

**A Reponse to Andrew Purves' Paper--
"I Yet Not I But Christ:' Galatians 2:20 and the Christian Life
in the Theology of T. F. Torrance"**

for the *Thomas F. Torrance Fellowship* Annual Meeting
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I wish to thank Dr. Andrew Purves for a well-thought-out, clearly articulated, faithful rendering of such a fundamental Torrancian concept as the vicarious humanity of Christ, particularly as it finds expression in the theological implications which underlie Galatians 2:20. This is actually the second version of the remarks I originally wrote to be presented here. I suppose it might have been easier to respond to a paper with which I have strident disagreements. But inasmuch as I resonate so strongly with the theological insights of both Thomas and James Torrance, having had the privilege of studying with James in my postgraduate years, I found myself tending to reiterate what you had already said, though lacking your admirable conciseness. Thus, you have presented me with a delightful problem. Aside from my inclination to want to emit an "Amen! Preach it, brother," I trust you would appreciate more than a hearty hurrah. So I have tried to consult my own life and teaching experiences to identify aspects of this subject which might invite further clarification or development, especially points which either my students or lay people in general have struggled to grasp as they have had occasion to become acquainted with this paradigm of the vicarious humanity of Christ.

As I was engaged in rethinking what I might say here, I have at the same time been challenged to think theologically in the midst of a very disturbing event that occurred within the particular existential context of my life in Spokane, WA. A few weeks ago a

horrendous automobile crash happened in which a van carrying a father and five kids—ranging in age from two and twelve—was hit by a driver who crossed a grassy median and plowed into them head-on. In one devastating collision that reduced their vehicle to a collapsed mass of mangled metal, an entire generation of five children—with all of the bundles of experiences, hopes and dreams bound up with their young lives—vanished either instantly or within minutes. The sobering realism of that event dominated the news reports and prevented any retreat for me into a realm of comforting theological abstractions. The shocking wallop of such a catastrophic loss—not only because it involved children but because it wiped out an entire up-until-then *large* family’s offspring—had assaulted the sensitivities of so many in my community that it was hard not hearing about it in casual conversations everywhere. But the shock of the accident itself was accompanied by an equally unexpected response from the bereft parents, which found sound-bite expression in the following day’s newspaper headlines: “Death of kids called God’s will.” I envisioned that as precipitating many a water cooler conversation around the workplaces of my city that day. (It would be interesting to explore the implications of the concept of Jesus’ vicarious humanity for one’s view of divine providence in the face of tragic loss such as this. But that is for another day). A third round of headlines the next day appeared as the following: “In grief, family offers forgiveness,” which told of the grief-stricken mother visiting the driver at fault in his hospital room to deliver that word of forgiveness issuing out of her fervent Mennonite faith. The question pressed in on me with unrelenting insistence: What, if anything, does the vicarious humanity of Christ have to offer to this distraught Christian woman in the face of such catastrophic loss? I will return to this incident later.

Rather than summarizing your already fine summary of Torrance's understanding of the vicarious humanity of Christ, I would like to focus our attention and invite further contemplation around three areas: 1) the implications for understanding human personhood, 2) the ontologically inclusive nature of Jesus' elective, vicarious representation, and 3) some further thoughts on the nature of our participation in Christ.

Dr. Purves has rightfully spotlighted Galatians 2:20 (i.e., "I live yet not I but Christ") as a pivotal hermeneutic of the Gospel in Torrance's thinking. As Torrance himself expressed it, "We must never unwittingly cast people back on themselves. For the gospel is always 'Not I, but Christ.' The first concern of preaching, then, is 'in Christ's grasp of us rather than in our grasp of him.'"¹ Of all the Pauline literature, Galatians is particularly well suited to be a biblical anchor for discussion of the vicarious humanity of Christ, for Paul is at pains to take to task any perspective--however outwardly religious--which seeks to detract from grace by supplanting the full glory of God's atoning work in, through and as the man Jesus Christ. However fine-sounding the arguments may be which stroke one's ego by suggesting that human perfectibility is attainable if one only prays/strives/witnesses/studies/serves/(fill-in-the-blank) diligently enough, they are variations on the theme of self-justification for Paul. Adhering to such a supposed "gospel" is embracing the very antithesis of the true Gospel of grace, he insists; it is a mere charade, "really no gospel at all" (Galatians 1:6-7).

1. Implications for understanding human personhood

Turning first to the matter of *human personhood*, what, then, avoids the shoals of self-justification while giving us a firm place on which to stand as human persons before God? What does Galatians 2:20 tell us about the Christian's self-identity in Christ?

¹ T. F. Torrance, "Preaching Jesus Christ" in *A Passion for Christ*, Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1999.

Ironically, though it begins with the word “I,” the dominant note is a sobering one: *Christ crucified*. That is the first point of identity in this context, Paul says. Who am I? One whose destiny is bound up with the Crucified Lord. The first premise of Galatians 2:20—“I have been crucified with Christ”—is a jarring one that dismantles any grounds for relying on our own inherent goodness or human capabilities. As strange as it sounds, death is the first order of business in the Christian life. As Torrance (echoing Barth’s frequent refrain) puts it,

“. . .the fact that God’s Only Begotten Beloved Son had to become incarnate in the world in order to restore men and women to fellowship with God, shows the depth of their need, and the dire reality of sin and its judgment. If it took the coming of the Eternal God into time. . .in order to redeem time, there must be a fearful chasm, utter separation, between God and man.”²

Clearly, our plight is so dire that we in and of ourselves are helpless and hopeless apart from this intervention on our behalf. Grace revolves around *being rescued* from the present evil age, *and the Rescuer is not us!*

Torrance goes on to speak of the great irony of God’s justifying activity in Christ in the face of our hopeless situation. Healing grace first comes to us looking like its precise opposite:

“. . .by putting us completely in the right or the truth with God, Christ calls us completely into question. . . .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 centre of a volcanic disturbance in human 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.”³

² T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002 (originally appearing as the Auburn Theological Seminary lectures, 1939), p. 76. Cf. also T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988, p. 160. Note: where Torrance uses what appears to be non-inclusive language—“men,” “mankind,” etc.—the context in each case clearly indicates inclusion of both men and women. I will not tamper with the original form of the quotes, even while drawing the readers’ attention to the obviously inclusive tenor of his meaning.

³ T. F. Torrance, “Cheap and Costly Grace,” in *God and Rationality*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 65-66. Cf. also T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press,

And yet this word of judgment *is* the needed grace. This exposure of judgment is good news! We no longer have to live a lie, burdened with maintaining the pretense of being in the right independent of God's intervening act of grace in Christ! Our forgiveness is secured not through our own presumed goodness but by this necessary death.

The question at hand is what theological resources we might draw on to form a healthy view of the self. Do the "ground rules" change when one considers the spiritual formation of the self in relation to *Christ*—i.e., the *Christian* life? Barth cites a common *misconception* that a thoroughgoing Gospel of grace inevitably leads to "all of Christ" meaning "nothing of us." The same misconception is sometimes attached to the notion of the double movement aspect of the vicarious humanity of Christ, taking a form like this: "If Christ not only represents God to us, but also represents us to God even in our faith response to God, where is there any room for active involvement on the believer's part? Thankfully, the language of Paul offers a valuable corrective. The "I have been crucified with Christ" is followed in close proximity by "*I live*"—a seemingly oxymoronic statement if there ever were one! The "I" of the believer has been incorporated into Christ's death, and yet that "I"-self nevertheless lives. Appended to that assertion he continues, "yet not I but Christ," which might sound like the self has been erased, until the rejoinder is added "and the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." What is going on here? I have *died*. . .no wait a minute, I *live*. . .hang on, at the most fundamental level it is *Christ*, not me. . .and yet, it is still my *own* particular life---it is truly my own unique self that is being lived out.

1982, p. 18: "The fact that, through the free grace of God, Jesus Christ is made our Righteousness means that we have no righteousness of our own. To be put freely in the right with God means that we and all our vaunted right are utterly called in question before God. Epistemologically, this means that to be put in the truth with God reveals that in ourselves we are in the wrong."

Here is where the concept of the hypostatic union of Christ, which Purves rightly highlights as central to Torrance's dynamic understanding of the Person and work of Christ, might be profitably extended beyond its immediate reference to the union of divine and human natures in Christ. The twin notions of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* declare in complementary fashion vital truth about the inner constitution of Jesus' Personhood: *Anhypostasia* asserts that Jesus has no independent existence apart from the eternal Logos of God assuming human nature, while *enhypostasia* expresses the fact that Jesus nevertheless does exist as a particular, concrete human being in this relationship with the Eternal Logos. That is to say, as Purves observes, Jesus' personhood is *enhypostatic* in the Logos of God as its Subject.⁴

Can we not legitimately extend this relationship to pertain also to the *believer's* relationship with Christ, as intimated in Galatians 2:20? The human self, theologically viewed, has no independent autonomous existence in itself. Indeed, as Purves puts it succinctly, echoing Emil Brunner: "Autonomy is unbelief."⁵ By that token, to operate on the assumption that the self is autonomous, absolutely independent and self-sustaining is to embrace untruth by mistaking a "pseudo-self" for the real self. It is to circumvent the necessary judgment on the pseudo-self expressed in the assertion "I have been crucified with Christ," severing it from its corollary: "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." To quote Torrance,

Sin is the contradiction introduced into the very nature of man as essentially dependent on God. . . . Sin is a contradiction in the heart and at the basis of human existence as a personal being before God, his/her Creator. . . . a corruption of his whole existence and a disintegration of his very self in its relation to God.⁶

⁴ Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 26.

⁵ Purves, *Reconstructing*, p. 25.

⁶ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, pp. 161-2.

Such a depiction of the ravaging effect of sin at the ontological roots of selfhood is reminiscent of Athanasius' language, which speaks of sin as wreaking the corruption and corrosion of our being, launching us on a dehumanizing trajectory toward non-existence.⁷

In short, true human selfhood is *enhypostatic* in Christ, correlative within creaturely limits to Christ's humanity being grounded in the Eternal Word of God.⁸ Likewise, we become truly human only as we live in relationship with the Word and Image of God—namely, Christ. The self's origin derives from God its Creator—an ontological connection that is maintained even when the self denies that vital connection and seeks to ground itself in itself. Far from our individual personalities dissolving into nothingness, we discover a new freedom to become more truly ourselves than ever before. The distinctiveness of our personhood is not squashed but comes into sharper focus through this relational connection with the Word. Such union and communion of God through the Risen Christ is, as Torrance depicts it,

“the restoration of true creaturehood to man, the affirmation of man in the fullness of his human existence and reality. . . .the humanizing in Jesus of dehumanized man. . . .the foundation and source of a profound and radically new Christian humanism. . . .”⁹

Torrance, Purves and I among many others readily exhibit a rightful enthusiasm for exploring more of the implications for a healthy view of the self which derive naturally from a deeper understanding of the truly human Personhood of Christ. Precisely because the inescapably vicarious tenor of “I live yet not I but Christ” can mistakenly court a

⁷ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, translated & edited by A. R. Mowbray of C.S. M.V., London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., 1944, pp. 32-35.

⁸ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, p. 106.

⁹ T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1976, p. 79, to which he adds the summative comment: “This is the ontological side of redemption, the healing and restoring of being in relation to the creative Source of all being.”

distorted or truncated view of the self in relationship with Christ, as we have seen—e.g., “Christ is all, I am nothing”—it is all the more reason why more careful development of this theme is surely in order.

2. The ontologically inclusive nature of Jesus’ elective, vicarious representation

Torrance’s articulation of a double movement of Christ introduces concepts of representation and substitution that must be carefully expressed lest we unwittingly ignite further misunderstandings. “Christ for us” can begin to be heard as “Christ instead of us,” which can suggest “Christ replacing us” to the extent that “us” becomes obliterated altogether. Again, when “all is Christ” becomes heard as “nothing of us” in any sense whatsoever, something has gone awry.¹⁰ To some, this trajectory becomes inevitable when the concept of substitution is introduced into the conversation. Dorothee Sölle and John Macquarrie, for instance, conclude that substitution *excludes* the person being substituted, which they see as dehumanizing and depersonalizing. In opting for the alternative term of representation to describe Jesus’ atoning work, they feel confident that they have avoided the troublesome connotations connected with substitution. But their understandings of Christ as Representative differ significantly from the double representative role of Christ which is so fundamental to Torrance’s theology, for their paradigm inevitably throws us back to “do our part” (i.e., repenting, believing) in response to Christ “doing his part” (i.e., living an exemplary life and dying for us) to reconcile us to God. It is, as Torrance decries, a fatal divorce between substitution from representation, the net result of which is a tearing

¹⁰ Purves, *Reconstructing*, p. xxi. For instance, to assert as Purves does, that pastoral theology must have recovery of God as its proper *object* shouldn’t eliminate the *subjective* aspect (i.e., the Spirit’s work in us and we as human subjects of God’s acts). Objective and subjective poles are both involved. Yet what the concept of the vicarious humanity of Christ contends is not that the subject pole is eliminated but rather that both objective and subjective poles of the Word of God, which are addressed as objective event to humankind and subjectively responded to and actualized from the human angle, both *first* occur in and through the person of Jesus—an event that is objective to us. As a *secondary* movement, the Spirit awakens us to participate actively as subjects in what has already been actualized for us in Christ.

asunder of what the Gospel, in Torrance's estimation, has clearly joined—i.e., the atoning significance of the Person of Jesus from his atoning work.¹¹

Torrance's corrective is a clarion call (reminiscent of Bonhoeffer's summons in his day) to recover the centrality of the "Who" question. Our perception of what Jesus actually accomplished in his atoning work revolves around our answer to the question of *who Jesus is*:

It becomes clear, therefore, that what we require to recover is an understanding of justification which really lets Christ occupy the centre, so that everything is interpreted by reference to who He was and is. After all, it was not the *death* of Jesus that constituted atonement, but Jesus Christ the Son of God offering Himself in sacrifice for us. Everything depends on *who* He was, for the significance of His acts in life and death depends on the nature of His Person. It was *He* who died for us, *He* who made atonement through His one *self*-offering in life and death. Hence we must allow the Person of Christ to determine for us the nature of His saving work, rather than the other way round.¹²

The concept of representation can be misleading if drawn solely from common expressions of representative actions in everyday life. Representative democracy, for instance, revolves around officials elected at our initiative to act on our behalf. Whether in fact they do act in our best interests or not (and today we would not be hard-pressed to make a case for the latter!), their representation of us cannot impact our human nature at the fundamental core of our being. We may be delighted with or abhor their decisions and actions, but our essential being is not transformed by them.

However, taking our cues from Torrance, if we consider *who* Jesus is, representation takes on a much more radical scope. Who is this who has assumed human flesh to become one of us? The *Creator Word* in and through whom all things were

¹¹ Torrance, "Cheap and Costly Grace," p. 65. Cf. also Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992, pp. 80-1.

¹² Torrance, "Cheap and Costly Grace," p. 64.

brought into being.¹³ Thus, the humanity of the incarnate Christ is not merely confined to that of a solitary individual but includes reciprocity that is “essentially corporate in nature.”¹⁴ As the Personal Creative Source of all creaturely beings, there is an essential *ontological* link with the humanity of all persons that is utterly unique.¹⁵ “The whole universe is ontologically bound to the incarnate and risen Jesus, and therefore that the whole universe is brought to share in the freedom of the Creator.”¹⁶ What happens in and through *this* man’s humanity can reconstitute the human nature in which all persons partake. Only the humanity of the *Creator God* has power and authority to *re-create* human nature,¹⁷ a power and authority revealed through Jesus’ resurrection.¹⁸

If Jesus Christ is not himself God, then there is no final authority or validity for anything he said or did for human beings. If he were not divine, he could not act divinely, and if he were not Creator, he would not be able to save and recreate humanity. ‘No creature can ever be saved by a creature.’¹⁹

“How can one person include all others in himself?” asks John Macquarrie.²⁰ It is indeed an absurd prospect if Jesus were a mere creature and nothing more. But if Jesus is none

¹³ John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17

¹⁴ Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, p. 89.

¹⁵ Cf. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 182-3; cf. also Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, pp. 154-5: “He who was made flesh is the Creator Logos by whom all things were made and in whom all things are upheld. When he became incarnate, and divine and human natures were united in his own person, his humanity was brought into an ontological relation with all creation. So far as our humanity is concerned that means that all men were upheld, whether they know it or not, in their humanity by Jesus Christ the true and proper man, upheld by the fulfillment and establishment of true humanity in him. . . .”

¹⁶ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 107.

¹⁷ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, p. 106. Cf. also Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, p. 41. Also Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, p. 75: “He was the Word of God made flesh, the Word by whom and through whom all things are made that are made, the Creator Logos. The whole life of Jesus, the Word made flesh, is creative life within our fallen and corrupt existence—it is recreative.”

¹⁸ Note Torrance’s careful wording here: “Although we may approach Christ by meeting him and seeking to understand him in his humanity, as soon as we confront him in the power of his resurrection our understanding of his humanity must be set within the fact of the *whole Christ*, as God manifest in the flesh, the Creator in our midst as human creature, come to effect the recreation of human nature from within its existence in space and time.”

¹⁹ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 138.

²⁰ John Macquarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, rev. ed., London: SCM Press Ltd., 1988, pp. 43, 54, 57. Cf. also Macquarrie, *Thinking About God*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1975, p. 175 and Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, London: SCM Press, 1990, p. 402.

other than the eternal Logos of God in whom we live and move and have our being,²¹ then his assumption of human nature cannot fail to have vicarious repercussions, as Torrance attests here:

In his incarnation he who by nature is internal to the being of God has embodied the creative source and ground of all human being in himself as man. As the Head of creation, in whom all things consist, he is the only one who really can act on behalf of all and save them. . . . Thus the redemptive work of Christ was fully representative and truly universal in its range. Its vicarious efficacy has its force through the union of his divine Person as Creator and Lord with us in our creaturely being, whereby he lays hold of us in himself and acts for us from out of the inner depths of his coexistence with us and our existence in him. . . .²²

Torrance contends that Jesus responds to the Father for us in our name and on our behalf, that Jesus believes and prays and worships for us, fulfilling the covenant from the human side as well as the divine side.²³ Thus, in asserting that Jesus overcomes our inadequacy by supplying “the sole ground of acceptable human response to the Father. . . . the one place on earth and in history where full reciprocity between God and man and man and God has been established,”²⁴ we are not superimposing some foreign paradigm onto the biblical witness to Christ. On the contrary, we are bringing out the sonorities of Jesus’ self-identity that have tended to become muted. This is, again, not to eliminate our active engagement in responding to God’s gift of grace, but rather to provide “the creative ground and normative pattern for the actualization of every response to God on our part”²⁵—the ground on which we may be enabled to respond—i.e., to respond by participating in Jesus’ Response made for us on our behalf.²⁶

²¹ Acts 17:28; Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, pp. 89-90.

²² Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 155; also pp. 150-1.

²³ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, p. 77.

²⁴ Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, p. 89.

²⁵ Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, p. 93.

²⁶ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996, 53. Cf. also Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, pp. 116-7, where in a discussion of

Purves has helpfully called attention to Torrance's anchoring of the double movement of Jesus' representation in the covenant of God with Israel, again showing that the notion of vicarious human response made on behalf of another is not a maverick idea imported from some alien ideology. Rather, it is deeply embedded in Israel's existence through such institutions as the sacrificial system and especially through the doubly representative role of High Priest on the Day of Atonement.²⁷

Helpful in this regard also might be a more sustained focus on how the doctrine of *election* can serve as a resource for reconfiguring our understanding of how human personhood is transformed through Christ's vicarious humanity in a way that is *not depersonalizing but repersonalizing*. Jesus as *homoousios* with the Father does not speak another word than the word of the Father but is himself the enfleshment of that singular Word of God. Jesus is not merely the external executer of a prior elective word by God but the very concrete historical expression of God's elective purpose to be God for and with us in our very human flesh. We look in vain, therefore, for another basis on which to ground not only God's intention toward us but also the place in which true personhood is actualized, "creatively reground. . . in the very life of God himself,"²⁸ according to

worship Torrance underscores the inextricable link between inclusive substitution and representation in correlation with the "not I but Christ" tenor of Galatians 2:20 "We have to think of this in terms of substitution as well as representation. If he were only our representative before God, he would represent us in *our* prayer and worship and would be, so to speak, their instrument. But as substitute as well as representative he acts in our place and offers worship and prayer which we could not offer, yet offers them in such a vicarious way that while in our stead and on our behalf they are made to issue out of our human nature to the Father as our own worship and prayer to God. . . . This is not a Pelagian offering of the immolated Christ by man nor a Pelagian offering of ourselves in addition to the sacrifice of Christ, but the pleading of a sacrifice which by its very nature is offered on our behalf and in our place and in our stead, so that it is *not we but Christ himself* who here stands in for us as our Mediator and Advocate, while we take refuge in his sole sacrifice, finding shelter in his prayer and intercession and not in our own." [italics mine]

²⁷ Cf. T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, esp. ch. 1 & 2. Also cf. James Torrance, *Worship*, esp. ch. 2.

²⁸ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, p. 13.

Torrance. Purves resonates with this portrayal of Jesus' role in relation to God's elective will: "Jesus *is* the mission of God to and for the world."²⁹

The biblical concept of the "one for the many" is relevant here. James Torrance helpfully distinguishes the biblical sense of the phrase from a Platonic notion. The latter view posits the "one" as a generic concept/universal form—the ideal essence of a thing—which is all-important; the many particulars are simply temporary, imperfect expressions of the unchanging abstract concept.

But the biblical notion of 'the one and the many,' the thought of the all-inclusive humanity of Christ, is totally different, where the many participate (*koinonein*) personally in the one. It is not just a Platonic concept of Jesus as an ideal embodiment of humanity. . . . The New Testament is thoroughly non-dualistic about Jesus being not only a man, but the One Man, the one person in whom God has given himself personally to the world and for the world, that his purposes for all humanity might be brought to fulfillment. There is an absolute uniqueness to the person of Jesus Christ, deeply concerned for every single one of the many to bring every single one into personal union with himself, to share his personal union with the Father. Thus in Jesus Christ 'the one and the many' means at once the one for the many, the one who stands in for the many, the many represented personally in the one, the one who comes by the Spirit to each one of the many whom he loves and knows by name to say: 'It is for you, John, and for you, Mary, and for you, Peter.'³⁰

In my own conceptualization, I speak of election in a fourfold sense:³¹ As ***Exclusive: the One for the many*** (along the lines just mentioned); as nevertheless ***Inclusive: the many in the One*** (in the sense of the ontologically inclusive bond between us and Jesus as Creator Word and Head over creation); as ***Preclusive: the many displaced by the One*** (the notion that we are deprived of the illegitimate place of trying to maintain

²⁹ Purves, *Reconstructing*, p. 23.

³⁰ James Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, pp. 51-52.

³¹ Jeannine Michele Graham, *Representation and Substitution in the Atonement Theologies of Dorothee Sölle, John Macquarrie and Karl Barth*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005, pp. 203-220. Note Barth's assertion that Jesus' representative humanity has universal relevance "*per definitionem*" in virtue of who he is (*C.D. IV.1*, pp. 284-5; *C.D. IV.2*, p. 81; Cf. *C.D. IV.2*, pp. 280-1: "The New Testament does not know of Jesus Christ who is what He is exclusively for Himself. . . .there is no Jesus existing exclusively for Himself, and there is no sinful man who is not affected and determined with and by His existence.")

our own existence as if our personhood were not grounded in every word—The Word—that proceeds from the mouth of God; and as *Conclusive: the many re-placed by the One* (in the sense that God’s covenant purpose for fellowship with us is concretely and conclusively actualized in Jesus for us as we find our rightful place in dependence on the Triune God.³²

3. Some Clarifying Thoughts on Participation

Participation vs. Imitation. My experiences in the Church resonate with Purves in recognizing an all-too-easy tendency to confuse the concept of participation in Christ with *imitation of Christ*, and therefore with the ongoing need to clarify the difference.³³ All too often the Gospel is construed as a combination of an exemplarist moralism of striving to replicate Jesus’ *life*---as attested by the popular WWJD paraphernalia³⁴---with stress on making our decision to accept Jesus’ satisfactionary death. Jesus’ part was to live the perfect life and die for our sins in our place; our part is to accept that death and to find somehow within ourselves the wherewithal to try to imitate his spotless record of living a life pleasing to God. The issue is somewhat complicated by the fact that there *are* biblical exhortations which call precisely for imitation: “Have this attitude in you that was in Christ Jesus our Lord. . .” (Philippians 2:5). “When you pray, say ‘Our Father, who art in heaven....’” (Matthew 6:9-13).

Two discussions I had recently—one consisting of seminary students and one comprising a home study group--raised the question regarding the vicarious humanity of

³² Torrance alludes to this conclusive aspect of Jesus’ representative work when he quotes F. W. Camfield, who in speaking of the Gospel testimony about Jesus asserts that he is “wholly divine because in him occurred a deed of God in which the human nature which the divinity had assumed was wholly turned round, negated in its empiric actuality and restored to its divine definition.”

³³ Purves, *Reconstructing*, p. 152.

³⁴ Standing for “What Would Jesus Do?” Appearing most often in various forms of jewelry, it is worn largely as a challenging reminder to the bearer to imagine how Jesus might have responded in various contemporary life situations and then to emulate that response.

Jesus in relation to worship: What practical difference does it make to say we worship God with Jesus as the Object of our worship or to say that Jesus is not only the *object* but the *agent* of our worship, the one who prays/believes/worships in our place as our continuing High Priest and gives us the gift of participating in his continual self-offering? Does the worship service really look much different? Whether believers construe worship as imitating Jesus' example or as participating in his self-offering, we still pray, sing, make offerings, listen to the Word, worship. Is the difference merely attitudinal or motivational? they have asked.

On a personal note, I have witnessed countless Christians whose initial ardor for all things spiritual slowly dulls as the result of a progressive inner sense of exhaustion at trying to maintain momentum on a perpetual treadmill of duties and obligations geared toward pleasing God. Often such earnest pursuit of "victorious Christian living" is accompanied by the nagging sense that trying harder and harder to measure up to some impossibly high ideal is futile. I have been on that treadmill myself. The paradigm of the vicarious humanity of Christ provides a potent antidote to the malady of the very works-righteousness impulse about which Paul was so distressed in his observation of the Galatians. It is truly not all up to us to render the perfect prayer/offering/worship/Christian life to God! Attitude shift? Absolutely! Motivational overhaul? Without a doubt! But even more, it is an actual content shift: our human situation has truly been *radically altered* from within the ontological depths of the humanity of our Representative and we are now summoned to live by faith in that new reality. Ironically, as Purvis notes, it is precisely as we are united by the Spirit to participate in Christ that we do as an expression

of maturing discipleship progressively imitate Christ in our lifestyle. “The *participatio Christi* is the ground for and leads to *imitatio Christi*.”³⁵

Participation’s cruciform shape: Kenosis and Plerosis. The believer’s participation in Christ is often spoken of exclusively in terms of sharing in the *blessings* of Christ’s atoning work. Calvin’s famous insight is often cited that the blessings accomplished by Christ are only accessible to us as we are grafted into Christ by the Spirit through faith³⁶. Union with Christ is also referred to as sharing in the Son’s *communion* with the Father through the Spirit. In keeping with Torrance’s stress on the *dynamic outworking* (not merely static constitution) of the hypostatic union of divine and human in Christ, we can profitably explore a *kenosis/plerosis dynamic* both as it was expressed throughout Jesus’ entire life and as it constitutes the lives of all who participate in union and communion with Christ.

Torrance engages in several discussions of this self-emptying/fullness theme in his description of the Person and work of Christ. The christological hymn of Phil. 2:6-11 most clearly exhibits this pattern of the *self-emptying* of his entire incarnate existence to the point of death (i.e., not in the sense of relinquishing divine attributes—an obvious hazard of what Torrance refers to as the “receptacle view of space and time”³⁷--but in the sense of emptying himself out from existing solely in divine form in order to exist also in the human form of a servant), which is balanced by his resurrection exaltation. However the *plerosis*, or fullness of glory, is not merely confined to the final chapter in heaven but is a gradual crescendo that runs throughout Jesus’ entire earthly journey, reaching its grand climax in his resurrection and ascension.

³⁵ Purves, *Reconstructing*, p. 197.

³⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.1.

³⁷ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, pp. 124-6.

It is the Cross and the Resurrection that shadow and light up the whole life of Jesus, and his self-concealment and self-manifestation are to be understood in this shadow and light. In this way we can understand the whole historical life of the Lord Jesus as a kind of *kenosis*, a self-emptying, a humiliation, a yielding of itself up in suffering to God. But with that *kenosis*, Camfield points out, there is an ever-increasing *plerosis* through which the fullness of God in Christ breaks forth culminating in the Resurrection Glory.³⁸

Torrance elaborates further on this kenotic path of Jesus' life, stressing that it is not merely pristine human nature but *fallen sin-compromised humanity* which is being borne vicariously for us as the self-offering of his life in obedient service to God and, thus, sanctified in himself.³⁹

As the vicarious sin-burdened humanity of Christ is surrendered, and surrendered by a divine act in Christ, there comes in the full revelation, fulfillment, or *plerosis*, of his divinity.⁴⁰

We should note that for Torrance, there is no conflict between asserting Jesus' assumption of fallen human nature and affirming his active sinlessness. Quoting Hilary, Torrance qualifies Jesus' relation to our fallen nature as "a flesh which he shares with us by wearing it not by sinning in it."⁴¹

Not in spite of but precisely *through* the mysterious veil of Jesus' humanity--a life of freely rendered humble service and suffering--the majesty of Jesus' divinity comes into increasingly sharper focus. This self-emptying/self-manifesting interplay throughout Jesus'

³⁸ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, p. 34. Cf. also Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, pp. 161 & 157: "Through his incarnation the Son of God has made himself one with us as we are, and indeed made himself what we are, thereby not only making our nature his own but *taking on himself our lost condition* subject to condemnation and death, all in order that he might substitute himself in our place, discharge our debt and offer himself in atoning sacrifice to God on our behalf. . . ." [italics mine]

³⁹ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, p. 53.

⁴⁰ Torrance, *Doctrine of Christ*, p. 35.

⁴¹ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, p. 162. He elaborates on this thought on p. 161: "The Lord transferred to himself fallen Adamic humanity which he took from the Virgin Mary, that is, our perverted, corrupt, degenerate, diseased human nature enslaved to sin and subject to death under the condemnation of God. However, far from sinning himself or being contaminated by what he appropriated from us, Christ triumphed over the forces of evil entrenched in our human existence, bringing his own holiness, his own perfect obedience, to bear upon it in such a way as to condemn sin in the flesh and to deliver us from its power." Cf. also Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, pp. 39-41, 63-6.

life in which incarnation and atonement are not isolated categories but a dynamic interwoven reality of Person-in-act (or act-in-Person)⁴² is, no doubt, reminiscent of Barth's twin depictions of Jesus as "The Lord as Servant" and the "Servant as Lord."

When it comes, then, to the matter of participation in Christ through union with him by the Spirit, we would do well to expand our notions of participation to incorporate a *cruciform* shape. While recognizing the uniqueness of Jesus' work which he alone can do for us and which we do not duplicate (e.g., his substitutionary death in our place is uniquely his to offer), Paul articulates a discernible *kenosis/plerosis* pattern numerous times when he speaks of the life of Christian discipleship:

If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation.⁴³

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.⁴⁴

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.⁴⁵

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead.⁴⁶

I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.⁴⁷

Clearly, the vicarious humanity of Christ does not mean we are spared the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," to borrow the Shakespearean phrase, that we are somehow conveniently removed from vulnerability to suffering hardship or even tragic

⁴² Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, p. 15.

⁴³ II Cor. 1:6

⁴⁴ II Cor. 4:10-12

⁴⁵ Col. 1:24

⁴⁶ Philippians 3:10-11

⁴⁷ Ephesians 3:13

loss. It is not a safeguard enabling us to skate blithely above the pathos of human frailty. Rather, participation through union and communion with Christ entails participation in the life of the One in whom humanity and divinity, self-emptying and fullness of glory, death and life, surrender and exaltation, are not mutually exclusive but are *mysteriously interwoven* dimensions of the one saving trajectory of reconciliation. As such, it establishes a paradigm for the Christian life in which suffering and struggles are not “unspiritual” anomalies lying somehow outside of the normative pattern of Christian discipleship.⁴⁸ On the contrary, they are endemic to it⁴⁹ and can even become the channel through which we share in the “wounded healer” ministry of Jesus’ healing compassion to others who suffer.⁵⁰ Participating in Christ, therefore, does not entail bracketing off the seamier side of human experience, as if such participation only pertains to overtly blessed experiences. *Losing one’s life* in humble servanthood for Christ’s sake—whether in a literal or metaphorical sense—is not an exhortation merely for those strangely drawn

⁴⁸ Note, however, Torrance’s clear grasp (echoing Barthian overtones) of the *asymmetrical* relationship between suffering servanthood and resurrection triumph: “. . . the Church is sent out in the mission of the everlasting Gospel into history, under the sway of earthly authorities and powers, and within the structures of space and time. It cannot be true and faithful to its Lord if it refuses to live the life of the servant within and under all that, even though it is crucified to the world in Christ and is already risen with him and as such shares his triumphant victory over the powers of the world. . . . The involvement of the Church in the suffering of mankind must never be allowed to stifle that supreme note of resurrection triumph. . . .” Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, pp. 102-5.

⁴⁹ Torrance quotes F. W. Camfield to underscore this point, which attends the kenotic self-surrender of Jesus through which paradoxically not only Jesus’ true humanity is revealed but also Jesus’ divine authority: “In and through the self-emptying of the actual empirical humanity, the true humanity which is after the original creation of God finds continual expression until it rises up revealed and complete in the resurrection. . . . Therefore on the part of the earthly historical Jesus we have on the one hand, a continual dependence upon and subordination to God, a striving and struggling and waiting upon his will, a looking from himself outward to the leading of God, a perpetual activity of prayer, a declaration that God alone is good and that he himself must not be called good; and on the other hand, we have an abiding sense of possessing divine authority, the feeling of a unique relation to God, the consciousness that God’s kingdom is present in him and that he exercises the power of that Kingdom. These two attitudes are not contradictory; they are the inevitable expressions of a divine-human life, the inevitable results of that deathward movement in him which in virtue of being such is in its deepest reality a life-ward movement.”

⁵⁰ II Cor. 1:3-7

to masochism or martyrdom but is the normative route for *finding one's true life* as we share in the communion & mission of the Crucified Risen Lord Jesus.

But here again, the vicarious humanity of Christ sheds light on how participation in Christ's sufferings differs from mere imitation of Christ. Consider, for instance, the event I mentioned at the beginning of this paper in which five young kids lost their lives in a fiery crash. The distraught mother confounded the entire community of Spokane, WA by publicly expressing forgiveness of the driver at fault, whose actions completely wiped out her entire offspring. One possible explanation for her response to the situation might be a deep sense of moral duty. She is a Christian. Forgiveness is a Christian duty. Perhaps like the sword of Damocles, the ultimate threat hovers overhead of not being forgiven by God if one doesn't readily forgive those who have caused one harm, prodding her to summon within herself the strength to give the required response.

But consider an alternative perspective. In her human frailty in the face of this crushing assault, she cries out in hope against hope to the Crucified Lord with whom she is united by faith, the Man of Sorrows well acquainted with grief whose own journey has preceded her own through this devastating valley of tears and catastrophic loss. Rather than looking solely within herself for the strength to render a WWJD act of imitation, she entrusts herself and her excruciating, incomprehensible pain to Jesus, who in his humanity has already rendered a life of faithful obedience and perfect forgiveness in the crucible of life's onslaught for her in her name and in her place as her faithful Representative before God. Not only that, Jesus also gives her the hallowed embrace of healing solidarity within which she can know that the agony of her personal cross, *while not minimized, is relativized* by the eschatological vision of ultimate healing and

restoration in the hope of the resurrection yet to come at the end of the age. In Torrancian language, the *actuality* of Jesus' atoning work for her—and for us—creates the *possibility* of her own subjective participation in it by the Spirit, fleshed out within a full range of life contexts. Without denying her potent emotions (perhaps even her doubts), she looks away from herself to Jesus, who walks beside her as the Author and Perfector of her sorely tested faith, as her high priestly intercessor and advocate who gives her a share in his unwavering faith, his all-sufficient prayers, his right standing before God. In her human frailty and agonizing grief she is mightily upheld by her Savior, confident that despite the unpredictable vicissitudes of life and the unspeakable brutality of violent death, nothing will sever her communion with the grace of her Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God her Father and the fellowship of the Spirit.