

## THOMAS F. TORRANCE'S EARLY ECUMENICAL VIEWS ON ECCLESIOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of this study is to explore the fundamental theological principles which Thomas F. Torrance considered to be necessary for ecumenical agreement in ecclesiological questions. In undertaking this endeavor, two limitations are set. On the one hand, the inquiry is limited to the early ecumenical engagement of Torrance, that is, his work in the late 1940s and 1950s. On the other hand, due to the variety of topics within ecclesiology which are covered in his studies from this period, this study is restricted to two of his articles in which great emphasis is given to the relation of Christ with his Church, the nature and mission of the Church, and the Christological correction of ecclesiology. These studies are Concerning Amsterdam I. The Nature and Mission of the Church and The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church. After a systematic overview of these two studies, a personal reflection is given in which the leading ideas of Torrance's ecumenical engagement in the field of ecclesiology are highlighted, and his three primary ecclesiological principles are outlined.*

### Introduction

Alister E. McGrath, in his work on Thomas F. Torrance's theological development and significance, writes the following about his ecumenical engagement:

It is arguable that Torrance's main contribution to ecumenical dialogue lay not so much in his personal participation in the bilateral conversations of the time [1940s and 1950s], but in his rigorous exploration of the fundamental theological principles which he considered to be the necessary basis of such dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. E. McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 95.

These fundamental theological principles are what this study aims to explore. In pursuing this purpose, the following limits have been taken into account. First, the inquiry has been limited to the early ecumenical engagement of Torrance, that is, especially in the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Second, even his studies written within this period cover a variety of topics within ecclesiology.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, this study is restricted to two articles by Torrance, which are also referred to by McGrath, in which great emphasis is given to the relation of Christ with his Church, the nature and mission of the Church, and the Christological correction of ecclesiology. These are the boundaries within which we pursue our study of Torrance's leading ecumenical principles.

In order to do so, a systematic overview of the two relevant studies, "Concerning Amsterdam I. The Nature and Mission of the Church"<sup>4</sup> and "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church,"<sup>5</sup> is first given, which is followed by a summary of the leading ideas of Torrance's ecumenical engagement.

### **Concerning Amsterdam I**

The purpose of this first overview is to face the ecclesiological questions which had been raised in the first two volumes prepared for the meeting of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam and to point the discussion further along the road to theological unity.<sup>6</sup>

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2 Torrance's later ecumenical engagement, especially in the Orthodox-Reformed dialogue from 1979, is marked by a different approach. In that case, Torrance proposed to begin with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and then from that basis to move on to the doctrines of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the sacraments, and the ministry. See T. F. Torrance, *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), xi. As we will see, his early ecumenical engagement is characterized by a Christocentric approach. This difference, however, does not result in inconsistency in his theology, because for him Trinitarian and Christological approaches are inseparable. See in the field of ecclesiology, e.g., T. F. Torrance, "Where Do We Go from Lund?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (1953): 58.

3 As McGrath points out in his book *Thomas F. Torrance*, 96. Torrance's writing on ecumenical issues in the 1950s were gathered together in T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church, Vol. 1, Order and Disorder* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959) and *Conflict and Agreement in the Church, Vol. 2, The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960).

4 T. F. Torrance, "Concerning Amsterdam I. The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Discussion of Vols. I and II of the Preparatory Studies," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2 (1949): 241-70.

5 T. F. Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 7 (1954): 245-269.

6 Torrance, *Concerning Amsterdam I.*, 241.

From the outset, Torrance sets out two principles. Firstly, the unity of the churches is an *eschatological reality* which is present even in the midst of disunity and yet is still to come at the end of history. It is a reality that "interpenetrates history and transcends it."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, its effect is twofold: it brings the churches together to seek unity and yet prevents them "from snatching too hastily at a visible unity."<sup>8</sup>

This brings us to the second principle of his argument. Torrance offers a middle way between confessionalism and relativism which he describes as *Eucharistic thinking*: "not that primarily in which we offer of our own traditions and efforts toward a common pool, but an ever-new and thankful receiving together of the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 14.5 and Eph. 4.12-16) 'till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that speaking the truth in love we may grow up unto Him in all things who is the head, even Christ.'"<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand the notion of Eucharistic thinking, we should note that Torrance utilizes the notion in two ways. Figuratively, it means the Eucharistic attitude, that is, the humility of receiving, instead of offering or giving,<sup>10</sup> which is considered to be the correct attitude in ecumenical relations. Literally, Eucharistic thinking denotes the idea that the Eucharist mediates eschatological unity to us. Through the Eucharist we receive judgment upon and, at the same time, healing for our divisions.<sup>11</sup> These two principles, the unity of the Church as eschatological reality and the need for Eucharistic thinking, have several implications which Torrance unfolds as follows.

First, if the unity of the Church is eschatological, then ecclesiastical validity cannot be equated with any form of earthly validity. The validity of the ministry, order, councils, or theological formulations of the Church cannot and do not repose on any historical basis, but only on a certain divine act, i.e. the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the continuity of the Church is not based on the actual succession of bishops, but on Baptism whereby we are

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7 Ibid., 242.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 243.

10 Interestingly in his other study, "The Paschal Mystery of Christ and the Eucharist," in *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays toward Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 118, the act of offering is emphasized, although it is interpreted as participation in the self-offering of Christ.

11 Ibid., 243-244.

initiated into the unrepeatable events of Christ's life.<sup>12</sup>

Second, "if the given unity of the Church is essentially eschatological then there is ultimately no self-consistent whole in any historical traditions."<sup>13</sup> One's own tradition can be corrected and completed only by other traditions. We can find an interesting example of this in Torrance's two essays: "The Relevance of Orthodoxy" and "The Orthodox Church in Great Britain."<sup>14</sup>

In the first essay, Torrance interprets Acts 2:41-47 "through Orthodox eyes" to understand it in its original context.<sup>15</sup> Torrance highlights Orthodox principles which he deems to be normative also for the Reformed. The Church must let the truths of the Gospel impose themselves upon the Church's life in such a way that it must be aware that its doctrinal formulations only point to the divine truths but do not contain them.<sup>16</sup> It is the same concerning the Holy Spirit whom the Church does not possess, but rather is possessed by Him, and accordingly church structure must express this openness to the Majesty of God: instead of hierarchy, authority in fellowship is the right pattern.<sup>17</sup> Where Torrance is most critical of the Reformed in favor of the Orthodox is the topic of worship. He states that Reformed worship is far removed from the worship of the early Christians, whereas the Orthodox liturgy is the most biblically grounded. For him the main point of Orthodox liturgy is that it is considered to be lifted up by the Spirit into the ongoing heavenly worship, whereas Protestant worship is a way of expressing oneself before God.<sup>18</sup>

In the second essay, Torrance points out areas in which Orthodox contributions would be welcome in the British context in which, according to Torrance, many church leaders lack a solid theological grounding. In this situation the coherency of doctrine and church life, which is a characteristic of the Orthodox Church, is

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12 Ibid., 244-245.

13 Ibid., 245.

14 T. F. Torrance, "The Relevance of Orthodoxy," *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 4 (2013): 324-332; T. F. Torrance, "The Orthodox Church in Great Britain," *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 4 (2013): 333-339. Both essays can be found also in: M. Baker and T. Speidell, *T. F. Torrance and Eastern Orthodoxy: Theology in Reconciliation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015). In this study, footnote references to these essays match the page numbers as they appear in *Participatio*.

15 Torrance, "Relevance of Orthodoxy," 325.

16 Ibid., 325-327.

17 Ibid., 327-329. See also Torrance, "Orthodox Church in Great Britain," 337.

18 Torrance, "Relevance of Orthodoxy," 330-331.

needed.<sup>19</sup> In relation to this, Torrance also highlights the ability of the Orthodox Church to defend the Christian faith in a changing culture by learning to distinguish the central truth of the Gospel.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Torrance also suggests that the Orthodox Church might offer a simplified liturgy to the Reformed Church, in which a strong theological liturgy would be appreciated.<sup>21</sup> Finally, he proposes the rethinking of the doctrine of the Virgin Mary which could heal the deepest schism in the one people of God, i.e. between Israel and Christianity.<sup>22</sup>

Torrance's appreciation for the Orthodox Church arises from the conviction that its tradition is rooted more in the ancient form of Christianity than that of any other denomination.<sup>23</sup> For this reason it can help the Reformed Church to be more faithful to biblical principles. I think that Torrance's suggestion involves a great opportunity for renewal in the Reformed Church. Caution is needed, however, because Torrance's argument has its weakness as well as its strength. In fact, its weakness and strength both stem from the same root. While the Orthodox Church can help to provide a clearer picture of biblical truths, it can also hinder the embodiment of the Gospel in today's culture. A simple example: if we in postmodern society tried to renew the Reformed church service by using a simplified Orthodox liturgy, it would be more unfamiliar to many people - especially to the youth - than the well known Reformed liturgy. The simplified Orthodox liturgy may better reflect biblical truths, but its foreignness in today's western culture would likely obscure those truths for those in attendance. This does not mean, however, that Torrance's suggestion is wholly inappropriate to the contemporary context. His approach might be of immense help in finding new ways of worship that are faithful to the core of the Gospel. Thus, the *epiclesis* and the idea of joining the worship of God in heaven can provide the impetus for taking a fresh look at worship. It is important, however, to find a way of doing so that is accessible to people living in a postmodern age. In short, faithfulness to the Gospel demands that a way be prepared for the proclamation of the Gospel in each particular culture.

After this brief digression, we now turn to the third implication of Church unity as an eschatological reality. The given (doctrinal) unity places responsibility on the churches "to think out every doctrine into every other doctrine."<sup>24</sup> The

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19 Torrance, "Orthodox Church in Great Britain," 335.

20 Ibid., 336.

21 Ibid., 337-338.

22 Ibid., 338.

23 Torrance, "Relevance of Orthodoxy," 325.

24 Torrance, "Concerning Amsterdam I," 246.

result of this should be the correction of doctrines, overcoming differences, and then getting closer to the "most ultimate truths." Torrance highlights three doctrines: *ecclesiology* should be corrected by *Christology* and both of them by *eschatology*, because these suffered from arrested development in the course of church history.<sup>25</sup> In the rest of his study, Torrance deals with the agreements and disagreements concerning the nature and mission of the Church.

*The nature of the Church:* Concerning the relation of the Church to Christ, a question on which there is no agreement, Torrance highlights the following issues. First, he applies the pattern of the hypostatic union to the relation in such a way that he identifies the whole Christ as the "divine element" of the Church: "as God and Man are related in Christ so Christ and the Church are related."<sup>26</sup> Second, he emphasizes that the Church as the *Body* of Christ must not be conformed to the fashion of the world (in terms of a hierarchical structure) but should image its Lord in humble service. It is in this way that the Church becomes, as it were, sacramentally correlative to the life and passion of Christ. "It is thus that she [the Church] fills up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, and thus that she shews forth His death till He comes."<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the worldly structure of the Church is not the element whereby the Church images its Lord, and therefore neither does it belong to the everlasting *esse* (essence) of the Church. Third, concerning the continuity of the Church, Torrance stays within the pattern of the hypostatic union with its emphasis on Christ's sovereignty. The *visible* continuity of the Church cannot be underestimated, because as in the incarnation so in the Church: Christ is involved in physical events in space and time. Thus "the Church extends the corporeality of the Word and mediates it to a corporeal world through such physical events as the Bible, Preaching, the Sacraments, etc."<sup>28</sup> The same is true for the ministry, which is grounded in historical continuity with the apostolic foundation. However, all these are only means which, by their sacramental character, are used by Christ to communicate himself through them to the world. Church order must be conformed to this divinely appointed service to make room for this creative breaking of God's Word into the world. This is what it means to say that Christ is the head of the Church. A hierarchical church order should not prevent Christ's government over his Body.<sup>29</sup>

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25 Ibid., 247.

26 Ibid., 248. Torrance thinks that the hypostatic union is grounded upon the "immanent relation within the transcendent Trinity." See in Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, Vol 1, 44.

27 Torrance, "Concerning Amsterdam I.," 250.

28 Ibid., 252.

29 Ibid., 253-254.

*The mission of the Church:* The sacramental character of the Church brings it so close to its Lord that Torrance speaks, in a certain sense, of the identity of their actions: "her [the Church's] Word in the Gospel of reconciliation and forgiveness is in fact the Word and Power of Christ."<sup>30</sup> This sacramental character of the Church serves as a framework for the topic of apostolic succession which Torrance unfolds as follows. It is Christ who is the apostle sent by the Father. Christ gives us (the whole Body) to share in his ministry. However, within this ministry the role of the apostles is unique, because they formed the "human end" of the divine revelation. In this primary sense the apostolate is unrepeatable. It has its only "earthly counterpart" in the biblical witness of the Old and the New Testaments. The ministry of the Church inheres in its foundation, the unrepeatable apostolate, and the apostolate is mediated through the ministry. There is a chronological sequence between apostolate and ministry, but this inherence and mediation are more determinative in their relation to one another.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it is not the ministry of the priestly order of the Church on which the whole question of the apostolic succession turns, but the ministry of the whole Body which stands in the "apostolic succession" through its conformity to the apostles' witness and which has been empowered by Christ "to be a fellow-worker with him in the evangelization of the world." This is a "holy synergism," as Torrance names it.<sup>32</sup>

Torrance claims that the nature of the Church is fundamentally eschatological. Through it the new humanity, or rather the new creation, breaks into the world. The task of the Church is to let itself be the channel through which this divine act takes place. The mission of the Church is prevented by its "collaboration with" the world, by being clothed in the world's passing form and fashion, a disorder which obscures its real nature. In this prevention of mission even our traditions are to blame. They are "ever-deepening grooves" in which the power of God has been "systematically canalised."<sup>33</sup> The eschatological nature of the Church derives from its relation with its Lord in whom everything is already re-created and who gives a share in the new creation to his body.<sup>34</sup>

Having reviewed the first article, let us now turn to the second one. The evaluative comments are reserved until the last part of the essay where we will trace the main motifs which are connected and deepened in both studies.

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30 Ibid., 260.

31 Ibid., 260-63.

32 Ibid., 265.

33 Ibid., 270.

34 Ibid., 268-70.

## The Atonement and Oneness of the Church

Torrance states in this study that the biblical statement that the Church is the Body of Christ is not a mere figure but a reality, and accordingly the doctrine of the Church should be formulated in terms of the Christological analogy. He puts great emphasis on the results of modern biblical studies which bear on the Christological basis for our understanding of the doctrine of the Church. He deals especially with the bearing of atonement on the doctrine of Christ and, through it, on the doctrine of the Church.<sup>35</sup>

Although Torrance is critical of the way in which the doctrine of the hypostatic union has tended to be interpreted in static terms, he does not think that the classical formulation needs to be changed so much as it needs to be filled out "in accordance with its own fundamental position, in a more *dynamic* way."<sup>36</sup> It means to look upon the Chalcedonian formula in its context of Christ's mission for our salvation, as *the hypostatic union at work* in expiation and atonement. What does this dynamic reinterpretation of the hypostatic union mean in reference to the Church? Torrance highlights the importance of Christ's atoning assumption of our human nature and parallels it with our communion with Christ which he understands as our being given to participate in the hypostatic union. In the former case, it was the One who represented the Many and, in the latter case, it is the Many who now represent the One, yet only on the basis of the former representation.<sup>37</sup> I interpret this train of thought as a dynamic reinterpretation of the nature of the Church in terms of its mission to the world on the basis of the dynamic reinterpretation of the hypostatic union (person) of Christ in terms of his mission for our salvation.

Secondly, Torrance points out on the basis of the concepts of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* that though the atonement was supremely the act of God, the humanity of Christ has a full place within this divine action. "The manhood was integral and essential and not merely instrumental."<sup>38</sup> It was not simply the act of God *in* man but God *as* man. With respect to the hypostatic union, this means that in his substitutionary atonement, Christ took the enmity between God and man into his own flesh and actually intensified it. In him, man did not find shelter from God but was exposed to his judgment, face to face without any protection. Torrance then proceeds to apply this to the Church stating: "If such

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35 Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," 245-246.

36 Ibid., 247.

37 Ibid., 249.

38 Ibid., 250.



incorporation and substitution are the way of the Son of Man, they are the way of the Church as His Body."<sup>39</sup> He continues: "The only way the Church can follow Him is by way of *anhypostasia*, by way of self-denial and crucifixion, by letting Christ take its place and displace its self-assertion; and by way of *enhypostasia*, by way of incorporation and resurrection, by receiving from Christ the life which He has in Himself and which He gives His own."<sup>40</sup>

This application may not seem to be clear at first glance, and so it needs some explanation. *Anhypostasia* means that "in the *assumptio carnis* the human nature of Christ had no independent *per se* subsistence apart from the event of the Incarnation, apart from the hypostatic union."<sup>41</sup> Applied to the Church this means that the Church does not have an independent existence apart from the Lord who is its head. Torrance, however, does not stop at this point but speaks even of Christ's taking the place of the Church. The only idea that prevents Torrance at this point from Apollinarian error on the ecclesiological level is the inseparable bond between *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia*. Because the Church also has real *enhypostatic* existence within its relationship with Christ, its substitution is not equal with displacement. It expresses the openness of the Church to Christ's lordship over his Body. Substitution means in this case that the Church denies itself and its will in order to follow its Lord and his will.

Thirdly, Torrance turns to the application of the Christological analogy to the doctrine of the Church. He approaches it from different angles. Logically, the analogy is "a relation involving neither identity nor difference but something of likeness and something of difference *proportionaliter*."<sup>42</sup> Christologically, it means the application of the Chalcedonian terms *inconfuse* (unconfusedly) and *inseparabiliter* (inseparably) to the relation between Christ and the Church.<sup>43</sup> Soteriologically, it involves the *mirifica commutatio* (wonderful exchange). "Thus the analogical relation between Christ and the Church reposes entirely upon what He has done for the Church by taking its place that it might be conformed to Him, and is maintained because Christ continues to live for the Church so that the life of the Church is to be found not in itself but in Him."<sup>44</sup> Pneumatologically, the Christological analogy refers to the fact that as the Word became flesh through the Spirit – though the flesh did not become the Word – it is through

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39 Ibid., 252.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 249.

42 Ibid., 253. *Proportionaliter* means proportionally.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 254.

the Spirit that the Church is assumed by Christ as his body in an irreversible relationship.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Torrance summarizes the relation of Christ and his Church along the lines of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia*, asserting that the Church does not have an independent *hypostasis* apart from the atoning work of Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit, but through incorporation into Christ it is given a real *hypostasis* and therefore a concrete function. This concrete function might be interpreted as a certain view of *imitatio Christi*: the Church analogically “bears about in its body the dying and rising of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>46</sup> This is the ontological reality which is enveloped in the biblical assertion “the Church is the Body of Christ.”

On the basis of the above mentioned Christological concepts, Torrance asserts the following issues concerning the Church. Firstly, the Church must be a *suffering servant*, “working out analogically in itself what happened in Christ for the Church, to fill up in its body that which is eschatologically in arrears of the sufferings of Christ and so to fulfil the Word of God.”<sup>47</sup> It is in this way that the Church participates in the ministry of Christ. This participation has, however, further conditions to be mentioned. This leads us to the second point. The Church’s participation in the ministry of Christ is analogical, involving likeness as well as difference. What happened to Christ *uniquely* happens also to his Church *in its way*.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, the priesthood of Christ and of the Church must be *distinguished* as must also be his sacrifice and the Eucharistic action of the Church. Their *unity* and also the nature of their relation consists in the fact that the Church *serves* its Lord, entirely *subordinated* to him, and it is through its ministry that Christ carries out his own. Torrance, at this point, speaks even of the substitution of the Church by Christ, that the Church in its ministry allows Christ to displace the Church. It is Christ himself through his Holy Spirit who “fulfills His own ministry” in and through the Church.<sup>49</sup> Thirdly, Torrance interprets redemption as Christ entering our human existence, into the principles and structures of our fallen world, in order to justify us apart from the Law.<sup>50</sup> For the Church, sharing in that redemption means that principles and structures of this age, and therefore the historico-judicial forms of the Church,

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45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 256.

47 Ibid., 257.

48 Torrance cites from the report of the Faith and Order Conference at Lund.

49 Ibid., 257-59.

50 Torrance does not identify the worldly structures with sin but looks upon them as impregnated with sin in this age.

are relativized, that is, the Church is not fettered by them but freed to live within them and use them for its mission.<sup>51</sup>

The next topic Torrance deals with is that of ecclesial succession. He interprets the term *stoikheion* (succession) according to its meaning in the Epistles to the Galatians and the Colossians, that is, as a "temporal succession turned into a legal tradition or cosmological principle."<sup>52</sup> In this sense, *stoikheion* is demonic, seeking to usurp the authority of God. Christ, however, redeemed us from the tyrant force of *stoikheion*.<sup>53</sup> This relativizes the relation of the Church to historical succession. Torrance does not expound upon this but states that the Church "must learn [. . .] to use succession in Christ." He speaks similarly of tradition which may degenerate into an independent principle but can be correctly used "in terms of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Body of Christ."<sup>54</sup>

Finally, under the heading "The sacramental life of the Church," Torrance applies sacramentally the dynamic concept of hypostatic union (the mutual involution of incarnation and atonement) to the life of the Church. This means that he parallels incarnation and atonement with baptism and Eucharist. Both pairs are "dual moments in the one movement"; incarnation and atonement constitute the moment of redemption, while baptism and Eucharist constitute the moment of sanctification.<sup>55</sup> In the case of the sacraments this means that though both have to do with our incorporation into Christ clothed with his Gospel, baptism speaks of it as an abiding reality while in the Eucharist it is an eschatologically repeated event. In terms of unity this means that through baptismal incorporation the Church is given unity as a perfect reality; nevertheless this unity needs to be realized through continuous Eucharistic communion and growing up in the unity of faith. The way of the Church is growth from unity to unity in the fullness of Christ.<sup>56</sup> Baptism is the primary enactment and expression of the oneness of the Church, because in it we are incorporated into Christ in whom not only God and man have been inseparably bound together but also the divine judgment of man has been brought about. In our incorporation into Christ our sinful divisions are brought under that judgment and destroyed in Christ. The Eucharistic communion does not add

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51 Ibid., 260-61.

52 Ibid., 263.

53 As in the case of worldly structures, succession in itself is not evil. See *ibid.*, 264.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 265.

56 Ibid., 265-66.

anything to this incorporation and unity but renews the Church's oneness in Christ and anticipates its fullness to come in order to enable the Church to live out its unity in a broken and divided world.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Torrance expands the topic of unity so as to center it on the topic of mission, asserting that "*the road to unity lies through atonement*" which denotes the "entering [of the Church] into Christ's passion for the redemption and unification of the broken and divided world."<sup>58</sup> In this way, unity and mission are essentially interwoven, and unity becomes a dynamic concept similar to that of the hypostatic union at the Christological level. This dynamic unity constitutes the foundation and essence, or the *esse* of the Church, which relativizes every other part of its life such as tradition and succession. The mission of the Church likewise becomes, in a certain sense, the *actualization* of the atoning work of Christ. "The Church is, so to speak, the atonement becoming actual among men in the resurrection of a new humanity."<sup>59</sup>

Now that we have overviewed these two specific studies, let us summarize our findings by identifying Torrance's primary ecclesiological principles.

### **Summary of Torrance's Ecclesiological Principles**

As we have seen, Torrance sets out two principles in the first study we presented, both of which point in the same direction: 1) the unity of the Church is an eschatological reality both interpenetrating and transcending history that relativizes all ecclesiastical traditions; 2) the Eucharist has the same effect in that it-relativizes our traditions and also judges and heals our divisions. These two principles speak of the same reality, because it is through the Eucharist that unity as an eschatological reality interpenetrates history. The Eucharistic principle, however, develops the first principle, because it points out that our unity is not a goal which we must try to reach through our ecumenical endeavors, but is rather a fully personal reality in Christ. In him, receiving his body and being his body, we become one. It is not something which we receive through the sacrament from the divine sphere above history, but it is Christ himself who communicates himself to us, giving himself, judging us, and healing our divisions by giving us participation in himself and therefore in his oneness. This becoming and being in relationship with Christ is the core idea of the second part of Torrance's article. Christ relates to his Church as his

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57 Ibid., 266-267.

58 Ibid., 267.

59 Ibid., 268.

two natures relate to each other such that the Church is entirely subordinated to him and serves its Lord in humble mission. This relation serves as a basis for the *sacramental character* of the Church, whereby Christ communicates himself not only to the Church but through the Church to the world. Scripture, preaching, and sacraments are only means, but they are means whereby Christ is present to his Church and through the Church to the world. In this mission the Church is a "fellow-worker" with Christ in "holy synergism."<sup>60</sup> Finally, the mission of the Church has a universal scope, because it involves the realization of the new creation achieved in the new humanity of Christ throughout the world in need of redemption.

In the second study, the topics of the Church's sacramental character and holy synergism are detailed especially along the lines of the doctrines of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia*. Torrance even deepens the classical meaning of these doctrines in their application to the relation of the Church to its Lord. *Anhypostasia* means not only that the Church does not have independent existence apart from Christ, but that it has existence in Christ only if it lets itself be displaced by Christ. *Enhypostasia* means not only that the Church is given a real existence in its relation with Christ, but that the Church is entirely dependent on Christ who gives his own life to his Church.

In this way, Torrance is able to emphasize the Church's utter dependence on Christ as it participates in his mission such that holy synergism does not mean any independent co-working of the Church apart from Christ, because everything it does depends entirely on Christ's creative act in and through the Church in virtue of its sacramental character. Indeed, the participatory nature of the Church's mission means that it is actually Christ who is not only present in it but also at work through it. He is the one who fulfills his mission by means of the Church. However, the subsistence of the Church is not annulled by Christ but rather creatively upheld and fully used to serve the aim of its Lord. This is the nature of the Church, its dynamic nature at work in the mission of Christ. This is what makes the Church the Body of Christ. This is the *esse* of the Church<sup>61</sup> which relativizes every "outer form," worldly structure, and historical succession, yet frees them in Christ in order to be used for his mission.

The pattern of the hypostatic union serves as a framework for the whole system by which the divine and the human are related in Torrance's ecclesiological

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60 Torrance, "Concerning Amsterdam I," 265.

61 In his *Conflict and Agreement in the Church, Vol. I*, 106, Torrance calls Christ the *esse* of the Church. My argument does not oppose this statement but intends to support it.

theology, giving constant priority to the divine over the human.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the idea of substitutionary atonement gives dynamism to what Torrance deems as a static understanding of the hypostatic union which is then realized on the side of the Church as it serves its Lord, letting him fulfill his mission through the Church. In this mission the Church is almost identified at certain points with Christ; however, the firm Christological basis protects the importance of the Chalcedonian *inconfuse* in the Church's relation to Christ. The idea of the participatory nature of the Church's mission can be misleading, if it is interpreted as an underestimation of the visible Church. In light of the Church's sacramental character, however, this idea leads, on the contrary, to a high estimation of the Church, because it asserts nothing less than that in and through the Church it is Christ himself who is present and at work. In and through the Church it is the new creation which breaks into history and reconciles the world in its estrangement from God.

In conclusion, Torrance's ecclesiological views on the relation of Christ and his Church can be summed up in the following way: the pattern of the *hypostatic union* should be applied to the whole life of the Church by which it serves as the basis for the Church's *sacramental character*. This means that the Church and its whole life—Scripture, preaching, sacraments, mission, etc.—point away from themselves to the Church's Lord. It also means that the Church is utterly dependent on its Lord in whose mission it is given to participate. This derives from the dynamic reinterpretation of the hypostatic union and its application to the mission of the Church. "As in atoning reconciliation incorporation in Christ is on the ground of substitution, so in the ministry of reconciliation participation in that ministry is on the ground of substitution."<sup>63</sup> This is the way that the Church may really be the Body of Christ and whereby it can participate in fulfilling the mission of its Lord to the world.

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62 Torrance writes: "The *unio hypostatica*, is, as it were, projected through the Holy Ghost [ . . . ] to form the relation between Christ and His Church, between the real presence and the bread and the wine in the Eucharist, between the divine Word and human speech in the *kerygma*". See *ibid.*, 44. This pattern applies to every element of the Church, giving it its sacramental character.

63 Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," 259.