

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.

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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 Lorien 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.