

ARTICLES

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

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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.