.

in a vicarious way to assume and redeem our humanity.²⁰ Christ's humanity heals ours, including our moral selves and relations, our actions and motives, and our personal agency as disciples of Christ. Following the lead of Kierkegaard as an incarnational theologian (not a textbook "existential philosopher"), Torrance treats "ethics" not as autonomous moral philosophy but as a matter of participation in and union with Christ. When Webster asserts that a doctrine of justification must "underline the primacy of the moral," of course in that sense Torrance did "neglect [or suspend] ethics," in the sense of autonomous human self-justification through independent moral law; but Torrance's alternative favors an *account of justification that places human morality under the cross of Christ in order to reestablish a Christian ethic of faithful obedience and joyous gratitude to our God of reconciling grace.*

Underlying his Christian ethic is one of his oft-quoted biblical verses, Galatians 2.20 (as translated by Torrance): "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith, the faithfulness of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." The vicarious humanity of Christ means that we may and must rely on his faithfulness to uphold and undergird *our humanity* (contra-Webster), including:

all my human responses to God, for in Jesus Christ they are laid hold of, sanctified and informed by his vicarious life of obedience and response to the Father. They are in fact so indissolubly united to the life of Jesus Christ which he lived out among us and which he has offered to the Father, as arising out of our human being and nature that they are *our responses* toward the love of the Father poured out upon us through the mediation of the Son and in the unity of his Holy Spirit.²¹

Christ's humanity, contra-Webster, *validates* our humanity as we live and act in union with him by his Spirit, which is to say, he grounds and establishes our fallen and faltering humanity as we participate in his covenant-keeping in our place and on our behalf. The vicarious humanity of Christ established St.

20 Ibid., 156, 185.

21 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, New Edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 98 (emphasis Torrance's). Also see Andrew Purves' essay on Gal. 2:20 in *Participatio*: http://www.tftorrance.org/journal/participatio_supp_vol_2_2013.pdf. Elmer Colyer's excellent introduction, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), is the source of the TFT translation of Gal. 2:20 (97). Colyer underscores that the vicarious humanity of Christ does not evacuate humanity of its response because "*all of grace involves all of humanity*" (118-9, emphasis added). I'm grateful to Professors Colyer and Purves for reading and making helpful comments on my essay.

Paul *all the more* in his own distinctive reality, so that more of Christ does not mean less of me, as Webster assumes when he charges that Torrance “solely” or “exclusively” emphasizes the vicarious humanity of Christ. Webster’s quizzical question, What “room is left” for genuine human activity?, relies on a zero-sum game. Christ’s faithful and obedient humanity is precisely what *makes room* for our humanity and places a *higher judgment* on us when we neglect or refuse to be who we are and are becoming in him.

The vicarious humanity of Christ does not “threaten” or “absorb” humanity, as Webster seems forced to think, but in fact *frees us to be human!* Because “we rely wholly upon the vicarious faith of Christ and not upon ourselves even in the act of faith . . . we are really free to believe . . .”²² Christ’s vicarious faith makes both possible and necessary our act and life of faith. Christ’s vicarious humanity, as we will see, sanctifies and informs and reorients our moral order, social reconciliation, and political responsibility, from moral conformity to a legal-religious code to a filial, trusting, loving obedience to God. *One can read the entirety of Torrance’s body of work as a theology of reconciliation on all levels of life: personal, social, historical, political, and cosmic.*

The vicarious humanity of Christ suggests not what Webster calls for as “policy-formation” but a filial ethic. Christ healed “the ontological depths” of our disobedient and alienated humanity and bent it back to “filial union with the Father” and “in indivisible oneness of agency with that of the Father and the Holy Spirit,” so that in union with our brother Jesus we are sons and daughters of the Father. Christ redeemed humanity “out of the depths of our actual existence through the incredible oneness which Christ forged with us in his vicarious humanity.”²³ Because Jesus was God acting as one among us, God’s reconciling work in the world is a reality and source of true freedom for us to act. The vicarious humanity of Christ bends back toward God our disobedient humanity so that we may truly and freely participate in Christ’s humanity and live and act in union with him.

Far from the vertical overshadowing the horizontal, as Fergusson charges, Christ’s own humanity establishes the atonement in “our human existence”

22 Torrance, *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke, 1959), cix. Also see Christian Kettler’s two volumes: *The God Who Believes: Faith, Doubt, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005) and *The God Who Rejoices: Joy, Despair, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010). I am grateful to Prof. Kettler for his many good comments and suggestions for my essay.

23 Torrance, “The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order,” in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 238-9.

because it is anchored in God's own self-giving and reconciling being. The Spirit mediates Christ to us and us to Christ so we may actually participate in his vicarious and redemptive humanity. We live in union with Christ by the Spirit, for "Calvary and Pentecost belong integrally together."²⁴ Christ's cross and Spirit work together to bind us to Christ in and through faith, believing and living and acting in union with him by God's grace.

Torrance does resist a programmatic ethic of moral deeds and misdeeds, virtues and vices, for Christ's atoning work extends to all humanity and the whole creation, so "that the whole moral order had to be redeemed and be set on a new basis through the atonement." In Christ, we move from conformity to a moral code to a trusting and active obedience to the living God. The unity and distinction between us and God in Christ overcomes the "unbridgeable rift" in ourselves because God's moral ordering of human affairs since the Fall became an inexorable bondage to legalism. But Christ heals this very "unbridgeable rift between what we *are* and what we *ought* to be, for no matter how much we try to be what we ought to be we can never transcend that deep rift in ourselves."²⁵

The atoning mediation of Christ entails "a soteriological suspension of ethics' in the establishing of a new moral life that flows from grace in which external legal relation is replaced by inner filial relation to God the Father." By the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, "this new life of ours in him is inwardly ruled by the indicatives of God's love rather than externally governed by the imperatives of the law."²⁶ For Torrance the merely ethical is legal, extrinsic, and lived out in a way that fails to recognize the person and work of Christ and of our reconciled relationship to God in him. Mere morality, for Torrance, must be superseded by the indicatives *and* imperatives of God's grace. In this way Christ fulfills "ethical obligations" or, as Torrance would say, humanity's covenant obligations to God, with his own filial obedience in which we now may and must participate by the Spirit as beloved children of our Father. Hence, contrary to the critics' contention, *we actually share in Christ's faith and obedience, and through his person and work we live humanly as his brothers and sisters and sons and daughters of his Father.*

Christ's atoning work is not merely moral or cognitive or legal but *ontological*:

Here the ultimate ground of the moral order in God is no longer a detached imperative bearing down abstractly and externally upon us, for it has now been

24 Ibid., 242-3. Also see Victor Shepherd's essay on the *homousion* of the Holy Spirit in *Participatio*: http://www.ttorrance.org/journal/participatio_vol_3_2012.pdf. I am indebted to Prof. Shepherd for his many incisive comments and suggestions for my essay.

25 Ibid., 249-51.

26 Ibid., 252-3.

embodied once for all in the incarnate Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and takes the concrete and creative form of new righteousness that transcends the split between the is and the ought, the righteousness of our Lord's obedient Sonship in which our human relations with our Father in heaven have been healed and reconciled. We are now made through justification by grace to share in the righteousness of God in Christ. Thus we are made to live in union with him and in the communion of his Holy Spirit who sheds the love of God into our hearts, and informs our life with the very mind of Christ the obedient Son of the Father. This does not represent merely a conceptual change in our understanding of the moral order, but *a real ontological change resulting from the interlocking of incarnation and atonement in the depth and structure of our human existence and the translation of the Son/Father relation in Christ into the daily life of the children of God.*²⁷

We are in fact new creatures, not merely conceptually but more importantly ontologically, and through the gift of the Spirit we may and must live and act what we already are and will become from now till the eschaton. All things are made new in Christ, which requires the *opposite* of what Webster unfortunately calls "excuses for inaction." The incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ, who has assumed and healed our humanity, calls us to follow him by participating in what he has done and continues to do in the world; we act in union with Christ by the presence and power of the Spirit in service to God the Father on behalf of the world.²⁸ Far from inaction, the Spirit calls us to take up our cross and follow Christ. To borrow a favorite phrase of James Torrance, brother of Thomas Torrance who shares the same view of the vicarious humanity of Christ, *the unconditional indicatives of grace call for the unconditional obligations of grace.*

Torrance, in fundamental accord with Barth, affirms an actual change of humanity in Jesus Christ and through union with him, so that Jesus' humanity does not "threaten" or "absorb" or "invalidate" our humanity, once again in Webster's dichotomous, either-or language, but *validates our humanity* on a "wholly new basis" in Christ:

27 Ibid., 254; emphasis added.

28 I have explicated a trinitarian-incarnational social ethic in four essays. Two appear in *Festschriften* for Ray S. Anderson: "Incarnational Social Ethics" in *Incarnational Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society, and Family*, C. Kettler and T. Speidell, eds. (Helmets & Howard, 1990) and "The Humanity of God and the Healing of Humanity: Trinity, Community, and Society" in *On Being Christian . . . and Human On Being and Human*, T. Speidell, ed. (Wipf & Stock, 2002). The other two are in *SJT*: "The Incarnation as Theological Hermeneutic for Liberation and Reconciliation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* (Vol. 40 #2, 1987) and "A Trinitarian Ontology of Persons in Society," *Scottish Journal of Theology* (Vol. 47, #3, 1994) — originally presented in King's College London.

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL SUSPENSION OF THE ETHICAL

In Jesus Christ, God has intervened decisively in the moral impasse of humanity, doing a deed that humanity could not do itself. That impasse was not simply created by the inability of human beings to fulfill the holy demands of the law and justify themselves before God, but created by the very nature of the (moral) situation of man before God, so that it could not be solved from within itself as demanded by the law. Thus the intervention by God entailed a complete reversal of the moral situation and the setting of it on a wholly new basis . . . as sheer gift of God's grace which is actualized in them as reality and truth.²⁹

Christ's atoning work effects and announces "the great change and renewal of all things," "the whole of creation," and "*cosmic peace*."³⁰ It is not merely a personal or private affair primarily on a vertical plane of existence, a criticism that ignores and distorts his theological social ethic, but occurs in and throughout all strata of human life and affairs.

Hence we must think of the reconciling work of God in the cross, not only as once and for all completed and effected, but as travelling within and through our historical existence, as it were, as continually operative in reconciling intervention within history and all the affairs of humanity, and in the whole cosmos — *Immanuel*, God almighty with us in the midst of history, bearing all its sin and shame in his holy love, for he has already gathered it up upon himself.³¹

All things are reconciled in Christ as "God's presence in sheer grace" breaks through the fallen cosmos, "so that not only human life but the whole of creation has been set on a wholly new basis."³²

God's reconciling work penetrates and transforms the social and horizontal spheres of human life:

For humanity, the redemption of the cross involves at the same time reconciliation of man with fellow man, of all men and women with each other, and particularly of Jew and Gentile, for the middle wall of partition has been broken down and God has made of them one new man in Christ Jesus. The word of the cross is not that all men and women are as a matter of fact at one with one another, but that such at-one-ment is achieved only in desperate and

29 Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. R. T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 107.

30 Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. R. T. Walker (Downers Grove IL; IVP, 2009), 168-9.

31 *Ibid.*, 170.

32 *Ibid.*, 195.

crucial action, through atonement in the death and resurrection of Christ. But because that has been finally achieved in Christ, the cross cuts clean across the divisions and barriers of the fashion of the world and resists them. It entails a judgement upon the old humanity of Babel and the proclamation of the new humanity in Christ Jesus which is necessarily one and universal. That becomes evident in the Christian church, whose function is *to live out the atonement in the world*, and that means to be in the flesh the bodily instrument of God's crucial intervention. And so the church becomes the sphere in which the great reconciliation, already wrought out in the body of Christ, is being realized among mankind, and the life and action of the church becomes sacramentally correlative to the life and passion of Christ Jesus.³³

Reconciliation is a universal event as believers become "joined to Christ and therefore joined to a new universal humanity." Thus the crucified Christ breaks down "all the barriers of race and language" as he leads Christians "to proclaim reconciliation to all and to live it out, for it is by that same motion of universal reconciliation that he and she have themselves been redeemed in the cross."³⁴ Clearly our new status in Christ is a call to transforming action, not passive inaction! *We are to be who we already are and are becoming in Christ.*

The risen and ascended humanity of Christ, contra-Fergusson, raises our humanity to a new status in him *in order to continue Christ's ongoing work of reconciliation in and of this world.* "The staggering thing about [the ascension]," Torrance insists, "is that the exaltation of human nature into the life of God does not mean the disappearance of man or the swallowing up of human and creaturely being in the infinite ocean of the divine being, but rather that human nature, while remaining creaturely and human, is yet exalted in Christ to share in God's life and glory." Christ's humanity does not swallow up our humanity, as characteristically occurs in non-biblical mysticism, just as Christ's divinity does not overtake his own humanity! Our new status in Christ does not function "as a flight from history, but precisely the reverse, as the invasion of history by the kingdom of Christ through the everlasting gospel."³⁵ *The vertical invades and redeems the horizontal:* "Participation in Christ carries with it participation in one another," Torrance clearly and emphatically proclaims, "and our common reconciliation with Christ carries with it reconciliation with one another."³⁶

33 Ibid., 199.

34 Ibid., 200.

35 Ibid., 294-6.

36 Ibid., 375.

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL SUSPENSION OF THE ETHICAL

The Incarnation, Torrance proclaims, embodies God-in-person loving us and giving himself to us. The Incarnation is not a mere example of love (as it is for Arius and Harnack), but God's reconciling love and effectual action in light of the unique priority of the Incarnation (as it is for Athanasius, Barth, and Torrance). The Incarnation enacts and announces God-in-person loving us and giving himself to us.³⁷ In place of the Athanasian affirmation of the deity of Christ, however, "we see today the enormous emphasis on ethical and human values, on personality and social relations, in which man tries to find a foundation for his own feet."³⁸ Torrance hereby sets aside a Kantian ethic, which also questions Webster's "primacy of the moral" as a subtle form of self-justification. The autonomous human project repeats and recapitulates Adam and Eve's Fall in an act of self-justification, which attempts to replace God's concrete command already fulfilled in the vicarious humanity of Christ with the abstract moral philosophy of the good, true, and beautiful.

Torrance advocates an Athanasian-Trinitarian-ontological ethic in continuity with the ancient and orthodox faith over and against an Arian-unitarian-moralistic ethic:

If Jesus Christ is only morally related to God himself, then the best he can be is a kind of moral Leader who through his own example in love and righteousness points us to a better moral relationship with the heavenly Father . . . The Church then becomes little more than a way of gathering people together on moral grounds or socio-political issues . . . But if Jesus Christ is God the Creator himself become incarnate among us, he saves and heals by opening up the dark, twisted depths of our human being and cleansing, reconciling and recreating us from within the very foundations of our existence.³⁹

In the Incarnation, the Son assumes both our human nature as created and as fallen, healing what he has assumed as a prolepsis of our humanity in the crucified, risen, ascended, and coming humanity of Christ. The Arian view, however, more simply and superficially relies on a doctrine of human self-justification:

Thus there has opened up a deep gap in our relations with God and with one another which we cannot bridge. . . . The human heart is so desperately wicked that it cunningly takes advantage of the hiatus between what we are and what we ought to be in order to latch on to the patterns and structures of moral behavior required of us, so that under the image of what is good and right it masks or even fortifies its evil intentions. Such is the self-deception

37 Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 85-6.

38 Ibid, 243.

39 Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 61-2.

of our human heart and the depravity of our self-will that we seek to justify ourselves before God and our neighbors . . .⁴⁰

Jesus Christ, however, “became the humanising Man who constitutes among us the creative source for the humanising of mankind,” the true healing, restoring, and establishing of human morality and social existence from the perspective of an Athanasian vs. Arian social ethic.

Now if from this perspective, in light of the fact that as the Mediator between God and man Jesus Christ is the personalising Person and the humanizing man, we look back at the doctrine of the Church, we may be able to see more clearly why the Church is not merely a society of individuals gathered together on moral grounds and externally connected with one another through common ethical ideals, for there is no way through external organization to effect personalizing or humanizing of people in society or therefore of transforming human social relations. But that is precisely what takes place through the ontological reconciliation with God effected in the Mediation of Christ which binds the Church to Christ as his Body. Through union and communion with Christ human society may be transmuted into a Christian community in which inter-personal relations are healed and restored in the Person of the Mediator, and in which interrelations between human beings are constantly renewed and sustained through the humanizing activity of Christ Jesus, the one Man in whom and through whom as Mediator between God and man they may be reconciled to one another within the ontological and social structures of their existence. . . . *The very same message applies to human society, for in virtue of what takes place in the Church through corporate union and communion with Jesus Christ as his Body, the promise of transformation and renewal of all human social structures is held out in the Gospel, when Society may at last be transmuted into a community of love centring in and sustained by the personalizing and humanizing presence of the Mediator.*⁴¹

Reconciliation is a social, historical, and even cosmic — not merely a private — affair, but this is a wholly other reality based on an Athanasian-ontological, rather than an Arian-moralistic, view of things. The humanity of God in Christ sanctifies and humanizes our humanity in relation to God and to others and even to the structures of society, contrary to the critics who have missed this socio-ethical-political theme in Torrance’s theology.

Very far from a private or vertical ethic — and in precisely the opposite direction — Christ has even redeemed the very space-time structures of the cosmos, the very conditions of our humanity and all that supports human existence:

40 Ibid., 71.

41 Ibid., 72; emphasis added.

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[I]t is necessary to see that the resurrection means the redemption of space and time, for space and time are not abrogated or transcended. Rather are they healed and restored, just as our being is healed and restored through the resurrection. Of course we cannot separate our being from space and time for space and time are conditions and functions of created existence and the bearers of its order. The healing and restoring of our being carries with it the healing, restoring, reorganizing and transforming of the space and time in which we now live our lives in relation to one another and to God.⁴²

Christ has redeemed us from “the *nomistic form of human existence* that is thrown into sharp relief by justification,” so that fallen humanity is no longer enslaved to ethical self-justification, given the gap between the is and ought that plagues our attempts to do good on our own and without God. *We may now participate in “the life-giving New Man” by his Spirit and through his body the Church, both to proclaim and to practice the reality of reconciliation in Christ within this fallen world.*⁴³ God’s Spirit has moved human moral activity out of the sphere and business of legalistic moral self-promotion into the sphere of God’s Kingdom, wherein our standing with God is both *gift* (with gratitude to the covenant faithfulness of the Son whose humanity includes and reorients our) and *task* (but not a Kantian moral autonomy that reduces true religion to mere ethics). In Christ, we may and must love God from the heart, obey him throughout all of life, and love all our neighbors, both near and afar, as our brothers and sisters in God’s Kingdom.

Torrance’s trinitarian-incarnational ethic assumes and announces an inter-relationship of faith and godliness: of worship, behavior, and thought.

An outstanding mark of the Nicene approach was its association of faith with ‘piety’ or ‘godliness’ . . . that is, with a mode of worship, behavior and thought that was devout and worthy of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This was a distinctively Christian way of life in which the seal of the Holy Trinity was indelibly stamped upon the mind . . . of the Church.⁴⁴

The Creator is the Redeemer, who intervenes in human affairs, binds and reconciles the whole universe in himself, and grants a contingent freedom to participate in his own freedom — all dependent upon the genuine humanity of the Son in his oneness of being and agency with his Father.⁴⁵ The Spirit of

42 Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grands Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 90-1.

43 *Ibid.*, 96-9.

44 *Trinitarian Faith*, 17.

45 *Ibid.*, 91, 107 137ff.

Christ actualizes within the Church the whole life and ministry, the person and work of Christ: "healing and restoring and deepening human personal being" as "*personalised persons*," both "in relation to God and in relation to one another." The Spirit "actualises among us the self-giving of God to us in his Son, and resonates and makes fruitful within us the intervening, atoning and intercessory activity of God on our behalf."⁴⁶

Christ's reconciling work comports better with the "real participation" theology of Paul, Athanasius, Barth, and Torrance more so than the mere "moral resemblance" view of Arius, Kant, and Harnack. Social reconciliation *under the cross of Christ and grounded in the very being and life of God himself* understands that the moral order itself leads us back into legalistic moralism as human agents before God, and so it too needs God's gracious healing in Christ.

[T]he atonement in terms of the inner ontological relations between Christ and God and between Christ and mankind, implies that the very basis for a merely moral or legal account of atonement is itself part of the actual state of affairs between man and God that needs to be set right. The moral relations that obtain in our fallen world have to do with the gap between what we are and what we ought to be, but it is that very gap that needs to be healed, for even what we call 'good', in fulfillment of what we ought to do, needs to be cleansed by the blood of Christ. . . . The inexplicable fact that God in Christ has actually taken our place, tells us that the whole moral order itself as we know it in this world needed to be redeemed and set on a new basis, but that is what the justifying act of God in the sacrifice of Christ was about. . . . Such is the utterly radical nature of the atoning mediation perfected in Christ, which is to be grasped, as far as it may, not in the light of abstract moral principle, but only in the light of what he has actually done in penetrating into the dark depths of our twisted human existence and restoring us to union and communion with God in and through himself. In this interlocking of incarnation and atonement, and indeed of creation and redemption, there took place what might be called a 'soteriological suspension of ethics' in order to reground the whole moral order in God himself.⁴⁷

The "suspension" of ethics, for Torrance, is not a temporary disruption of human activity but a permanent alteration, redemption, and transformation of the very categories of moral decision-making and action in God's gracious action

46 Ibid., 190, 230, 249.

47 Ibid., 160-1. For a discussion of Torrance's understanding of "ontological" as "onto-relational" (and thus inherently ethical), see Gary Deddo, "The realist and onto-relational Frame of T. F. Torrance's Incarnational and Trinitarian Theology," *Theology in Scotland* (Vol. XVI, 2011), 105-33.

in Christ.

Torrance likes to speak of an “epistemological inversion,”⁴⁸ which we could extend to an *ethical inversion* based on what we think we do on behalf of our own moral matters, rather than on who we are in Christ and through him with the Father. God is personal, dynamic, and relational: “that free outward flowing of his Being in gratuitous love toward and for others reveals to us something of the inmost nature of God’s being . . .”⁴⁹ In fundamental agreement with Barth (irrespective of measured volume of output on “ethics”), Torrance insists that we have no life based in our autonomous and self-justifying selves but only in Christ:

Thus in living out to the full in our humanity the relation of the Son to the Father, and therefore in bringing the Father into direct and immediate relation with the whole of our human life, Jesus Christ was the perfect man perfectly reflecting the glory of God, but as such and precisely as such, the whole course of Christ’s perfect human life on earth was identical with the whole course of the Father’s action toward mankind.⁵⁰

Thus, Christ as the Son of the Father in the presence and power of the Spirit of God overcomes the human split between the *is* and the *ought*. Torrance’s ethic is a filial one, not a moralistic or legalistic one! Christ’s true humanity, God as one among us, acts as the basis and agent of our human-ethical activity within the context of the sacramental life of the Church. Because he is our brother, we are God’s children. Torrance does indeed have a “moral ontology,” which however is rooted in our filial relationship with Christ in, by, and through the Spirit in relationship to God. Contra-Webster, Torrance upholds a clear and intrinsic connection between Christ’s person and work and human being and activity as service in Jesus Christ squarely situated in the world. The “intrinsic connexion” between Christ and us is that Christ’s obedience to the Father quickens our faith-wrought love, gratitude, and obedience.

Torrance’s Christian Ethic Based on the Atoning Work of Christ, not on the Self-justifying Action of the Sinner

Torrance’s trinitarian-incarnational ethic begins with a foundational axiom from his essay “The Eclipse of God”: Jesus Christ alone frees us to love God and

48 Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 105.

49 Ibid., 123-4.

50 Torrance, *Incarnation*, 126.

our neighbors by sharing in his life and our renewed and transformed humanity, "not out of a centre in ourselves . . ." Furthermore, "It is only in and through Jesus Christ that man's eclipse of God can come to an end and he can emerge again out of darkness into light," which means "to hear a Word coming to him from beyond which he could never tell to himself."⁵¹

Torrance continues his trinitarian-incarnational ethic in his essay "Cheap and Costly Grace": *Christus pro me* frees us from the autonomous ethical enterprise and refers us back "to the objective intervention of God in Christ, a saving act independent of man himself by which he is liberated even from himself, for there is nothing that man can do by way of knowledge or decision or believing that can deliver him from his in-turned, self-centred self."⁵² To quote Torrance at length from this critical essay,

Let us consider then what is involved in justification by Christ alone. It means that it is Christ, and not we ourselves, who puts us in the right and truth of God, so that He becomes the center of reference in all our thought and action, the determinative point in our relations with God and man to which everything else is made to refer for verification or justification. But what a disturbance in the field of our personal relations that is bound to create! Many years ago when I read a well-known book on *The Elements of Moral Theology* I was astonished to find that Jesus Christ hardly came into it at all. He had been thrust into a corner where He could hardly be noticed, while the ethical and indeed the casuistical concern dominated the whole picture. But what emerged was an ethic that was fundamentally continuous with their ordinary natural existence and was essentially formal. How different altogether, I thought, was the ethical disturbance that attended the teaching and actions of Jesus or the upheaval that broke in upon contemporary society and law when He proclaimed the absolutes of the Kingdom of God, and summoned people to radical obedience . . . What the Gospel of Jesus proclaims is that God Himself has stepped into our situation and made Himself responsible for us in a way that sets our life on a wholly new basis.⁵³

Jesus healed our self-willed inner being, so that we may be truly and fully responsible for moral action. Therefore, Torrance's Christian ethic is an evangelical ethic:

Jesus Christ has come to lift man out of that predicament in which even when he has done all that it is his duty to do . . . he can never overtake the ethical

51 Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford, 1971), 54-5.

52 Ibid., 58-9.

53 Ibid., 60-2.

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'ought' . . . [I]n Jesus Christ God has already taken a decision about our existence and destiny in which He has set us on the ground of His pure grace where we are really free for spontaneous ethical decisions toward God and toward men. This means that the decision to which man is summoned in the *kerygma* of Jesus is one that reposes upon the prior and objective decision that He has taken on our behalf and which He announces to us freely and unconditionally.⁵⁴

Justification by Christ alone suggests a soteriological suspension and categorical transformation of self-justifying ethics:

God Himself has intervened in our ethical predicament where our free-will is our self-will and where we are unable to extricate ourselves from the vicious moral circle created by our self-will, in order to be selflessly free for God or for our neighbor in love. It means that God has interacted with our world in a series of decisive events within our historical and moral existence in which He has emancipated us from the thralldom of our own failure and redeemed us from the curse of the law that held us in such bitter bondage to ourselves that we are now free to engage in obedience to God's will without secondary motives, but also so free from concern for ourselves and our own self-understanding that we may love both God and our neighbour objectively for their own sakes. It is thus that justification involves us in a profound moral revolution and sets all our ethical relations on a new basis, but it happens only when Christ occupies the objective center of human existence and all things are mediated through His grace.⁵⁵

*Throughout Torrance's integrated theological ethic — again as a precise counter to his critics — is the interrelationship of Incarnation and Atonement: "Apart from Christ's incarnational union with us and our union with Christ on that ontological basis, justification degenerates into only an empty moral relation."⁵⁶ Christ is the very ground and grammar of theology, salvation, and ethics. *Torrance relies upon Athanasius vs. Arius not only for his theology but also for his ethics.* Torrance's recurrent call for an "epistemological inversion" suggests an ethical correlate that turns programs and human projects (or "policy-formation," as Webster wishes) on their head:*

By pouring forth upon men unconditional love, by extending freely to all without exception total forgiveness, by accepting men purely on the ground of the divine grace, Jesus became the center of a volcanic disturbance in human

54 Ibid., 62.

55 Ibid., 62-3.

56 Ibid., 64-5.

existence, for He not only claimed the whole of man's existence for God but exposed the hollowness of the foundations upon which man tries to establish himself before God.⁵⁷

Autonomous ethics, to sharpen the point, suggests a sinful self-reliance, which indicates that Torrance stands in basic continuity both with Barth and with Bonhoeffer too:

That is to say, are we to learn how to live without God, without prayer, without the supernatural, without any belief in or thought of the interaction of God with our world? If so, does this not really mean that we are thrown back fully and finally upon ourselves? . . . Bonhoeffer starts, like Barth, from the fundamental principle of the justification of the sinner by grace alone which makes a man really free for God and his brothers, for it sets his life on a foundation other than himself where he is sustained by a power other than his own. Justification by grace alone removes from us all false props, all reliance upon external authorities, and all refuge in worldly securities, and throws us not upon ourselves but upon the pure act of God in His unconditional love, so that the ethical and the religious life are lived exclusively from a centre in Jesus Christ.⁵⁸

Torrance clearly and unequivocally aligns himself with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological ethic (which is to say, with Karl Barth too):

Christian ethic is ontologically structured in Jesus Christ and therefore participates in and through Him in His victory over the dualism between two separate spheres. It is because he took so seriously the incarnation of the Son of God in the space and time of this world that he insisted 'that there is no real possibility of being a Christian outside the reality of this world and that there is no real worldly existence outside the reality of Jesus Christ'. There is no place therefore to which the Christian can withdraw from the world; rather must he learn to live out the reality of Christ within it, for it is in that world that He the Son of God made our reality His own, and made His reality ours.⁵⁹

In "The Word of God and the Response of Man" (which Webster rightly dubbed as "monumental," even while neglecting its significance for ethics):

We recall that in Jesus Christ the Word of God has established reciprocity with us in the conditions, structures and limitations of our creaturely existence and within the alienation, disorder and disintegration of our human being where we

57 Ibid., 66.

58 Ibid., 76.

59 Ibid., 78.

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are subject to the wasting power of evil and the divine judgement upon it, in order to lay hold of our world and sustain it from below, to recreate its relation to the Creator and realize its true response to Him as God and Father of all. That is to say, in Jesus Christ the transcendent Rationality of God has planted itself within the created order where its bounds, structures and connections break down under the negation of evil, in order to reintegrate spiritual and physical existence by setting up its own law within it, and restore it to wholeness and integrity in the form, as it were, of a meeting of the Rationality of God with itself in the midst of estranged existence and in the depths of its disorder. In this way, the incarnation has affected the whole creation, confirming the primordial act of the Word in conferring order and rationality upon it.⁶⁰

Torrance, not surprisingly, upholds a unitary or holistic view of Christian service in and through Christ on behalf of all humanity and creation: "We cannot hold apart the ministry of love from the activity of science, nor may we pursue our scientific exploration of the universe except in obedience to the God of love." He continues:

If we are to follow this Jesus in the modern world we must surely learn how to apply scientific knowledge and method to such terrible problems as hunger, poverty, and want, without falling into the temptation to build up power-structures of our own, through ecclesiastical prestige, social success or political instrumentality, in order to make our ministry of compassion effective within the power-structures of the world, for then we would contract out of Christian service as *service* and betray the weakness of Jesus. On the other hand, if we are to engage in scientific exploration of the universe, in response to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ by whom it was made, we must learn to respect the nature of all created things, using pure science to bring their mute rationality into such articulation that the praises of the Creator may resound throughout the whole universe, without falling into the temptation to exploit nature through an instrumentalist science in the interest of our own self-aggrandizement and lust for power, for then also would we contract out of Christian service as *service* and sin against the hiddenness of Jesus in the world. No doubt, the created rationalities of word and number are very different, as different as the world of persons and the world of things, but they both go back to the same source in the transcendent Rationality of God and they are both brought together in the incarnation of God's Word in Jesus Christ, for they are upheld and sustained by Him. Therefore our service in the realm of word and our service in the realm of number must be co-ordinated through Jesus Christ in our common response to the love of God.⁶¹

60 Torrance, *Gospel, Church and Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 163.

61 *Ibid.*, 163-4.

Torrance's essays in *Gospel, Church and Ministry* offer a personal glimpse of the man who was first and foremost a minister of the Gospel — and perhaps Webster et al. are right after all that he was not an "ethicist" because he was not a dualist! Regarding parish ministry, Torrance didn't separate proclamation of the Gospel and pastoral visitation, and likewise later, he couldn't separate his theology lectures from the personal power of the Gospel. For example, Torrance had weekly dinner and discussion with his parishioners, who considerably helped him relate the Gospel to daily life and work. In monthly study with parishioners of the Sermon on the Mount, one parishioner raised his farm workers' salaries above the government standard, which increased the prosperity both of the farmer and his workers.⁶² Service in Jesus Christ by his body the Church, exceeds, not displaces, government standards and programs.

When the Church becomes merged with society and culture, its "mild form of Christianity" leaves it with no message to the modern world. The Church should not identify herself with any social order or political regime, "far less with the 'status quo.'"

The Church can only be the Christian Church when she is ever on the move, always campaigning, always militant, aggressive, revolutionary . . . to turn the whole order of State and society, national and international, upside down. . . . By throwing the social environment into ferment and upheaval, by an aggressive evangelism with the faith that rebels against all wrong and evil, and by a new machinery through which her voice will be heard in the councils of the nation as never before, the Church will press toward a new order. Whenever there is evil in the industrial and economic order, in the political or international sphere so in the social fabric of ordinary life, the Church must press home the claims of the Christian gospel and ethic. . . . [T]he great task of the Church is the redemption of the world and not a comfortable life in little, religious churches and communities.⁶³

The Church has a unique existence, message, and function, which excludes a merger or identification with society, or a confusion of Christianity as Christendom, or an equation of moral or civic life with the Christian life. The Church does have a worldly form, and its methods and organization should translate the Gospel to society, "through which she can have a purchase upon the State."⁶⁴

The Church is both conservative and revolutionary (contrary to critics' view of Torrance's political ethic as the former but not the latter): the servant of

62 Ibid., 35, 50.

63 Ibid., 43.

64 Ibid., 75-6.

the living God, not to uphold and justify the status quo but to take initiative in society to check the authoritarian State. So A: The Church must recover her distinctiveness and believe again that the proclamation of the gospel is her primary task, refusing to identify with any social system or political program and especially taking offensive action against the status quo. And B: The Church must overhaul its organizational forms and outmoded methods, especially ad hoc measures that are out of step with modern, business-like finance.⁶⁵ The Church must advance “the claims of the Christian gospel and ethic” in all spheres of life: personal, social, industrial, economic, political, and international by her witness to the gospel that God is ushering in a new order of “peace and brotherly relations on the basis of the Christian ethic” — checking for example the basic human tendency toward a will to power or an emphasis upon ourselves and instead presenting to society the Christ who came as a ransom for many to redeem the world.⁶⁶

Torrance’s Athanasian vs. Arian love-ethic proclaims that “God is the great householder who has come to take control of his own house and family and order it according to his love,” for “in the whole human life of Jesus the order of creation has been restored.” The Christian Church participates in the redeemed order of humanity and creation in Jesus Christ, who took the form of a Servant — “not simply an imitation of his obedience but a fulfilling of God’s will through participation in Christ’s obedience” by the person and power of the Spirit.⁶⁷ Again, contra Webster’s early essays that pit imitation against participation, participation in Christ does not pose a false dichotomy over and against an imitation of Christ, even though for Torrance the former precedes and includes the latter.

Christian service, for Torrance, is not an optional matter: “The great characteristic of all Christian service or *diakonia* is that while it is certainly fulfilled under the constraint of the love of Christ it is a service *commanded* by him and laid by him as a *task* upon every baptized member of his body.” He continues, again in complete agreement with Barth: “The content of the commandment and the content of the service in obedience to it derive from the self-giving of God himself in Jesus Christ the Lord. He gives what he commands and commands what he gives. He commands a service of love, and he gives the love that empowers that service.”⁶⁸ Torrance’s ethic, following Barth, is one of obedience to a person and not adherence to what Webster calls “the primacy of the moral.”

65 Ibid., 76-81.

66 Ibid, 81-4.

67 Ibid., 94-7.

68 Ibid., 140-2.

Human mercy mirrors and participates in the mercy of God himself: "It is the very property of God's nature to be merciful, and in mercy it is that nature that he has come to share with men and women in Jesus, that they, too, may be merciful as he is merciful."⁶⁹ Reminiscent of Matt. 25 (and Calvin), Torrance proclaims his unitary theological ethic:

Hence Christ is to be found wherever there is sickness or hunger or thirst or nakedness or imprisonment, for he has stationed himself in the concrete actualities of human life where the bounds and structures of existence break down under the onslaught of disease and want, sin and guilt, death and judgement, in order that he may serve man in re-creating his relation to God and realizing his response to the divine mercy. It is thus that Jesus Christ mediates in himself the healing reconciliation of God with man and man with God in the form, as it were, of a meeting of himself with himself in the depths of human need.⁷⁰

The Church cannot be in Christ without being in him as he is proclaimed to men in their need and without being in him as he encounters us in and behind the existence of every man in his need. Nor can the Church be recognized as his except in that meeting of Christ with himself in the depth of human misery, where Christ clothed with his gospel meets Christ clothed with the desperate need and plight of men.⁷¹

The Church must resist the two-fold temptation: on the one hand, to use worldly power to secure success, "not only to institutionalize its service of the divine mercy but to build up power structures of its own" — even though the Church should support on behalf of the poor and hungry "scientific methods in the production and distribution of goods from the vast wealth with which God has endowed the earth"; and on the other hand, to retreat into a spiritual ministry of forgiveness while conceding corporate responsibility to the State for the betterment of human welfare.⁷²

While Torrance's Christian ethic is not primarily moral or political — and perhaps its greatest strength is its service as a counterpoint to the many politicized theologies of our day! — it is centered on the Church's service to God on behalf of the world. And Christ calls his Church to a three-fold ministry of service to: (1) believe in intercessory prayer as a direct reliance upon God and as a direct

69 Ibid., 145.

70 Ibid., 150.

71 Ibid., 151.

72 Ibid., 154-5.

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engagement with the world, rather than “frantic attempts” to make its ministry and message relevant, powerful, and successful; (2) practice evangelistic and suffering witness on behalf of all people in their estrangement and separation and alienation from God; and (3) live the reconciled life first and foremost by healing its own internal divisions, which mirror the divisive forces of evil in the world, so that it may “live out in the midst of a broken and divided humanity the reconciled life of the one unbroken Body of Jesus Christ — that is *diakonia*.”⁷³

One preeminent moral issue that hits home for the one body of Christ is the division within the Church of a practice of, what Torrance calls, “‘apartheid’ between different churches”!⁷⁴

Until the Christian Church heals within itself the division between the service of Jesus Christ clothed with his gospel and the service of Christ clothed with the need and affliction of men, and until it translates its communion in the body and blood of Christ into the unity of its own historical existence in the flesh, it can hardly expect the world to believe, for its *diakonia* would lack elemental integrity. But *diakonia* in which believing active intercession, bold unashamed witness, and the reconciled life are all restored in the mission of the Church will surely be the service with which Jesus Christ is well pleased, for that is the *diakonia* which he has commanded of us and which he has appointed as the mirror through which he reflects before the world his own image in the form of a Servant.⁷⁵

Holy Communion, for example, is a diaconal ministry of “distribution of goods from the Lord’s Table which presupposes a complex practice in which the Lord’s Supper and the Love-feast, the Eucharist and the Agape, and the evangelical mission of the Church, were closely bound together.” In fact, as Torrance comments and commends, deacons of the Early Church distributed the goods or gifts from the Lord’s Table to the poor.⁷⁶ Perhaps Torrance would object to Holy Communion in the church sanctuary with linen cloth covering the altar or Lord’s Table, dualistically separated from a soup kitchen on bare tables in the church’s basement?⁷⁷ Christ himself distributes food and drink through his Church to

73 Ibid., 160.

74 Ibid., 179.

75 Ibid., 161.

76 Ibid., 199.

77 My essay, “Ray S. Anderson’s Doctrine of Humanity as a Contribution to a Theology of Culture: A Case Study Approach (in *Cultural Encounters: A Journal for the Theology of Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2011: 17-27) similarly addresses the dualism of worship on Sunday separated from AA meetings on Sat., drawing upon TFT’s theological ethic via his student Ray Anderson. The upshot of the essay is that alcoholics need the living God,

the poor and hungry and homeless, among whom Christ himself dwells and ministers. Perhaps churches should display in these food distribution centers sacramental symbols, such as the Lord's Table accompanied by Jesus' words in Matt. 25:35-40 [NEB]: "For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when I was thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger, you took me into your home; when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help; when in prison you visited me . . . I tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me."

Jesus' words in Matt. 11:27b-30 [NEB] are also crucial for Torrance: "Everything is entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son and those to whom the Son may choose to reveal him. Come unto me, all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy; and I will give you relief. Bend your necks to my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted; and your souls will find relief. For my yoke is good to bear, my load is light." So the work of Christ is the work of the Father, in whom we participate by the power and presence of the Spirit. Following Christ in discipleship, which involves "ethics" too, means being where Christ is on behalf of the poor and hungry and thirsty and needy. For that is where we ourselves meet Christ and invite those whom we encounter in the presence of Christ in mutual need of God's given grace to us and for us.

The early Church helped transform society, not by political and ideological programs or theologies of liberation, but by being faithful to the gospel that God himself has intervened to redeem and restructure our human and social existence. The Church's ministry and mission is the proclamation of the Word and pastoral visitation and counsel "to people as *persons*" — not as "pawns of politicians" or secular psychology and counseling as a replacement of the personal ministry of the Word.⁷⁸ Christ has redeemed the whole of human existence as God among us in our place and on our behalf.

Contrary to Webster, Christ "does not override our humanity but completes, perfects, and establishes it," especially in light "of bringing Christian understanding of the personal relations within the Holy Trinity to bear upon social relations and structures . . ."⁷⁹ The vicarious humanity of Christ, very far from "invalidating" humans of their being and agency, does just the opposite. Christ assumes, heals, and sanctifies our humanity, placing "all our human life and activity before God,"

as the founders of AA believed and experienced, not just a "higher power," which was a pragmatic compromise that capitulated to the religious pluralism of our culture.

78 Ibid., 162-6, 170.

79 Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994), 13, 26.

“under the judgment of the cross . . . our goodness as well as our badness,” and redeeming and reorienting the ontological depths of our humanity through his true humanity.⁸⁰ Torrance does indeed affirm an intrinsic and integrated relationship between what Christ has done as one among us, in our place and on our behalf, creating a new and transformed basis for human morality, interpersonal relations, social structures, and the created order. While one might disagree with his specific conclusions on moral and social issues, the critics themselves have neglected and ignored both his implicit and explicit Christian theological ethic.

Torrance’s views on five social-ethical issues

The following issues illustrate how Torrance has addressed moral matters that are both personal and social (as if one could separate human issues in such dualistic fashion). His larger point about the soteriological suspension of ethics underscores his unitary framework of knowledge, but this foundation did not prevent him from also addressing concrete ethical issues (whether or not one agrees with his conclusions). The following are examples of how he addressed them and suggest how he would address other moral matters. As his mentor, Barth, said about his incomplete *Church Dogmatics*, if you’ve read what I’ve written, you’ll know where I was going! The same could be said of Torrance’s treatment of ethics: although occasional, they are indicative of how Torrance discussed Christ’s concrete call to follow him in ministry and service.

Ministry of Women

The call and ordination of women for the ministry of the Gospel, for Torrance, is based on an evangelical egalitarianism that presupposes the “radical change” effected in Christ — i.e., “the old divisions in the fallen world have been overcome in Christ and in his Body the Church,” a reversal and “healing of any divisive relation between male and female due to the curse imposed upon them at the fall” (Gen. 3:16).⁸¹

Torrance argues concretely and forcefully:

Thus any preeminence of the male sex or any vaunted superiority of man over woman was decisively set aside at the very inauguration of the new creation brought about by the incarnation. In Jesus Christ the order of redemption has intersected the order of creation and set it upon a new basis altogether. Henceforth the full equality of man and woman is a divine ordinance that

80 Ibid., 30, 35, 59.

81 Torrance, *The Ministry of Women* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1992), 3-5.

applies to all the behavior and activity of 'the new man' in Christ, and so to the entire life and mission of the Church as the Body of Christ in the world.⁸²

[I]n view of this representative and substitutionary nature of the sacrifice of Christ, to insist that only a man, or a male, can rightly celebrate the Eucharist on the ground that only a male can represent Christ, would be to sin against the blood of Christ, for it would discount the substitutionary aspect of the atonement. At the altar the minister or priest acts faithfully in the name of Christ, the incarnate Saviour, only as he lets himself be displaced by Christ, and so fulfils his proper ministerial representation of Christ at the Eucharist in the form of a relation not I but Christ,' in which his own self, let alone his male nature, does not come into the reckoning at all. In the very act of celebration his own self is, as it were, withdrawn from the scene.⁸³

God-Language

While Torrance took this more progressive theological view on women's ordination, he also upheld a traditional theological view of God-language — and whether or not one agrees with him, once again, these issues illustrate his concern for concrete personal and social issues:

Thus the act of God's self-revealing to us takes our human speaking, hearing, and knowing into its concrete realization within God's personal interrelation with us and so there is necessarily included within it an *anthropomorphic* component. It cannot be stressed too much that this is not an anthropomorphic element which is generated by any independent act of knowing or conceiving of God on our part, but one that arises in the self-determination of God's being toward us, in his creating us for fellowship with himself, in his establishing personal relations between us and himself, and in his making himself known to us within those relations. As such, the anthropomorphic component is to be understood not in terms of some cultural inheritance from the past that we may replace as we choose, but in terms of what God himself has adapted and defined in his unique self-revealing to us. It is not, therefore, something defined by what we human beings are of ourselves and projected by us onto God in our conceiving of him. . . . Accordingly, human fatherhood may not be used as a standard by which to judge divine Fatherhood, for there is strictly no comparison between human fatherhood and divine Fatherhood any more than there is between human being and divine Being.⁸⁴

82 Ibid., 5.

83 Ibid., 12.

84 Torrance, "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. A. Kimel (Grand Rapids: Eerd-

Torrance borrows from Athanasius: "It would be more godly and true (or accurate) to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name God from his works alone and call him Unoriginate," which would be based on a "center in ourselves" rather than a "center in God." The trinitarian formula expresses God's unique and personal self-revelation, which excludes generic or unitarian substitutes such as "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer." Only the blessed Trinity "conveys the truth of God's intrinsically *personal, interpersonal, and personalizing* being" — over and against impersonal conceptions based on "the personification and deification of our own desires and ideals" or "submerged in waves of sociocultural secularization in which the souls of men, women, and children are easily and quickly drowned."⁸⁵

Ray Anderson, student of Torrance, writes in the same volume:

The historical particularity — and scandal — of the incarnation of God begins with the man Jesus. But rather than *divinizing* the male at the expense of the female, the incarnation *humanizes* both male and female by bringing their biological and gender differentiation under judgment for the sake of revealing the true nature of God and the true status of humanity as created in the divine image, male and female.⁸⁶

Abortion

Torrance's argument against abortion (in most cases, as long as exceptions don't become norms) begins with a goal to "keep medicine to *the art of healing human persons*, i.e. persons regarded as a unity of physical and spiritual realities," "beyond its merely physical or biological existence," for the unborn child is "*body of his soul and soul of his body*." "The human being is an integrated whole . . . an *embodied soul* and a *besouled body*" — once again in basic agreement with Barth. This unitary human being is essentially male and female, male or female, as the "basic feature of humanity" — so sex "may not be reduced to its physical and biological aspects," which would perpetuate the "animalisation of sex" so prevalent in modern society.⁸⁷ Contrawise, Torrance writes on marriage, "The basic unit of creation is not the individual human being, male or female, but man and woman joined together as one," which is

mans, 1992), 124, 129-30.

85 Ibid., 132-3, 141-3.

86 Anderson, "The Incarnation of God in Feminist Christology: A Theological Critique," Ibid., 308-9.

87 Torrance, *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1999), 4, 7-8.

grounded in God's creative and redemptive work.⁸⁸

Thus, "the embryonic child, male or female, is an embodied soul and a besouled body, and as such is already, not a potential, but an incipient person, which Torrance views as "from the moment of conception," which provides support from modern science that he or she is "genetically complete." He does acknowledge "that difficult circumstances arise in which exception is called for in the prohibition of abortion," but in a relativistic society exceptions are turned into rules, which with Michael Polanyi he calls a "moral inversion." "[T]he unborn-child in its open structure (in line with Polanyi's analysis) to what is beyond empirical observation" helps avoid "the rationalistic and deterministic fallacy." Torrance appeals to "a *regulative force*, and indeed a *controlling source of information*" beyond the sheer organic structure and genetic components of the embryo, which again follows a biblical unitary view of body-soul and affirms "the human embryo as already a *human life*."⁸⁹

He underscores a social or interpersonal view of the unborn child because "it is in and through relation with the mother that the embryonic being of the child begins his or her personal existence, and that it is through loving personalising relation with the mother that the tiny personal being of the foetus is nourished, and its embryonic personal response to the mother is developed, evident, for example, in recognition of and reaction to the mother's voice." "Certainly," he continues his theological ethic about and against abortion, "it is God himself who is the Creative Source of all personal being and inter-personal relations – he is the personalising Person, who brings us into personal life and being through the inter-personal activity of a father and mother, which begins with our conception, develops in our pre-natal life, reaches fruition in birth and childhood, and blossoms with the inter-personal life and love of a human family," an interpersonal bonding that "must be regarded as *personal*."⁹⁰

In sum, "we must think of the human person as transcendently determined in his or her existence as soul and body, which not only constitutes him or her as a personal human being before God, but maintains him or her in relation to him as the ultimate Ground and Source of his or her creaturely order. . . . The human embryo is fully *human being, personal being* in the sight and love of his or her Creator, and must be recognised, accepted, and cherished as such, not only by his or her mother and father, but by science and medicine."⁹¹

88 Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of Marriage* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1992), 3-4.

89 *Unborn Child*, 8-11.

90 *Ibid.*, 15-7.

91 *Ibid.*, 18-9.

Torrance addresses in more popular form his basic view of abortion to pro-life Presbyterians in North Carolina, to whom he repeated one of his basic axioms for his theological ethic: "As such we are ultimately to be understood not from an independent center in ourselves, but only from above and beyond ourselves in a unique relation to God."⁹² He appeals to the Virgin birth as a compelling theological argument against abortion:

It belongs to the very heart of the Gospel that the Word of God who was the eternal Son of God, of one being with the Father, and through whom all things were made, chose in his love to become incarnate in Jesus Christ, was conceived through the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and became a true human being. It is surely to him who became a holy embryo in the Virgin's womb, and was born of her to be the Savior of the world, that we must go, in order as Christians to understand what the unborn child is as an embodied human soul, and as one loved by the Lord Jesus who came to be the Savior of the human race. The eternal Word of God become incarnate *was and is himself the metaplan*, the creative and regulative force in the birth of each human being, come among us as one of us to be Lord and Savior of the human race!⁹³

Telling and Doing the Truth

Torrance also wrote an essay on Anselm as a way of discussing and relating telling and doing the truth. Here we see his integration of the epistemological with the ethical: knowing things *kata physin* ("in accordance with their nature"), which also means knowing God according to his nature and acting in accord with it. He notes the close relation "between telling the truth and doing the truth . . . signifying, by word or act, that that which is, is what it is and what according to its nature it ought to be." Truth, then, refers "to a condition of reality beyond itself . . . the truth or rightness of that to which it refers," from which "there derives a universal obligation for things to be true . . . for truth is a demanded form of rightness: a thing is true not only when it is what it is but when it is rightly what according to its nature it ought to be."⁹⁴

He agrees and insists with Anselm "that ethical acts and judgments are grounded in the ultimate Rightness and have to be understood in terms of the debt that it exacts," which pertains both to doing the truth and to telling the

92 Torrance, *The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child* (Lenior, NC: Glen Lorian Books, 2000), 11.

93 Ibid., 13-4.

94 Torrance, "The Ethical Implications of Anselm's *De Veritate*," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 24 (1968), 309-11.

truth. So for Anselm and Torrance, "the truth of genuinely moral action is simply the rightness of will fulfilled for its own sake." Moral action is both rational and voluntary, "for only when the mind and will act together can the rightness of will be fulfilled for its own sake." In short, "[T]he rightness of sanctification depends on the rightness of its *end* and its *object*, of its *why* and its *what*, which are determined for it by an objective correctness . . ." and through which we participate "in the Supreme Truth or Supreme Rightness of God."⁹⁵

Law

Torrance, as a final example, wrote an entire monograph on law, which continues to display a consistent theological social ethic that the critics simply ignore. He criticizes "modern ethics where the norms of behaviour are tracked back to mere convention and social utility, without any claim that they are objectively grounded in being or constrained by an order in the rational nature of things independent of ourselves" – e.g., the lack of a "deeper and more enduring foundation that we have allowed in our legal science or in our political constitution. We need to rediscover the ontology of juridical law," rather than a legal positivism that lacks "the ontological rooting of moral and judicial law from its objective ground in the Ultimate Truth and Rightness of God himself." Modern legal theory too often relies upon "a moral positivism, as ethical principles and concepts uprooted from their ontological grounds tend to be treated as little more than traditional arrangements deriving from the evolution of human relations or to be regarded merely as convenient social conventions which can have no more than an oblique relation to an objective basis if such an idea is to be entertained at all" – unlike modern physical science which "has moved from a positivist to a realist outlook . . ."⁹⁶

Similar to his essay on Anselm and ethics, he argues that legal science must *think and behave* "strictly in accordance with the nature of things." Similar to his essays on abortion, he bases the true nature of law on "the ontological substructure of personal and social relations" or "person-constituting relations," such as the human family which is "governed by mutual sharing, love and concern." This "ontological structure of interpersonal human relations . . . points all human law-making beyond itself to a normative source and self-sufficient ground in Almighty God."⁹⁷

95 Ibid., 314-9.

96 Torrance, *Juridical Law and Physical Law: Toward a Realist Foundation for Human Law* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), ix-x, 2.

97 Ibid, 28, 41-5, 53

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL SUSPENSION OF THE ETHICAL

Torrance thus argues for a concept of order in a way that shows how integral his ethic is with his entire view of theology and science (which anticipates the next essay on Torrance's scientific ethic):

Hence, far from thinking of the saving acts of God in Jesus Christ as in any way an interruption of the order of creation, or some sort of violation of natural law, we must rather think of the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ . . . as the chosen way in which God, the ultimate Source of all rational order, brings his transcendent mind and will to bear upon the disordered structures of our creaturely existence in space and time.⁹⁸

For the Incarnation of the Word is

the creative order of redeeming love, and the kind of order that is unable to reveal to us its own deepest secret but can only point mutely and indefinitely beyond itself. Yet since this is an order that we may apprehend only as we allow our minds to yield to the compelling claims of reality, it is found to be an order burdened with a latent imperative which we dare not, rationally or morally, resist, the order of how things actually are which we may appreciate adequately only as we let our minds grope out for what things are meant to be and ought to be.⁹⁹

Summary of the Counter-Critique

In sum, Torrance affirms a soteriological suspension of autonomous ethics superseded by the vicarious humanity of Christ, which sanctifies human morality as people be and become who they truly are in union with Christ. Far from invalidating our humanity, Christ's humanity heals the ontological depths of our being to reorient and validate our human lives and actions in him. Torrance roots a Christian "moral ontology" in the very relational being of God himself, which suggests a filial, not a legal or moral, ethic. The critics of Torrance have failed to understand his unitary Christian theological ethic, based on a trinitarian-incarnational paradigm that addresses concrete personal and social issues, which is to say, human life and existence. We've seen how the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ upholds those on the margins of life, such as women in ministry and the unborn child, affirming and redeeming the created order on behalf of those whose voices have been muted and marginalized. For Torrance,

98 Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 21.

99 *Ibid.*, 34.

the very being and heart of God affirms, upholds, and sanctifies all of human life. Whether or not one agrees with his specific stances on such moral issues, Torrance has articulated a thoroughly theological ethic of reconciliation in Christ, who creates and promises the transformation of humanity and all personal and social structures on the basis of God's grace.

**THE UNITARY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
ETHICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY
IN THE THOUGHT OF T. F. TORRANCE**

Travis M. Stevick, Ph.D.
**Ordained Elder in the Iowa Annual Conference
of the United Methodist Church**
tstevick@gmail.com

Abstract: *T. F. Torrance's general rejection of dualism is present in many of his works. His rejection of the dualism between epistemology and ethics is important for understanding the totality of his thought. In this paper, I will discuss three concrete case studies that reveal the unitary relationship between ethics and epistemology in Torrance's thought. This is followed up with documentation that reveals that this unitary relationship is not accidental or an afterthought, but forms a vital strand of all of Torrance's thinking.*

T. F. Torrance objected to many forms of dualistic thinking. We can find his rejection of cosmological, epistemological, and Cartesian dualisms in many of his writings. A further dualism rejected by Torrance, though far less fully documented either in the primary or secondary literature, is the dualism between epistemology and ethics. For Torrance, authentic knowledge of any object must be knowledge according to the nature of the object, *kata physin*, and not according to convictions or frameworks of thought deriving from elsewhere.¹ This epistemological conviction is, at the same time, an ethical one. We can see that our need to think of things in this way as flowing from the concern to behave toward things in an appropriate way. Conversely, our ability to behave appropriately toward things depends on our ability to know them according to their natures.

In this paper, I shall begin by presenting three cases where Torrance's epistemological and ethical convictions intertwine. Once that is done and we have an example of the kind of thing to look for in Torrance's work, I shall turn

¹ Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 45 (hereafter *PCT*).

my attention to other passages that show that this unitary relationship between ethics and epistemology in Torrance's thought is not accidental but characteristic of his entire way of thinking.

Torrance and the Anselmian notion of truth

Torrance frequently engages with Anselm's work, *De Veritate*, when explaining his understanding of truth.² In these various discussions, Torrance draws out three different levels in which something may be said to be "true." First, there are what Torrance calls the two "truths of statement." The first of these is the kind of truth a statement has when it makes grammatical sense, though both Anselm and Torrance acknowledge that this is not what we usually mean when we say that a statement is "true."³ Secondly, a statement is considered true when it refers to some state of affairs beyond itself in a faithful and appropriate manner. When a statement has both truths of statement, we say it has "truth of signification."

Beyond this level of truth is what Torrance calls the "truth of being." A thing is what it is and not something else, which means that there is a certain "truth" or "rightness" inherent in being that cannot be reduced to statements *about* being. As it is to *being* that our statements refer, Torrance sees the truth of being as being more basic (in the sense of fundamental) than the truths of statement. Lastly, the truth of being depends upon the supreme truth of God for it to be what it is. In this way, the concept of "truth" is something that, first and foremost, refers to the being of God, in a secondary sense to created being and, in a tertiary sense, to our statements *about* being.⁴

While this reflection is clearly relevant for understanding Torrance's ontology and epistemology, it is also relevant for understanding his ethic as well. Truth is

2 Major discussions can be found in *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Publishing Co., 1982), 126-137 (hereafter *R&ET*); *Reality and Scientific Theology*, revised 2002, Wipf and Stock ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), 143-147 (hereafter *R&ST*); "The Place of Word and Truth in Theological Inquiry According to St. Anselm," in *Studia Mediaevalia Et Mariologica*, P. Carolo Balic OFM *Septvagesium Explendi Annum Dicta*, ed. Zavalloni, O. (Rome: Antonianum, 1971), 142-147 [131-160]; "Ethical Implications of Anselm's *De Veritate*," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 24, no. 5 (1968), 309-313.

3 See the major discussions in Torrance as well as Anselm, "On Truth" [*De Veritate* 2], in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, tr. Ralph McInerny, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 154.

4 Note that this is very different from the mainstream understanding of "truth" in which truth is seen to be applicable primarily, if not exclusively, to statements in their relation to being.

not something we may be indifferent toward. As Torrance says, "We owe it to the truth to be truly related to it."⁵ It is not enough to *speak* rightly, we must also *behave* rightly toward truth, whether the truth of being or the supreme truth of God. This speaking rightly and behaving rightly, while conceptually distinct, are characterized by a unitary relationship through their connection with the supreme truth of God.

There is a difference between the truth of action and the truth of signification, however, not only because their respective rightnesses vary according to the things themselves, but because in moral actions it is demanded of us not only to do what we ought in accordance with an objective rightness but to will that rightness for rightness' sake. Nevertheless in both we are concerned ultimately with one and the same rightness through participation in the Supreme Truth or Supreme Rightness of God.⁶

In this way we see that, for Torrance, epistemology and ethics are not finally separable but form two facets of an integrated approach for engaging with reality that includes both our knowing and our behavior.

Torrance on Legal Reform

In his short book, *Juridical Law and Physical Law*,⁷ Torrance argues for the need to reform British legal practice. He first discusses the problem as he sees it, following up his diagnosis with a concrete program for reform. This demonstrates, perhaps more clearly than any of his other publications, the unitary relationship between ethics and epistemology in Torrance's thought.

The problem faced by British legal practice, as Torrance sees it, is that the rulings of formal law, or the law enacted formally by the official legislative power of a nation, are seen as sovereign over the rulings of common law, or the law developed over time in various courts across the nation which dealt with actual, concrete, questions of justice. This practice arises from the more basic conviction that law is subject to the legislature, which stands in stark contrast to the conviction embedded in the common law tradition that it is the business of the courts to "discover" laws rather than to "invent" them.

5 Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 304 (hereafter *T&C*). See also *T&C*, 317; *R&ET*, 127, 145.

6 Torrance, "Ethical Implications of Anselm's *De Veritate*," 319.

7 Torrance, *Juridical Law and Physical Law*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997, hereafter *JL&PL*).

Torrance provides something of a genealogy of the idea that the legislature is sovereign, even over law itself, which has the effect of showing that the convictions embedded in the practice of common law predate those of formal law. Additionally, Torrance argues that common law arose organically out of the struggle to articulate the implications of justice rather than by being imposed artificially upon the people and their relationships. Torrance traces the history of British legal reform back through Locke and Bentham (though being influenced by Newton's conception of physical law).

Briefly, the trajectory of thought goes something like this. The Newtonian dualism between "absolute, true, mathematical time and space and relative, apparent, sensible time and space" inspired, in Locke, a similar dualism between common law and formal law.⁸ This way of thinking led Locke to argue that, since "nature is made of material substances which . . . obey the purely mechanistic laws of Newtonian physics; thus there is no basis for social laws in nature."⁹ Given this lack of necessity, all laws were to be seen as being the product of social convention or convenience. This resulted in a kind of legal positivism.

Locke's own views retained protective devices that would prevent the usurpation of the legislature over the people. After all, if law is the result of positivistic convention rather than necessity, it follows that the people must retain the right to withdraw legislative authority from the government "if it acts contrary to the will of the majority and [such authority may then] be entrusted to another government, for the people alone perpetually retain a supreme power and only voluntarily delegate it to the legislative assembly so that it may establish a standing rule, common to them all, by which they may enjoy their prosperities in peace and safety."¹⁰

However Britain adopted, under the influence of Jeremy Bentham and contrary to Locke's views, a single house of Parliament entrusted with total sovereignty to make and impose law on the people.¹¹ Bentham had claimed that there must be an "omnicompetent legislation" because "any limitation of sovereignty is in contradiction to the general happiness principle."¹² While this step leads to something that is, strictly speaking, no longer a form of positivism,¹³ Torrance

8 *JL&PL*, 6, 8.

9 *JL&PL*, 8, in a quote from F. S. C. Northrop.

10 *JL&PL*, 11.

11 *JL&PL*, 14-15.

12 *JL&PL*, 14.

13 Positivism has traditionally prided itself on staying close to the empirical data, holding

still speaks of this change as being the *result* of legal positivism. Whether he is correct in using this term or not, it seems reasonable to claim that the rise of legal positivism paved the way for such a “hardening” of the authority of the legislature which seems to be the real root of Torrance’s concern with the British legal system.

At its root, Torrance is criticizing the conventionalist conception of law in favor of a realist conception.¹⁴ Indeed, the central question is “whether the law rests upon what the American Constitution calls ‘self-evident principles’ or not, that is, whether at bottom it has to do with what is intrinsically true and right.”¹⁵

What does Torrance think should be done?

Before exploring his concrete views on legal reform, Torrance connects the change he sees as necessary with the epistemological change he has found in the natural sciences. Newtonian science separated geometry from experience and then clamped the axiomatic and deductive geometric framework down upon experience.¹⁶ Just as Einstein fixed this error by bringing geometry into the heart of physics, so legal science could be corrected by bringing common law into the heart of formal law.

Torrance’s explicit reflections on juridical law are shaped by his conviction that all our thinking and behavior is rational only if it is *kata physin*. “All authentic knowledge, including legal knowledge, depends upon belief in and recognition of orderly patterns inherent in the universe.”¹⁷ Torrance develops the distinct elements of legal science in a way that strikingly parallels his epistemological reflections.

While in legal science we are no less obliged than in natural science to *think* of realities strictly in accordance with their nature, in legal science we are especially concerned with the obligation to *behave* strictly in accordance with

scientific theories as nothing more than convenient “mental fictions” (Mach’s term) that we use for organizing our thoughts. If we are to see formal law as being analogous to our theoretical expressions in natural science, it would seem that it is not appropriate to call the resulting position, opposed by Torrance, “legal positivism.” It would seem that a consistent legal positivism would react just as strongly to the Benthamite perspective as Torrance, though its subsequent development might be very different indeed.

14 *JL&PL*, 14. Torrance sees the conflict between these two conceptions as going back at least to the 1760s.

15 *JL&PL*, 15.

16 *JL&PL*, 24.

17 *JL&PL*, 27.

the nature of things. Hence we are obliged by reality itself to behave toward human beings as persons and not as animals, and to behave toward animals as living sentient organisms and not as inanimate rocks, so that appropriate positive laws are 'made' in order to articulate and make public the hidden regulative principles in those obligations. Thus, we elaborate legal systems, not in order that we may do as we please, but that we may be directed to do in common as we are obliged to do under the compelling claims of reality and its intrinsic rationality.¹⁸

This similarity of language and presentation further cements the unitary relationship between epistemology and ethics in Torrance's thought.

Torrance's positive recommendations for legal reform largely appropriates an approach to law-making put forward by Alan Watson, then Professor of Civil Law at the University of Edinburgh.¹⁹ While the content and structure of the resultant legal structure are taken from Watson's essay, Torrance presents what he believes to be the most important elements of Watson's position within a framework picked up from Einstein's essay, "Physics and Reality."²⁰ To understand the significance of this presentation, we must take a brief glance at Torrance's appropriation of Einstein in his discussions of scientific epistemology.

Torrance follows Einstein in ordering our knowledge by dividing our scientific thinking into three conceptual levels. "At the ground or primary level of daily life our experiences and cognitions are naturally and inseparably combined together. Here our basic concepts are intuitively comprehended and are directly correlated with the complexes of sense experiences."²¹ However, this level is not scientifically satisfactory on its own because it is not characterized by logical unity. "Hence scientific operations begin with a movement from this level of everyday thinking close to experience to a second level, where we seek

18 *JL&PL*, 28.

19 Alan Watson, "Two-Tier Law: A New Approach to Law-Making," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Jul., 1978), 552-575, 552. Indeed, it is easy to find several portions of text that seem to have been lifted, word-for-word, from Watson's essay.

20 Albert Einstein, "Physics and Reality," in *Out of My Later Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 59-97, specifically the section titled, "The Stratification of the Scientific System," 63-65. The most important discussions on this topic in Torrance's work can be found in *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1981), 156-159 (hereafter *G&G*), and *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 82-88 (hereafter *CDG*). Also, see my discussion in Travis M. Stevick, "Truth and Language in the Theology of T. F. Torrance," *Participatio* 2 (Supp. Vol., 2013): 67-101.

21 *JL&PL*, 54.

to order the basic concepts in our understanding of the world by connecting them up into a coherent theory, in the process of which we shed what we judge to be unnecessary, or merely peripheral, cognitions and ideas."²²

This secondary level is *also* not sufficient in itself. It aims to facilitate encounter with reality, but is also inherently "revisable in the light of what becomes disclosed and is thereby made a more effective instrument of disclosure."²³ If this secondary level is consistent, it must find its comprehensiveness in a tertiary level. The movement to this level "involves the revision and clarification of the theorems already used, in testing the compatibility of the structure they build to experience, and the formalization of a higher and more tightly ordered theory will also have to be put as a question to reality and be clarified, revised, and simplified in the process."²⁴ All of this is aimed at reaching, as Torrance quotes Einstein, "a system of the greatest conceivable unity, and of the greatest poverty of concepts of the logical foundations, which are still compatible with the observations we made by our senses."²⁵

Watson's contribution to legal reform is of interest to Torrance in both its goals and its structure. Watson aims for our law to fulfill three requirements: First, it must be capable of responding to the needs and concerns of a society; second, it must be comprehensible to the people to whom it is relevant; and third, it must be as comprehensive as possible.²⁶ Watson attempts to achieve this by the institution of a tiered structure of law, with a first and second tier, where the first tier aims to be as comprehensible to the layperson as possible, the second tier (which also carries the force of law) aims to make it as comprehensive as possible. Additionally, there should be an "interpretive committee" who would attempt to "make the law responsive to what the community needs and wants."²⁷

These goals are achieved with three levels of legal concepts. Torrance explicitly connects Watson's ideas with Einstein's.

Professor Watson's essential intentions are very similar to those of Einstein in his account of the general method of science, although Watson's two tiers would correspond rather to the levels of ordinary science and meta-science. A basic level corresponding to the 'informal physics' which we spontaneously acquire in our daily unreflecting adjustments to nature is left out of the picture – that is,

22 *JL&PL*, 54-55.

23 *JL&PL*, 55.

24 *JL&PL*, 55.

25 *JL&PL*, 56.

26 Watson, "Two-Tier Law," 552.

27 Watson, "Two-Tier Law," 557.

the unwritten law embedded in the ontological structure of community life on which we implicitly rely, corresponding to Einstein's primary level close to the complexes of sense experience – but it is doubtless assumed.²⁸

That Torrance would assume that Watson had realist convictions that he had left tacit is telling. There is reason to believe that Watson is far more "positivistic" than Torrance with regard to law-making. Not only is Watson silent as regards the concern to "discover" rather than "make" law,²⁹ he also repeats the goal that law is intended to reflect the needs and wants of the community and never mentions Torrance's conviction that law is to uncover the moral law already implicit in our unreflecting interactions with one another.³⁰

Of course, this observation only speaks to the likelihood that Torrance has taken Watson's proposal in a direction not sufficiently warranted by Watson's own essay. It does not necessarily negate Torrance's own perspective or make it inconsistent. Rather, it reveals that Torrance is not merely repeating Watson's proposal but is creatively appropriating it in such a way that it fits in more neatly with Torrance's wider concerns.

"The institution of first rank law, then, represents the organization of the law into a general code which is immediately comprehensible to most citizens, whether they are legally trained or not, and which will provide answers to the great majority of their legal problems."³¹ That is to say, the first rank of law would attempt to organize our experience and observations of justice at the tacit level into some kind of unified account of the underlying reality that gave rise to those experiences and observations.

The institution of second rank law represents the provision of an authentic and authoritative interpretation of first rank law together with the function of constant revision and improvement of it, which would have the effect of unifying first rank law and making it consistent, thereby also ensuring its comprehensiveness.³²

Torrance's account of both first and second rank law precisely parallels his discussions of the function of the "first" and "second theoretical levels" in scientific inquiry more generally.

28 *JL&PL*, 61.

29 Watson, "Two-Tier Law," 554, even suggests that the belief that courts "merely find existing law" rather than create law, is "fictional."

30 *JL&PL*, 46-47.

31 *JL&PL*, 61.

32 *JL&PL*, 61.

Torrance argues that the two tiers of law are not entirely sufficient but a third tier needs to be added. Unlike the other two tiers, this third tier would not have the force of law, but would serve as a kind of meta-law, through which the other two tiers could be tested "upon sheer justice" and would fulfill the purpose of both a supreme court of appeals as well as a bill of rights, and would "therefore [be] without subordination to the legislature."³³

We must note that Torrance connects this third tier of legal structure with the tertiary level (or second theoretical level) in Einstein's thinking. In point of fact, since Torrance has assumed that Watson's two-tiered approach to law *assumes* a level parallel to Einstein's first stage of scientific inquiry, this "third" tier is actually analogous to a *fourth* Einsteinian level. This is, again, not a critique of what seems to be Torrance's point, since Einstein's system (as well as Torrance's normal appropriation of it) places no *a priori* limit on the number of levels that may be necessary for proper scientific procedure, only that three levels is often sufficient.³⁴

We see in this case study that Torrance speaks of the way to reform legal practice in ways that precisely parallel several of his discussions of epistemology. This provides a significant and concrete example of how, for Torrance, ethical and epistemological reflections are not to be separated, but constitute two different facets of an integrated approach to reality. If we want to know something or someone as we should, we must know it or them kataphysically; if we want to behave toward something or someone as we should, we must do so kataphysically.

Order

It must be noted that, when Torrance specifies that we must know things according to their natures, he does not mean to imply that we can treat objects and persons as atomistically separable units. Rather, things and persons are what they are, in part, due to their relations with other objects and persons. Torrance calls these kind of person-constituting relations "onto-relations."³⁵ Further, objects, persons, and their relations are not chaotic in nature, but orderly. He also makes a distinction between the divine order inherent in the

33 *JL&PL*, 65.

34 *CDG*, 84.

35 The term, "onto-relations," can be found in *R&ET*, 42-51; *The Mediation of Christ*, revised ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard, 1992), 47; *T&C*, 230; *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 185; *CDG*, 102-103; *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 26-27, 51 (hereafter *CT&SC*); *Divine and Contingent Order*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 109-110; *JL&PL*, 43-44; *G&G*, 174.

being of God and the contingent order that characterizes creation. According to Torrance, the presupposition of order is indispensable in rational activity. "All rational knowledge has to do with order, in developing an orderly account of the way in which things actually are in their own inherent structure or intelligibility. If they were not orderly in themselves they would not be intelligible to us and would not be open to rational description and explanation."³⁶

This conviction, that the order inherent in things, whether divine or contingent, carries moral weight. Torrance writes the following, referring to the "kind of order that is disclosed through the incarnation of the Word," though he could just as well have been speaking of the contingent order in other fields of inquiry and engagement. "Since this is an order that we may apprehend only as we allow our minds to yield to the compelling claims of reality, it is found to be an order burdened with a latent imperative which we dare not, rationally or morally, resist, the order of how things actually are which we may appreciate adequately only as we let our minds grope out for what things are meant to be and ought to be."³⁷ Thus, reality being what it is and not something else places demands upon us that must be obeyed in both epistemology and ethics.

As the above quotation makes clear, Torrance believes that the dualism between "is" and "ought" is yet another dualism that must be overcome.³⁸

The recognition that a proper scientific description of contingent realities and events provides an account not only of how things actually are but of how they ought to be goes far toward bridging the unfortunate gap between natural science and moral science or ethics. After all, if in rigorous scientific inquiry we feel obliged to *know and understand* things strictly in accordance with their natures, in a true and faithful way, it is also the case that we feel ourselves obliged to *behave* toward them strictly in accordance with their natures, in a true and faithful way. Thus true knowledge and right behaviour are both responses to the compelling claims of reality which we cannot rationally or morally resist. This is surely an essential part of what we mean by the *scientific conscience*. If science and ethics overlap at this crucial point, it seems clear that commonly accepted views of science and ethics must change in order to do justice to the double fact that there is an inescapable moral ingredient in scientific activity

36 *The Christian Frame of Mind* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989), 17 (hereafter *CFM*).

37 *CFM*, 34.

38 See *PCT*, 43; *CFM*, 88. Torrance sees the split between "is" and "ought" as being related to the split between "how" and "why." See also *CFM*, 25. Some implications of the bringing together of "is" and "ought" can be found in Christopher Holmes' contribution to this volume. A study of how Torrance might overcome the Humean critique on this topic would be deeply interesting, but beyond the scope of this volume.

and an inescapable ontological ingredient in ethical behaviour. There is a proper interrelation between the “is” and the “ought,” between being and obligation, which we need to recover today in natural, moral, and legal science alike.³⁹

This passage makes it clear that, for Torrance, epistemology and ethics are not to be separated. epistemological language (“scientific description,” “know and understand”) and ethical language (“obliged,” “inescapable moral ingredient”) are woven together to give voice to what may be called “ethico-epistemological convictions” (“scientific conscience,” “we cannot rationally or morally resist”).

Unitary Epistemology and Ethic in Torrance’s Writings

By way of review, let us consider the three examples presented so far. First, we saw that Torrance’s appropriation of Anselm’s concept of truth wove together the convictions that we must labor to ensure that our statements are related appropriately to being (which, in its turn, must be related to the supreme truth of God) so that the latter can confer truth on the former. This was seen as an ethical as well as epistemological concern, as we owe it to the truth to be rightly related to it. Second, we saw that when Torrance recommended the reform of British law, an undoubtedly ethical field, he approached the issue in a remarkably parallel way with his approach to epistemological concerns. Finally, Torrance’s commitment to order, both as it is and as it *ought* to be, reveals epistemological and ethical concerns to be interwoven to form an integrated whole.

Now that we have seen ways in which *kata physin* forms, for Torrance, both an epistemological and an ethical principle, we are in a position to see these intertwined concerns throughout his writings more clearly. This section will be composed of passages found in Torrance’s writings accompanied by brief commentary to draw out their significance for this discussion. It is the aim of this approach to make it clear that the unitary relationship between epistemology and ethics is not isolated to a few case studies but is characteristic of all Torrance’s thought, to be found in his “scientific” writings over his entire career. All italics will be added to highlight the most relevant sections of the passages.

Perhaps the most “user-friendly” exposition of the practical implications of Torrance’s principle of *kata physin* as well as the epistemology and ethic bound up with it, is found in his 1992 address “Incarnation and Atonement in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism.”⁴⁰ It will be quoted here at length.

39 *CFM*, 53.

40 Published in *PCT*, 41-71.

Let me indicate how this rigorous scientific inquiry operates. Suppose we inquire into the nature of a tree and bring all our rational faculties to bear upon it. In doing so we develop a modality of the reason that is appropriate to the specific nature of the tree and do not treat the tree as we would a rock or a human being, for that would be to think of it contrary to its nature, *παρὰ φύσιν*, as the Greeks would say. The tree is alive but not personally alive, and so we adapt our mode of knowing and reasoning in accordance with its nature as a tree. Suppose then we switch our inquiry to a cow, which is a living thing like a tree but is an animal, which unlike the tree is a moving being. Here there takes place another switch in the modality of our reason, in which it is adapted to the specific nature of the cow as an animal. Our scientific method is the same, knowing something as rigorously as possible in accordance with its nature. But when we then turn our inquiry toward a human being, the modality of our reason changes yet again in accordance with the nature of the human being. Here a radical change is involved because unlike a cow a human being can talk back to us and reveal something of himself or herself to us. Moreover, a human being is a rational agent with a depth of intelligibility that a cow does not have, and a human being is personal in nature, which calls for a two-way relation, a personal interaction, between the knower and the one known. We cannot get to know another human being if we stand aloof and say, now just you keep dumb, and let me try and understand you. We cannot really know another human being except in a two-way interaction with him or her. We have to open our heart and mind to him or her and listen to what he or she has to say about himself or herself. It is only in and through personal interaction that we get to know another human being. In fact, we probably really know others only as we reveal ourselves to them, rather than merely by trying to find out what they are in themselves by way of impersonal observation and deduction.⁴¹

Torrance here speaks both of how we come to know things as well as of how we ought to *behave* toward those same things. A deficiency in our knowledge of a thing will necessarily bring about a deficiency in ethical behavior, either to a greater or lesser degree. Conversely, an unwillingness to behave kataphysically will lead to a deficiency in knowledge.

Reason is our capacity to behave consciously in terms of the nature of what is not ourselves, that is to say, the *capacity to act in accordance with the nature of the object*. Hence true thoughts are thoughts which refer properly to reality and which are thought in accordance with the nature of the object to which they refer. They are not true if they refer to certain objects in a mode that is determined by the nature of other and different objects; they cannot

41 *PCT*, 46-47.

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be true, for example, if they refer to personal beings as if they were merely things. Persons must be treated as persons if our thoughts of them are to be properly objective. Reason is our capacity for objectivity in this sense. *To be rational, therefore, means to behave not in terms of our own nature, but in terms of our knowledge of the world outside of us, of things and persons, in accordance with their own natures. Clearly this objectivity or reason cannot be confined to the intellect alone, but characterizes every aspect of our human life and activity as rational persons* – indeed it is the essential characteristic of personal consciousness. It is what distinguishes rational, personal activity from all inorganic, impersonal activity. Genuine objectivity must never be confused with objectivism – that would be a form of irrationality. It is the nature of persons to be reasonable, to relate themselves objectively to the world around them, in action as well as in reflection, in emotion as well as in volition. Thus if in natural science we develop a knowledge of things in their objective reality by learning to act in accordance with the nature of the world around us, so in the sphere of the ethical and social life we develop a capacity to act objectively in relation to other persons, by behaving towards them in accordance with their natures, not in terms of the natures of things and not in terms of our own subjective determinations. That is why love occupies such an essential place in these inter-personal relations, for the capacity to love objectively is the capacity in which we live as persons. Indeed, it is the ultimate source of our capacity to behave in terms of the nature of the object. Hence it would also be irrational to treat things as persons. Strict respect for the nature of what is other than ourselves is the very core of rationality.⁴²

Here, so early in Torrance's writing career, we see not only his scientific ethic interwoven with epistemology, but also with the the Christian concept of love and, by virtue of the essay in which this paragraph appears, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the importance of ecumenism. Ethical thinking is a vital strand woven into every facet of Torrance's theology.

Torrance makes the connection between epistemology and ethics explicit in several places. Here are three such passages.

In a science we know some given reality strictly in accordance with its nature, and we let its nature determine for us the form and content of our knowledge of it. We cannot assume that we already know what its nature is, *for we learn what it is only through inductive questioning in which we try to let it declare itself to us in spite of, and often in contradiction to, what we tell ourselves about it.* This is a process in which we find ourselves being stripped of our preconceived ideas.

⁴² *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 232.

Our main difficulty in learning is undoubtedly with ourselves and our built-in habits of thought which we stubbornly carry over from the past or from another area of knowledge into our inquiries but which can only obstruct and distort our apprehension of what is really new. *In scientific activity we let ourselves and what we think we already know be called in question*, so that as far as possible we may know the given reality out of itself and in accordance with its own nature . . . In scientific activity of this kind *we try to ground our knowledge of the given reality squarely upon the reality itself and articulate what we know out of a compelling and exclusive relation with it*. This means that we must distinguish what we know from our subjective states and conditions and that in proportion as we know something in accordance with its own nature we allow our presuppositions to be suspended or set aside. But it also means that we must learn to distinguish what we know from our knowing of it, so that we may not confuse our forms of knowledge with the realities we apprehend through them. What all this adds up to is the principle of scientific objectivity, which is simply an extension of our fundamental rationality *in which we think and act in accordance with what is the case*. Is it needless to stress once again that this is the antithesis of objectifying modes of thought in which we project upon what we seek to know elaborations out of our own consciousness?⁴³

Scientific knowledge of this kind implies that we must learn to distinguish what we know from our subjective states and conditions. This is one way to state the basic scientific principle of objectivity, but it is only an extension of our fundamental mode of rationality. *We are rational when we act in accordance with the nature of the object*. To behave as though this table were not there or as though it were a personal being would be quite irrational, for it would not be treating what is 'there' in terms of what is the case. Since scientific thinking rejects all irrationality and unreality of this sort it will not allow us to impose upon any object we claim to know ideas of our own invention or ideas that we have transferred to it from some other kind of thing. This is why the scientific thinker *must be ruthlessly critical of himself and his preconceptions*, in order to prevent himself from overlaying the object of his knowledge with stuff that does not belong to it and which only obscures and distorts genuine knowledge of it.⁴⁴

Thus we find ourselves in a situation where the intelligibility manifest in and through the universe seems to lay hold of us with a power which we cannot rationally resist. *It is part of our rationality that we act under the compulsion of the nature of things and assent to it in a positive way*, but here there is a

43 *God and Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 92 (hereafter G&R).

44 G&R, 115-116.

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relation of transcendent reference which catches up on us and requires of us the same kind of assent, for somehow we are already committed to it in the correlation of our mental operations and the open structures of the universe of being. While it is certainly true that the semantic reference of the intelligible system of the universe breaks off and can only point brokenly beyond, so that the intentionality it involves in virtue of its contingent nature does not terminate upon an identifiable rational ground, nevertheless we are aware of coming under an imperious constraint from beyond which holds out to us the promise of future disclosure and summons us to further heuristic inquiry *which it would be irresponsible of us to evade*. It is important to note, however, that the force of this constraint is inseparably bound up with *the obligatoriness of being* and its immanent rationality that bear upon us in the universe, and therefore with the cataleptic consent which we are bound to yield to the given reality of things beyond our conceptual control or manipulation.⁴⁵

In light of such passages, it seems clear that Torrance does not see epistemology and ethics as separate but conceives them both in a unitary way that overcomes the dualism between is and ought.

It is conceivable that these passages are readily seen by readers as being about epistemology, and this interpretation would seem to be encouraged by Torrance's obvious stress upon epistemology. However, we must not allow the fact that such passages are clearly about epistemology blind us to the fact that they are clearly *equally* concerned with ethics. Several passages reveal that Torrance has woven ethical considerations into his notion of rationality. Other passages make it clear that we must be epistemically rigorous if we are to behave appropriately and that we must be committed to ethical behavior if we hope to know and understand things adequately. Both are required if the principle of *kata physin* is to be our guide.

Many more passages could be added to those already cited to show the many and varied ways the unitary relationship between epistemology and ethics works itself out in Torrance's thought.⁴⁶ The evidence presented above, though, should be sufficient to demonstrate that, far from being any kind of afterthought or neglected topic, ethical considerations form one vital strand of Torrance's whole theological and scientific project.

While it is clear that Torrance does not present his ethical convictions in an orderly way and devotes no substantial publication to their exposition beyond

45 *R&ST*, 53-54.

46 See, for some examples, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 163-164, 275; *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 26, 216, 331, 341; *G&R*, 52-53, 114-115, 198; *CT&SC*, 27-30; *R&ST*, 48, 50, 69; *T&C*, 222.

the occasional short essay,⁴⁷ this is not evidence that Torrance neglected ethics. Rather it shows that he proceeded consistently with his overarching scientific and theological convictions and integrated it within his other discussions. For Torrance, ethics finds its proper place as an important component of all human thought and behavior. To separate it out as if it could be discussed intelligibly in isolation from other concerns would be to fail to allow the *content* of his ethical concerns to inform the *form* of their presentation.⁴⁸ If this is so, it would seem that Torrance provides us with an example of a theologian whose ethic is robust and effective precisely because it does not set itself up as an independent discipline but resides at the heart of all human life.

47 Such as, for example, *JL&PL*, "The Ethical Implications of Anselm's *De Veritate*," and his pamphlet on abortion. *The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child* (Scottish Order of Christian Unity, 2000).

48 For a discussion on Torrance's insistence on the integration of form and content, see Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 345-363.

REVIEWS

***EXPLORING CHRISTOLOGY AND ATONEMENT:
CONVERSATIONS WITH JOHN MCLEOD CAMPBELL,
H. R. MACKINTOSH AND T. F. TORRANCE***

Andrew Purves

Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015. (272 pp.)

[ISBN: 978-0-83084-077-9] \$30.00 (USD)

Andrew Purves teaches historical theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, USA and has authored several books of pastoral theology. At the end of the book under review, he explains that the three theologians with whom he has held “conversation” in the preceding pages are the major sources behind his earlier work in pastoral theology (p. 254). The preface to *Exploring Christology and Atonement* describes his aim to enrich contemporary Christian ministry with christological and soteriological insights mined from a particular vein of Scottish Reformed theology. Purves presents his conversation partners: his former teacher at the University of Edinburgh, Thomas F. Torrance; Torrance’s own Edinburgh professor, Hugh Ross Mackintosh; and a critically appropriated influence on both Torrance and Mackintosh, deposed Church of Scotland minister John McLeod Campbell (p. 12). Purves esteems these three theologians as “doctors of the church To read them is to be spiritually and not just intellectually and theologically elevated” (p. 13).

Relying heavily on Torrance, the Introduction sketches Purves’ theological method. First, theology is rightly an ecclesial activity, meant to be practiced *within* the church and *for* the church by those who are members *of* the church. These parameters exclude, certainly not all academic theology, but theology done purely for academic reasons, amputated from the life of God’s people. Purves colorfully portrays such detached theology as “a discipline listlessly wandering the corridors of the academy whimpering for a seat at the table” (p. 19). Second,

theology's proper epistemology is critical realism. This commitment produces a posture of humble attentiveness: attentive to the self-disclosure of a reality beyond us which can truly be known, yet humble because our knowledge is ever partial (in both senses of the word: incomplete and biased). Consequently, no doctrinal construct is past correction; *semper reformanda* remains theology's watchword this side of the Parousia.

Between the bookends of the Preface and Introduction on the one hand and Chapter 7's ministry-oriented conclusion on the other, the body of *Exploring Christology and Atonement* divides into equal halves. Chapters 1-3 examine Christology from three complementary angles, with McLeod Campbell's, Mackintosh's, and Torrance's views surveyed in each chapter. Chapters 4-6 study atonement and Purves' approach shifts: rather than interweaving the three theologians' views within each chapter, he devotes an entire chapter to each theologian in turn.

Chapter 1 returns to the issue of methodology. McLeod Campbell, Mackintosh, and Torrance all ground Christ's atoning work in his incarnate person. Their starting point is the fact of the incarnation, not metaphysical explanations of how it may be possible, philosophical conceptions of generic theism, or theological discussions of predestinarian secret counsels. The three Scots reject extrinsic notions of penal substitution and imputed righteousness in favor of filial (McLeod Campbell), personal (Mackintosh), and ontological (Torrance) perspectives on atonement. Near the end of the chapter, Purves reviews Torrance's discussion of Christ's relationship to Israel. Concerning Torrance's view of Israel's vicarious rejection, Purves worries whether "Torrance has just gone a bit too far into a mystery that may be best left opaque" (p. 62).

Chapter 2 focuses on two-natures Christology. Writing as an amateur theologian, McLeod Campbell assumes more than addresses orthodox views. Mackintosh approves of Nicaea but critiques patristic metaphysical terminology. He wishes to affirm Christ's true divinity (including preincarnate existence and worthiness of worship) and true humanity without ascribing to Christ two consciousnesses, wills, or natures, especially an impersonal (anhypostatic) human nature. Instead, Mackintosh opts for a kenotic view in which the divine Logos self-contracts in the incarnation in order to relate to general human experience. This self-emptying kenosis, though, is complemented by Christ's self-fulfilling plerosis as he grows in grace throughout his earthly career. Purves appreciates Mackintosh's teaching on plerosis but finds his kenoticism more speculative than scriptural. Ironically, in seeking to escape the metaphysics of classical Christology, "Mackintosh is not thoroughgoing enough, perhaps, in

pushing kenosis backwards into God such that Christ . . . is the criterion for divinity" (p. 95). Torrance denies kenoticism and has much to say in support of Nicene Christology as crucial for a proper, non-dualistic perspective on revelation and reconciliation. Purves presents Torrance's Christology as more comprehensive and correct than his predecessors'.

Chapter 3 covers the "magnificent exchange" and union with Christ, both of which Purves wishes to hold together as two sides of the same salvific coin. Although this chapter is labeled as part of the christological half of the book, it studies McLeod Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement*, with its doctrine of atonement as "vicarious penitence," and Mackintosh's constructive critique of it. Purves himself finds McLeod Campbell's model insightful but incomplete. Like McLeod Campbell, Torrance teaches that Christ has fulfilled the divine-human covenant from both sides. What he has done *for* us is realized *in* us through our union with him. The doctrine of union with Christ appears implicitly in McLeod Campbell and explicitly in Mackintosh and Torrance. The chapter ends with Torrance's applications of the doctrine to Christian faith, worship, and service.

Chapter 4 opens with a meditation on Christ's cry of dereliction. Purves urges that the Trinity as a whole was affected but not destroyed by Christ's experiences of godforsakenness and death. Purves then turns to McLeod Campbell, sketching his ministry to parishioners bound under contractual conceptions of religion, reviewing his defense of his atonement teaching, and offering an extended evaluation of that teaching. He judges that McLeod Campbell redirected the concern of atonement theology away from the satisfaction of divine honor (as in Anselm) or divine law (as in Federal Calvinism) to the fulfillment of divine love. This is a fruitful move, although McLeod Campbell overemphasized the filial category to the total exclusion of the legal. A more balanced perspective, Purves believes, will stress the former while making a place for the latter, as Torrance does. Purves proceeds to defend McLeod Campbell against a variety of critiques, including Mackintosh's.

Chapter 5 looks at Mackintosh's volume on atonement, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*. Like McLeod Campbell, Mackintosh transposes atonement from a penal to a personal-relational key. He draws an analogy from the human experience of giving and gaining forgiveness: just as the forgiver bears the painful cost of forgiving the wrongdoer, forging renewed fellowship with the wrongdoer, so also God bears the cruciform cost of reconciling humanity, creating not a legal fiction but a fresh relationship. Purves does worry about the projectionism inherent in this analogy, presuming as it does a "shared moral order between God and humankind" (p. 177). On the previous two pages, Purves himself succumbs to a

bit of projectionism by contrasting the impassioned God who acts to forgive with classical theism's impassible, immutable, hence to Purves' mind, immobile deity. *Pace* Purves, such is hardly the *actus purus* of scholastic theology, much less the impassibly suffering God of patristic theology!¹ Projectionism aside, Purves praises Mackintosh for holding together God's love and wrath, Christ's ministry and cross, and Christian justification and sanctification within a non-penal framework. Purves repeats his desire to make one additional reconciliation: that between the personal-relational model beloved of McLeod Campbell and Mackintosh and the legal model spurned by them.

Chapter 6 explores Torrance's *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*. As in Christology, so in soteriology, Purves views Torrance as the comprehensive and corrective climax to the trajectory from McLeod Campbell through Mackintosh. Torrance engages with the biblical data to a far greater degree than his theological forebears, although Purves finds "a bit forced" the correlation of Hebrew terms (*padah/kipper/goel*), *munus triplex*, and Christ's active obedience, passive obedience, and incarnation (pp. 208-209 n. 27). He feels that Torrance's doxological tendencies indicate one (though not the only) "criterion for truth in theology": does one's doctrine evoke adoration (p. 215)? Torrance's view of justification as Christ's fulfilling the Law apart from the Law succeeds in harmonizing the legal and the filial aspects of atonement. Purves does question the consistency of Torrance's affirmation of imputed righteousness but defends his teacher's disavowals of limited atonement and universalism. In the possibility of self-damnation, as in the role for our faith, worship, and service in union with Christ, Torrance belies his critics' charges of hyper-objectivism by preserving a place for our genuine response to grace. Purves grants that Torrance's doctrine of sanctification is underdeveloped but believes that "he would encourage movement in that direction, and that a theology of human agency in Christ is properly anticipated" (p. 240).

Chapter 7 shows how the three Scots' beliefs about Christ and atonement affected their pastoral theology. All three served in parish ministry at some point during their careers — McLeod Campbell, throughout the entirety of his. He preached to call his people to faith in the unconditional love of God in Christ. Mackintosh's preaching did likewise, while his university teaching inculcated piety as well as learning in his students. Purves is particularly at pains to demonstrate

1 See, e.g., Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; repr. 2005); Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (trans. and ed. William Hendriksen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 151: "immutability should not be confused with monotonous inactivity or immobility."

that Torrance was a pastoral theologian, citing his statements about ministry and his personal recollections of service in the Alyth parish during the 1940s. Torrance's former students could supplement Purves' evidence with their own testimonials to his pastoral bearing.² The book concludes by reasserting Purves' conviction that Christology and atonement are the necessary foundations of pastoral theology.

Purves' volume provides a handy preview or review of his conversation partners' Christology and soteriology for students and busy parish ministers. Scholars heeding David Fergusson's call to attend to Torrance's Scottish theological context will appreciate Purves' demonstration that "Torrance is properly viewed as much more than the student of Karl Barth" by tracing the "family resemblances" among Torrance, McLeod Campbell, and Mackintosh (p. 239).³ It is especially gratifying to see attention paid to the rather neglected figure of H. R. Mackintosh.⁴

While Purves speaks of all three Scots as "doctors of the church" (pp. 5, 13), he clearly regards Torrance as the *doctor doctorum*. This is salutary insofar as Torrance incorporates the best insights of his predecessors within a system that has deeper roots in scripture and tradition. Occasionally, though, Torrance's influence overshadows the data.⁵ Thus Purves says that his conversation partners' theological trajectory gained inspiration from the Greek Fathers (p. 10). Torrance certainly drew from them, but McLeod Campbell cites them nary at all, while Mackintosh frowns on most patristic Christology, whether Greek or Latin, as mired in Hellenistic metaphysics.⁶ Elsewhere, the lines are indistinct regarding the differences among the three Scots' views on whether Christ assumed a

2 See, e.g., Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 54–55; Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert T. Walker; Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), x; George Dion. Dragas, "T.F. Torrance a Theologian For Our Times: an Eastern Orthodox Assessment" (n.p.: Grace Communion International, 2013), www.youtube.com/watch?v=Frhvk-MY3dg, 00:31:10–00:34:10.

3 David S. Fergusson, "Torrance as a Scottish Theologian," *Participatio 2* (2010): 77–87.

4 See John L. McPake, "The Reception of the Theology of Karl Barth in Scotland," *Tyn-dale Bulletin* 47.1 (May 1996): 181–184; McGrath, *T. F. Torrance*, 163–164; Robb Redman, "Mackintosh, Torrance and the Reformulation of Reformed Theology in Scotland," *Participatio 2* (2010): 64–76; Fergusson, "Torrance as a Scottish Theologian," 81–82.

5 This is a tendency among Torrance's students against which Fergusson warns in "Torrance as a Scottish Theologian," 86–87.

6 See George M. Tuttle, *John McLeod Campbell on Christian Atonement: So Rich a Soil* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1986), 73–75; H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (The International Theological Library; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913; repr. 1920), 213–215, 222, 226, 237–248, 288–303.

fallen human nature (cf. pp. 11, 63, 91) and between Torrance's and Calvin's perspectives on predestination (pp. 229, 231).⁷ Regardless of these quibbles, *Exploring Christology and Atonement* fully achieves its aim of enhancing pastoral theology through reflection on the heart of the Christian faith: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor 5:19 KJV).

E. Jerome Van Kuiken
Associate Professor of Ministry and Christian Thought
Oklahoma Wesleyan University

7 Evert J. Van Kuiken, "The Relationship of the Fall to Christ's Humanity: Patristic Theology as an Arbiter of the Modern Debate" (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2013), 47–58, 98–107, 225–226 (this thesis is currently being considered for publication by T&T Clark as E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Fallen or Not? Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy*); Dragas, "T.F. Torrance a Theologian For Our Times," 00:49:17–00:54:15; Alasdair Heron, "Calvin in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance: Calvin's Doctrine of Man (1949)," *Participatio* 2 (2010): 44–63, esp. 56; E. Jerome Van Kuiken, "Convergence in the 'Reformed' Theologies of T. F. Torrance and Jacob Arminius" in Keith D. Stanglin, Mark G. Bilby and Mark H. Mann, eds., *Reconsidering Arminius: Beyond the Reformed and Wesleyan Divide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), 130 n. 27.

PERSONS, POWERS AND PLURALITIES

Flett, Eric G.

Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011

The best kind of theology is generative. That is, it inspires others to take what they find, develop, expand, and apply it in ways that were perhaps never even imagined by the original author. One of the most encouraging things about the recent burgeoning of interest in T. F. Torrance is the way it has provoked a new generation of theologians to explore its implications for topics about which Torrance himself said very little. This is especially appropriate given that Torrance was essentially doing just this with his supreme mentor, Karl Barth. His pioneering work in theology and science, for example, amounts to a formidable attempt to press through the ramifications of Barth's work for a field relatively untouched by Barth himself.

So it is that Eric Flett, in this lucid and masterly revised doctoral dissertation, asks us to consider how Torrance can help us articulate a trinitarian theology of culture. Why might this be necessary or fruitful? After all, theologies of culture abound. The answer lies, I think, in the profoundly trinitarian character of Torrance's outlook. With very few exceptions, current Christian perspectives on, for example, the arts, politics and economics, are pervaded by what is in effect a unitarian metaphysics — in which a generic theism provides the basic outline, perhaps coloured in at various stages by an appeal to the trinitarian patterns of God's engagement with the world. Quite rightly, Flett, through Torrance, reorients the whole topic unashamedly around the triunity of God, not only as it is displayed in the economy of creation and salvation, but more fundamentally as it characterizes God's own life *ad intra*.

Thus Flett gives us an extended exposition of the Scottish theologian's conceptions of creation and humanity as they relate to the self-disclosure of the three-fold God — and, we might add, with a clarity not always evident in Torrance's own writing (!). Even on its own, this serves as a first-rate summary of Torrance's relational ontology. But the most original part of Flett's study concerns the way he takes this ontology and begins to work it out in relation to culture, focusing especially on Torrance's notion of "the social co-efficient of knowledge." He expands on the meaning of this term in relation to Torrance

himself, but extends its potential and implications beyond what Torrance himself envisaged. In the final chapter, he asks what it means for the life of the Church, not only as the site where the theological realities he has been speaking about are embodied, but also as the agent of transformation. He concentrates especially on the re-configuration of the concept of person, and on what Torrance calls “three masterful ideas” that shaped Western scientific culture: the unity, intelligibility, and freedom of the universe. Flett closes by “improvising” for us: sketching the relations between the triune personhood of God and “a design for living,” between the contingency of creation and the “principalities and powers,” and between human identity/agency and the plurality of human culture.

Flett has started the ball rolling in this field, orienting us in just the right direction. It is now for others — or perhaps Flett himself? — to take things much further than this, and show us in detail how *particular fields of cultural activity* can be transformed, in theory and practice, by the stunning theological vision Torrance has given us.

Jeremy Begbie
Thomas A. Langford Research Professor of Theology,
Duke Divinity School, Duke University

**THOMAS F. TORRANCE AND THE CHURCH FATHERS:
A REFORMED, EVANGELICAL, AND ECUMENICAL
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PATRISTIC TRADITION**

Raddcliff, Jason R.

Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2014. Paper, xx + 228 pp.

T. F. Torrance, one of the greatest English-speaking theologians of the 20th century, is known for many things, but surely two of the most important are his interpretation of the Church Fathers and his substantive dialogue with Eastern Orthodox theologians. This book, a revision of a Ph.D. dissertation completed at the University of Edinburgh, brings these two aspects of Torrance's work together by focusing on his understanding of the *consensus patrum* and the ecumenical implications of that understanding.

The first two chapters set the stage for Radcliff's portrayal of Torrance's unique reconstruction of the patristic tradition by describing other historical attempts at patristic retrieval. Chapter one surveys such retrievals in Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and different eras of Protestantism. Radcliff unsurprisingly argues that Roman Catholic understandings of the *consensus patrum* have relied largely on Augustine as filtered through Aquinas, and that Eastern Orthodox reconstructions have viewed the Fathers through the lens of Gregory Palamas' famous distinction between the essence and energies of God. The early and later Reformers, according to Radcliff, sought to show the fundamental continuity between the Bible, the early Fathers, and their own teaching, in contrast to the distortions of Medieval Roman Catholicism. By the late 19th century, however, Protestants had divided into biblicists who essentially ignored the Church Fathers via a rigorous interpretation of *sola Scriptura*, and those like Harnack who saw the Fathers' message as a kernel of biblical truth surrounded by the chaff of Hellenistic philosophy. Then in chapter two Radcliff surveys three 20th-century evangelical rediscoveries of the Church Fathers. The first was a conversionist movement, in which evangelicals who rediscovered the Fathers converted to Eastern Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism. The second was the movement of Emerging Christianity, whose eclectic appropriation of early Christian practices and beliefs was as much a protest against seeker-sensitive worship as it was

a serious retrieval of the past. The third was the movement of Ancient-Future Christianity and Paleo-Orthodoxy represented by Robert Webber and Thomas Oden. Radcliff argues that this movement was a much more serious appropriation of the Fathers than the first two, but it tended to read Augustinian and Protestant theology back into the entire early Church.

Against this backdrop, Radcliff spends chapters three through five describing T. F. Torrance's approach to the *consensus patrum*. In chapter three, he points out that Torrance was unique as a *Western* theologian focusing almost exclusively on the *Greek* Fathers. He asserts that at the heart of Torrance's understanding of patristic theology lies the Nicene and Athanasian concept of the *homoousion*, from which Torrance argues against any dualism that would divide God as he is in himself from God as he has revealed himself to us. Chapter four describes Torrance's famous demarcation of patristic theology into two axes and two streams. Torrance sees a sharp distinction between the Athanasian-Cyrrillian axis founded on the *homoousion* and the Cappadocian axis with its inherent dualism between who God is and how he reveals himself to us, and he believes that both the Byzantine and the Medieval streams of thought were plagued by such dualism. In chapter five, Radcliff asserts that the significance of Torrance's approach lies in the fact that he remains faithful to the central tenets of Reformed theology (especially the divine initiative in salvation) while seeking genuine dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox. His proposal to return to the Athanasian-Cyrrillian axis requires both Reformed and Orthodox to "unknow" (p. 170) certain elements of their own tradition, elements that Torrance attributes to the dualism that infected both Byzantine and Western theology later in Christian history.

While chapters three through five are mainly descriptive, Radcliff also highlights the most significant and brilliant of Torrance's insights into the Fathers and into Christian theology more generally. For example, he explains Torrance's notion of scientific or "objective" theology, in which God as object is known only through his self-revelation, and he insists that this means that biblical words always point beyond themselves to the divine realities to which they refer (p. 81). Radcliff does well to emphasize this, because in an academic world that tends to oscillate between biblical *words* and theological *concepts*, Torrance's insistence that we focus on the divine *reality* stands as an important corrective. Radcliff similarly points out that Torrance did not hold to the distinction between Alexandrian and Antiochene Christology and that his role in moving patristics scholarship away from that dichotomy (which had dominated early 20th-century scholarship) "cannot be overstated" (p. 95). This too is a valuable point, especially considering that the alleged Antiochene/Alexandrian dichotomy *still*

does dominate textbooks on historical theology, church history, and the history of interpretation.

Radcliff's book concludes with an assessment of Torrance's *consensus patrum* and a proposed manner of adopting it. He emphasizes the importance of Torrance's claim that one can see contemporary evangelicalism, just as much as Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, as the heir of patristic theology (p. 184). He correctly points out that Torrance's focus on the ontology and personhood of Christ can provide an important corrective to typical Reformed thought focusing more exclusively on atonement (p. 192). In the midst of Radcliff's great appreciation for Torrance, he also expresses significant reservations. He argues that Torrance's criticism of the Cappadocians may actually have been aimed at the contemporary dualism of John Zizioulas and may have reflected the 1980s more than the 380s (p. 194; cf. p. 137). Similarly, Radcliff disapprovingly notes one of the most frustrating aspects of Torrance's work: he "hardly discusses other patristic scholars or secondary texts and is not always entirely transparent about his filters for reading The Fathers" (p. 194). Radcliff summarizes both his appreciation and his reservations by claiming that while evangelical patristic scholarship needs more nuance than is evident in Torrance's Athanasian/Cappadocian line of demarcation, such scholarship also needs to learn from Torrance's contention that there were streams of thought in patristic theology, streams that we can and should elucidate without delineating them as starkly as Torrance did (p. 197).

This is a very helpful book. Radcliff has summarized the work of a prolific theologian writing about an immense body of theological literature, and I believe his summaries are generally fair and accurate. Radcliff succeeds well in capturing the central features of Torrance's reading of the Fathers, in pointing out problems with Torrance's *consensus patrum*, and in offering fruitful suggestions by which future research might avoid these problems.

At the same time, Radcliff's book would have been stronger with more attention to two major issues that perennially cloud any attempts to appropriate Torrance's *consensus patrum*. The first has to do with the way Torrance handles his patristic sources. Radcliff briefly discusses this matter (pp. 61-2), emphasizing that Torrance does not cite any given edition of the text and often cites many passages in the same footnote. What Radcliff implies but does not state, though, is that Torrance rarely quotes his sources. He includes many, many references, but rarely does he excerpt key passages and analyze them in detail. Radcliff would have done well to focus more attention than he did on the way Torrance uses his patristic sources. The second issue is whether Torrance reads too much

of his own theology (or perhaps, too much of Barth's theology) into the Church Fathers. One could argue that this is the elephant in the room, because the validity of Torrance's approach to the Fathers would be seriously undermined if indeed it were true that Torrance's Athanasius is simply Torrance (or Barth) in fourth-century garb. Radcliff addresses this issue in his conclusion (pp. 191-3), but considering its gravity, one might have expected him to have done more with it.

The fact that Radcliff's book does not go deeper into those two questions does not in any way diminish its usefulness, but it does place the book's value in a different sphere than would have been the case if he had addressed them more substantially. A scholar who is unconvinced by Torrance's interpretation of patristic theology is not going to be persuaded by Radcliff's work. The elephant is still in the room. But at the same time, Torrance's approach to patristic theology is deeply provocative and — if it is even partially correct in its main assertions — profoundly significant. In my opinion, we disregard Torrance's interpretations at our own peril. At a time when not only scholars but even lay people are increasingly interested in the early Church, Torrance's *consensus patrum* deserves a broader hearing than it has received thus far. By pointing us to Torrance's reading of the Fathers, Radcliff has done the evangelical scholarly community, the broader evangelical community, and indeed the still broader ecumenical community, a great service.

Donald Fairbairn
Robert E. Cooley Professor of Early Christianity,
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary