

The
Princeton
Theological Review

VOLUME XIV, No. 2

FALL 2008

ISSUE 39

A TRIBUTE TO THOMAS F. TORRANCE

The Generosity of Thomas Forsyth Torrance: A Memoir with Letters
Mark Koonz

A Tribute to Professor Tom Torrance
Samuel H. Moffett

Reflection on the Importance of the Theology of the Rev. Professor T.
F. Torrance for the Life and Mission of the Church
George Ziegler

Torrance's Doctrine of Faith
Daniel Thimell

T. F. Torrance: The Onto-Relational Frame of His Theology
Gary Deddo

Apollinarianism in Worship Revisited: Torrance's Contribution to
the Renewal of Reformed Worship
Roger J. Newell

The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance
Ray S. Anderson

Atonement, the Incarnation, and Deification: Transformation and
Convergence in the Soteriology of T. F. Torrance
Trevor Hart

T. F. Torrance: Mystical Theologian Sui Generis
Myk Habets

Thomas F. Torrance on Eucharistic Sacrifice
George Hunsinger

The Princeton Theological Review is a student-run, semi-annual journal that exists to serve students within the Princeton Theological Seminary body as well as the wider theological community by providing a resource that challenges, informs, and equips them to become more effective and faithful witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is committed to engaging theological issues in ways that are grounded in Scripture, centered on Jesus Christ, formed by the work of the Holy Spirit, and oriented toward the historic confessions and contemporary reflections of the church.

CONTACTING THE EDITORS

Your responses to the materials published in the *PTR* are a critical part of the journal's success. We welcome and appreciate your ideas. Please send all correspondence to:

Executive Editor
The Princeton Theological Review
Princeton Theological Seminary
P.O. Box 821
Princeton, NJ 08542

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

If you would like to become a new subscriber, renew your subscription, purchase a gift subscription, make a donation, or change your address, please address your correspondence to the Managing Editor (Subscriptions).

Subscription rates are \$12 for students and seniors, \$15 for individuals, and \$25 for institutions in the U.S. Canadian residents should add \$5 to the preceding rates. All other foreign residents should add \$10 to the preceding rates.

SUBMITTING TO THE *PTR*

We welcome your contributions for consideration to be published. Please see our call for papers, found on the last page of this journal or at our website (www.princetontheologicalreview.org). We encourage you to submit articles as an attachment via e-mail: ptr@ptsem.edu

If you mail using the U.S. Postal Service, please send a hard copy with a disk to the General Editor at the address above.

All submissions should be in final form.

The *PTR* reserves the right to edit all submissions before publication.

REPRINTING FROM THE *PTR*

If you want to photocopy material original from the *PTR*, please follow these guidelines: For personal use or use in congregations or classrooms, we grant permission for 50 copies to be made, provided the articles are distributed at no charge and you include the following information: "Copyright (year) (author) Reprinted from *The Princeton Theological Review*."

The Princeton Theological Review is a ministry of the Theological Students' Fellowship. *The Princeton Theological Review* is not an official publication of Princeton Theological Seminary, and the opinions expressed in the *PTR* are not necessarily those of the editors, the Theological Students' Fellowship, or Princeton Theological Seminary.

CONTENTS

Prolegomena	Cambria Janae Kaltwasser	5
The Generosity of Thomas Forsyth Torrance: A Memoir with Letters	Mark Koonz	7
A Tribute to Professor Tom Torrance	Samuel H. Moffett	21
Reflection on the Importance of the Theology of the Rev. Prof T. F. Torrance for the Life and Mission of the Church	George Ziegler	23
Torrance's Doctrine of Faith	Daniel Thimell	27
T. F. Torrance: The Onto-Relational Frame of His Theology	Gary Deddo	35
Apollinarianism in Worship Revisited: Torrance's Contribution to the Renewal of Reformed Worship	Roger J. Newell	49
The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance	Ray S. Anderson	65
Atonement, the Incarnation, and Deification: Transformation and Con- vergence in the Soteriology of T. F. Torrance	Trevor Hart	79
T. F. Torrance: Mystical Theologian Sui Generis	Myk Habets	91
Thomas F. Torrance on Eucharistic Sacrifice	George Hunsinger	105
Book Reviews		111

PROLEGOMENA

Cambria Janae Kaltwasser

In reflecting on the life and work of a single theologian, we are reminded that theology cannot be an abstract endeavor, detached from a personal encounter with the Gospel; all true theology arises out of the event of God's Word as it makes itself known to human hearts. To this truth the legacy of Thomas F. Torrance bears witness. Torrance was a revered theological scholar and writer. Yet, as many have testified, beneath his commanding intellect lay the pious heart of a pastor and missionary. Through his writings and his relationships with students, we catch a glimpse of one captivated by the voice of Jesus Christ.

With the death of Torrance in December of 2007, the world lost one of its foremost Christian thinkers, whose theological contribution the Christian community is only beginning to estimate. It is for the furtherance of this legacy that the *Princeton Theological Review* offers this fall issue in tribute to the life and work of Professor Torrance. We are honored here to present reflections and articles by some of the brightest minds he influenced, among them his students, his friends, and those drawn in by the words of this great teacher.

This issue is divided into two parts. Part I pays tribute to Torrance's personal and pastoral legacy. First, Mark Koonz offers a personal reflection on Professor Torrance's interactions with Princeton Theological Seminary students in the late 1980s and his ongoing correspondence with pastors in the years that followed. Koonz highlights Torrance's generosity of spirit, demonstrated by his willingness to engage both students and pastors in theological discussion. Samuel Moffett, professor emeritus of Princeton Theological Seminary, follows with a personal tribute to Torrance, reflecting on their friendship and their lives' convergences. In our third piece, Geordie Ziegler, reflects on Torrance's lasting contribution to the church. Ziegler emphasizes Torrance's vision of the church as living out of Christ's own ministry. In "Torrance's Doctrine of Faith," Daniel Thimell presents a pastoral appraisal of the doctrine of Jesus Christ's vicarious faith, as Torrance expounded it. Thimell argues that faith is not to be understood as the human contribution to salvation; rather, our faith is grounded in and enabled by the faithfulness of Jesus.

Part II contains several extended treatments of Torrance's theological contributions. First, Gary Deddo sets forth the concept of onto-relations as the paradigm that underpins Torrance's theology. He portrays the fact that God's being is constituted relationally as the means by which God enters into meaningful relationship with the world. This theme weds Torrance's Christology with his Trinitarian theology and touches upon the doctrines of creation, soteriology, and anthropology. In "Apollinarianism in Worship Revisited," Roger Newell takes up Torrance's critique of liturgical forms that stress Jesus' deity at the expense of his humanity, depriving Christian worship of a proper sense of Christ's human mediation. Newell connects this insight to modern worship trends, arguing that

“functional Apollinarianism” ignores Christ’s solidarity with humanity, instead laying undue emphasis on the efficacy of our individual acts of worship. Ray Anderson, a student of Torrance, lifts up Torrance’s contribution of the “Christological Basis of Practical Theology” by which God’s self-revelation forms the ground of Christ’s continuing priesthood. Our participation in Christ’s vicarious humanity mediated through the Holy Spirit provides the ontological grounds of the church’s ministry.

Three of our authors take Torrance’s theology into conversation with Eastern Orthodoxy, each from a different angle, yet each with an emphasis on Torrance’s understanding of reconciliation as participation in Christ. Trevor Hart focuses his analytic lens on Torrance’s doctrine of soteriology, arguing that it represents a convergence of Eastern and Western doctrines that can best be described as “deification.” Yet in taking up the theme of deification, Hart argues, Torrance removes it from its typical locus in creation and anthropology, and instead develops it from within the nexus of Trinitarian and incarnational theology. Hart writes that Torrance presents a doctrine of atonement in which the reconciliation wrought between God and sinful human beings is not an external transaction, but an ontological transformation occurring “within the very depths of human being.” Myk Habets argues that Torrance’s theology offers a unique version of theological mysticism through its integration of themes, such as theosis, *Visio Dei*, and mystery. Rejecting all forms of “wordless or conceptless mysticism,” Torrance rather advances an understanding in which human beings come to knowledge of God through union with Christ who is Light of Light, Habets argues. Finally, drawing from Torrance’s theme of participation in Christ, George Hunsinger advances an ecumenically sensitive understanding of Eucharistic sacrifice, one that honors the uniqueness of “Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice on the cross.” Hunsinger takes up Torrance’s emphasis on the unity of Christ’s person and his work, such that Christ is our “living atonement,” and he argues that by Christ’s vicarious humanity human beings are given to participate in his one sacrifice.

As the scope of this issue reveals, Torrance’s legacy is manifold. His lasting resources for the church and his contributions in the area of Trinitarian theology—practical, systematic, and ecumenical—are far-reaching. In all these areas, Torrance’s was a life lived out of encounter with the Word of God. Torrance claimed repeatedly that we must allow our pursuit of truth to be directed by our object of study. And so it is in service to the object of the church’s faith, Jesus Christ, that we present this issue of the *PTR* in dedication to Professor Thomas F. Torrance.

THE GENEROSITY OF THOMAS FORSYTH TORRANCE: A MEMOIR WITH LETTERS

Mark Koonz

LECTURES, Q & A, AND TIME WITH STUDENTS

Thomas F. Torrance's presence at Princeton Theological Seminary was made welcome throughout his career by the respect in which he was held by three successive presidents: John Mackay, James McCord, and Thomas Gillespie. However, in his retirement years, he was chiefly known to students through the forum provided by the student group Theological Students' Fellowship (TSF). The year the founders of the TSF chapter at PTS graduated (1988), I was given the job of organizing our speaker's forum for the coming year.¹

Given an approved list of speakers with names and addresses, I had my summer work cut out for me. In the spring of 1988 Richard Burnett introduced me to Dr. T. F. Torrance, a retired professor from Scotland, and said he would be a good speaker for next year. I had heard his name before, but did not want to commit on the spot. While speaking with Professor Torrance, I looked over his shoulder and saw Richard, looking the wise uncle, mouth the words, "He's good."

I took a chance and scheduled a talk, but in the back of my mind I wondered how it would go over. A theologian had told me he started one of Torrance's books once, but found it "almost impenetrable." Yet when the day arrived, we found the room filled to capacity, with people seated on the floor. Many had their lunches with them, because all TSF talks were noontime forums. Torrance held our attention as he spoke about the revolution in science and its epistemological ramifications for theology. Afterwards, there was a run on the bookstore, and I was reprimanded for not notifying the manager that such a distinguished speaker was coming. We counted over 150 students in attendance, plus a few faculty members. The count never diminished in the succeeding years.

Torrance was on the board of the Center of Theological Inquiry, where he supported the work of his friend James McCord, and came to Princeton about twice a year for CTI meetings. Starting with this first TSF lecture, he began the habit of asking me to tea. I think my scheduling his talks had a lot to do with it at first, but when he discovered that I was reading (sometimes struggling) through

1 I will always be grateful to Bob McGaha, who, together with his friends, placed me on the TSF steering committee. Without this opportunity I might never have known T. F. Torrance. It was my privilege to serve as chairman for the academic year 1989-90, taking over from Paul Pittman, III.

his books, he invited me to see him again in the evening and ask questions. These invitations were repeated on the next visit, and continued until I left Princeton. He generously allowed me to record these sessions. I cannot say how much time Torrance gave to students when he taught at Edinburgh, but whenever he visited Princeton after his retirement we discovered his generosity of spirit and love for teaching theology evident in his openness to helping students. He gave loads of time to students, though his days were not empty. Each day was full of meetings with CTI scholars, seminary professors, and friends, as well as university faculty and scientists. Yet somehow he always found time to be with those who asked for theological help.

Torrance's second TSF lecture was on the Resurrection, and the recording of it is available from PTS's Media Services. However, at that time they refused to record the question and answer period, which is a shame because Torrance was in high form as he answered questions about Newtonian and Kantian dualisms, which prevent modern people from believing in the Incarnation and Resurrection. In that vein he argued that the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith "are one and the same." Other hot topics kept many enthralled and in no hurry to leave. This time the bookstore had been duly notified and plentifully stocked with Torrance titles, doing a good volume of trade.

Because I had introduced Torrance before his lectures, some students asked me whether he was ever willing to make appointments. I thought he would meet with them if his schedule was free, I said, and I encouraged them to ask him directly. A few were bold enough to do so and were delighted with the result. Once a few other students arranged for a special meeting with Torrance at the Adams House. Torrance gathered with about 10 students and his friend, Professor James Loder.² It was kept small and private because the people who organized it wanted an informal meeting with freedom to ask questions. I was there as a guest. At the last minute another student came in with an assistant professor of New Testament, whose mood looked strained.

In prior public lectures and private discussions, Torrance had taken the opportunity to expose and undermine faulty presuppositions of the historical-critical method. He argued that too many New Testament scholars operated with an outdated understanding of the universe, based on a Newtonian cosmology that was shattered by Einstein, "yet most of them aren't even aware that their science is obsolete." This was said with special reference to those who, like Rudolf Bultmann, accepted a closed continuum of cause and effect that rules out miracles, rules out revelation, and rules out the entire incarnation of God's Son. The details and explanations would follow as Torrance argued his case.³ This did not always

2 PTS Professor of Christian Education and author of *The Transforming Moment* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989).

3 T. F. Torrance, "The Historical Jesus": From the Perspective of a Theologian," *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. William C. Weinrich (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), vol. 2, 511–26. This article contains an outline of Torrance's argument, though in person he could fill in more details and discuss more biblical passages. For details on the great shift in scientific thinking since

go over well. That evening at Adams House, it soon became apparent that the NT professor had not come to listen, but to argue and refute.⁴

Torrance began by describing three theological models of the universe. In the first, the realm of God and the realm of creation overlap and interact: this is the Christian view of the New Testament. In the second, the two worlds or realms have a huge gap between and never interact, touch, or overlap: this he called the Gnostic view. In the third, God's world touches this world at a tangent, or the other world touches this world at a mathematical point: this is the Arian or Bultmannian view. There must be myriads of mathematical points, and Arius said there are myriads of images of God: Jesus is only one of the myriads. When Torrance described this position, he said, "Suppose you operate with a dualism like this and you want to know something about God. Your thoughts don't terminate on God because they are only tangentially related, [so] your thought bends back upon yourself so that the content of your understanding of revelation is self-understanding. Now that's primary with Bultmann. It's self-understanding that is the content of revelation, not God Himself. Your thought about God does not terminate upon God, but in the end terminates on yourself." However, in the Christian worldview, "the other world intersects with this world, as happened in the Incarnation. Here you have Christ: he's God of God in that world [pointing to his diagram] and man of man in that world [pointing again], so that when we know Christ our thought terminates upon God, not simply upon this world."

All of this was just a summary to get our discussion going for the evening. But someone jumped in with a question: "In the Bultmannian view . . . is the point of intersection the self or is it Christ? What is that point?"

Torrance answered, "The point of intersection is any point where in this world you think you may be in touch with God. And Christ is therefore just an instance of that. But when you really push your thought to that point it doesn't really go to God, it bends back and touches yourself. Because there is no—I come to this later on in Kant—there's no knowing of things in their internal relations but only knowing as they appear to us. Now that was quite definitely Bultmann's position."

the time of Newton, Kant, and Hume, see T. F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), currently available through Wipf & Stock Publishers. As early as 1967, Cambridge New Testament scholar Charles Moule undermined arguments separating the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith in *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (SCM Press, 1981 [1967]). I point out this achievement even though, by 1993, Moule came to consider this book out of date and preferred that readers consult his *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge University Press, 1977). The work of Richard Bauckham, Martin Hengel, James Dunn, N. T. Wright, Ben Witherington, III, et al., has established that the early church was indeed concerned with reliable historical testimony about the Jesus of history.

4 New Testament professors at PTS who thought highly of Torrance included Bruce Metzger, Cullen Story, and Ulrich Mauser. Story, the Johannine scholar, was very positive about Torrance's collection of sermons on Revelation, *The Apocalypse Today* (London: James Clarke, 1960). The Metzgers were friends for many years.

Here, the NT professor jumped in, “Are you arguing that he is Kantian or Christian?”

“Oh, he’s Kantian not Christian, certainly, on this point,” Torrance replied.

“I think he’d probably disagree with you, with all due respect,” came the tense rejoinder.

“Well, I talked to Bultmann and I knew him,” Torrance said, unruffled. “He can’t get away from this. He’s basically Kantian. I’ll come back to that in a minute. Bultmann denies quite flatly that with Jesus our thought terminates upon God. No question about that. It’s in his writings and [was] in his conversations.”

Maybe “I talked to Bultmann and I knew him” gave Torrance too much of an edge.⁵ Shortly after this the NT professor walked out. Did he realize that Torrance was attacking Bultmann’s *ideas*, not his personal piety? We stayed. Torrance went on to say more about Deism and the Newtonian framework, Kant, and—yes—more about Bultmann.

One of Bultmann’s claims was that the early Christians thought they lived in a universe with, as it were, three decks or levels—earth in the middle with a heaven above and a hell below—a mythological cosmology. In *Kerygma and Myth* he wrote, “We no longer believe in the three-storied universe which the creeds take for granted. The only honest way of reciting the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the truth which they enshrine—that is, assuming that they contain the truth at all. . . . No one who is old enough to think for himself supposes that God lives in a local heaven.”⁶

Torrance offered a devastating critique. “I have investigated every reference to space and time and cosmology, through Aristotle and Plato, down through the second century. And I haven’t found a single instance of a three decker notion of the universe. . . . Not a single reference. The first reference you’ll get of anything like that is in Pseudo-Aristotle’s *De mundo* in the second century [A.D.]. I don’t know why no Greek scholar ever challenged him before. Really, he was talking through his hat.”

The New Testament writers did not hold to the cosmology that Bultmann alleged, nor did they hold that God exists in a spatial relation to this world. Neither angels nor the Son of God had to travel through space to arrive on earth, etc. Later, Torrance told me his critique was being published, but he wished he had done it while Bultmann was still alive.⁷ He would like to have seen Bultmann’s reaction. Insofar as Torrance’s critique is accurate, it seriously undermines the respect in which Bultmann has been held as a classicist.

This snippet is presented to show the reason why students wanted to hear Torrance. He could speak on a high intellectual level, but could also put his argu-

5 Torrance had taken part in student discussions in Bultmann’s home in 1937, and later encounters included Bultmann’s visits to Edinburgh when he gave the 1954–1955 Gifford Lectures.

6 Rudolph Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch, tr. R. H. Fuller (London, 1951), 4.

7 T. F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 289–342.

ments into clear and rather blunt form in order to communicate with students and cut to the heart of the matter. He never showed fear of being challenged by other scholars and always offered a reasoned response to questions. His talks were extremely stimulating.

After I graduated, I handed over the reigns of TSF to Tom Hansen and friends, who continued to invite Torrance to speak. His third TSF lecture is published in the little book *Preaching Christ Today*.⁸ (I heard this live because I still lived in Princeton and continued to meet with him for another year.⁹ Then I moved on and pursued my pastoral vocation.)

COMMUNICATIONS WITH PASTORS

As a pastor I continued to receive copies of Torrance's new essays and lectures, as did some other interested friends. He would mail them to us, often by his own initiative. Sometimes his friend Jim Neidhardt, co-authoring a book with a major section on Torrance,¹⁰ would honor us with these new essays. Or he would ask another friend, PTS Archivist William Harris,¹¹ to pass on copies of "my new essay" to students and pastors. As a result of his attention and interest, I would occasionally write him. Sometimes his answers were brief, and other times lengthy to a surprising degree.

His generosity in answering the questions of students and pastors is noteworthy. He never treated unknown pastors as though they were unimportant. On the second occasion I went to Scotland and had tea with him in his study (in 1998), he showed me the stack of letters on his desk. Some were from academic theologians and a Roman Catholic cardinal. Others were from pastors and theology students. He said he didn't mind answering mail, though it took time out of his week, so long as they weren't unsolicited dissertations.¹²

Once, Father Raymond Davis observed the way Torrance gave of himself to students. "In my experience the great people are always like that," he opined. "It is the lesser scholars who resent giving time to students. The people with truly great minds are often rather generous." The fulsomeness of Torrance's response to my letter on the Resurrection and Karl Barth is an example of this generosity. My questions probed changes in Barth's position and the charge of docetism.

Torrance's reply is dated 15 October 1996:

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

9 Torrance also met with students and faculty at Drew University for an informal discussion, and lectured at a meeting of the American Scientific Affiliation.

10 James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt, *The Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology and Science* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992). Neidhardt taught physics at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

11 After serving as chaplain in the US Navy and pastorates in the PC(USA), Rev. Harris served as the first Archivist for PTS. President John Mackay had encouraged his friendship with Torrance beginning in the 1950s.

12 I wrote Torrance less often after seeing the volume of his correspondence.

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your letter of Oct. 4. Yes, I am in good health—the only problem is that I am apt to be a bit wobbly on my feet these days—some kind of balance problem. But that does not hold me back, apart from my having to give up driving a car, which is a bit of a nuisance.

I had a very interesting visit to Denmark in May. . . . I was asked to join a small group of mathematicians, physicists and philosophers of science—I was the only theologian involved—when I had to read a paper on creation, time and world order. . . . Now I am working on a lecture on “Einstein and God”, which I have to give in St. Andrews, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh. He was rather more positive about faith and God—by no means a positivist.

Your letter brings me back to theology. . . . The resurrection and Barth! He certainly believed from the start of his theological career vividly in the resurrection, influenced in part by a visit to the Blumhardts whose great cry was “Jesus Christ is risen”. He had to wrestle with how to understand that the resurrection from the grave [w]as a historical event. Overbeck with his notion of *Urgeschichte* helped him to repel the positivist notion of historical in terms of this-worldly causality, and thus he rejected Bultmann from the start, whom he accused of treating historical events like a magician. But the resurrection had to be understood in terms of the downright reality of the human nature of the Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, in which he found help in the Reformed theologians use of the patristic *anhypostasis* and *enhy-postasis*.¹³ In my recent book on Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell, I note how this was a major concept, along with the Trinity, in the older Scottish theologians, who were not trapped in rationalist federal ideas. Applied to Christ, this means that his incarnate life was that of the mighty Son of God come to be the Redeemer of the world—the virgin birth and the resurrection were thus twin events in our redemption, for in neither could the person and the work of Christ be separated.

Barth did not like “apologetic” in the popular sense, for no event of divine redemptive import can be established or interpreted from arguments outside of it. True apologetic is the display of the inner rationality of divine revelation and incarnation. To be a good apologete one must give an account of the intrinsic truth and reason of God’s creating, revealing and saving acts—and that is the inner substance and heart of a proper

13 For clarification of these terms, see T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 198–201, and *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 160–61.

dogmatics. Yes, it was the actual resurrection in body from the grave, the historical and divine event in space and time, that altered the whole perspective of things, and enabled people to understand the whole incarnate life of the Lord Jesus as a complete resurrection event, breaking into and through our sin-ridden fallen existence. The Gospel records are astonishingly reliable about this—problems arise in people’s minds when they imagine they have to interpret it in terms of secular worldly forms of thought. But even from within the incarnational perspective the Apostles found themselves upholding the sheer physical reality and reliability of the witness—cf. for example, the first chapter of 1 John, and 1 Cor. 15.

I remember long ago coming across the little book by Frank Morrison: “Who Moved the Stone?” which clears the ground of a lot of skeptical nonsense about the physical as well as the spiritual event of the resurrection. I think that Pannenberg is right to hold that we have to regard the resurrection on two levels, in which the reality of the lower is justified by the higher level. This is the sort of thing we do in relating the different levels in scientific exploration and justification. But that scientific way of relating levels to one another, open upward but not reducible downward, can be of only a minor significance—though it may help some people to see something of the way in which it is the downright divine act that gives reality to the historical. This way of thinking of the resurrection in the light of different levels, in which the lower level is not transcended, by the higher level, but on the contrary established in our understanding of it, can be helpful to many people—but they will not get very far “ben”, as we say in Scotland, until they are really caught up in the full reality of God’s redemptive act in our space and time. I am hoping, by the way, to get my book on “Space, Time and Resurrection”, reprinted, and am in touch with Wipf & Stock Publishers in Eugene, Oregon, about this. . . .

I think in Barth’s Commentary on Romans, he was influenced by some of Luther’s knife-edge and paradoxical metaphors, eg about tangential relation, which he did not take up in straight theological thinking. We certainly do not believe in the resurrection through a discovery of some kind of necessity which is to be related to the concatenation of historico-causal events. Rather the other way round! Certainly the reality of the event is not dependent on OUR recognition of the event, but of course the reality of the event as act of God in space and time, carries its own intrinsic meaning calling for our recognition. The resurrection confirmed the realization of the Apostles that Jesus is Lord, but instead of discounting the historical Jesus, it confirmed and established it in the disciples’ eyes. I write a little about this in one of the chapters of my recent book on the Trinity.

Regarding what I said about KB and the tangential character of the resurrection—what changed was the way of expressing it, as he had done in the Römerbrief. I think that his commentary on Corinthians gave too much attention to the notion of “superhistorical”, but, in my view he never had anything other than a realist view of the resurrection from the days when he visited the Blumhardts—and certainly in all his dogmatics he operates with the fullest and most realist understanding of the resurrection in body, in space and time, and history. The change that took place in Barth’s thinking was an ever deepening understanding of the concrete saving event—not a change from a skeptical to a more realistic understanding. It was the resurrection from the beginning which gave him his theological starting point, and he ended with the same emphasis, as I recalled in the Preface to *Space, Time and Resurrection*. What you relate on your own deeply moving experience when you were thirteen is of the same genre.

Thank you for praying for me constantly—I need it. I pray for you also, and frequently.

There is a possibility that I may be visiting Princeton later on in November, when I may be staying with the Moffetts.¹⁴

With prayerful good wishes for you and your ministry,

As ever

[signed] Tom Torrance¹⁵

At the Adams House meeting Torrance also answered questions on election. Older theologians examined different words, such as “election,” “love,” “grace,” and so on, and because the words are different they posited different entities. “But in God they’re not different. The love of God for all men is the same as the election of God for all men. So if Christ is the creator of all men, and all men have their being in Him, and He became man, then all men are ontologically grounded and related to Jesus Christ. When He died for mankind, He died for all mankind. When He loved mankind, all men got loved. But that doesn’t mean to say that all men will actually be saved. Because our problem there is that, whether you have limited atonement or universalism, we are trying to interpret the action of God in Christ in terms of Newtonian logico-causal connections. That is the real sin.”

In discussions on the subject of natural theology, Torrance had always said that efforts to build a logical bridge between God and the world are invalid. He reiterated this in reference to the doctrine of election. “If you think with logical-

14 Samuel Moffett, PTS Professor of Missions Emeritus, and his lovely wife Eileen.

15 Private correspondence with the author, 15 October 1996.

causal connections then if Christ died for all men all men have to be saved. And if you say Stalin and Hitler went to hell, then you say He didn't die for all men, you see. But both those mistakes, the limited atonement or the universalism, have a fundamental problem behind them: they substitute for the Holy Ghost logical-causal connections. That is the real error. And that comes from the Latin tradition. You don't get that in the Greek theological tradition." When he was asked for something to read on this, he suggested the Introduction to "The School of Faith."

Torrance's largesse in responding to pastors is evident in his reply to Lance Hickerson, who later wrote asking for clarification on election.¹⁶ This letter is dated 20 September 1995:

Dear Mr. Hickerson,

I have been away from home—hence the delay in writing to you.

In writing a history of Scottish Theology¹⁷ I have had to distinguish quite sharply between "evangelical Calvinism" and "logical, federal, or rationalistic Calvinism." The problem arose with Theodore Beza and Du Moulin the younger who cast the teaching of Calvin into a mould of rigidly syllogistic logic, which made them differ at decisive points from Calvin. For example, Calvin rejected the mediaeval idea (Alexander Hales) that while the death of Christ is sufficient for all, it is efficient only for some—see Calvin *On Eternal Predestination*, IX.5—whereas Beza made it a major plank in his teaching, as did the Synod of Dort, which rejected the Gospel message that Christ died for all mankind, tasted death for every man, etc. Hence they argued that the great missionary command of our Lord applied only to the covenanted and elect. This view was formalized in the Federal system of Calvinism, going back to Perkins and others, in which all the teaching of the Bible was cast into a rigidly logical framework, which was elaborated in accordance with preconceived notions of law and not biblical notions of grace. But it involved very serious metrological heresy in the way in which it read the kind of distinctions that obtain in a creaturely finite world, back into God. Thus when they expounded PREdestination, the "pre" was understood in terms of temporal, causal, and logical *prius*, and so in terms of rationalistic connections that belong only to the created world. To project the way we finite creatures think and speak and act into the eternal Being of God is a dreadful form of heresy, and indeed blasphemy. Once

16 L. Hickerson, Bible teacher and graduate of PTS, was working for the Dead Sea Scrolls Project (directed by Professor James Charlesworth) when he attended the Adams House meeting.

17 T. F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology, From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

the teaching of the Gospel is cast into that form, the whole nature of the Gospel of grace is changed, and indeed the very concept of God is changed—eg it denies that God IS Love, and involves a serious form of Nestorian heresy in separating the incarnate Son from the Father, so that instead of understanding God exclusively in terms of the self-revelation of the Father in the Son, they start with a rationalist concept of God governed by law and absolute power, both humanly conceived, behind the back of Jesus Christ! Then they twist the message of the Gospel to make it fit in with their preconceived rationalist framework. Who did this more than John Owen, the rational Congregationalist, the strength of whose writing lies in its legalistic and logical concatenation all through, but which so damaged the NT teaching of the Gospel that militates against missions? It was only when that was overthrown, with the idea that the Gospel is to be preached only to the chosen few and not to all mankind and all nations, that foreign missions arose, and Calvinism was restored to its original evangelical form. Moreover the kind of piety and godliness to which this legalized and localised Calvinism [tended] was what the Scottish divines denounced as “neo-nomian”. It also gave rise to the idea that the propositions of the Westminster Confession are exact expressions of Biblical statements, and so they read the Bible in the Light of the Westminster Confession, and not the other way round. Thus they lapsed back into the Roman error of interpreting the Bible in the light of tradition, and not the other way round!

All the problems you raise come from this form of rationalist or logical Calvinism—eg problems about God’s sovereign power, which is understood in terms of Aristotelian logic and causality and not the evangelical revelation of God in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. One cannot project into God the kind of divisions and distinctions which we human creatures have to employ in a finite world—so that to distinguish different aspects in the will of God etc is serious error, a form of mythological projection into Deity. Thus also to distinguish between the Word and Will of God, the Love of God (*dilectio*) and election (*electio*) is also to project into God creaturely distinctions which we must not and cannot do. A federal and rationalistic Calvinism thus represents a severely anthropomorphic notion of God, a problem with which it copes only by absolutising in God human ways of thinking in logic and cause, which is precisely what Calvin himself rejected! The same problem arises in the logicalised distinction between permitting and efficacious permission.

Hence in answer to your questions:

1. No it is not proper to speak of more than one aspect of God’s willing, for God’s Will and God’s Being are one and the same—his Will is his Being in action, and God’s Being is the Love that God is. Here we must

keep strictly to Christ who is God incarnate, in mind, heart and will and act—there is no other God, and God acts in no other way than he has revealed himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, that is in a fully Christo-centric way, and NEVER behind the back of Jesus Christ.

2. What you speak of as “meticulous providence” is to read Aristotelian notions of causal connections and distinctions back into God—it is a form of rationalistic determinism. That was even rejected by the Westminster Confession, although it did make use of the Mediaeval Roman distinction between second causes and the first cause—the very notion of “cause” in this sense is not Biblical but Aristotelian. When Calvin on an occasion used “cause” in relation to election, he said that Christ himself is “Cause” in all four senses of “cause”—he was himself the material and efficient as well as the formal and final cause of election. We are elected IN Christ. He was himself the Elect one and we are elected in him and by him and for him. See his *Sermons on Ephesians*, for example.

3. Election is both individual and corporate. The Lord Jesus Christ was both the “one and the many”. He is the one Creator God in whom all human beings live and have their being, but he is also one particular man, Jesus born of the Virgin Mary, in whom each one of us personally and individually meets and knows God, but knows him in union and communion with Christ in an essentially corporate as well as individual and personal way. This wonderful relation of the one and the many which permeates the Bible all through, is rejected by and lost in rationalistic localized Calvinism. One of the passages which federalistic absolute particular predestinationists seek to justify themselves is by appeal to St. Paul’s teaching in Romans and God’s loving Jacob and rejecting Esau. But that is to misread and misuse it, for the passage has to do with the way in which divine election operated in Israel, from the many to the one, and from the one to the many, ending up, as St Paul does with the statement that “All Israel will be saved”. See here George Hendry’s exposition in *The Westminster Confession Today*, 1960.¹⁸

4. Does the fact that salvation is ascribed wholly to God exclude genuine human action? It is from God, and indeed God in Christ (there is no other God!), that we human beings live, move and have our being—it is God who created human beings so that the nearer we get to God, the more properly human we become—it is when we depart from him that we become inhuman. That is why God’s activity in Christ his incarnate Son, the Word made flesh, is essentially personalizing and indeed humanizing

18 Published by John Knox Press. George S. Hendry taught systematic theology for many years at PTS. Torrance had a high regard for Hendry’s *The Gospel of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958).

activity. See my book *The Mediation of Christ*, in its new edition by T & T Clark. . . .

It might be helpful for you to read a recent book by Professor Leanne van Dyk, called *The Desire of Love, John McLeod Campbell's Doctrine of the Atonement* (published by Peter Lang, New York, 1995)¹⁹—that would be a good antidote to John Owen! You may have met Leanne Van Dyk at Princeton where she wrote her doctorate now published in this book. It may help you also to read a recent small book of mine, *Preaching Christ Today, The Gospel and Scientific Thinking*, published by W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids. . . .

With prayerful good wishes,

[signed] Thomas F. Torrance²⁰

This reply exhibits Torrance's generosity of response, but some of his publications will need to be consulted for more scholarly elaboration of his teaching on election and predestination.²¹

In February 1997, I flew from Montana to hear Torrance deliver his last Princeton lecture at CTI: "Einstein and God."²² Theologians and scientists, including Nobel laureate John Wheeler, filled the room. And James Loder was there, who always introduced Torrance to his class, after recounting his scholarly fame, as "the only theologian I know who has a prayer bench in his study." It was an honor to attend.

For his theological writings, lectures, private conversations and personal attention, I will always be grateful. It is an understatement to say that my life was enriched by him. In conclusion, I recall he did not belittle lesser minds or show favoritism when students asked for help. He did his part to deepen our theological thinking, and affirmed the historic Trinitarian faith with intellectual integrity. He encouraged many who were not Reformed to stay in their own traditions and evangelize their own people. There was "love for the brethren" and balance in his

19 The actual title is *Desire of Divine Love*.

20 Private correspondence with Lance Hickerson, 20 September 1995.

21 Begin with Torrance's 126-page introduction to his book, *The School of Faith* (London: James Clarke, 1959); it is currently available through Wipf & Stock Publishers. This beautifully written piece can be supplemented with his early articles: "Predestination in Christ," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941): 108–41; "Universalism or Election?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2 (1949): 310–18. Cf. A. A. Solomon, "The New Testament Doctrine of Election," *SJT* XI (1958): 406–22; James B. Torrance, "The Incarnation and 'Limited Atonement,'" *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 2 (1984): 32–40; James B. Torrance, "Introduction," in John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 1–16. For the biblical material, see the commentaries on Romans by Charles E. B. Cranfield, and H. H. Rowley's *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950).

22 Thomas Torrance, "Einstein and God," *Reflections* 1 (Spring 1998): 2–25.

ecumenical approach. He could not think of serving Christ without serving the Church. It was in the service of his Lord that Torrance gave so much of his time to the worldwide Church. His time was given to diverse groups and individuals, including scientists, theologians, and students preparing for pastoral ministry. On behalf of myself and many others, I thank the family of Thomas F. Torrance for sharing so much of his time with us.

Rev. Mark Koonz received his MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1990. He is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, having served as pastor of churches in Kansas and Montana. He is currently pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Walla Walla, Washington State. His interests include reading, rambling conversations with friends, youth trips into the unexpected, long walks in the country, and painting landscapes. He can be contacted at mkoonz@charterinternet.com.

A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR TOM TORRANCE

Samuel H. Moffett

Thomas F. Torrance was just a famous name to me before we became friends. Perhaps the friendship was inevitable. We were both of Scottish heritage, both born in northeast Asia, both sons of missionaries, both Presbyterians, both seminary professors, and both about the same age. I think it was his books that first attracted my notice long before I ever personally met him, but when I did, I discovered that the man was even greater than his books. He lived what he taught, and because of this, his books came to life for me.

It was my wife Eileen, in the early 1980s, who gave us our first personal meeting. Tom and Margaret were visiting Princeton Seminary. I had been recently called to the Chair of Ecumenics and Mission. We knew that they were close friends of President James and of Hazel McCord, but Mrs. McCord was ill. We also knew that the Torrances had strong missionary connections with China. Because of this, Eileen sought them out, offering to take Margaret around Princeton or New York. Tom and I decided to join them, and our compatibility was instant.

Tom Torrance was intensely interested in the world mission of the church and asked about our work in Korea and told us with great affection about his own parents and their work in China. He said he knew about my father.

He was also a friend of Princeton Seminary and of the American Church. His deep concern with the relationship of science and the Christian faith had been instrumental in the founding of the Center of Theological Inquiry, and he was an active Board member there.

Our friendship has deepened over the years with the whole Torrance family. Thomas Torrance was more than a great theologian and churchman. He was deeply spiritual, ecumenical, authentically intellectual, enthusiastically mission-minded—and he was my very dear friend.

Born in North Korea to missionary parents, Samuel Moffett received his education in America at Wheaton College, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Yale University. From 1947 to his permanent retirement in 1987, he dedicated his time to missionary work and teaching, both in Asia and in the United States. Dr. Moffett currently resides in Princeton, NJ as the Henry Winters Luce Professor of Ecumenics and Mission Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary.

REFLECTION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE REV. PROF. T. F. TORRANCE FOR THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

George Ziegler

I had completed two years of seminary before I was introduced to T. F. Torrance's book, *The Mediation of Christ*.¹ Though I had been a Christian for close to 20 years (and even served as a missionary in China for two years), I remember feeling that I was hearing the gospel for the very first time. Since that summer, more than a decade has passed, most of which I have spent in ordained pastoral ministry. Yet the fundamental reorientation that occurred for me through my encounter with the writings and teaching of T. F. Torrance has set the trajectory of my life and ministry.

I am convinced that Torrance remains an important figure, not just for the 20th century, but also for the Church of *today*, because his life embraces all together Church, mission, and theological seriousness. Liberal, evangelical, or emergent, today's Church needs—no, requires—this tripartite combination in order to be who she is created to be in Christ.

What makes T. F. Torrance so important for the Church? First of all, Torrance's *life* is a lesson in the synthesis of Church, mission, and theological seriousness. Torrance and his five siblings grew up in a missionary family in China. The three boys (Tom, James, David) share a common theology and passion for Christ that has led them each to some combination of serving the Church and writing and teaching theology. The three girls (Mary, Grace, Margaret) all married pastors (two of whom also served as missionaries) and although they were not theologians as such, they were strongly supportive of their brother Tom in spirit throughout their lives. It has been my privilege to know personally several of the children of the six original Torrances; as one observes the extended family, these three themes of Church, mission, and theological seriousness pervade. The extended family has continued the Torrance legacy through theological teaching, missionary service, and pastoral leadership throughout the world.

1 T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, The Didsbury Lectures (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992).

I want to highlight three elements of T. F. Torrance's theology that I believe inspire and motivate this kind of wholistic dedication to Christ and his Church.

THE CHURCH SHARES IN CHRIST'S MINISTRY

For Torrance, the whole of the Church's life takes place "properly within the circle of the life of Jesus Christ."² There is no point in our life in Christ in which we act alone. Thus, while the service and worship of the Church is not the *same* as the ministry and worship of Christ, neither is it *another* ministry.³ The Church's function in this world is not to take over from Christ, as if she were a body acting in his absence. Rather, the Church is *one* body *with* Christ, and in union with him serves his mission in the world. The Church serves Christ's ministry of reconciliation in a way correlative to the ministry of Christ and yet in a relation of subordination and obedience. She recognizes that the pattern for her life and work on earth has its significance only in directing the world's attention away from herself and towards her risen and ascended Lord.⁴ In this ministry, the controlling concept is that of servants serving their Master and Lord who himself is the Suffering-Servant. Yet as the Church shares in the servant ministry of Christ, she does so with hope and joy, for she also participates in his exaltation. The Church's responses of faith and obedience are essentially *echoes*—"the joyful communion of those who give thanks for a sacrifice made on their behalf and who are summoned by the music of angels to an antiphonal oblation of praise and thanksgiving."⁵

THE CHURCH'S LIFE IS UNCEASING FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

Torrance's relentless insistence on the active agency of God in all of our knowledge and service acts as a constant guard against the Church's objectifying tendencies – the human tendency to think of God as "up there", "out there" and distant from us. There is no "safe distance" from God that humans can achieve, for the relation of creatures to God is inherent and unavoidable. No one is a spectator. Our unresponsiveness to the presence of God in all aspects of life is simply rebellion and sin. Torrance reminds the Church that all her responses of faith and obedience—her worship, her mission, her preaching, her reading of Scripture—are a "knowing *with*" and a "sharing *in*" the mission and ministry of Christ. Christ is Mediator of our entire humanity. By virtue of his ongoing ascended life, this mediation of Christ is an ongoing activity. The Christian's responses are never simply responses *to* Christ, but are always also a *sharing with him* by the Spirit in his response and offering on our behalf. The Church's acts are "sacramentalized" as the ascended Lord uses her as his instrument of self-proclamation.

2 T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays towards Evangelical and Catholic unity in East and West* (London: G. Chapman, 1976), 211.

3 T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 37.

4 T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1977), 122.

5 *Royal Priesthood*, 96.

MISSION FLOWS FROM UNION AND COMMUNION

Christian living or “life in Christ” finds its source and *telos* in a sanctifying union and not simply a justifying redemption. This union is not simply declaratory or judicial, but *onto-relational*. Salvation is not a “thing” that we are “given” called “grace” with “benefits.” Rather, we are adopted into the Father-Son relationship of Christ through union with him. “Men and women are savingly reconciled to God by being taken up in and through [union with] Christ to share in the inner relations of God’s own life and love.”⁶ The Spirit unites human beings with Christ’s humanity in such a way that we are adapted for knowledge and communion with God and for fellowship with one another in what is a “humanizing” or “personalizing” activity.⁷ Ethics, for Torrance, flows from this new relational situation in which we find our true center of existence with Christ in God and live as God’s covenant partners.

The implications of this priority for the Christian life are endless and need to be worked out in both the academy and the Church, for there is nothing passive or static about this relation. This onto-relational union calls for a reciprocal “intelligent life-answer” within us by the Spirit. In this way, the life of the Son is made to reverberate in our hearts and lives through the Spirit. Torrance writes:

The Christian revelation discovers to us that our existence is grace through and through, but also grace in a special sense: that we have been so made, as intelligent beings, that we must give an intelligent life-answer to grace in such a way that our existence is ours only as we *re-live our grace-existence* in a thankful and knowledgeable motion in answer to the Word of grace.⁸

We “re-live our grace-existence” as we joyfully offer the life and sonship of Christ which we have freely received back to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.⁹ In this way, the life of Christ is echoed in our hearts while our voices are added to that mighty angelic chorus of antiphonal praise just on the other side of the veil.

In this short excursion into Torrance’s theology, I have sought to demonstrate the thoroughness with which Torrance calls the Church to recognize her true nature and purpose—an existence centered with Christ in God such that all her faith and obedience is a joyful and thankful sharing in and with the actual mission and ministry of the living Christ.

It is this thrilling theology and the fruit of lives inspired by it that have led me to temporarily leave pastoral ministry to pursue PhD studies in Aberdeen, Scotland. For myself, Torrance’s theological legacy to the Church and its mission in the world was too significant to permit a superficial understanding or an appre-

6 *Mediation of Christ*, 64.

7 This is Torrance’s understanding of *theosis*.

8 T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 116. Italics added.

9 *Theology in Reconciliation*, 212.

ciation from a distance. I wanted time to be steeped in the kind of theological reflection on the Church's union with Christ that generates a pastoral ministry characterized by "unceasing fellowship" and a missional engagement that flows from that same center. Certainly the academy is not the only beneficiary of Torrance's rich theological legacy. He has left an equally substantial gift to the Church—one which I hope to receive and distribute in my own calling. The theological convictions that produced a family of missionaries, pastors, and theologians need to be mined, inhabited, and celebrated by today's church leaders and lay people. What an incredible vision Torrance offers to the Church to share by the Spirit in the life and mission of the living, reigning, and ascended Christ.

Rev. George (Geordie) Ziegler is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), having served the congregation of Fremont Presbyterian Church in Sacramento, California for eight and a half years. He currently resides with his wife and three children in Banchory, Scotland, where he is pursuing post-graduate research at the University of Aberdeen on the doctrine of theosis in T. F. Torrance in interaction with Eastern Orthodoxy.

TORRANCE'S DOCTRINE OF FAITH

Daniel Thimell

The motivating force behind much of Thomas F. Torrance's theology can be traced back to his first fourteen years of life growing up in a missionary home in Chengdu, West China. His father's "consuming concern...was to help the people of West China to faith in Christ."¹ As a young man, Torrance shared that missionary zeal, which later was channeled into "his desire to promote and teach Christ-centered theology."²

His theological discourse is certainly compressed and written at a high level of abstraction, which can drive one to despair.³ Some of this is due to the sheer power of his intellect. T. H. L. Parker once commented regarding John Calvin that, like Samuel Johnson, he was one of those rare intellects "born to grapple with libraries";⁴ the same might be said of Torrance. Yet the highly condensed nature of his writing really stems from his relentless determination to be Christ-centered. He frequently sweeps over vast areas of theological landscape in a single sentence, grounding it all in Christ. And if it be objected that he, like Karl Barth, falls prey to a "Christocentric constriction," one might note that someone else, writing with apostolic authority, declared it his objective to "take every thought into captivity to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Much has been written about T. F. Torrance's exposition of theology as a science, his critique of dualism and his support for Barth's theology. Yet one largely overlooked aspect of his contribution is his doctrine of faith. On the one hand, an exploration of his doctrine of faith reveals the fundamental contours of his theology: his vigorous defense of the once-for-allness of what God has accomplished in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. But on the other, it highlights his understanding of the Gospel as the Good News of Christ, not only for us but in us, not as a potential reality awaiting our ratification and response, but as an already accomplished event in which we are invited to share.

Some years ago, Torrance published an article on the doctrine of faith, which ignited a firestorm of controversy.⁵ He asserts that human faith is grounded in God's faithfulness, and that indeed, faith and believing do not properly apply to

1 David W. Torrance, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance: Minister of the Gospel, Pastor, and Evangelical Theologian," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowland and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 2–3.

2 Ibid., 5.

3 See Daniel W. Hardy, "T. F. Torrance," in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 173.

4 T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 16.

5 T. F. Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," *Expository Times* 68 (1957): 111–14.

humanity but to God. Furthermore, Jesus is presented as the vicarious believer, in whose believing we are given to participate.

That view was challenging then, and it is challenging still. In our own time, faith is sometimes portrayed as a kind of spiritual muscle or human virtue or latent potency which we actualize and thus from which we reap material or physical benefits. God becomes transmuted into a virtual Coke machine, passively awaiting our activation through the human unleashing of faith. Others depict faith as a heroic commitment to certain ideals, such as peace and justice, to which Jesus, the “man for others,” was committed. In its more evangelical form, faith may be presented as a pious attitude which fulfills the condition for forgiveness or right relationship with God. Many doctrines of assurance falter at precisely this point, for the question then becomes, do I have the proper attitude or feeling? Did I repent enough, believe enough, trust enough? In each of these instances, whether faith is viewed as force, an idealistic commitment, or a pious attitude, the focus is upon the individual and her psychological states.

To be sure, faith *is* indispensable. Without it no one is justified. We are summoned to believe in the One who died and rose again for us. When the Philippian jailer cries out to Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul does not respond, “Do nothing at all. Just remain as you are.” Rather, he declares, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30–31).

Faith is a human act, but Torrance’s contribution is to emphasize that human faith is undergirded by the faithfulness of Jesus as God the vicarious believer, who believes for us. If this seems to be strange language, it might be pointed out that Torrance grounds this doctrine, not only in certain passages of Scripture, but also in the priesthood of Jesus.⁶ His inhumanity is not the coming of God *in* man, which would reduce him to one of a series of prophets. Rather, he is “God coming to us *as man*.”⁷ He is “Mediator in such a way that in his incarnate Person he embraces both sides of the mediating relationship.”⁸ Thus, as we shall see, Torrance expounds our human faith as a participation in the faithfulness of Jesus, our High Priest. When faith is seen as the vital link between God and humanity, Torrance’s point becomes all the more relevant, for if it depends upon us and our piety, we are of all people most miserable. But the vicarious humanity of Jesus constitutes the only way, the only link.

The medieval church distinguished between *fides informis* (unformed faith, bare orthodoxy) and *fides caritate formata* (faith formed by love through the supernatural infusion of grace). Although an emphasis was placed upon faith as *assensus* (mental assent to divinely revealed truth as taught by the church), the ordinary layperson might be expected to exercise no more than *fides implicita* (implicit faith), a readiness to embrace whatever the church taught.

6 T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 110ff.

7 T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 66–67.

8 *Ibid.*, 66.

To all of this, the Reformers responded that faith is more than assent to doctrinal propositions, it is *fiducia*, personal trust in God's saving mercy through Christ. This represents a recovery of the New Testament emphasis on personal relationship, with the primary object of faith being a personal God.

It is all well and good to emphasize that we are justified by grace through faith, but so often the focus then shifts to faith as *our* part. Moreover, preoccupation with delineating various types of faith can distract our attention away from the Savior and the salvation he has secured. It can lead to anxious questions as to whether one possesses the right kind of mental state in order to appropriate redemption. John McLeod Campbell, as a young Scottish minister in the 1820s, discovered that his parishioners were convinced regarding "Christ's power to save" and of the "freeness of the Gospel," and yet they were filled with anxiety about their spiritual state because "all their doubts were as to themselves." He found that their concern was how they might connect with the blessings of the Gospel. In order to possess Christ as their Savior, they felt there was a condition they must fulfill, some sort of "repentance or faith or love."⁹ It was up to them to supply the "needed link."¹⁰

McLeod Campbell's flock had grown up steeped in a particular interpretation of Calvin's theology, sometimes called High Calvinism. High Calvinists had modified Calvin's theology by the addition of "the covenant of works," and thereby introduced unwittingly the notion of conditionality into God's relations with humanity. Adam and Eve, it was asserted, were given a covenant which stipulated that they could have eternal life if they were obedient. Such a teaching is unknown to Calvin. With this doctrine of conditionality well ensconced in their theology, it was a small step to say that, even for the elect, there are conditions. God will justify the sinner if that one believes and repents. There was further added the covenant of redemption, a sort of tritheistic bargain which provided that if Jesus would die for the elect, God would grant them justification.¹¹ Of course, the High Calvinist would reply that such a theological system is not based on conditional grace, since God provides that which his conditions require. The elect are given the faith that is necessary. Nevertheless, the entire notion of conditionality is arguably contrary to the Gospel. And again, it immerses the sinner in introspection, in hopes of ascertaining whether she possesses the requisite faith.

American evangelism has typically been more Arminian than Calvinist and thus has not been preoccupied with questions of divine election. God sim-

9 John McLeod Campbell, *Reminiscences and Reflections*, ed. Donald Campbell (London: Macmillan, 1873), 132.

10 *Ibid.*, 151.

11 See R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985); and D. A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). For a contrasting interpretation, arguing for a continuity between Calvin and the later Calvinist tradition, see Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982).

ply “elects” those whom he “foreknows” will believe. Yet the pivotal question remains for the Arminian as for the High Calvinist: “Do I really believe?” Evangelism influenced by Arminianism is constructed on a Semi-Pelagian model. First the preacher earnestly sets forth all that God has done in Christ: “Two thousand years before we were born he died for guilty sinners; every sin, even the most heinous, is atoned for.” And then comes the all-too-typical conclusion: “This is what God has done. Now, this is what *you* must do: repent, believe, read your Bible, and go to church.”

Now, at first glance, this summons seems to accord with the Scriptures. Are we not commanded to do these things in response to the Gospel? So we are! But that is precisely the point. Our actions, our costly discipleship, even our believing, are not *conditions of grace, but responses to grace*. Paul tells the Corinthians, “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). It is true that the Apostle goes on to say, “be reconciled to God” (verse 20), but the basis for our subjective response of being reconciled, of believing, is that Christ has already reconciled us by what he has done. It is a completed event. Faith, for Torrance, does not create a new reality. It simply participates in an already completed event. And even that participation is a sharing in the faithfulness of Jesus. From the cross, Jesus cried out, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30), not “We’re almost there! I’ve done my part, now you do yours.” It is finished. It is far beyond our poor power to add or detract. Salvation is not a cooperative venture. It is not as though God has done his 90 percent, and now it is up to you to do your 10 percent.

For Torrance, Christ has accomplished our salvation in his life, death, and resurrection. Whereas Western Christianity tends to interpret the atonement in almost exclusively forensic terms, Torrance contends that in the Scriptures and in the early patristic tradition, “the Incarnation and the atonement are internally linked, for atoning expiation and propitiation are worked out in the ontological depths of human being and existence into which the Son of God penetrated as the Son of Mary.”¹² Thus the mediation of Christ takes place within his own person as the God-man. His work is accomplished in his Person, within his Priesthood. He cites Athanasius, the great champion of the soteriological significance of the *homoousion*, as identifying a two-fold movement from God to humanity and from humanity to God. The incarnate Son of God must be true God from true God, since only God can save us.¹³ Yet he must also be truly man, living in “somatic solidarity”¹⁴ with us in order to touch our human condition.

As our substitute, he dies in our place. He dies our death, the death we should have died. The wages of sin is death and Jesus pays that wage by dying instead of us. But more than legal dimensions are involved. Jesus is not only our substitute. He is also our representative. By this he means that Jesus embraces us in his all-inclusive humanity. Our Western, individualistic minds find it difficult to

12 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 50.

13 T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 149; Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 83.

14 Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 155.

grasp how Jesus can be linked with us through humanity, but he is. We are incorporated into his vicarious, representative humanity through union with Christ.¹⁵

Torrance is drawing from Paul's teaching¹⁶ that in the *assumptio carnis*, Christ took our humanity upon himself in such a manner that when he died, we died; when he rose, we rose; and when he ascended, we ascended with him. In our humanity he took our sin upon himself and offered up a life of faithful obedience which we could not offer. He then died and rose again in somatic solidarity with us such that his humanity became our new humanity. Now in union with Christ through the Holy Spirit, we participate in all that he has done for us and live out of his righteousness and his risen humanity.¹⁷

Torrance's doctrine of faith must be seen in this context, as a participation in the faithfulness of Christ, in his Priesthood in our humanity. As our High Priest, he offers the one response that is acceptable to the Father on our behalf. He dies accepting the divine verdict of "Guilty" upon our humanity, and he confesses our estrangement from God in his cry of dereliction from the Cross. In so doing, "Jesus converted man's atheistical shout of abandonment and desolation into a prayer of commitment and trust, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.'"¹⁸

It is important to note that Torrance does acknowledge the importance of human belief in response to the Gospel, but he emphasizes that this faith is grounded in the faithfulness of Christ. In fact, "the faithfulness of Christ involves both the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness of the man Jesus." In other words, Jesus as the God-man is faithful as God and as man. Furthermore, the humanity of Jesus embraces all of humankind, such that we can speak of "our involvement in the whole movement of the Incarnation from the birth of Jesus to His ascension."¹⁹

In that life of union between God and man Christ manifested a twofold steadfastness or faithfulness: the steadfastness of God and the steadfastness of man in obedience to God; the steadfastness of God the Word revealing Himself to man, and the steadfastness of man believing and trusting in His Word and living faithfully upon it. Jesus Christ is God being true to Himself steadfastly and faithfully in the midst of our human estrangement, into which He entered in grace and steadfast love. Jesus Christ is man being perfectly true to God, steadfastly and faithfully obedient to God, the Amen of truth to God's truth. He is from the side of man, man's *pistis* answering to God's *pistis*, as well as from the side

15 Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 1 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959), 239–49; c.f. Christian D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 125–28; Kye Won Lee, *Living in Union with Christ: the Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 157–66.

16 See 2 Cor. 5:14, Eph. 2:4–6, and Col. 3:1–3.

17 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 94–96; T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith* (London: James Clarke, 1959), lxxx–lxxxii.

18 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 52.

19 "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," 133.

of God, God's *pistis* requiring man's *pistis*: as such He lived out the life of the Servant, fulfilling in Himself our salvation in righteousness and truth.²⁰

In this way *our* faith is implicated in *his*.

This teaching maintains continuity with the Reformed insistence that the Gospel means that God always gives what he demands. It can be argued that this is the true content of *sola gratia*. The *sola* does not govern one part of the Gospel (atonement), while human autonomy and free will govern another (repentance and faith). *Sola* is an all-embracing rejection of human performance as playing any role at all in salvation.

Of course, it may be replied that God gives the sinner faith, but not in the faithfulness of Christ. It is simply a miraculous gift bestowed upon the sinner in the form of a "positive conviction, wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit."²¹ But then the sinner is obliged to hunt around within to see whether in fact he has a warrant for supposing he possesses such a gift. Torrance avers that the faith we need for salvation is located in Christ, in the faithfulness of the God-man as man. Thus the sinner is urged to look away from herself, her piety, and her spiritual attainments, to Christ. Thus, he says, "Jesus Christ is thus not only the incarnation of the Divine *pistis*, but He is the embodiment and actualization of man's *pistis* in covenant with God."²²

Christ therefore upholds *both ends* of the divine-human relationship. Torrance contends that this is the import of 2 Corinthians 1:18ff., where Christ is both the "faithful *Yes* of God to man," and the "faithful *Amen* of man to God." God in Christ has done it all, has atoned fully for our sins in his life and death, but we are not thrown back upon ourselves to make a connection with his atonement. Christ also offers up to God "our human response of obedience and faithfulness."²³

It is precisely here that Thomas Smail demurs. Smail, in many ways Torrance's ally in a Reformed theological stream mediated through Barth, finds Torrance less than satisfactory at this point: "It is indeed true that I cannot respond *by myself* till Christ has responded for me; it is also true that I must answer for myself."²⁴ Smail thinks that Torrance's failure to make room for our individual response is part of an inadequate distinction between the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. He further contends that the Holy Spirit "brings Christ's vicarious 'Yes' to God on my behalf, and makes it available to me." He "enables me," which is to say, he "lets me say my 'Yes' to his 'Yes.'"²⁵

20 Ibid.

21 Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 133.

22 Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," 113.

23 Ibid., 114.

24 Thomas A. Smail, *The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 109.

25 Ibid., 112.

Christian Kettler offers an incisive rejoinder, contending that Torrance indeed acknowledges the “importance of the personal response of faith,” but solely as a participation in Christ’s vicarious humanity. He notes that for Torrance, the human condition is so damaged by sin and death that Christ came to accomplish an ontological atonement in the depths of human being, such that “he did not merely *enable* us to respond.... He acts on our behalf, when we are unable, not to *destroy* our responses, but to *establish* them, in order to provide a *basis* and *foundation* for them!” Thus, I can respond for “my myself” so long as we add the words “in Christ!”²⁶

Kettler occupies solid ground in finding provision for our personal response (in Christ) to the atonement accomplished in the vicarious humanity of Christ. Torrance says that Jesus “provides us freely with a faithfulness in which we may share.”²⁷ We *are* summoned to believe, but our feeble faith is strengthened and upheld by the faithfulness of Jesus. He illustrates this by recalling how he taught his young daughter to walk: “She did not rely upon her feeble grasp of my hand but upon my strong grasp of her hand which enfolded her grasp of mine within it. That is surely how God’s faithfulness actualized in Jesus Christ has laid hold of our weak and faltering faith and holds it securely in his hand.”²⁸

In the Medieval Church, grace was viewed as a quasi-substance, detached from Christ and deposited in the church. The burning question then became, *how* do you get it? The answer was found in the Sacrament of Penance, which stipulated the conditions of *contritio*, *confessio*, and *satisfactio*. The response of Calvin was that God has already spoken the word of grace, of forgiveness on the Cross. We are summoned to a life of “evangelical repentance,” not as a condition of grace but as a response to it, enabled by it.²⁹ So it is with faith. The great mistake, it would seem, is to detach faith from Christ and suggest that there is a chasm between God and humanity which *we* must cross by the exercise of *our faith*.

Nicholas Wolterstorff likens faith to a flimsy footbridge strung over a deep chasm.³⁰ As a human act, it is. It is a precarious, risky venture, but enfolded in the faithfulness of Christ, faith finds a strength and a vitality and a sure confidence not its own. In the movie, *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke Skywalker, the valiant warrior, leaves Yoda without completing his training as a Jedi. Obi-Wan laments, “That boy is our last hope.” Yoda responds, “No. There is another.” In our life in Christ, there is Another, One who believes for us and who continues to uphold us by his faithfulness.

As Torrance puts it so movingly:

26 Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ*, 140.

27 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 92.

28 *Ibid.*, 93.

29 See James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 44–45.

30 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 76.

The whole of our salvation depends upon the faithfulness of God who does not grow weary of being faithful. It is God's faithfulness that undergirds our feeble and faltering faith and enfolds it in His own.... That [Jesus Christ] stood in our place and gave to God account for us, that He believed for us, was faithful for us, and remains faithful even when we fail Him again and again, is the very substance of our salvation and the anchor of our hope.³¹

Thus, the content of *sola fide* is *solus Christus*.

Daniel Thimell, PhD University of Aberdeen, teaches theology at Oral Roberts University and is pastor of St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Marshall, Oklahoma.

31 Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," 114.

T. F. TORRANCE: THE ONTO-RELATIONAL FRAME OF HIS THEOLOGY

Gary Deddo

Thomas F. Torrance was born to missionary parents in Chengdu, Sichuan, China, on August 30, 1913. The family returned to Scotland in 1927, where Torrance studied classics and philosophy at the University of Edinburgh (1931–1934), completed his B.D. at New College (1934–1937), and went on to begin his Ph.D. studies under Karl Barth in Basel. During World War II, he served as a military chaplain and was awarded the MBE for bravery. After the war, he served as a pastor to several parishes in Scotland before becoming Professor of Christian Dogmatics at New College, Edinburgh, a position he held for twenty-seven years.

Torrance's name is probably most widely recognized for his work (with Geoffrey Bromiley) editing and translating into English Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and for founding the *Scottish Journal of Theology*. Widely regarded as the most outstanding Reformed theologian in the English-speaking world during the twentieth century, Torrance (with his brother David) also edited a new English translation of Calvin's New Testament commentaries and wrote dozens of books and hundreds of journal articles. The best-known works of Torrance are his early monograph on theological method, *Theological Science* (Oxford University Press, 1969), and his recent works in theology, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (T & T Clark, 1988) and *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (T & T Clark, 1996).

Several other achievements of note should be mentioned. Torrance was elected to be moderator of the Church of Scotland (1976–1977). In 1969, he became a member of the International Academy of Religious Sciences (*Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses*) and, in 1976, became a member of its sister organization, the International Academy of the Philosophy of Sciences (*Académie Internationale de Philosophie des Sciences*). In 1978, he was awarded the Templeton Prize for progress in religion for his contributions to the emerging field of theology and science. Torrance was also involved in the very significant consultations between Eastern Orthodox and Reformed churches, which resulted in the doctrinal landmark "Joint Statement of the Official Dialogue Between the Orthodox Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches" issued on March 13, 1991 in Geneva, announcing that an "agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity" had been reached. He also had the unusual honor of being made a protopresbyter of the Greek Orthodox Church by the Patriarch of Alexandria in 1973. Of final interest, I should note that Torrance was a friend of Billy Graham. In fact,

it was Tom who spearheaded the invitation to Billy to return to Scotland in 1991 to conduct a series of ten evangelistic meetings.¹

Tom Torrance passed away this last December, on the second, at the age of ninety-four. While known and appreciated by many, full consideration of Tom Torrance's work has really just begun. There are many foundational theological themes to be explored. Certainly crucial will be the doctrines of the Incarnation and of the Trinity, the mediatorial ministry of Christ, God and creation, and formal matters, such as theological method, the relationship of theology to the natural sciences, and his ecclesiology and corresponding ecumenical work to reunite the church. Out of all these, and more we could consider, there is a fundamental aspect of this thought that, if not given full play, renders much of his thought puzzling, confusing, or unpersuasive and will undermine any full benefit of the theological insight he offers. While the term "paradigm" is far too overused, full comprehension and appreciation of Torrance's work can be gained only by grasping and indwelling what I can only identify as his fundamental theological paradigm shift. In fact, in order for theology itself to be faithfully done—that is, done in a way that is worthy of its subject—Torrance found that we needed not just new answers to old questions, or even new questions; what is needed is a new frame of mind, new ways of thinking, not just new thoughts.

A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR THEOLOGICAL THINKING

If we are to grasp the new paradigm, the new way of thinking, reading Torrance requires that we let him critique how we think, not just what we think. The transformation of mind that tracking with Torrance demands is not just due to his own predilection to find his own new "paradigm," but, in his view, is required by the very nature of what it means to do theology faithfully. Such a reorientation is called for by the very nature of the object of theological reflection, God revealed in Jesus Christ according to Scripture.

This recommended frame of mind is not unique to Torrance, although rare in modern times. Torrance himself traces this line of reoriented thinking back to Athanasius who, in his dealings with Arius in the fourth century, recognized that our living faith in God calls for us to think "not from a center in ourselves," to avoid "mythologizing," to repent of "idolatry," and rather to think "from a center in God," for that is what it means to think theologically. In this mode of thought we recognize that God is not a creature and therefore cannot be directly compared to any creaturely realities. Rather than giving fixed or normative status to creaturely experience, our minds have to be uniquely reformed by the reality of the unique object we know, namely, God revealed in Jesus Christ. All our concepts, words, images, comparisons, and narratives must be radically sanctified under the impress of the truth of the revelation we have been graciously given so that we might think, as Athanasius put it, in an "accurate" and "godly way" about God. In

1 For the most complete biography available to date, see Alister E. McGrath, *T. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999).

this way our orthodoxy is necessarily and intrinsically entwined with our doxology and orthopraxy.²

AS FUNDAMENTAL AS REALITY

As Torrance indicates, this Athanasian approach to theological reflection reaches a crucial turning point when it comes to how we think about the nature of reality itself. We are mostly in the habit of referring (rather abstractly) to the deepest dimension of reality as its “being.” So we may ask: What is the nature of being? Of God’s being? Of our being? Our assumptions about being or reality are so fundamental that how we conceptualize what things really are necessarily colors all our thinking, including our theology. Often we remain unreflective about those assumptions. Certain philosophical and theological trends down through the ages have actually encouraged the neglect of ontological considerations, claiming they would only lead to presumptive theological speculation. Of course, there have been theologically unhelpful approaches to ontological considerations, but avoiding the issue is not necessarily one of them. In fact, these assumptions are so foundational, like the letters and words we use to communicate, that they are unavoidable. They are the tools we use to think, ask questions, and weigh answers. We use them to form, communicate, and evaluate all our ideas, concepts, understandings, and, yes, narratives. They are the water in which the fish swim. And, like fish, we rarely ask what it means to be wet, or look at the tools themselves that we use to engage in thought, communication, and deliberation on the way to action.

Torrance, in the Athanasian tradition, raises the question about the adequacy of our conceptual tools for doing faithful theology. In his analysis he provides us not just with a new vocabulary (different words or definitions), but with a new theological grammar that structures our ways of thinking, meaning, and communicating. Attempting merely to take away from Torrance his vocabulary or distinctive theological terms in order to deploy them within our usual grammar will lead to a confused and unsatisfying result. In fact, as far as I can tell, many find Torrance difficult to read just because they unreflectively borrow his concepts or theological conclusions only to try and plug them back into their own (divergent) frames of reference. This is no more effective than taking select English words, inserting them into, say, Hebrew and then expecting the language to make even better sense.³

THE ONTO-RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK

A central, if not the central, element in Torrance’s approach to theology involves his conviction that the Christian revelation of God in Christ requires

2 For the most extended discussion of Athanasius’s discovery and explication of the nature of faithful theology, see T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), especially chapter 1. See also his *The Christian Doctrine of God*, chapters 3 and 4.

3 For Torrance’s discussion on the nature and grammar of theology, see *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005), chapters 5 and 6.

that we adjust our fundamental assumptions about reality, about being, so that we think “onto-relationally.” The rest of this paper will spell out just what that means and entails.⁴ In general, Torrance means that especially when we think about God, we should think what—or better, who—God is, is essentially constituted by relationships. God would not be God if God did not exist eternally in relationship. Relationship is essential to the being of God such that if the relationships were different, God would be different. Or, without the relationships, God simply would not be God. So Torrance says of the early church fathers:

It became clear to them that the ontic relations between the divine Persons belong to what they are as Persons. No divine Person is who he is without essential relation to the other two, and yet each divine Person is other than and distinct from the other two. They are intrinsically inter-related not only through the fact that they have one Being in common so that each of them is in himself whole God, but also in virtue of their differentiating characteristics as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit which hypostatically intertwine with one another and belong constitutively to their indivisible unity with the Trinity. There is an indivisible and continuous relation of being between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit so that the Being of the Godhead is understood to be whole or complete not on the Father only but in the Son and in the Holy Spirit as well. These ontic and holistic interrelations between the three divine Persons in virtue of which they are what and who they are as Persons are substantive relations...or “onto-relations.”⁵

Now the contrasting frame of mind or grammar Torrance is attempting to reform seems to be endemic to modern Western ways of thinking (although not exclusively so). Torrance traces the foundational habits of mind clouding and confusing our theological reflections back across the centuries to at least Aristotle, coursing its way through Medieval and much of Protestant Scholasticism. It has also been powerfully reinforced through the Enlightenment philosophies of Locke, Descartes, Newton, and Leibnitz. These thinkers share a frame of mind that essentially regards reality, especially the reality of God, as being non-relational. That is, relationship is not essential but accidental (in the philosophical sense “not necessary”) to the being of God. God would be God and would be the same God with or without relationship to anything. Such a frame of mind is essentially atomistic and individualistic. Things are what they really are autonomously, all by themselves, apart from all relationships.

4 For the key passages that highlight the significance of an onto-relational way of thinking for theology, see *The Ground and Grammar*, 17–178; *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 102, 103, 157, 161, 166, 175, 194, 196; *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 43–45; *The Trinitarian Faith*, 275. Note that there are many other passages touching on onto-relational thinking in scientific endeavors. I will not address that dimension at all in this paper, but it does figure significantly in Torrance’s attempt to communicate with those in the scientific community.

5 *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 156–57.

Although applied especially to God, the same frame has also been assumed to apply to human existence as well. Relationship is not essential to humanity. God or we may or may not be involved in relationship; we or God remain essentially the same either way. God is thought to have fullness of being without relationship. In fact, the essential reality of God has often been defined in terms of a non-relational autonomy. Aristotle, for example, thought of God as the unmoved mover, while Leibnitz thought of God as the Monad. In traditional Christian theology, Roman Catholic and Protestant, the doctrine of God proper was often developed under the heading of *De Deo Uno* with a separate heading for thinking about God as Trinity, *De Deo Trino*. The attributes of God quite often have been explicated within a rubric that regards God being most like a single individual. The doctrine of the Trinity has often been addressed at the end or as a second separate section of the doctrine of God. The unintended effect, then, was to regard the trinitarian nature of God as more or less merely an attribute of the one unitarian God. The result has been that we begin with a notion of the oneness of God that necessarily and essentially excludes relationship, and then try forcibly to insert into that fixed notion the triune persons and relationships. This has led to confusion and even rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. It just does not fit or make sense. But what would happen if we started the other way around?⁶

Now the explanation of how so much received Christian theology came to regard God in essentially non-relational ways is not as significant as recognizing when and where this is the case, especially in our own thinking, and grasping the alternative paradigm and its theological implications. The rest of this paper will address that issue.

GROUNDING IN CHRISTOLOGY

What led Torrance to give such significance to conducting our theology in onto-relational terms? The foundational insight comes out of a biblical and theological consideration of Christology, that is, of who Jesus Christ is. Biblically-grounded orthodox reflection on the person and place of Jesus Christ in Christian faith and worship acknowledges that who Jesus Christ is, is constituted by his relationships—with the Father and the Spirit. The biblical witness to Jesus Christ is that his identity, who he is, is the Son of God. His absolutely unique relationship with the Father and the Spirit as the Son is essential to who he is and so to what he says and does for us. According to the biblical witness and Jesus' own self-witness, the identifying and so revelatory name of Jesus as Son is inherently relational as is the name of the Father. The New Testament narratives indicate that Jesus is who he is in virtue of his relationship to the Father and the Spirit: in his conception, in his baptism, in his ministry, in his transfiguration, in his atoning work, in his commissioning of the apostles, in the promise of the Spirit. All of who Jesus is and what he does essentially involves the Father and the Spirit. Eliminating the relational element of who Jesus Christ reveals himself to be evacuates the

6 See Torrance's discussion in *Ground and Grammar*, 174ff., for a brief explanation of how we came to operate with non-relational categories in our theology.

revealed identity of Jesus of any revelational value. If we do not recognize how he is related to the Father and the Spirit, we do not recognize, according to the New Testament, who he is. We do not yet believe.

Theological reflection in the early church confirmed this in its own way, notes Torrance. Were Jesus Christ not one, or as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed says, *homoousios* (one in being) with the Father, the Son would not be who he is: the Son would not be Lord and God, the Son would not be worshipped, and God, then, would not himself be our Savior. Jesus Christ could not be said to be eternally begotten of the Father and so could only be a creature made by God, completely different (*heteroousios*) or merely like (*homoiousios*) the Father. The early church in its creeds and confessions recognized that Jesus Christ has his being by being united to the Father, and, following this of course, by being one in being with the Spirit. If Jesus Christ were not eternally related according to his essential being to the Father and Spirit, he would not be the Son of God, he would not be divine, he would not be the image of the Father revealing himself to us, and he would not be Lord. Furthermore, he could not save us, as God, to be God's true children—that is, to really become in our being his sons and daughters. Eliminating the essential character of the relationship of Jesus to the Father and Spirit empties our faith of our knowledge of God and removes our salvation from God himself. If relationship is not essential to who Jesus is, then he is either other than God and so necessarily a creation of God, or he constitutes merely a conventional name or designation we use to refer to the appearance of the one unitarian God to us in a different form or shape, not truly the Son of God incarnate.

So, as Torrance indicates, working with an assumed non-relational ontology gives us no room to grasp the nature of who Jesus Christ is. If granted normative or determinative status in our understanding, our theology will be thrown in the direction of one heresy or another. If God truly is who he is with no relations internal and essential to his being, then we are left with three less-than-faithful ways to understand Jesus Christ. First, if oneness of being excludes relationship, to say then that the Father and Son are one (or Jesus is the Son of God Incarnate) must mean that in the end Jesus is swallowed up in the Father, so that there is no real distinction—the Son having no abiding humanity (adoptionism), or alternatively, Jesus was never really distinct from the Father, but just appeared to us to be so in the incarnation (docetism). Second, assuming a non-relational oneness forces us to mean that the Father is, in the end, swallowed up in the Son and disappears so there is no real abiding difference; God, as it were, turns into a man and ceases to be God. Only the Son is left (mythology). Third, if relationship is not essential to the being of God, if God must be all one undifferentiated ontological stuff or “substance” (to use Aristotelian categories), then we can only conclude that Jesus is neither God nor human, but a third kind of thing (a *tertium quid*)—a fusion of divinity and humanity into another kind of being without relationship (Apolinarianism). In short, if God and Jesus are ontologically one, but relationality is excluded from the true nature of being, then we can only mean that when A (God) and B (Jesus) come together, and are one, then A turns into B, B turns into A, or A and B fuse and become C, neither A nor B.

Torrance makes explicit that if we are to offer a fully Christian orthodox confession, then relationship must be internal and eternal to the being of God. But an onto-logic which is inherently non-relational rules out just this very thing from the beginning. A faithful Christology requires our repentance (*metanoia!*) from such a substantival or non-relational ontology and the affirmation of what amounts to an onto-relational understanding. This is the implication arising directly out of the declaration of the *homoousion* of Nicea that Torrance grasped and explicates so profoundly.⁷

TRINITARIAN GROUNDING OF ONTO-RELATIONS

Of course, the Christological controversies of the early church are inextricably intertwined with the Trinitarian controversies. These terms really differentiate certain elements of an ongoing discussion about how we are to understand Jesus Christ and so how he is related (yes, *related!*) to God (the Father) and the Holy Spirit (of God). Consideration of who Jesus Christ is as the Son of the Father leads to an understanding of who he is eternally and internally in God. The church's grappling with this deeper insight led to what we now call the doctrine of the Trinity. That doctrine remains a revealed mystery in that we in our understanding do not come to comprehend God, but we nevertheless confess we truly apprehend God since God is capable of and was successful in revealing himself (Jn 1:18; Mt 11:27; Heb 1:3; Jn 14:9). Our trinitarian understanding of God protects the mystery of God against rationalizations. Such rationalizations amount to our attempts to comprehend the Christian God strictly in terms of creaturely realities and categories, comparing God to what we seem to know and describe in our human experience. So, perhaps especially in the West, we project onto God our sense that things are what they are independent of anything else. That way is exactly what Athanasius regarded as idolatrous, mythological, inaccurate, and ungodly thinking. He saw a way forward that Torrance has passed on to us.

Faithful trinitarian formulations have been often said to require simultaneously the eternal unity, difference, and equality of the divine Persons. Torrance noticed that such unity cannot be understood as an undifferentiated and uniform substance, all one stuff, since that would eliminate the personal difference. That is the heresy of modalism. Neither can the difference be regarded as dividing or separating the being of God since that leads to tritheism (three ontologically separate beings) or to subordinationism (the difference between their being of differing ontological status: one person is not divine), which maintains the difference but does so by denying the ontological unity. Attempting to explicate the doctrine of the Trinity with the a priori constraints of a non-relational ontology, we are forced into affirming one of the several standard heresies.

What is required to maintain all three trinitarian criteria is a radical adjustment of our ontological grammar: we need an onto-relational frame of mind. For when relationship is allowed to take on ontological status, it enables us to think

⁷ The Christological grounding is covered at length in *The Trinitarian Faith*, especially in chapters 4 and 5.

of oneness as personal unity, not uniformity or undifferentiated ontic stuff. The oneness of God is a unity, a fellowship, a communion within the eternal being of God. The biblical witness then does not need to be converted in our minds to mere human conventional language or poetic metaphor that indicates no actual reality but can be taken as really revelatory of who God is. The Father and Son have eternally known, loved, and glorified each other.⁸ God really is eternally and so truly and actually Father, Son, and Spirit united without confusion or separation in one being. Of course, the New Testament witness to God's being loving now can take on a far more profound meaning. God is loving in his own being from all eternity before there ever was a creation.

Similarly, when we hear that the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, while eternally remaining Father and Son (or God and Word), we are not forced into modalism, tritheism, or subordinationism since relationship is allowed to have ontological status.⁹ Although we cannot comprehend exactly what or how such a unity works, especially in terms of human experience, we can approach the trinitarian nature of God with greater understanding. God has being by being in triune relationship. There never was a time when God was a lonely God, "looking for someone to love." Of all our human experience, a community of persons does analogously point more faithfully to God than does an autonomous atom or an isolated individual. God, in the fullness of his being, is holy loving, holy fellowship, and holy communion of the Triune Persons.¹⁰

ONTO-RELATIONALITY AND *PERICHORESIS*

Such a relational grasp of God in the early church led it to adopt a particular word and give it unique theological meaning to refer to the disclosure of the absolutely one-of-a-kind unity in God revealed in Jesus Christ. That word is *perichoresis*, which can be translated "mutual indwelling" or "coinherence" or "in-existence." Often, it mistakenly has been thought to derive from the Greek word *choreo*, from which we get our word choreography and so has become associated with dancing. The true root of the word, however, is *chora*, which is the Greek word for "space" or "room." While the figurative meaning of dance is not entirely misleading and perhaps even illuminating in an ancillary way, *perichoresis* indicates the making room for one another, creating space for the indwelling of the other or—perhaps a bit more loosely—being hospitable to one another. It is meant to render the biblical description of being "in" one another as we find prominent in the Gospel of John. The Cappadocian theologians of the fourth century referred to the "being in" or "inexistence" (*enousia*) of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Such understanding escaped the constraints of non-relational ontological thinking of much Greek thought and broke new ground by grasping the unique

8 See Mt 11:27; Jn 17:4 and 24.

9 See Jn 10:38; 14:10, 11, 20; and 17:21.

10 The trinitarian grounding of onto-relational thinking is treated in particular by Torrance in *Ground and Grammar*, chapter 6, and in *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 157 and 165–66.

unity of God in an onto-relational way—which came to be captured in essence by the word *perichoresis*.¹¹

IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER DOCTRINES

Once our frames of mind have been released from the thrall of non-relational ontological categories, our understanding of other doctrines can also undergo a transformation as well. I will briefly touch on these just to indicate the fruitfulness of this paradigm shift. The overviews below are just meant to be suggestive and indicative of the potential development of theological reflection along new trajectories.

CREATION

The doctrine of Creation has often been grasped in non-dynamic, mechanical, and atomistic terms. When an onto-relational option is introduced, new ways of understanding God's relationship with creation arise. If what creation is depends upon its actual relationship with God, then the nature of creation cannot exhaustively be captured by either logical or causal formulations. God's initiatives cannot be regarded as strictly causal events which have mechanical effects on created, relatively inert material. Analogies drawn from Newtonian physics (think of the collision of billiard balls) just will not do when attempting to understand the God-world relationship. In an onto-relational frame, the interactions must be construed in more personal and dynamic terms, in fact, much more like what we actually see in Scripture as God interacts with the world especially though Israel, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The source and destiny of creation can only then be regarded as radically contingent—first upon God's interactions with creation, and then within that divinely-appointed relational reality, upon creation's response to the initiatives of God and the resulting conditions.

Perhaps most critically, the onto-relational framework restores a meaningful place for divine and human agency in our understanding of creation. Without it, creation is most often approached in mechanical, impersonal, and even fatalistic ways. In Christian theology the result is often a more or less deistic description of creation. The sovereignty of God can then be approached as neither deterministic nor ineffectual. God can be regarded as victor over evil without being the source or cause of evil.

A dynamic and interactionist understanding undermines and then restructures the usual predestination/free-will debates where divine and human willing are causally interpreted in a zero-sum matrix. The working of God is not in direct competition with human agency, as force vectors in a field, but providentially

11 Significant discussions of *perichoresis* occur through Torrance's writings, but of special note are those found in *Christian Doctrine of God*, 102–3 and 168–202; *Ground and Grammar*, 172–73; *Trinitarian Faith*, 234. The word itself was first used theologically of the relations of the two natures in Christ. It was then deepened and brought over to serve the doctrine of the Trinity.

providing and overseeing humanity's limited yet real freedom in right relationship with God within the matrix of an onto-relational cosmos.

Properly rendered in the light of the Trinity and the Incarnation, the debates between process theologies and classical orthodoxy are also reframed since God's interactions with creation can be grasped in personal and dynamic ways without losing God's sovereignty or making God the source of evil.

The onto-relational framework opens up whole new vistas that radically reconfigure many of the perennial debates over God's connection with creation, exposing them to be false dilemmas set up by faulty non-relational presuppositions. We can grasp much more securely the personal character of God, who acts faithfully towards creation in promise and fulfillment, when worked out within an onto-relational paradigm which guards against having analogies drawn from within creation set up arbitrary boundaries around our theological understanding.¹²

SOTERIOLOGY

In the realm of soteriology, the onto-relational framework also bears much fruit. On the basis of a trinitarian and incarnational Christology where Jesus Christ is understood to be who he is in relationship with God in onto-relational ways, we can now understand differently God's relationship to us in Christ. Key to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, Jesus Christ is understood to be not only *homoousios* with God, but also *homoousios* with us. It is often overlooked that the Creed contains this double *homoousios*. First then, we should recognize, as Torrance does, that Jesus Christ reveals to us not only the truth of God (in the divine human relationship), but also the truth of humanity (in the human-divine relationship). The essential truth we find in Jesus Christ is that who and what humanity is, is founded in humanity's relationship with God. Humanity has its origin and destiny in its relationship with God. That relationship is essential to the very being of humanity.¹³ There is, as Barth famously said, no such thing as a godless humanity, even if humanity denies or forgets its God.¹⁴

UNION WITH CHRIST

For Christians in particular, the onto-relational option places at the center of the Christian life not the will of the Christian, not the belief, worship, or mission of the church, but the union of all believers together with Christ. Union with Christ, understood in an onto-relational way, serves as the essential definition of

12 For relevant discussion on the dynamic and inter-actionist relationship of God with creation, see especially *Trinitarian Faith*, chapter 3, and *The Christian Doctrine of God*, chapter 8. There are also many passages where Torrance is interacting with contemporary science and so discusses the onto-relational nature of creation. See the entire work, T. F. Torrance, *Divine and Content Order* (T & T Clark, 2005).

13 See especially *Trinitarian Faith*, chapters 4 and 5.

14 See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics (CD)* III.2, 203, 553; CD III.4, 653; CD IV.1, 480–81; CD IV 3.2, 788 and “The Humanity of God” in *The Humanity of God* (John Knox Press, 1974).

what it means to be a Christian—being united to Christ. As we migrate over into the new frame, obstacles are removed that once blocked us from seeing what the Apostle Paul meant by saying of himself, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). We can start to fathom better what we hear when we read that we are “co-buried,” “co-raised,” and “co-made alive” with Christ (Col 2:12, 13; 3:1) or that our lives are hid “with Christ in God” (Col 3:3), that we are seated in the heavenly places with Christ (Eph 2:6), that we are “one” with Christ and are actually “in” him in a way that somehow is comparable to his being “in” the Father (1 Cor 6:17; John 17:21–23)! The seemingly incomprehensible emphasis on the real exchange between Christ and us, spoken of so often in early church teaching and which led to the absolutely crucial emphasis in both Luther and Calvin (and in much subsequent Protestant theology) on our union with Christ, then begins to come into focus.

Giving union with Christ its full biblical weight requires that we maintain both the ontological and relational elements. One without the other will not do. Lacking the relational element yet maintaining an abstract and impersonal ontology offers us two equally objectionable alternatives: that Christ has ceased to be himself and turned into us or that we have turned into Christ and are no longer ourselves! However, upon overlooking the ontological element but retaining the relational, the Scriptural witness to union with Christ must be reduced to just a metaphorical description that does not point to any reality.

Our non-ontological relationship with Christ must then be reduced to psychological dimensions (we have warm feelings and strong emotional sympathy for one another), and the Christian life constitutes maintaining the right psychological state of mind towards Christ and his towards us. Or, relationship to Christ can be reduced to the moral “union” of two independent wills willing the same thing. We aim at somehow figuring out “what Jesus would do” so that we can will what he wills, and by imitation, do what he would have done, were he here with us. The Christian life is then about keeping our wills in line with his will by willing that alignment. Within the onto-relational frame, however, our perspective on most everything in the Christian life changes: our prayer, worship, obedience, ethics, vocation, ministry, evangelism, mission, and salvation itself. Relationship with Christ is a real union with him, a right relationship at the root of my being that is given as a gift. I really do belong to God as a child of his, sharing in Christ’s own union and communion with the Father in the Spirit. The Christian life then is participating in the graciously given fellowship and communion, rather than trying to make actual a potential made possible by Christ or reach an ideal exemplified by Christ. We have barely touched on some very important matters related to union with Christ, but hopefully you can begin to see a new horizon brightening and awaiting theological exploration.¹⁵

15 See especially *The Mediation of Christ*, chapters 2 and 3.

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Another profound implication arising from an onto-relational theological orientation is our very perception of who and what a human person is. Several scholars, most notably Eastern Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, have recounted how the early church's grappling with the person of Jesus and the trinitarian persons of the Godhead transformed their foundational assumptions about human being.¹⁶ Regarding human persons as only temporary appearances to be reabsorbed into their true Form or as exhibiting mere interchangeable roles (think of the megaphone masks distinguishing different persons in Greek theater, *proso-pon*) was transformed into thinking of persons as abiding realities in real relationship with God and others. The Western world inherited this monumental shift in thinking about the person.¹⁷ Subsequently, with, it seems, the help of certain Christian theological trends, often traced back to Boethius (480–525) and especially reinforced by Enlightenment thought, the ontological status of persons was retained, but the relational element dropped almost completely out of sight. We are what we are individually, autonomously, and even solipsistically and atheistically. Reinstating the onto-relational frame puts us back on track, enabling us to resist every reductionism of human personhood. In particular, it guards against a radical individualism often assumed in philosophies such as atheism, deism, materialism (or naturalism), and political theories tending towards anarchy as well as against the disappearance of the person in Platonism, pantheism, various monisms, and forms of political theory tending towards tyranny. The onto-relational framework provides a bulwark against other perhaps more subtle forms of reductionism current in at least modern Western culture, where we attempt to interpret the human person in terms of physics, chemistry, biology, individual or evolutionary psychology, or in terms of a functional sociology or social-psychology, politics, or economics. An onto-relational frame has enormous implications in the political arena for sorting through the issues of individual human rights or the status of nation-states. It reconfigures all our ethical deliberations that intrinsically involve relationships, not the least of which are the universal relationships between men and women, parents and children, and among the various nations/*ethnoi* who, in biblical terms, are in their very being neighbors one to another. The choice between individualism and collectivism proves to be another false dilemma once both the ontological and relational dimensions of human being are admitted. Persons are who they are first in relationship to God and then in real relationship with each other. We have our being by being in communion. That insight provides a secure foundation for human ethics.¹⁸

16 John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion* (New York: St. Vladimir's, 1985).

17 For Torrance's discussion of persons, see *Ground and Grammar*, 173–74; *Meditation of Christ*, 48–49, 65–72; *Trinitarian Faith*, 230; and *Christian Doctrine of God*, 102–3, 160–61.

18 For an exploration of the onto-relational understanding of Karl Barth (although he did not use the term), see Gary W. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996). For the particular implications for race, see Gary W. Deddo, "Neighbors in Racial Reconcilia-

THE NEW HUMANITY

Most radically, indwelling an onto-relational framework enables us to begin to approach what Paul was getting at when he said that he “no longer regards anyone from a merely human point of view” (2 Cor 5:16), that there is one new humanity re-created in Christ (Eph 2:13–18), and that Christ—who is the proto-Adam—actually has become the new head of humanity (Rom 5:14–15; 1 Cor 15:45–49; Eph 1:10). These days, many are searching for some means to unite humanity. We are looking for common ground. We are tired of divisions and wars. We are looking to governments, ideologies, religions, transcendental experiences, democratic rights, economics, etc. to bring us together. The Gospel, on the other hand, offers us the “all inclusive vicarious humanity”¹⁹ of Jesus Christ. He alone is the exclusive place where all human beings, without exception, can really and actually find unity without losing themselves. He himself is the common ground between God and the whole of humanity and among all of humanity in its various expressions—a claim that echoes Scripture’s witness to the cosmic lordship of Jesus Christ. But, unless we are ready to grasp such an astounding claim within its natural, realist framework—the onto-relational reality revealed in Jesus Christ as the new head of humanity—it offers us little more than fleeting metaphorical inspiration rather than the real onto-relational foundation of his call to us to participate in his ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5) in the power of the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show very briefly what Tom Torrance meant by onto-relationships and how significant it is not only for grasping what he was saying, but also for doing Christian theology as faithfully as we might. Without such a paradigm shift, a reformation of mind, we hinder ourselves from fully grasping the central realities of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Christian life. Allowing our minds to be recast so that we admit an onto-relational framework to form in our understanding not only illuminates those central doctrines, but also has profound implications for all of Christian theology and ethics. And those areas, just barely touched on above, are waiting to be explored by those who will follow Torrance as he followed Athanasius and the biblical witness to the Triune God made known in Jesus Christ.

Rev. Gary Deddo, PhD University of Aberdeen, is senior editor for InterVarsity Press Academic and lives with his wife and three children just outside of Chicago, IL. He is the author of Karl Barth’s Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human (Peter Lang, 1999). Deddo is also founding president of the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship (www.tftorrance.org).

tion: The Contributions of a Trinitarian Theological Anthropology,” *Cultural Encounters* (Summer 2007): 27–46.

19 This phrase is from Tom’s brother, James B. Torrance, in his *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 50–51.

APOLLINARIANISM IN WORSHIP

REVISITED:

TORRANCE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE RENEWAL OF REFORMED WORSHIP

Roger J. Newell

Liturgy and theology go hand in hand. Theology divorced from worship is not divine, but liturgy that is divorced from theology is not true service of God. . . . As I see it, that is our [the Reformed church's] greatest contribution to the theology of the world Church—the carrying through into the ecumenical situation of an integration born out of the centrality of the doctrine of Christ, and therefore the Christological criticism of the doctrines of the Church, Ministry, and Sacraments, in order that as we seek to come together in Christ the doctrine of Christ may be allowed to reshape all our churches so that we may grow up together into the fullness of Christ.¹

Throughout his writings as a theologian of the Reformed church, T. F. Torrance insistently sought to recover a Christ-centered, Trinitarian worship for the church—evangelical, orthodox, and catholic. I would like to describe how he struggled to accomplish this goal by starting with his diagnosis of the recurring problem of Apollinarianism in our worship.

THE CHALLENGE OF APOLLINARIANISM THEN AND NOW

In Torrance's most prescient essay regarding the challenge facing contemporary Christian worship, "The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Church," he carefully traced the Patristic roots of a kind of worship which had the unfortunate result of exalting the deity of Christ at the expense of diminishing his utterly real humanity.² Using J. A. Jungmann's study of ancient liturgy, Torrance describes how an effort to eradicate any hint of Arianism, with its subordination of Jesus, led to a liturgical practice of prayer directed *to* Christ, instead of *to the Father through Christ* as the one mediator. Why does this matter? Because prayer *to Christ* inevitably focuses on Christ in his majesty and grandeur

1 T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 1, *Order and Disorder* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959), 94.

2 T. F. Torrance, "The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy," in *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 139–214.

within the Godhead “in a way that seriously diminished and sometimes eliminated the Biblical stress on the high priesthood of Christ and his human mediation of prayer to the Father.”³

The source of this error was Apollinarius and his claim that the human mind (*nous*) was set aside when the divine *Logos* became incarnate. Apollinarius argued that if Christ had a human mind, he would have had sinful thoughts, would not have been truly perfect, and hence would not have been able to redeem us. Here is the *monothelitism* that leads to *monophysitism*.⁴ In their diagnostic reply, the Cappadocians, including Gregory of Nazianzus, identified this as a virulent new strain of docetism because if Christ’s human nature is only represented by a body, but not a human mind, it means he was never ignorant and never had the power to choose sin. Removing from Jesus what corresponds to us and replacing it with what is sinless ultimately means that Jesus had no fully human experience and did not and does not share our human experience to the full. Christ, therefore, was not a priest joined to us by *fellow feelings*. All of this cuts the ground from his mediatorial activity on our behalf because the whole of human nature was not taken up in the incarnation. God has not really come all the way to us.⁵

In their response to Apollinarius, the Cappadocians strengthened Athanasius’ argument that in assuming our flesh, Jesus was at the same time healing it. As they put it, what Christ has not assumed he has not healed.⁶ An Apollinarian Jesus, whose human nature is absorbed by the divine nature, has lost the human nature. After many debates on surrounding issues, over 500 bishops gathered at Chalcedon in AD 451 to clarify the church’s commitment to Nicea in 325. Chalcedon declared that Jesus Christ is complete in Godhead *and* complete in humanity—truly God and truly human, acknowledged in two natures, without confusion. The distinction of natures is in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature is preserved and comes together to form one person. Let us remember that in teaching that Jesus Christ had two natures in one person, Chalcedon did not so much explain the mystery of *how* Jesus is both God and human as it sought to describe faithfully the mystery that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine without reduction upward or downward, but faithfully following out the lines of thought which hold these two imponderables together.

Yet despite the genuine progress of Chalcedonian Christology, Torrance argues that an overreaction to Adoptionism and Arianism set in, in which a focus on Jesus’ genuine humanity began to yield place to an emphasis on Christ’s perfect deity.⁷ Even amongst the Cappadocians, Torrance detects this tendency. For instance, he sees it when John Chrysostom taught that the priest on earth became the counterpart to the priesthood of Christ in heaven, “which had the effect of

3 Ibid., 142.

4 Ibid., 147.

5 Ibid., 148.

6 Ibid., 154.

7 Ibid., 185.

investing the earthly priesthood with terrible and terrifying awe.”⁸ Left out by this formulation is a clear-eyed awareness of the saving activity of *the human Jesus* towards the Father. The stage was set for a “liturgical Apollinarianism” in the East.⁹ It became endemic to see Christ in his priesthood only as God, not as human, and into this human vacuum seeped the exaltation of a human priest.¹⁰ Torrance draws this lesson: whenever we obscure the human agency of Christ our priest, a substitute priesthood arises to mediate between us and Christ.¹¹

A similar reactivity to Arianism arose in the West, which led to a diminishing of the mediatorial and priestly presence of Christ *as human*. Prayer *through the merits of Christ* replaced prayer through the mind and mediation of Christ, and as in the East, the agency of the human priest in conducting the liturgy came to the forefront. In the absence of Christ’s human bridge laid down for us, there arose the demand for other mediatorial “functionaries,” such as the cult of Mary and the saints all gathered momentum. Torrance concludes that in both East and West, “the church was thrown back upon itself to provide a priesthood which could stand in for Christ and even mediate between the sinner and Christ.”¹² In both the Byzantine and Coptic East and also in the West, “a great barrier of mystery and awe and dread comes in between the supplicant and Christ, for he is actively present in the Eucharistic sacrifice in all the terrible majesty and omnipotence of sheer deity.”¹³ Torrance’s plea is for the church to recover an emphasis on the incarnation not simply as the coming of God *into* humanity but as God *becoming a human*. Thus God comes *as a human priest* and does for us in our humanity “what we are unable to do for ourselves.”¹⁴

THE RELEVANCE OF HISTORICAL THEOLOGY FOR CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

How does Torrance’s analysis of historical theology contribute to the renewal of our worship today? First, if Jesus in his humanity does not worship the Father *with us* and *on our behalf* in a vicarious way, then Jesus’ priestly ministry is absorbed entirely into the majesty of Godhead. As a result, the guidance of Chalcedon becomes a monument on the official mantelpiece of our doctrine but not a working map to inform actively our prayers and worship.¹⁵ The consequences are clear: unless Christ’s human mediation on our behalf is clearly acknowledged and honored in our liturgies, prayers, and sermons, we are “thrown back upon ourselves” to offer our own worship to the Father.¹⁶ Whether in corporate or individualistic forms, the effect on worship is the same—to eclipse Christ’s humanity

8 Ibid., 192.

9 Ibid., 193.

10 Ibid., 196.

11 Ibid., 206.

12 Ibid., 204.

13 Ibid., 200.

14 Ibid., 201.

15 Ibid., 204.

16 Ibid., 205.

with our own. For example, a Eucharistic celebration may be ornately decorated with “smells and bells” or rival the formality of a White House lawn ceremony. Or the priest, pastor, or worship leader may invest the presiding role with drama and grand stage presence. Either approach can lead the community to focus on the rite itself, which implicitly becomes a substitute for the agency of Christ. Our attention can be so absorbed by the mode and manner of the human priestly agency that there is an eclipse of the Son, a failure to see in the liturgy a “correlate to the crucified and risen Jesus and our participation in heavenly worship of praise and thanksgiving.”¹⁷

Whenever this *transcendent reference to Christ in our flesh* becomes either broken off or obscured, whenever our worship performance (as it were) *enshrines the mystery in itself*, then the liturgy, Eucharist, or clerical performance ironically becomes a rival to Christ. To turn this around, Torrance asks some blunt questions first raised by the nineteenth-century Scottish theologian, John McLeod Campbell: Does the sacramental celebration of the Lord’s Supper speak to us of Christ or commend itself? In our partaking of Communion, do we flee from our own worship and faith to rest in the self-offering of Christ?¹⁸

There are many ways a kind of *functional Apollinarianism* continues to distort our worship. Sometimes, we so emphasize the importance of Jesus’ death on the cross as the crucial transaction and substitute for our sins that we can reduce everything else about the life of Jesus to a cipher, as if the crucial meaning of God’s coming as a human is its convenience in getting divinity to the cross. But surely Jesus’ death redeems because it is the gathering together and culmination of his entire life and ministry. Jesus *lives out* the Sermon on the Mount, blessing those who cursed him, thirsting with all who yearn for righteousness, forgiving those who crucified him, and loving his enemies *to the bitter end*. Jesus in his humanity triumphed over all that imperiled the intention of God to bring the kingdom to its fulfillment on earth as it is in heaven.

Sometimes we can so emphasize Christ as a *divine* mediator, and not also a mediator and high priest in our own humanity, that we lose a sense of *fellow feeling* described in Hebrews:

[2:14] Since God’s children are flesh and blood, Jesus himself became like them and shared their human nature. . . . [2:17–18] He had to become like his brothers in every way, in order to be their faithful and merciful high priest in his service to God, so that the people’s sins would be forgiven. And now he can help those who are tempted because he himself was tempted and suffered. . . . [4:15–16] Our high priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a high priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. Let us have confidence, then, and approach God’s throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

we need it. [5:8] Even though he was God's son, he learned through his sufferings to be obedient. [7:17] And Jesus is our priest forever.

When we pray to and worship the one Jesus called Father *through Christ the Son*, what happens when we bypass the human Christ, who prayed for his followers in the upper room discourse with such empathy, who knelt in Gethsemane praying for Peter? What happens when we frankly do not know how to pray, as Paul poses our dilemma in Romans 8? Jesus takes our groans and sighs and confusing words to the Father as one who knows from within the weight of those sighs and groans. Contrast this with Apollinarian worship in which the emphasis is not on what unites us to God—i.e., Jesus, who in our human nature prays for us, who himself has been tempted as we are, who mediates within our humanity the mercy and companionship of God for us. Instead, the *emphasis* is on what separates us, namely Christ in his infinite majesty.

APOLLINARIAN/DOCETIC SONGS OF WORSHIP

In a careful ethnographic-theological study of charismatic worship in the contemporary Anglican church, James Stevens has used Torrance's essay to illuminate a certain rhetorical style which sets aside the humanity of God in Jesus and one-sidedly stresses Christ's deity.¹⁹ Many worship songs declare, "Jesus I exalt you" and "You are the exalted one." These acclamations can easily ignore the manner of Jesus' coming among us, which hardly can be described as exalted. The Jesus revealed in the Bible came as one who served, who emptied himself and took the form of a servant for our sake. Using the language of exaltation in worship apart from describing and semantically linking the manner and mode of Jesus' path from manger to cross can push worship into identification with an exalted, suffering free Divinity. This Divinity has utterly left behind the trajectory of the actual journey Jesus took and hence misconstrues the journey in his steps in which we are called to follow and participate.

A useful question to help us recover a balancing awareness of the humanity of Jesus and his mediation for us and in our human flesh is to ask the following: how many songs do we sing that describe the exalted One as the same One who, in his humanity, endured temptation, washed our feet, and suffered unto death? A functional Apollinarianism eviscerates our worship when songs and hymns regularly obscure or neglect Jesus' real humanity.²⁰ When Jesus' humanity is ignored, songs easily rush into the vacuum, as *the spirituality of the believer*, or the gifted worship leader becomes the focus. The recovery of the *humanity of Christ* in our prayer life and worship will surely help us interrupt the gaze upon ourselves as we worship.

Jeremy Begbie also has drawn on Torrance to interpret the implications for the content of our worship songs. He notes a certain tendency of contemporary

19 James H. S. Steven, *Worship in the Spirit: Charismatic Worship in the Church of England* (London: Paternoster Press, 2002), 199.

20 See Jeremy Begbie, "The Spirituality of Renewal Music," *Anvil* 8, no. 3 (1991): 234–36.

worship songs to neglect essential themes of Christian life, which a recovery of the humanity of Jesus' priesthood would help correct. Themes such as the cost of discipleship, suffering in face of opposition, endurance in times of trial, patience, and grief over human sinfulness are all embraced *on our behalf in God's coming to us as the man Jesus*.²¹ When our hymns and prayers do not integrate Jesus' actual achievement on our behalf, our worship inhabits a truncated gospel.

Perhaps the note most lacking, says Begbie, is the theme of hope amidst suffering, including the suffering of the entire creation. This was a huge theme in other periods of history, e. g., in the Black Gospel tradition, grounded on the slave experience from which, ironically, much Pentecostal and charismatic worship has derived.²² Without the clear centrality of the humanity of Jesus, gone is the connection of the Gospel with the pain and suffering of the world. As a result, too often our worship suggests an experience not of *connection* with the pain and suffering of the world but *an elimination and a disappearance* of pain and suffering. Is it any wonder why many non-Christians find contemporary Christian music *disconnected* from the grief and sorrow of real life which they face daily? But where the Docetism implicit in Apollinarianism abandons our humanity, Jesus our great high priest takes our broken humanity, gathers it, descends with it to the utter depths, and offers it up in prayer and worship to the Father.

Let us be clear: the problem with worship songs that emphasize the majesty of Christ is not in what they affirm but in what they neglect. When Jesus is absent as our great high priest in his role as our bridge—not just in his death on the cross but in his entire humanity, past, present, and future—what is the content of the *majesty* we praise? Surely the exalted Jesus has not been stripped of his humanity, the nail-pierced hands vanished away into divinity. For the sake of faithful witness, let our preaching, prayers, and intercession pay close attention to the words from Hebrews describing the high priest of our worship:

[7:24–25] He lives on forever and his work as priest does not pass on to someone else. . . . So he is able now and always to save those who come to God through him, because he lives forever to plead with God for them.

When the church prays, “Come Holy Spirit,” our call for the Spirit is not in isolation from Christ, nor is the Christ we exalt isolated from Jesus our brother, our great high priest who prepares a way for us, who comes alongside us, and who accompanies our prayers. On our behalf he presents them by sheer grace to the one he called Father and taught us to call *our* Father.

But when the center of gravity in our worship lays aside the narrative of this Jesus who joined our humanity to his own, modern worship becomes functionally Unitarian, as James Torrance has noted.²³ As a result, believers themselves, either corporately in our joint efforts or mediated through our worship leaders

21 Ibid., 235.

22 Ibid., 237.

23 J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 22.

and priests, invoke the Spirit to empower our worship and our prayers *directly* and immediately, as if the mediation of Jesus on our behalf has become irrelevant or simply a lingering liturgical phrase. Through a concentration on human personalities, ecclesiastical pedigree, or formulaic instructions, worship can become stifflingly self-aware of human traditions, customs, and personal charisma, while the humanity of Jesus is overshadowed by the humanity (and human organization) of the worshipping community.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Today in our churches, many young people are much more familiar with “lift Jesus high” choruses than Isaac Watts’s “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” Therefore, it is all the more urgent for young adults to be aware of Torrance’s historical analysis and to grasp the implications of a functional Apollinarianism for contemporary worship. In the current climate of praise and worship music, this can be difficult. For instance, one assignment I gave my historical theology students was to identify texts of worship music which clearly move in an Apollinarian direction. Then, I asked them to rewrite or amend the text in a way that acknowledges the full humanity of Jesus as high priest who leads us before God. In studying their responses, I have noted numerous misconceptions as students try to grasp the significance of this issue for our worship:

1. *It’s not about the language of personal relationship.* The problem with our worship music is not that the focus is more on our own personal relationship with God than with God alone. Christians worship the One who has chosen to be for us and to come alongside us, who has determined not to be God in isolation but to draw near and redeem those made in the divine image. A functional Apollinarianism stresses our relationship to a divine, majestic Jesus without indication of the unique mode and manner of majesty of the One who emptied himself, took the form of a servant, and humbled himself to death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8). This one and no other is who God has highly exalted (Phil. 2:9). This is the nature of the One who invites us to personal communion and a shared journey in his steps of servanthood and suffering love. Moreover, our relationship is with one who has come to us *as a human, as our priest*, who takes our frail prayers and offers them to the one he names as “our Father.”

If the language of personal relationship misleads, it is when we glibly translate this language for an individualistic culture that would prefer to strike out the little but immensely important *our*, and change it to the language of private ownership as *my* Father. This manner of personalizing actually isolates us within an inner religious experience rather than opens us towards a way of prayer to God which binds us to our neighbor, even as it unites us to the One Jesus who taught us to call *our Father*. If such individualistic language has a link to Apollinarian distortions, it is because we have distanced ourselves from the generous humanity of Jesus, and have distanced ourselves from our own humanity and the humanity of one another.

The “I, me, mine” trend of devotional language in worship is not wrong for affirming that God’s grace is personal and meant to change our lives. The error

is when it distorts Biblical faith by using a semantic shift in which the inclusion of our neighbor is set aside. This becomes a glaring symptom of a “Babylonian captivity” in which the church is compromised by the legacy of the Cartesian Enlightenment to define the meaning of persons in non-relational and highly individualistic categories. One of our urgent tasks in worship, as in the public life of nations, is to be continually transformed by the reality that the only humanity we have been given is a shared, relational humanity. Our selfhood is never a private possession. To the extent that Apollinarianism has trained us to neglect the humanity of Jesus, it will also train us in exclusionary and isolating ways of worship that separate us from our neighbors.

The themes of fellowship and communion remind us that Apollinarian worship forgets that God is a *triune communion of love*. If Jesus as our human priest is set aside, who accompanies and gathers our prayers and songs and takes them in the Spirit to the Father? We do. We mediate for ourselves and hence the focus is individualistically (or collectively) driven to what *we do* in worship, with our minds, our hands, and our hearts rather than the work of Christ, who accompanies all we do as our priest. But in the true spirit of accompaniment, Reformed worship can and ought to reconnect with the suffering of our neighbors near and distant, which can only happen as the content of our worship is deeply connected with the humanity of Christ. Because Apollinarianism neglects Christ’s genuine humanity, it neglects his *suffering* humanity and focuses worship on Jesus the *exalted* One, not the One who suffers for us and who calls us to have courage and whose call comes not from a majestic distance. The problem is worshipping a kind of majesty that has fundamentally lost the meekness and humility of the incarnation. It is urgent to recover the *baptized majesty of the crucified one* especially in a culture that is more comfortable polarizing God or humanity, judgment or grace, than in seeing how these are reconciled in Jesus.

2. *It is about reframing the language of exaltation.* A functional Apollinarianism is also commonly evident in the worship language surrounding Christ’s resurrection and ascension. My evidence here is the use of the word “exaltation,” particularly in some evangelical circles. In his book, *Christianity in the Academy*, the Baptist scholar, Harry Lee Poe, asserts that the cornerstone of genuine evangelical worship and experience is the awareness of an *exalted* Christ, even linking Bonhoeffer with this awareness. Poe writes:

For those who died for their faith in Christ, the present experience of the exalted Christ was more real than the sufferings of this world. According to their accounts, the martyrs had an awareness of Christ’s presence even as they were dying. Heaven had already opened, and they inhabited two places: physically they were still on earth, but spiritually they were already entering the heavenly realm. So Stephen says, “Look, I see heaven open and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:56) Present experience of the reality of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ marks

the witness of the martyrs as they faced death. This kind of terminology is also in the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.²⁴

But when we turn to what Bonhoeffer actually says as he faced death in a Gestapo prison, we see a profoundly Christological rethinking implicit in his martyr's faith. In *Letters and Papers from Prison*, he writes:

God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt. 8:17 ("He took up our diseases and carried our infirmities.") makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering. Here is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world: God is the *deus ex machina*. The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help.²⁵

Bonhoeffer describes here "a reversal of what the religious man expects from God. Man is summoned to share in God's sufferings at the hands of a godless world."²⁶ Poe, by contrast, depicts an exaltation that fits comfortably within a doctetic expectation of deliverance as escape from suffering, rather than the gospel's surprising narrative that God *as a suffering human* has born the suffering and pain of the world. In other words, to gaze directly towards heaven as our guarantor for future exaltation looks past that person and place where heaven has earthed itself in the unlikeliest of circumstances, the man of sorrows who "took up our diseases and carried our infirmities."²⁷

A more reliable guide for strength and consolation in participating in Christ's way (2 Cor. 4:10–12)—which all Christians are called in their small way to share and which authentically anticipates Bonhoeffer—is the hymn of Paul Gerhardt: "When my heart is most fearful, help me out of my fears, *through thy fear and pain*."²⁷ Moltmann's comments on Gerhardt's hymn bear repeating in order to clarify what exactly gave the sufferer hope:

Suffering is overcome by suffering, and wounds are healed by wounds. For the suffering in suffering is the lack of love, and the wounds in wounds are the abandonment, and the powerlessness in pain is the unbelief. And therefore the suffering of abandonment is overcome by the suffering of love, which is not afraid of what is sick and ugly, but accepts it and takes it to itself in order to heal it.²⁸

24 Harry Lee Poe, *Christianity in the Academy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 109.

25 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 361.

26 Ibid.

27 Quoted in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 46; italics mine.

28 Ibid.

Consider the guidance offered by the deep piety of many Negro spirituals sung by Black slaves. Theirs was an experience of abject humiliation and literal abandonment to chains and shackles, but they learned to steady their hearts as they learned to connect their suffering to that of Christ. The haunting question repeated in each refrain, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” witnesses that somehow the agony of American slavery, in order to be endured and redeemed, had to be yoked to the agony suffered by God in Christ.²⁹ For slavery’s victims, the intimacy of their most profound worship experience on earth and lifting up their heads to anticipate a better day somehow was resolved in the close proximity their music brought them to Christ, crucified, nailed to the tree, pierced in the side, and laid in the tomb. The only greatness of God that we can declare with confidence has come to us clothed in nail-pierced human flesh. Because of this unique cruciform signpost, our ideas and images about divine exaltation must be remixed as crucified glory. Because the highest no longer stands without the lowest, prisoner Bonhoeffer endured and died as one whose lowliness and suffering was experienced not as abandonment but as accompanied.

To summarize: the best remedy to combat the distortions of Apollinarianism is for worship consistently to circle the center of its attention upon the journey from manger to cross where Jesus’ humanity is fully unveiled, which thereby disqualifies all forms of docetic reduction. In other words, intrinsic to the worship of God’s majesty and exalted status is the humble birth and anguished death of a first-century Jew living under Roman occupation.

THE DILEMMA OF SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS IN WORSHIP

This brings us to the following question: how can our worship best bear witness to the saving humanity of Jesus? In other words, how can worship faithfully reflect this revolution in our human conceptualizations of divine majesty without absorbing it into some kind of conceptual mastery, sentimental contrivance, or bureaucratic control? How does faithful worship re-present and bear faithful witness to Christ, from manger, cross, and tomb to resurrection and upper room in a way that preserves the sheer humanity of Jesus without paying glib theological compliments that inadvertently minimize the scandal? In what follows I will note several of Torrance’s remarks on the way towards a more faithful worship and offer suggestions on ways to proceed further on the path he has opened for the church. Of course, my reflections here are offered not as pronouncements but as attempts to push the conversation along, subject to correction and refinement by others that share a similar desire for Reformed worship to be marked by a Christ-centered, Trinitarian pattern.

As a seminarian in the 1970s, I was concerned to read C. S. Lewis’ essay, “Priestesses in the Church?” and to wonder if the Reformed tradition was in danger of a serious disloyalty to the gospel by granting women permission to be ordained as pastors. As Lewis put it, the priest (or pastor) was representing Christ; to have a woman priest would be like referring to God as mother, or the

29 Ibid., 48.

second person of the Trinity as Daughter, and would reverse the mystical marriage of the church and God, with Christ as the bride.³⁰ Indeed, the notion of a sin against the grammar of our being male and female seems to be a standard argument in Anglo-Catholic and Roman Catholic circles—that in celebrating Holy Communion, the one who presides must be male because Jesus was male. (I note in passing that though Jesus was also ethnically Jewish, Gentile males have long since been grafted in. Apparently gender trumps ethnicity or race as the *conditio sine qua non* of human identity.) After reading Torrance’s *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, I was confronted with an approach that reframed the issue away from gender specificity and exclusion. For Torrance, at the Lord’s Supper, the one true priest is Jesus himself. And, if indeed he is the *head*, then we the church are a *corporate priesthood*, which the New Testament calls the *body* of Christ. *Corporately*, we are priests to each other, forming a servant community under Jesus, our head. This opens the way for our relations to one another in the manner spoken to James and John (and their mother) as they came seeking special seats of privilege (Matt. 20:20–28). This manner of humble servanthood becomes the ongoing sign of the church’s authenticity and the controlling description of our mission to the world.³¹ Henceforth Jesus’ ongoing priesthood in our midst ought not be usurped by grasping for dominance, whether male or female. Further, contra Lewis, how confusing to our imagination to envision Jesus’ words, “this is my body, this is my blood,” as pointing to each and every celebrant! Rather, Jesus intends with these words to refer to the loaf and the cup that he takes in his hands. These tactile signs, not myriads of future clergy, represent and remind the church of Jesus’ real presence.

Today I think the church, which seeks to be always reforming (*semper reformanda*), should go further along this trajectory. Too often the church’s corporate priesthood is narrowed to an individualistic act in which the preacher, worship leader, or priest serves a solo function and the corporate priesthood reduced to an audience. This is the consequence of the church forgetting that Jesus Christ is the true leader of our worship, not the devout person with a robe, a clerical collar, or a lead guitarist wearing a microphone headset and a Hawaiian shirt. How might our worship Sunday-by-Sunday be transformed through a corporate, holy nation of priests performing the liturgy rather than being an audience that watches an individual performance? Certainly, for anyone who has visited the Taizé community in Burgundy, France, the existence of different tasks in the liturgy need not replace a profoundly corporate performing of the worship together.

The more we recover a shared priesthood and are equipped to be priests to one another, as James urges in the context of community ministry (James 5:13–16), we will also remedy the oft-noted malaise of a clerical workaholic, isolated by a sense of role, notorious for neglecting the fourth commandment and its prescription of a weekly day of rest from one’s labor. Will the church really suffer

30 C. S. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” in *God in the Dock* (1948; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 236–37.

31 See *Conflict and Agreement*, vol. 1, *Order and Disorder*, 161; vol. 2, *The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel*, 137, 145.

an absence of nurture if a clergy takes a summer vacation like doctors, lawyers, plumbers, and construction workers do? I have been told there are churches where the problem is the opposite, but this is only the inverse of the same symptomatic focus (in the form of frustration) on the individual priest rather than a sharing together in a corporate priesthood.

IMAGELESS RELATIONS AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Finally, Torrance has stressed that our knowledge of God is not based on logical inference from sense experience, as in a Thomist epistemology, but is rather a direct, intuitive knowing in which we indwell God's Word.³² God acts directly upon us as we indwell invisible, imageless relations, which inhere in the Word.³³ Through this imageless way, as taught by the Hebrews, God becomes disclosed to us apart from visual or pictorial mediation and so refers to God without reading back creaturely (idolatrous) content into God.³⁴

What does this suggest for worship? Torrance's mentor, Karl Barth, famously asserted that pictorial and symbolic representations are out of place in the Protestant Church.³⁵ Let the church represent Christ solely by the gathered community in the action of worship and service! Shall Reformed worship today revert to the classic Swiss model as it still towers before us in the grand Reformed edifices of Zurich, Basle, and Geneva? Indeed, ought we replace all remaining stained glass windows, stow away all remaining altarpiece paintings, and either banish or apply the hammer to any lingering statues or sculpture? Moreover, is the way of knowing God in worship only to be heard through the words spoken by the preacher as they point imagelessly to Christ without interposing potentially idolatrous outer forms, such as bread or wine? Using this logic, the Quaker tradition has eliminated external forms, and celebrates the Christ who is present apart from all mediating symbols. Indeed, are not all such forms easily deformed by a clerical caste into idols, whereby access becomes a means of hierarchical control?

Certainly the Quaker tradition has given the church a prophetic witness against the misuse of means, for we need Christ, not something that resembles Christ!³⁶ Yet Torrance would remind us that in theology and in worship, "there is no disembodied word."³⁷ If, as Athanasius put it, Jesus is both the only *logos* and *eidos* of God, a vital theology of the Word ought not to confuse imageless relations with a disembodied word, as if we could bracket off the reality that God's

32 T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 84, 273.

33 T. F. Torrance, "The Integration of Form in Natural and in Theological Science," in *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1984), 90–92, 96.

34 T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 89.

35 Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth* (London: SCM Press Limited, 1975), 395.

36 C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 51.

37 T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), 47.

word has been made flesh (John 1:14).³⁸ The irony of the stress on imageless relations is the temptation to substitute an invisible conceptuality or abstraction for that which is utterly concrete—the Word made flesh. The worrisome feature would be to promote an overly intellectualistic focus on ideas rather than a whole-person knowing which entails hearing, yes, but also seeing and tasting. Only a whole-person knowing is an appropriate response to the fully human coming of God in Christ. In this sense, we can agree with the Thomists, in that we are dependent on sense experience, that is, on the empirical reality of Jesus the Word made flesh for our knowledge of God. Yet we can also affirm that through Jesus a cognitive Word is given to us immediately, not inferentially, as through God’s Spirit we indwell this reality.

Part of the jostling here between image and idea may be due to Torrance’s framework of thinking within a hierarchical scheme of knowledge borrowed from Albert Einstein’s writings on science. That is, in the highest level of knowledge, scientific statements connect us *ontologically* to God.³⁹ This is why Torrance endorses “theological science” as his primary metaphor for theology, over doxology (aesthetics) and service (praxis). To the extent this perspective frames worship as a level removed from the primary activity of theology, it can engender a liturgical observation which, though lacking nothing in respect to correct doctrinal statement, is detached from a felt attunement to the truth, and thus profits little. Moreover, a lack of sensitivity towards a proper *emotional rationality*, as John Macmurray puts it, can even inadvertently foster apathy.⁴⁰ So I would suggest we bind together the value of auditive, imageless concepts with an equal emphasis on indwelling Biblical *images* in order to nurture and ground our emotional lives in the truth. Thus, our worship can be “a touching place,” as the Iona Community song puts it, indwelling the reality where the incarnation of God in Christ overcomes the disruption between language and being, word and event, doxology and theology, heaven and earth. In other words, the renewal of our worship will not happen by preference, suppression, or repression of either our imagination or our thought life but only by a deeper and more congruent turning of both towards the truth as it is in Jesus. Artful depiction and accurate scientific precision both have their essential task in worship. An artful worship seeks to re-present and re-arouse our fading emotional receptivity to the God-given Biblical images. A worship imbued with the spirit of scientific precision and conceptual clarity enables us to know and to love the truth with all our minds. Torrance has described well how faithful worship brings together our cognitive and affective faculties before the truth.

38 T. F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 166.

39 T. F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1980), 156ff.

40 John Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1935), 190–92.

For through the Word Christ comes to us personally and worship reaches its *focal point and culmination in personal encounter with the living Christ*. It is then that Holy Communion has its rightful place crowning faith with vision and enacting in our flesh and blood the real presence of Christ.⁴¹

Distortions arise when we look *at* the elements of bread and wine instead of *looking through* these to Christ.⁴² But Word and Sacrament together as the work of the people (*leiturgia*) become the place in our worship, where through a *mediated immediacy*, we are drawn into communion with Christ, the one truly human leader of our worship.⁴³

Finally, it must be said that all talk of carefully balanced words and images, or even the recovery of a proper notion of the humanity of Christ, will not advance the renewal of our worship beyond sentimental aesthetics or sterile interpretation unless we both hear and feel in our bones the message of the Old Testament prophets—that God can get awfully tired of our liturgies, words, and ceremonies when we fail to “let justice flow on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream” (Amos 5:24). The prophets tell us our regard for the poor among us will be either the proof of our worship or the countersign that our worship has become an idolatrous surfeit of words and images. If we connect these words to Jesus’ parable of the final judgment (Matt. 25), where knowing him is identified with care for the sick, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner, and feeding the hungry, then we have an agenda for any local congregation that desires to function, in Lesslie Newbigin’s words, as a “hermeneutic of the gospel.”⁴⁴ That is, *to the extent* that we show forth “hands and sides” of suffering love as part and parcel of our preaching and worship, the world will be able to grasp the meaning of our evangelical words. “The body of the risen Lord is recognizable by the scars of the Passion, and his disciples will be corporately recognizable as his body when they bear the same scars.”⁴⁵

41 *Conflict and Agreement*, vol. 1, *Order and Disorder*, 55; italics mine. See also the sermons of Robert Bruce that Torrance edited. Bruce describes the sacrament as conveying meaning to the mind by the eye whereas preaching conveys meaning to the mind by the ear. Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper: Sermons preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh A.D. 1589*, edited with an introduction by T. F. Torrance (London: James Clarke, 1958), 54.

42 *Theology in Reconciliation*, 122.

43 I am indebted to Colin Gunton for this phrase. Cf. *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1995), 35, 58. Gunton registers caution that Torrance’s emphasis on intuitive knowledge, which I would associate with his prioritization of imageless relations, may not fully allow for the necessity of *mediation* (word become flesh) which is at the heart of the Christian doctrine of revelation.

44 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

45 Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season, Perspectives on Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 121, 146, 156, 175, and 188.

It is fitting to grant Torrance himself the final word on the mutual indwelling of these themes for the renewal of Reformed worship in our day—the recovery of Christ’s humanity for our worship, the renewal of our corporate priesthood, and the mediating enactment of the signs of Christ’s redemptive presence through preaching, sacraments, and missional service in Jesus’ name and according to his own servant style.

The perfection of the Church’s union with Christ Jesus has to be carried through the conditions of time, and how it is straitened until that is accomplished! By means of the Eucharist, so to speak, the agony of Calvary is witnessed in the ages into which the Church goes out as the suffering servant in the mission of the world’s redemption. And so it learns to fill up that which is eschatologically in arrears of the sufferings of Christ as it throws itself into the heart of the world’s trouble and acts out there, however costly that may be, the reconciliation of the Cross.⁴⁶

Roger J. Newell, PhD University of Aberdeen, a pastor for 13 years in Durham, England and Portland, Oregon, currently teaches in the faculty of religion at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon.

⁴⁶ *Conflict and Agreement*, vol. 2, *The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel*, 172.

THE PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE

Ray S. Anderson

I went to Edinburgh, Scotland in 1970 to study under Thomas Torrance after reading his two early books, *Theology in Reconstruction* (1965) and *Theological Science* (1969), both of which are heavily underlined, marking my first introduction to an incarnational theology presented with scientific rigor and grounded in a trinitarian epistemology of the self-revealing act of God. “We are not concerned simply with a divine revelation which demands from us all a human response,” he wrote, “but with a divine revelation which already includes a true and appropriate and fully human response as part of his achievement for us and to us and in us.”¹ It was his emphasis on the vicarious humanity of Christ by which we are given participation in the ongoing intra-trinitarian relations between the Son and the Father that drew me to study under him.

After sitting in his lectures for two years and writing my dissertation under his direction, I came to appreciate even more the deeply devotional, even pietistic life of faith that lay hidden behind his often forbidding erudition and the semantic thicket of his writing. Born in China of Scottish missionary parents, he was as comfortable talking about his personal relationship with Jesus as he was lecturing to an assembly of world-class physicists (as he did on the occasion of the anniversary of Einstein’s 100th birthday). After returning to the United States in 1972, I kept up correspondence with him and enjoyed his occasional visits to Fuller Seminary, where I was on the faculty.

In 1986, I spent a week with him in Hong Kong, where we were both invited to present lectures and dialogue with Confucianist scholars on Eastern and Western versions of human nature. It was there, sharing a flat with him where we cooked our own breakfast, that I finally dared to make the transition from being his student to a colleague, brother in Christ, and personal friend—a transition made difficult only by my own deference to his immense learning, but made easy by the grace of his own humanity.

Woven through the tightly-knit fabric of Torrance’s erudite and sometimes obscure theological essays, one finds the refreshing spring of a personal experience of Jesus Christ flooding its banks, revealing a passionate and compassionate pastoral heart. Only rarely does he speak of his own relationship with God; when he does, it is with a voice of serenity and sanity as that of a soul in the grip of grace.

1 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 131.

If I may be allowed to speak personally for a moment, I find the presence and being of God bearing upon my experience and thought so powerfully that I cannot but be convinced of His overwhelming reality and rationality. To doubt the existence of God would be an act of sheer irrationality, for it would mean that my reason had become unhinged from its bond with real being. Yet in knowing God I am deeply aware that my relation to Him has been damaged, that disorder has resulted in my mind, and that it is I who obstruct knowledge of God by getting in between Him and myself. . . . But I am also aware that His presence presses unrelentingly upon me through the disorder of my mind, for He will not Himself be thwarted by it, challenging and repairing it, and requiring of me on my part to yield my thoughts to His healing and controlling revelation.²

In line with Karl Barth's Christological epistemology, Torrance grounded the revealed knowledge of God in the personal ministry of Christ as the one who discloses to us the innermost being of God in the same act of reconciling estranged and sinful humanity to God. This is the inner logic at the heart of the atonement that binds humanity to God in a saving way and God to humanity in a knowing way. Torrance puts it this way:

Knowledge of God takes place not only within the rational structures, but also within the personal and social structures of human life, where the Spirit is at work as *personalising Spirit*. As the living presence of God who confronts us with His personal Being, addresses us in His Word, opens us out toward Himself, and calls forth from us the response of faith and love, He rehabilitates the *human subject*, sustaining him in his personal relations with God and with his fellow creatures.³

When my own interest turned from the more abstract discipline of systematic theology to practical theology, I discovered a rich source of theological insight into theological praxis in Torrance's writing. Human beings are lovers and worshippers as well as thinkers, and all of these aspects are potential sources of theological knowledge.

Citing John Duns Scotus, Torrance made a distinction between *theologia in se* and *theologia nostra*. In explaining these concepts Torrance goes on to say that as important as it is for theology to be grounded in God's own being (*theologia in*

2 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), v.

3 Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 188 (emphasis added). "He is in Himself not only God objectifying Himself for man but man adapted and conformed to that objectification, not only the complete revelation of God to man but the appropriate correspondence on the part of man to that revelation, not only the Word of God to man but man obediently hearing and answering that Word. In short, Jesus Christ is Himself both the Word of God as spoken by God to man and that same Word as heard and received by man, Himself both the Truth of God given to man and that very Truth understood and actualized in man." Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 63–64.

se), it is equally necessary that theology be mediated through the bounds and conditions of our life of faith (*theologia nostra*).⁴ While Torrance does not speak here of practical theology as a theological discipline, he insists that theology cannot properly be a science without being grounded in God's actual interactions with the world and with humans as recipients and interpreters of divine self-revelation.

The Christological foundations for Torrance's theology are as significant for the practical theologian as for the dogmatician. Dogmatic theology, as Torrance learned from his mentor Karl Barth, has no other basis than the incarnate Word of God, which penetrates through the Kantian barrier between the noumenal and the phenomenal so as to create a real, not mythical, epistemological basis for our knowledge of God. In the same way, Torrance has gone beyond Barth in demonstrating how the self-revealing Word of God through Christ (dogma) also becomes the basis for the on-going priestly ministry of Christ (praxis). This is the Christological basis for an authentic practical theology.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

In modern theology it was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) who first developed the area of practical theology, being instrumental in the formation of a Protestant Chair in that discipline at the University of Berlin in 1821. In this era practical theology first took the form of a "theology of the subject." The first practical theologian in an empirical sense was C. I. Nitzsch (1787–1868), who was a disciple of Schleiermacher. He defined practical theology as the "theory of the church's practice of Christianity." This led to a shift toward the social sciences and the second major emphasis in practical theology as a "theology in the way in which the church functions."⁵

Following Schleiermacher and Nitzsch, Philip Marheineke (1780–1846) began with faith as a unity of knowledge and action. He made a distinction between theoretical theology, which thinks from the perspective of the *possibility* of a relation between life and action, and practical theology, which is based on the *reality* of that relation. As a result, the theory-praxis relation became the object of reflection, and practical theology received its own independent status. The focus for innovation had to be in the local congregation. Gerben Heitink identifies this third development as a "form of political theology."⁶ Practical theology becomes a political theology when it calls into question existing forms of ministry and introduces new models of ministry based on praxis not only theory.

Theologians in the early 20th century, drawing upon certain emphases in the Protestant Reformation, developed a model of practical theology more along the lines of pastoral theology. Eduard Thurneysen, an early contemporary and life-long friend of Karl Barth, produced his classic work, *A Theology of Pastoral*

4 Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* (1982; repr. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 21ff.

5 Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, and Action Domains* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 49.

6 Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 53–65.

Care, which focused on the role of preaching as mediation of God's Word to humans so as to effect healing and hope.⁷ In North America, A. T. Boisen founded what became known as the "Pastoral Counseling Movement," which was followed by the work of Seward Hiltner.⁸ The shift from pastoral theology to practical theology took place under the leadership of Don S. Browning, who published a series of essays under this title in 1983.⁹ While pastoral theology is concerned with the relation between pastor and people, practical theology is focused more on the relation of church to ministry, and thus becomes an extension of God's ministry to the world.

In its early development, practical theology suffered from a dualism between theory and practice, with the theoretical aspect assigned to the disciplines of theology and biblical studies, and the practical aspect given over to the application of the results of theological study to the practice of ministry. The line between so-called academic theology and practical theology was first drawn by the faculties of the European universities, imported by the divinity schools of North American universities, and imbedded in the curricula of most theological seminaries. At the center of the discussion of the nature of practical theology is the issue of the relation of theory to praxis. If theory precedes and determines practice, then practice tends to be concerned primarily with methods, techniques, and strategies for ministry, thus lacking theological substance. If practice takes priority over theory, ministry tends to be based on pragmatic results rather than prophetic revelation.

With the emergence of a new breed of practical theologians, the shape of practical theology has rapidly begun to change. The line between pure theology and practical theology, as well as the demarcation between theory and practice, no longer is drawn so sharply and definitively. Distinctions are still to be made, but only as differentiations within a common task rather than as separate disciplines. Paul Ballard and John Pritchard say that practical theology

must take on the characteristics of theology as such. It too is a descriptive, normative, critical and apologetical activity. It is the means whereby the day-to-day life of the Church, in all its dimensions, is scrutinized in the light of the gospel and related to the demands and challenges of the present day, in a dialogue that both shapes Christian practice and influences the world, however minimally.¹⁰

7 Eduard Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962).

8 See Anton T. Boisen, *Vision From a Little Known Country: A Boisen Reader*, ed. Glenn H. Asquith Jr. (Decatur, GA: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1991); Seward Hiltner, *Pastoral Counseling* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949); and Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958).

9 See *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World*, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983).

10 Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), 12.

We can now say that practical theology is a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God's purposes for humanity, carried out in the light of Christian Scripture and tradition and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge. As a theological discipline, its primary purpose is to ensure that the church's public proclamations and praxis-in-the-world faithfully reflect the nature and purpose of God's continuing mission to the world, and in so doing authentically address the contemporary context into which the church seeks to minister.¹¹

THE PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF THOMAS TORRANCE

Practical theology demands a very specific understanding of the nature of theology. It demands that the theologian hold the practitioner accountable to the truth of God's revelation in history and that the practitioner hold the theologian accountable to the truth of God's reconciliation in humanity. Torrance reminds us that the contemporary reality and presence of Christ is what makes theology a "living theology."¹²

As the incarnate presence of the living God in space and time, he presents himself to our faith as its living dynamic Object. This has the effect of calling for a living theology, a way of thinking which is at the same time a way of living, that cannot be abstracted from the life-giving acts of Christ in the depths of human being and must therefore affect man radically in his daily life and activity.¹³

The task of practical theology is not simply to reiterate dislocated theological truths, but to examine theological understandings in the light of contemporary experience in order that their meaning within God's redemptive movement *in the present* can be developed and assessed. Theological truth is thus seen to be emergent and dialectical, having to be carved out within the continuing dialogue between the Christian tradition and the historical existence of church and world. While Torrance clearly holds a high view of Scripture as divine revelation, the truth of revelation is not something that can be abstracted from the person of Christ as living truth. Following Karl Barth in this regard, Torrance holds that truth is more of an "event" in which the preached or proclaimed Word has Scripture as its source while the effect of the Word as experienced through the Holy Spirit's activity in the lives of those who hear and obey constitutes the praxis of truth. Torrance seeks to avoid the subjective, or existential, implication of this

11 I have discussed the nature of practical theology as a discipline in my book, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

12 See also Ray S. Anderson, "Reading T. F. Torrance as a Practical Theologian," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 161–84.

13 Torrance, *Reality & Evangelical Theology*, 138.

view of truth by holding to the objective reality of the Holy Spirit as providing epistemological content in the revelatory event.¹⁴

In this way, Torrance offers us a non-dualistic approach to the relation of theology and ministry (or theory and practice).

The spiritual reality to which we belong has a range of content which we cannot infer from what we already know, but which we may get to know more fully only through heuristic acts of exploring entirely new ground and grappling with novel connections and ideas. . . . Hence intensely personal acts of relation, discernment and judgment belong to the epistemic act in every field of rational knowledge and fundamental science.¹⁵

This kind of heuristic thinking is what Torrance has called a “backwards kind of thinking.” There is a “backward correlation” from the new to the old (cf. Matthew 13:51).¹⁶ This is also similar to what Torrance calls axiomatic inquiry. Axioms are formulated out of experience and used to penetrate deeper into the inner logic of that which is to be known. While axioms are not susceptible to ordinary standards of proof, they serve as keys to penetrate into the inner structure of reality in order to cause this inner reality to reveal itself to us.

Torrance argues that through the incarnation, the divine Son assumed the humanity common to all descendents of Adam and Eve through the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus thus served as a vicarious representative of all humanity in his priestly ministry of bearing the consequence of sin in his death and delivering humanity from the power of sin through his resurrection.

[T]he key to the understanding of the Eucharist is to be sought in the *vicarious humanity of Jesus, the priesthood of the incarnate Son*. Eternal God though he was, he condescended to be our brother, and since we are children sharing in flesh and blood, he partook of the same, made like unto his brothers in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in the affairs *towards* God to make expiation for the sins of the people.¹⁷

For Torrance, revelation is always knowledge of the self-revealing God mediated to us through Jesus Christ. Simultaneous with—not sequential to—that act of self-revelation, is a corresponding movement from below to above which constitutes the act of reconciliation by which humanity is vicariously represented in the personal life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The two-fold significance

14 See “The Epistemological Relevance of the Spirit,” in *God & Rationality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 165–92.

15 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology and Science at the Frontiers of Knowledge* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 111.

16 Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 15ff.

17 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 111; emphasis in the original.

of the vicarious humanity of Christ means that through the person of Christ all that belongs to the innermost being of God is revealed to us through Christ and all that is demanded of God from humanity is fulfilled through Christ.

As with Karl Barth, Torrance held that the act of God is the hermeneutical criterion for the being of God. This becomes a Christological statement when Christ is viewed as the definitive act of the self-revealing God binding the historical people of God through Israel to the incarnation of God in the historical person of Jesus Christ in the interest of all humankind. In a masterful summary statement Torrance writes:

And at last in the fullness of time the Word of God became man in Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, within the embrace of Israel's faith and worship and expectation, himself God and man, in whom the covenanted relationship between God and Israel and through Israel with all humanity was gathered up, transformed and fulfilled once for all. In Him the revealing of God and the understanding of man fully coincided, the whole Word of God and the perfect response of man were indivisibly united in one person, the Mediator, who was received, believed and worshipped together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit by the apostolic community which he creatively called forth and assimilated to his own mission from the Father. Thus as both the incarnate revelation of God and the embodied knowledge of God, Jesus Christ constitutes in himself the Way, the Truth and the Life through whom alone access to God the Father is freely open for all the peoples of mankind.¹⁸

The knowledge of God which results from the historical act of God's self-revelation in Christ is not only *revealed knowledge* of God's inner being as grounded in the eternal relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but is also a *vicarious participation* of humanity in that intra-divine relation as the basis for a *saving knowledge* of God.¹⁹ This has far-reaching implications for practical theology. The mediatorial role of Christ thus works from both sides of the revelatory event in such a way that our knowledge of God through Christ is not only subjective saving knowledge, but it also brings the objective reality of God's Word into our contemporary situation in such a way that the praxis of the Spirit is actually the praxis of Christ occurring through the praxis of the church.

18 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard Publishers, 1992), 9.

19 "He is in Himself not only God objectifying Himself for man but man adapted and conformed to that objectification, not only the complete revelation of God to man but the appropriate correspondence on the part of man to that revelation, not only the Word of God to man but man obediently hearing and answering that Word. In short, Jesus Christ is Himself both the Word of God as spoken by God to man and that same Word as heard and received by man, Himself both the Truth of God given to man and that very Truth understood and actualized in man." Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 50.

Our knowledge of the Father and the Son, of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Father, is mediated to us in and through Jesus Christ in such a way that in a profound sense we are given to share in the knowledge which God has of himself within himself as Father and Son or Son and Father, which is part of what is meant by our knowing God through the Spirit of God who is in him and whom he sends to us through the Son. Now it is because we do not know the Father or the Son except through the revealing and reconciling work of Jesus Christ, that our knowledge of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is, as it were, a function of our knowledge of Jesus Christ.²⁰

This movement provides the ontological and objective basis for the life and ministry of the church in its continuing praxis of Christ's revelation and reconciliation. The Holy Spirit mediates the very person of Christ to us, not merely the benefits of Christ's death. The whole of Christ's life of obedience, prayer and worship thus becomes the objective and ontological basis for the Christian's life of faith. The church, as the body of Christ, participates in Christ's ongoing ministry of revelation and reconciliation. Through the incarnation the Son of God penetrated into the ontological structures of fallen humanity in order to restore humanity to its proper and divinely purposed existence through the reconciling ministry of Christ, which continues as the ministry of the church. This is the incarnational basis for a practical theology of the church's life and existence.

What is supremely needed, therefore, in all the churches today, is a far profounder understanding of the Incarnation, the coming of God himself into the structures of creaturely and human being, in order to restore the creation to its unity and harmony in himself—that is, a Christology with genuine *substance* in it once more, the theology of the incarnate Son of God, the one Lord Jesus Christ, “*being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.*” And then in intimate correlation with such a Christology, what is supremely needed also is a far profounder understanding of the Church as divine creation within the ontological structures of the universe, entrusted with the mission of healing and reconciliation in the depth of being.²¹

20 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 55.

21 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 283, emphasis in the original. “This in turn transforms the whole conception of the analogical relation in the sacramental participation. Not only is it one which has Christological content, but it is an *active analogy*, the kind by which we are conducted upward to spiritual things, and are more and more raised up to share in the life of God. This is an elevation or exaltation into fellowship with the divine life through the amazing condescension of the Son who has been pleased to unite Himself with us in our poverty and unrighteousness, that through redemption, justification, sanctification, eternal life, and all the other benefits that reside in Christ we may be endowed with divine riches, even with the life and love that overflow in Christ from God Himself.” Thomas. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 2 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960), 145.

This continuing ministry, or praxis of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, takes place in and through the life of the church without making the ministry of Christ subject to human manipulation and control. "That is the living God who still acts here and now through Jesus Christ in the Spirit, but *in the Spirit* means in God's own distinctive way and with God's own distinctive kind of power, and therefore beyond any realm of human control and manipulation."²²

The Word of the gospel (*kerygma*) which the church proclaims, says Torrance, "is in the fullest sense the sacramental action of the Church through which the mystery of the Kingdom concerning Christ and His Church, hid from the foundation of the world, is now being revealed in history . . . in *kerygma* the same word continues to be 'made flesh' in the life of the Church."²³

Correspondingly, says Torrance, "the church constitutes the social coefficient of our knowledge of God, for in the nature of the case we are unable to know God in any onto-relational way without knowing him in the togetherness of our personal relations with one another."²⁴ Here again we find insights that transform practical theology from being merely preoccupied with methods for achieving pragmatic success in ministry. If every act of ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit reveals something of God, as Torrance would surely agree, then the very social structures of that ministry have a coefficient value as a hermeneutic of the Word of God. This is what Torrance means by a "living theology."

It is as we are nursed and trained by the social coefficient of knowledge embodied in the society or community to which we belong, that we also gain the powers of judgment to relate experience to patterns of meaning, and then the initial acts of recognition develop into acts of identification which complete the process of inquiry in which we come to engage.²⁵

22 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 291; emphasis in the original. "That is the epistemological relevance of the doctrine of the Spirit. Certainly the history of Christian doctrine makes it clear that wherever the Church has allowed the reality of the historical Jesus Christ to be depreciated there it has also lost a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, through the dissolving of the Spirit into the immanent reason or into man's own attempts at understanding. The doctrine of the Spirit, i.e. of the objective reality and personal Being of the Spirit, stands or falls with the acknowledgment of the active coming and activity of the Being of God himself within our space and time in Jesus Christ." Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 235.

23 Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 2, 158–59.

24 Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology: A Fresh and Challenging Approach to Christian Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 46. Torrance says, "If the Word of God is to enter the forum as speech to man through the medium of human words it must be directed to man in community, and if that Word creates reciprocity between God and man it must create a community of such reciprocity within human society as the appropriate medium of its continuing communication to man." Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 146–47.

25 Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology: A Fresh and Challenging Approach to Christian Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 104.

It is for this reason that Torrance places such importance upon the empirical content of knowledge of God revealed through the church's praxis of life in the Spirit as the basis for our cognitive and theoretical theological formulations. In other words, the church's theological formulations are not only the result of its reflection on Scripture as an objective, impersonal, and abstract Word of God, but also includes the empirical actions of the church in its Spirit-led praxis of worship, ministry, and communal experience as the Body of Christ. Here again Torrance seeks to avoid the dualism of setting theory apart from practice by viewing the Word of Christ and the Work of Christ as two aspects of the one event of Word of God. "Word of God" thus includes both the Word of Christ and the Work of Christ.

It is, I believe, still within the matrix of Eucharistic worship and meditation upon the Holy Scriptures, and evangelical experience in the fellowship and mission of the church, that the empirical and theoretical components in our knowledge of God are found fused together, in a kind of stereoscopic coordination of perceptual and auditive images, and thus provide us with the cognitive instruments we need for explicit theological understanding of God's interaction with us.²⁶

Thus, theory and practice are united within this form of practical knowledge, which works itself out within the praxis of the church. This model of practical theology with its emphasis on ecclesial praxis and the attainment of practical knowledge goes a long way towards healing the rift between theory and practice. Torrance's insistence on the ecclesial context, where prayer, worship, and obedient response to the Word of God take place, fits well within the scope of practical theology as we now understand it.

In stressing that the atonement is grounded in the incarnation of God and not merely in his death on the cross, Torrance has often cited the statement of the Cappadocian father, Gregory of Nazianzus, that "what Christ has not assumed is not healed; but that which is united with his Godhead is also saved."²⁷ In becoming human flesh, the divine Logos assumed not only the form of humanity but humanity under the burden of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain and suffering. It is in the very person of Christ, Torrance argues, that God takes upon

26 *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 49. "In so far as worship and prayer are through, with and in Christ, they are not primarily forms of man's self-expression or self-fulfillment or self-transcendence in this or that human situation or cultural context, but primarily forms of Christ's vicarious worship and prayer offered on behalf of all mankind in all ages. . . . Hence when worship and prayer are objectively grounded in Christ in this way, we are free to use and adapt transient forms of language and culture in our worship of God, without being imprisoned in time-conditioned patterns, or swept along by constantly changing fashions, and without letting worship and prayer dissolve away into merely cultural and secular forms of man's self-expression and self-fulfillment." Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 213.

27 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 154.

himself the consequence of the fall and the resulting distress which humans experience as subject to natural catastrophes, moral evil, and demonic oppression.

The implications for pastoral theology are significant. Instead of relying upon psychological strategies alone to assist persons in dealing with their anger and pain, the pastoral caregiver can bring God to the side of the person who is suffering as one who becomes an advocate (*paraclete*). God's anger and outrage at evil can be expressed as more than divine affect; through Christ, God has entered into the "godforsaken" place (Matthew 27:46), where the absence of God's supernatural power is countered by the presence of God's suffering love.

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The theme of the *vicarious humanity of Christ* reappears in Torrance's discussion of the role of Christ in the mission of the church to the world. "We are to think of the whole life and activity of Jesus from the cradle to the grave," says Torrance, "as constituting the vicarious human response to himself which God has freely and unconditionally provided for us."²⁸ Any presentation of the gospel that strips Christ of the saving significance of his humanity is "unevangelical," argues Torrance. "How, then, is the Gospel to be preached in a genuinely evangelical way? Surely in such a way that full and central place is given to the vicarious humanity of Jesus as the all-sufficient human response to the saving love of God which he has freely and unconditionally provided for us."²⁹

The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, argues Torrance, not only constituted the "re-birth" of the church as the people of God, it called forth and empowered the church to be the continuing ministry of Christ in the world through the ministry of the church in the world and to the world.

Not only did he pour out his Spirit upon the Apostles inspiring them for their special task, and not only did he pour out his Spirit in a decisive and once for all way, at Pentecost, constituting the people of God into the New Testament Church which is the Body of Christ, but within that Church and its Communion of the Spirit he continues to pour out special gifts for ministry, with the promise that as the Gospel is proclaimed in his Name he will work with the Church confirming their ministry of Christ to others as his own and making it the ministry of himself to mankind.³⁰

Between the word of the Kingdom and its power of healing there is what Torrance once called an "eschatological reserve" in which the Word is borne in hope and faith.³¹ The incarnational community lives and functions between these

28 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 80.

29 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 94; emphasis in the original.

30 T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 121.

31 T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 11, *The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 159. See also, T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T

two moments—between the cross and the *parousia*, between the evangelical word of forgiveness and the final act of restoration and reconciliation. In this way, the church is viewed as existing in the world for the sake of the world. It does not possess Christ for itself at the expense of the world. The gospel given to the church to proclaim through its witness and presence in the world has already entered the world through Christ. The mission of the church is not an extra-curricular activity but rather an indispensable component of its own being in the world.

The Christ proclaimed in the gospel through the church has a counterpart in the Christ clothed with the needs of the world. In one of his most eloquent missiological utterances, Torrance says:

The Church cannot be in Christ without being in Him as He has proclaimed to men in their need and with 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.³²

We are not surprised to discover such a strong missiological imperative in Torrance's theology: he was born in China of missionary parents. Beyond that familial heritage, however, his vision of God's purpose in assuming humanity in the person of Jesus Christ is understood to be a mission to all humankind already completed in Christ. Mission is not to be understood as a way of actualizing a gospel imperative through practical methods and means. On the contrary, the actuality of God's reconciliation of the world in Christ (2 Cor 5:19) is itself the dogmatic basis for a practical theology of mission.

Practical theology, as envisioned by Torrance, therefore calls theology and the church back to its roots as a fundamentally missionary church with a particular vision and a specific task to perform in the world. As a missionary church, it is crucial that it remains faithful to its missiological task and vision. One of the primary tasks of the practical theologian is to ensure that the church is challenged and enabled to achieve this task faithfully.

The legacy of Thomas Torrance is to be found in his own faithfulness to the gospel of Christ. As a scholar, he sought to discipline the human mind to think in accordance with God's revealed truth. Woe to anyone who attempted to "stare him down" on a matter of theological substance. In theological debate he pressed forward with a tenacity that was as uncompromising as it was unrelenting. In the midst of a lecture at New College, Edinburgh in 1972, a student from Germany attempted to convince professor Torrance that perhaps something could be said on behalf of Bultmann, after all, on the basis of human self-understanding as leading to faith. "My dear young man," Torrance replied, looking over the top of his glasses, "Not only do I not see how one can be a theologian and think that way, I do not see how one can be a Christian and think that way." End of the discussion!

Clark, 1993), 45–47.

32 T. F. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," in *Theological Foundations for Ministry*, ed. Ray S. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 724.

What is not so well known, however, is his legacy as a devoted Christian. After a stunning lecture at Fuller Seminary on what he called the "Latin Heresy" in Western Christian thought, he was found sitting with students in the cafeteria talking to them about their relationship with Jesus. This too was part of his faithfulness to the gospel of Christ. He loved the church because he loved Jesus. Those of us who were privileged to be his students cherish his legacy of scholarly, Christian witness to Jesus Christ. In the doing of theology, he taught us, it is never enough to be clever or even brilliant; one must be truthful in practice as well as in proclamation. I continue to read him for the sake of the truth.

Ray S. Anderson is Senior Professor of Theology and Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He received a PhD from the University Edinburgh, Scotland in 1973, under the supervision of Thomas Torrance.

ATONEMENT, THE INCARNATION, AND DEIFICATION: TRANSFORMATION AND CONVERGENCE IN THE SOTERIOLOGY OF T. F. TORRANCE

Trevor Hart

The term “deification” is one generally associated with the theology of the Christian East, though it also has an established history and plentiful advocates in Catholic thought, too.¹ For the most part, Protestant theologians, not least those in the Reformed tradition, have been severe critics rather than proponents of the theology of deification. Where it has been given serious consideration at all, the theme has generally been treated as an unbiblical skeleton in the Christian closet, owing more to the classical philosophical schools than to the apostolic gospel. As a historian of doctrine, T. F. Torrance knew better than this, having learned the term’s meaning (as he would choose to define it) from such luminaries of the patristic tradition as Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius of Alexandria, and the Cappadocians. The contention of this paper will be that, despite his own solidly Reformed roots, in Torrance’s own theology what we witness is a transformation and convergence of Eastern and Western soteriological motifs, such that the account of salvation which he offers is itself at the last best captured in its fullness by the term “deification.”

At first glance, this may indeed be a contentious claim. It must be admitted that, while Torrance commends consideration of it to Reformed Christians, he expresses some reticence about the term “deification” itself, finding it to be a less than adequate rendering of the Greek terms *theosis* and *theopoiesis*.² For

1 For an account of its place in a classic Western source, see Gerald Bonner, “Augustine’s Conception of Deification,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 37/2 (1986), 369–86. Modern advocates of the theme in East and West respectively include the Russian Orthodox Vladimir Lossky and the Anglo-Catholic theologian Eric Mascall. See Lossky’s *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1957), 67–90 and *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 97–110. For Mascall’s account see, e.g., *Christ the Christian and the Church: A Study of the Incarnation and Its Consequences* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1946), 97ff. and *Via Media: An Essay in Theological Synthesis* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 121–65.

2 See, e.g., T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 243. Torrance expresses a preference for *theopoiesis* over *theosis*, since its accommodation of the verb *poieo* keeps clear the creaturely nature of the verb’s object as well as the full deity of its subject.

one thing, the term is easily misunderstood, not least in the wake of currents in modern Western theology that have proposed the inherent “divinity” of the human spirit and transmuted the gospel into a call to realize this essentially divine nature. The resurgence of similar monistic motifs in so-called New Age spiritualities and philosophies of the past few decades grants such caution even more warrant. As we shall see, nothing could be further from all this than the meaning of the term as Torrance understands it. Yet despite his reluctance to use the language of deification without constant qualification and clarification of the peculiar sense it bears in his thought (words—he never tires of insisting—must always be interpreted in accordance with the reality to which they refer us, and not vice versa), and given Torrance’s own perception of the nature of salvation and the way in which he situates this vis-à-vis other core doctrines, no other term is finally adequate to the task of classifying his thought. The best way to demonstrate this is by offering a whirlwind exposition of the shape of Torrance’s understanding of the locus and nature of salvation and its relationship to the doctrines of the trinity and the incarnation in particular.

A brief exposition of the inner logic of Torrance’s soteriology is problematic. In part, this is because of the fundamental unity of Christian theology as he himself perceives it and his refusal to treat any given doctrine in isolation, abstracted from the complex web of relations in which it finds its proper place. In his thought there is, as it were, a “perichoretic” indwelling of doctrines in one another, so that in attending to any one, one finds oneself immediately in the sphere of influence of several others without any awareness of having migrated. There are also issues of ontic and noetic priority to be reckoned with in approaching particular parts of this dogmatic whole. In some measure, too, the problem lies in Torrance’s literary contribution, which—despite its expansive nature—lacks (and resists) a single sustained systematic expression of the whole. One is thus compelled to draw upon a variety of sources, to harden the edges, and to pin down the location of concepts and the relationships between them that he himself was sometimes content to leave less than entirely clear. The dangers of inappropriate over-determination must always be borne in mind in any such undertaking.³ What follows, therefore, must be treated as a provisional and partial account, suited only to the specific task of indicating how Torrance’s theology might best be read as one which embraces the theme of salvation as the deification of our humanity.

The immediate doctrinal locus for the doctrine of deification is generally provided by theological anthropology, its advocates mostly choosing to earth it ultimately in the soil of humankind’s creation in the image and likeness of God. Torrance’s approach is quite different. While a theology of our creation *kat’ eikona* (according to the image) certainly forms a significant part of the backdrop to his discussion, it does not occupy center stage, and is not permitted independently to set the parameters in terms of which salvation is made sense of. As we have just seen, for Torrance doctrine maps a complex web of relationships between different

3 In what follows I have deliberately restricted my consideration to a handful of core sources in order to make the task of the reader wishing to pursue matters further a manageable one.

aspects of the reality that is God's relationship to the world; within this web, as he sees it, the doctrines of creation and of humanity, while not unimportant, are nonetheless more remote from the center of this particular conversation than some others. Thus, it is the doctrines of the trinity, the incarnation, and the deity of the Holy Spirit that supply the matrix for the articulation and development of his account of salvation as *theopoiesis*—the “utterly staggering act of God in which he gives himself to us and adopts us into the communion of his divine life and love through Jesus Christ and in his one Spirit, yet in such a way that we are not made divine but are preserved in our humanity.”⁴

We should note that Torrance's soteriology is certainly one in which the theme of salvation as the redemption of human beings from guilt and the judgment due to sin (imagery characteristically underplayed in Eastern theology) is not neglected, but finds central place.⁵ The human dilemma is at root that of alienation from God as a direct result of sin and of perpetual enslavement to a nature determined by its fallen condition. Thus for Torrance “sin” is more (though never less) than a moral, let alone a forensic reality: it is the state in which our humanity exists, a basic fact of our ontology understood in relational terms (as those whose primary reality is constituted by personal relationship to God and to others). Correspondingly, salvation is presented in familiar terms, as an “atonement” wrought in Christ's humanity whereby sinful humans may, despite their sin and alienation, have access to the Father and enjoy fellowship with him. The existential breach caused by sin is bridged by Christ's atoning work; humanity is reconciled to God. Yet the way in which Torrance construes this redemptive activity of Christ sets his presentation of the matter apart from much atonement theology in the Protestant tradition. The fundamental point of contrast lies again in his refusal to understand the logic of reconciliation in terms of what he himself calls “external relations,”⁶ but rather as an ontological reality established within the very depths of human being by the whole course of Christ's incarnate history from the conception in the womb of Mary to the ascension to the Father's right hand.

Protestant theology has typically dealt with the notion of atonement in one of two ways, both of which are characterized by Torrance as cast in terms of external relations between God, Jesus Christ, and the human race. The distinguishing feature has generally been the ascription of either a judicial or else an ethical nature to these relations. In either case, atonement is construed fundamentally as a transaction between various parties where, as a result of some atoning action that Christ performs, the status of the parties relative to one another, or to a divinely instituted legal code and its sanctions, is adjusted.⁷ The relations are “external”

4 T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 64.

5 See, e.g., Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 132.

6 See, e.g., Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 40; “Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy” in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39, no. 4 (1986): 473f.

7 For a discussion of examples, see, e.g., Paul Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988).

because there is a tacit denial here that any change is effected at the level of our human “being,” which is the perceived emphasis of the Roman doctrine of an “infused righteousness.” Rather, change is only at the level of our forensic or moral standing before God. Hence the classic Protestant insistence that believers are best thought of as forgiven or reconciled sinners rather than “saints” who have, through some mystical transformation of their inner being, been “made holy.”⁸ Furthermore, the atonement is, in all these cases, perceived to be external to the being of God rather than located at the heart of it.

Again, Torrance sees things rather differently. Rather than embracing the classic Protestant account of imputation (in which God agrees to treat those who are not righteous as though they were), he argues for an understanding in which, while moral and forensic language finds its proper place, atonement is nonetheless grasped as an ontological fact—something wrought within the depths of human nature as such. In the atonement, he insists, human being—the reality of human existence as we find it in the world—is really and actually reconciled to God. Fallen and debased as it is, our humanity is laid hold of and refashioned in a supreme re-creative act of the Spirit, being bent back from the warped and twisted shape it has assumed into the form that it was always intended to have within the teleology of divine creation. Atonement, therefore, is not merely retrospective (looking backwards to the brokenness of sin and death) but prospective, having as its outcome the fitting of our nature to share in that close personal communion with a Holy Father that is its proper eschatological destiny. On this understanding, then, the word “atonement” does not refer to a mere modification of legal or moral standing, but to a root and branch transformation of our humanity in its entirety, “reconciling” it to God by drawing it into a lived correlation with the shape of God’s own life. To use the seminal biblical metaphor so beloved of Torrance himself, in this correlation the covenant between God and Israel (and Israel on behalf of humanity) is finally fulfilled from both sides.⁹

This summary account provokes at least one obvious question to which readers will demand an answer. Refusal to provide an answer to it immediately is at least faithful to the experience of reading Torrance’s own work. Therefore, before answering it, I want to draw attention to another key theme that lies, unusually, at the center of Torrance’s soteriology rather than elsewhere in his theology, namely, his account of revelation and the participation of human beings in knowledge of God. Other theologies might place this logically prior to the stuff of dogmatics proper, as part of the prolegomena in which the necessary conditions for theology are described. For Torrance, too, theology (and the faith of which theology is a product) can arise only because God has made himself known; in this sense, an account of revelation has a determinative place in our theological epistemology. However, like his mentor, Karl Barth, Torrance sees that, first, theological prolegomena must really always be the last word rather than

8 See, for instance, the discussion of this difference in Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (London: Burns and Oates, 1966).

9 See, e.g., Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 10ff.

the first (since we should always describe our mode of knowing *a posteriori*, in the light of the actual engagement with something, rather than allowing *a priori* considerations to provide a prescriptive template). Second, he sees that when we chart our knowing of God, we discover that the shape of this “knowing” itself is part of the substance of dogmatics rather than a mere condition for it. We have already seen how various dogmatic fields overlap and interpenetrate, and this is precisely what we find to be the case here.

In short, salvation, according to Torrance, can finally be described as the drawing of men and women by the Holy Spirit to share in the self-knowledge of God. Since this description lends itself unhelpfully to various forms of Gnostic or rationalistic interpretation, it demands immediate qualification. Drawing upon a distinction borrowed from the philosopher of science Michael Polanyi, Torrance makes it clear that the saving knowledge spoken of here is not of the abstractive sort (the sort of knowledge which consists chiefly of data and might be recorded in written form or looked up on Google). Instead, it is *personal* knowledge, the sort of knowing that occurs when (as we say) we “know” another person or people, rather than when we “know” the square root of 897.6, or the date of Shakespeare’s birth, or the Ten Commandments.¹⁰ To say that we are granted participation in the self-knowledge of God, therefore, is not first and foremost to say that we know some otherwise hidden and inaccessible things *about* God—for instance, that he exists in the threefold form of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This, in Torrance’s own terms, is a second order mode of knowledge, the informational product of reflection on a first order encounter. Such things (the things we might loosely refer to here as “doctrine”) are generated by and secondary to the more important and fundamental way in which we know God, namely, by enjoying fellowship with the God who *is* Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as God approaches us and draws us into the circle of his own self-knowing. Knowledge *of* God in this sense renders knowledge *about* God, and not vice versa. And for Torrance, precisely because God *is* threefold (“triunity” refers appropriately not just to the shape of our knowing, but to the shape of what is known) and because of the pattern of the divine economy in history (in which the eternal Son “takes flesh”), this same personal knowing arises in the distinctive form of a sharing by the Spirit’s power in the eternal relationship that the Son has with the Father.

It is clear, then, that the theology of “revelation” here (God making himself known to human beings) is, when viewed from a certain angle, necessarily a theology of redemption, too. Since, for Torrance, the description of *how* we know cannot properly be disentangled from the concrete particulars of *what* we know (“the object determines the mode of knowing”), treatment of it involves a carefully articulated account of how we are lifted up by the Holy Spirit into personal communion with the Father through union with the Son.¹¹ In effect, the

10 For the relevant distinction see Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958).

11 See, e.g., Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 249: “It is through the same Spirit who came down at Pentecost that we are united to Christ in his identification with us, and joined to him in his self-consecration and self-offering for us once and for all on

doctrine of our “knowledge” of God entails a doctrine of adopted sonship. This in turn entails a description of our sharing (at a level appropriate to human creatures) in the inner-life of the divine trinity since, Torrance emphasizes, “the Father/Son or Son/Father relationship *falls within the very being of God.*”¹² Hence, we are already in territory where the language of “deification” or participation in God seemingly lies close to hand, but there is a vital component yet to be added.

For human beings to share in the inner-life of God requires that they be at one with God, and not in a state of alienation from him. “Requires” here does not refer to some arbitrary condition imposed by God, of course, but simply describes the logic of the circumstance: we cannot both be reconciled to and alienated from God at the same time, and sharing in the Son’s communion with the Father is fundamentally a reconciled state. Torrance links this specifically theological point to a wider epistemological observation: “All genuine knowledge,” he writes, “involves a cognitive union of the mind with its object, and calls for the removal of any estrangement or alienation which may obstruct or distort it.”¹³ Where our knowing of God is concerned, the relevant obstruction is caused by our sin; thus, for God to make himself known to us in the relevant sense, this sin must be dealt with and the existential breach that it has opened up fully healed. Again, the theologies of revelation and salvation overlap.¹⁴ Indeed, Torrance’s way of putting the matter suggests their spheres of influence are concentric: God reveals himself in atoning acts. To know God is to be reconciled to him as the Spirit lifts us up, effecting a “cognitive union with him in which our whole being is affected by his love and holiness. It is the pure in heart who see God.”¹⁵

The question, though, that naturally arises at this point, (now with more force than ever), is just how this view of things differs from the traditional Catholic notion of justification via an infused quality of righteousness, a change effected by grace in the very depths of the sinner’s own being, which fits him or her for the life of grace. Has Torrance not departed radically from the distinctive Reformation emphasis on atonement as an objectively wrought and finished work standing over against the sinner as the source of his or her confidence before God? Must we suppose now that the epithet “justified” does indeed refer to some subjective condition of sinners, rather than referring sinners outside themselves and beyond any worth and capacities identifiable in themselves for assurance? The answer is a resounding negative, but in order to see how and why, we need to reckon with a further distinctive element in Torrance’s soteriology, namely, his fusion of the claim that atonement is ontological rather than extrinsic with an appeal (at first sight rather odd) to the category of substitution.¹⁶ Yes, he insists,

earth and eternally prevalent in heaven.... The Spirit which Christ breathes upon us then becomes the Spirit of our response to him and through him to the Father.”

12 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 54; original emphasis.

13 *Ibid.*, 24–25.

14 See Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 132f.

15 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 26.

16 See, for example, his essay “Justification: Its Radical Nature and Place in Reformed Doctrine and Life,” in Torrance, *Theology and Reconstruction*, 150–68. On

God has indeed laid hold of our humanity and, through the anointing of his Spirit, has refashioned it, justifying and sanctifying it, and finally lifting it up to share in the dynamics of his own triune existence; but the locus of this saving activity is not to be identified in the particular lives of believers, but rather in the unique history of the one man Jesus Christ.

In the personal history of Jesus, Torrance maintains, the eternal Son of God himself assumed human nature and lived out a life of human sonship before his Father in the power of the Holy Spirit, healing and sanctifying that nature from its sinful disposition, bending it back from its warped existence into alignment with God's creative purpose for it, bearing it in humility to the cross in order to judge it and pay the price for human sin, and finally raising it up in a glorified state on the third day and exalting it to the Father's right hand.¹⁷ In all this, our fallen nature is transformed "from within" and rendered capable of sharing in the divine life, but it is so "vicariously"—the refashioning of our humanity having occurred "for us" in our substitute and representative, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the reconciliation here occurs from both sides at once: God moving towards man, and man moving reciprocally towards God within the constitution of a single personal existence.¹⁸

Immediately apparent from this is the fact that for Torrance the doctrines of the incarnation and the atonement are utterly inseparable. There can be no proper understanding of the "work" of Christ apart from an equivalent grasp of his person, precisely because his person is, in a profound sense, identical with the substance of his work. Atonement is not an abstract quantity that follows on from something that Christ does. It is what Christ *is*, namely, one in whom God and humanity exist in a reconciled relationship and in accordance with God's purposes in creation and covenant. Thus, Jesus "does not mediate a revelation or a reconciliation that is other than what he is, as though he were only the agent or instrument of that mediation to mankind. He embodies what he mediates in himself, for what he mediates and what he is are one and the same. He constitutes in his own incarnate Person the content and the reality of what he mediates in both revelation and reconciliation."¹⁹ In Jesus Christ, in other words, we actually see God and humanity at one, co-existing in fellowship in a harmonious unity of will and activity within the dynamics of the incarnate Son's life. In this sense, for Torrance, the hypostatic union of natures should not be construed as something timeless and static, but precisely as an atoning personal history in which the life of God and man meet and are conformed to one another in the Son's constant love for and self-offering to the Father.²⁰ Mediation, therefore, the bringing together of

the specific question of the relationship between his thought and Catholic theology, see "The Roman Doctrine of Grace and Reformed Theology," in Torrance, *Theology and Reconstruction*, 169–91.

17 See, e.g., Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 132–33.

18 See especially Torrance's essay "The Mind of Christ in Worship: Apollinarianism in the Liturgy," in Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 139–214.

19 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 56.

20 *Ibid.*, 65.

God and man, is not just a role that Jesus performs, but something involved in the very dynamics of his personal being as the incarnate Son.²¹

Of course, this was an at-one-ment forged only through the most profound struggle with the inherent propensity of our fallen nature towards sin and death. Thus, “Reconciliation was a creative as well as an atoning act of God accomplished in the ontological depths of human existence and its desperate condition under divine judgment, in order to redeem mankind from bondage and misery, sin and guilt, and to regenerate human nature, raising it up from its lost and corrupt condition into union with the divine Life embodied in Jesus Christ and exhibited in his resurrection from the dead.”²² This is an understanding of atonement that broadens the focus of our attention out from the death of Jesus on Calvary and insists that the latter is the logical culmination and natural symbol of a whole life in which sin is judged and put to death and obedience offered freely and gladly to the Father. In fact, in fusing the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement, Torrance eschews the habitual limiting of either to particular moments in Jesus’ history (the virginal conception and the crucifixion, respectively); rather, he insists on approaching them as interlocking dimensions of the Son’s engagement with the flesh in its historical entirety. Thus, “The incarnation includes the whole life and activity of Jesus Christ culminating in his resurrection and ascension, while the atonement begins from his very conception and birth when he put on the form of a servant and began to pay the price of our redemption.”²³

Undergirding this model of salvation is Torrance’s affirmation of the Nicene *homoousion* as applied both to the Son (in his divine and human natures respectively) and to the Spirit. On the one hand, Christ is and must be consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity. It is precisely because the Son of God is not related to God externally, as all creatures are, but rather belongs to the eternal being of God that he is able both to make God known to us—he himself is the very personal presence of God in our midst—and to reconcile our humanity to God by assuming it and living out his life of divine sonship from within it. On the other hand, Torrance’s ontological account of reconciliation also demands that Christ should be *homoousios* with us as regards his humanity, sharing to the full in our human condition. If he took our flesh to renew it from within, then that which he assumed must out of necessity have been humanity as we know and experience it, under the damaging and terminal effects of sin, bound by the power of sin, caught up in the gradual downward spiral that leads to judgment, destruction, and death. Thus, Torrance insists, what the Son of God assumed must have been precisely what in theological terms we call “fallen” humanity, and not some neutral or pre-fallen substitute for it. What he fashions for himself in the virgin’s womb is thus precisely humanity in that condition which needs to be redeemed. To be sure, having assumed it, Christ lives out a “sinless” existence within it; this, indeed, is the heart of the redemptive activity itself. But unless Christ had taken to himself

21 See Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 154ff.

22 Torrance, “Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy,” 474.

23 *Ibid.*, 475.

our corrupt and sinful nature, his sinless and obedient life before the Father would not have been “atoning”: it would not have possessed the reconciling and renewing force which it does in fact possess. This is Torrance’s understanding of the patristic dictum that “the unassumed is the unhealed”²⁴—a claim that makes sense only within the sort of ontological model of atonement with which he works.

Jesus Christ, then, is both the man who is reconciled to God in the very depths of his own personal being and the God who, as man, thereby reconciles others in and to himself. But in what sense, we may ask, is this latter claim actually true? If, notwithstanding the ontological nature of atonement it is also substitutionary and objective to us, if Christ’s particular humanity rather than ours is the locus of God’s regenerative and redemptive activity, then in what sense can it be maintained that we are actually reconciled or healed in the process? Are we not simply confronted here, as it were, with an ontological rather than a legal fiction, something which leaves us essentially unchanged?

Torrance insists that this is not so, since all that Christ is and does, he is and does “for us” and not for himself. In the incarnation, he writes, “God has drawn so near to man and drawn man so near to himself in Jesus that they are perfectly at one.”²⁵ What this means for Torrance is that all humans have drawn near to God in and with the one man, Jesus. How is this possible? To make sense of it, Torrance appeals to the category of Christ’s “vicarious humanity.”²⁶ In assuming the “flesh” that belonged to us, he argues, the Son of God identified himself with our condition and thus united us to himself, establishing an ontological bond by virtue of which his particular humanity was rendered inclusive in its relationship to ours; we are thereby included “in” him prior to and apart from any knowledge of or response to God’s redeeming action in him for our sakes. What takes place in him on our behalf, therefore, is no “fiction” but already impacts us at the roots of our own being, since we have no existence apart from the ontological solidarity which, by taking flesh, God has established between us and his incarnate Son. The context for making sense of this solidarity is not, as in some accounts of the idea, an anthropology drawing on extra-biblical categories (such as the classical philosophical notion of “concrete universals” or primitive notions of “corporate personality”),²⁷ but rather the specifically Christian theological claim that in Jesus it is the Creator Logos, in whom we already live and move and have our being,

24 See, e.g., *ibid.*, 476f.

25 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 29.

26 See, e.g., Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 136; c.f. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 94.

27 On the supposed influence of philosophical ideas on “mystical” and “metaphysical” notions of redemption in the patristic East, see, for example, H. E. W. Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption: A Study of the Development of Doctrine During the First Five Centuries* (London: Mowbray, 1952). For appeals to “primitive” anthropological categories in making sense of biblical ideas of redemptive solidarity, see the classic study of H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981).

who now takes to himself our humanity and thereby bonds us to himself humanly as well as by virtue of his existence “as God.”

All humans, therefore, are united to the regenerated and sanctified “flesh” of the Son, and through it granted access to the life of sonship, which he enjoys both eternally and now humanly. But inasmuch as this is something done by God *for us*—objectively and once for all in his atoning incarnation, death, and resurrection—it is not the whole story. Substitution must subsequently be complemented by and come to fruition in active participation as individual men and women are drawn by the Spirit that was in Christ to live out and “become” what, by virtue of their union with him, in a deeper sense they already are. “This union of Jesus Christ with us in body and blood by virtue of which he became our Priest and Mediator before God demands as its complement our union with him in his body and blood, drawing near to God and offering him our worship with, in and through Christ.”²⁸ This latter, secondary union comes to sacramental expression in baptism and the Lord’s Supper, both of which testify in a visible way to the fact that Christian existence is neither more nor less than faith’s appropriation, through the Spirit’s enabling, of what is already ours (established for us in his self-substitution for us before the Father) in Christ. For Torrance, therefore, in granting faith the Spirit does not *establish* our union with Christ, but rather re-establishes and confirms it, creating in us a new level of that same union which, in the virgin’s womb, he established once and for all. Thus, while the activity of the Son and the Spirit are distinct, they nonetheless thoroughly correlate and interpenetrate.²⁹ It was in the Spirit’s power that the Son, as the *Mashiach* (Anointed One), regenerated and reconciled our broken and alienated nature from within; and now, that same regenerative and reconciling activity is continued in others, as the same Spirit is poured out on all flesh, enabling their active participation in Christ’s redeemed humanity as sons and daughters of the Father.

On what basis, then, could this view of salvation as participating or sharing in the regenerated humanity of the Son be made sense of in terms of the language of “deification,” as I have suggested it might? The answer lies in the way in which Torrance situates his soteriology ultimately within the womb of his trinitarianism. What we see in the history of the man Jesus, he argues, is nothing less than that place in human space and time where eternal relations between the three divine persons are historically earthed. *Sub specie aeternitatis*, the Son relates to the Father and the Father to the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. Historically speaking, when the Son takes flesh, he relates (humanly) to his heavenly Father and the Father to his only beloved (now incarnate) Son in the power of this same Spirit, moving mysteriously in the virgin’s womb, poured out at Jesus’ baptism, and erupting from the darkness of the closed tomb, to mention just three key moments in what must nonetheless be supposed to have been a continuous if not uniform presence and activity. The life of intimate love between Father, Son,

28 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 111.

29 “Thus our receiving of the Spirit is objectively grounded in and derives from the self-sanctification of Christ through his own Spirit, and is not a different receiving of the Spirit from his” (Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 235).

and Spirit—now interwoven with human history in a wholly new way—is thus both the immediate context for and the substance of the outworking of human redemption. Atonement and regeneration take place within the depths of God’s threefold being, and in the Son’s “flesh” humanity is drawn into the dynamics of that same being, while yet remaining fully human throughout. (The two “natures” of the Chalcedonian confession remain properly distinct in the union.)

By way of brief elaboration, three points stand out as worthy of particular mention. First, the one who becomes incarnate and unites us to himself is none other than very God himself; thus, our participation in his humanity is precisely a participation in the humanity of God, a “fleshly” fraternity with the Creator who empties himself for our sake, but in doing so remains the One who he always was and is and shall be.³⁰

Second, the Spirit who, in due course, draws us severally to Christ and enables our personal sharing in his communion with the Father is himself none other than the Spirit of Christ, the one who is eternally *homoousios* with both the Father and the Son and who condescends to indwell us just as he indwelt (and still indwells) Jesus, lifting us up and enabling our personal response of faith and obedience and worship.³¹ Thus the “Godness of God” itself is present in the temples of our bodies in the person and the power of the Holy Spirit, a point Torrance learned well from Athanasius’s Letters to Serapion.³² In redemption, therefore, we are united to God’s own humanity, and we are filled with God himself in the person of the Spirit.

Third, we are defined now by our access (by grace) to the Father-Son relation, which lies at the heart of God’s eternal being—“the inner life of the Holy Trinity which is private to God alone” but “is extended to include human nature in and through Jesus” and with him all those to whom he has bound himself in love.³³ While one might argue that the central motif in Torrance’s soteriology is that of participative sonship, it is clear that this particular notion of “sonship” has nothing whatever to do with its Liberal Protestant counterpart in which God’s universal “Fatherhood” is traced from the doctrine of creation, turning it into a “natural” and ethical relation rather than one of pure grace.³⁴ For Torrance, God’s Fatherhood has nothing to do with his role as Creator, but is to be understood purely in terms of the eternal triune being in which God is the Father of the Son and the Son

30 “God is God and not man, and yet in the incarnation God has become man, this particular Man, Jesus Christ, without ceasing to be God” (Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 130).

31 See especially the essay “Come Creator Spirit, for the Renewal of Worship and Witness,” in Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 240–58.

32 “By *theosis* the Greek fathers wished to express the fact that in the new coming of the Holy Spirit we are up against God in the most absolute sense, God in his ultimate holiness or Godness” (Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 243). See also Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 191–251. On *Ad Serapionem* see Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 231f.

33 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 241.

34 For a classic example, see Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1901).

of the Father in the power of the Spirit who binds them in love. It is this relationship of *koinonia* and self-giving lying at the heart of what God eternally is that, in grace, is opened up to human sharing by the economy of the incarnation.

We should note that Torrance's insistence on wedding *theopoiesis* firmly to the incarnation (it is, Torrance insists, the obverse of Christ's "inhomination" and utterly contingent upon it³⁵) obviates the need for mediating categories, such as "created grace" and the "divine energies" appealed to in Western and Eastern versions of the idea, respectively. Since *theopoiesis* is not a direct communion of the believer with the Father or the Spirit but a reality mediated via our union with the incarnate Son, it is precisely the flesh of Christ in which we participate, and which provides the mediating term between our own humanity and the divine life in which we are given to share. For Torrance, if we would reckon seriously with the interface between God and humankind at all then the place to look must always be that particular point of contact which God himself established when he entered the virgin's womb. No other union can be entertained which is not founded upon and constrained by the dynamics and the limits of this one (limits worked out and articulated in the Chalcedonian confession to which Torrance grants so much weight). And no closer union between divinity and humanity can be imagined or entertained than this, for this is where God himself enters into our nature and makes it (and us) his own by uniting it with his own nature in the person of the Son.

Hence, while we may well think of salvation as a matter of *huiopoiesis* (the making of sons and daughters), it is nonetheless both appropriate and important to understand this also as a matter of *theopoiesis*—not the "divinization" of our humanity to be sure, but its being granted to share nevertheless in who and what God eternally is, by virtue of an act of grace in which he has first become what we are. "Deification," while an unfamiliar term in Protestant soteriology is thus the one that best captures and expresses the larger pattern of Torrance's understanding of salvation in which atonement, incarnation, and trinity are not discrete but interpenetrating doctrinal loci, because the complex reality of divine being and action to which each in its turn refers resists easy dissection other than at the cost of the death of the patient.

Trevor Hart, PhD University of Aberdeen, is Professor of Divinity at St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews.

35 See Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 189.

T. F. TORRANCE: MYSTICAL THEOLOGIAN SUI GENERIS

Myk Habets

I. TORRANCE, THEOLOGY, AND MYSTICISM

The work of The Very Reverend Professor Thomas Forsyth Torrance, one of the leading English-language theologians of the twentieth century, is most commonly associated with highly rational, even scientifically constructed, theological discourse of the highest intellectual order. Indeed, he has often been criticized for his dense grammar and complex argumentation. While these critiques fail to account for the specific context within which Torrance chose to work and write, they do represent a central feature of his scientific approach to theology. It would be untrue and unfair, however, to suggest that Torrance was merely an academic commentator on theology. Rather, Torrance was a Presbyterian minister, a distinguished Professor of Christian Dogmatics, a patristic scholar, a major translator and interpreter of Barth in the English-speaking world, a faithful husband, a devoted father, a Christian scientist, and an ecumenical leader. But he was so much more than these. In the words of I. Mackenzie, Torrance was “a wild preacher, whose heart and voice sang with a love for a wild Christ.”¹ Perhaps the greatest accolade one might pay Torrance, and one that he himself would certainly welcome, is that he was at heart a Christian, a figure who was utterly persuaded by the truth of the gospel and who sought to persuade others of that same truth.

One of the central axioms by which Torrance conducted his theology was the conviction that to know God we must know his being in his act and his act in his being. In order to do this, argued Torrance, we must not stand aloof from God like some detached observer but instead indwell God through union with Christ by the Spirit. To develop this approach he drew on the works of scientists such as Albert Einstein and Michael Polanyi, church fathers such as Athanasius and Karl Barth (two of his great heroes), and a host of other voices from across the Great Tradition—from Anselm and Calvin in the West to John Philoponos and Eastern Orthodoxy in the east.

By means of such an appreciation of the Great Tradition, Torrance’s theology was expansive in a way that invited both meditation and critical response. He pushed boundaries, challenged long-held assumptions, and—while committed to his Reformed heritage—understood that all traditions are living and thus require critical reflection and constructive contributions from successive generations.

1 I. Mackenzie, “Let the Brain Take the Strain (or: The Hail in this Tale Falls Mainly on the Gael),” in *St Andrews Rock*, ed. S. Lamont (London: Bellew Publishing, 1992), 82. Interestingly, Mackenzie was referring as much to Torrance’s lectures as his preaching.

Perhaps this is the greatest legacy Torrance has left to those of us working within the Reformed tradition—to meditate upon his work (along with the rest of the tradition) and to add our own critical insights in service of the church.

Through Torrance's intimate involvement with thinkers from the East (both the living and the long dead), his theology exhibits features not normally associated with Western, Reformed theology. One of these features is the place he affords Christian experience in his theology. Another of his key theological axioms is that one must do constructive theology as an *a posteriori* exercise, in light of the incarnation and our union with Christ, rather than in any *a priori* way in which scholastic theological metaphysics are imposed upon the Scriptures in such a way that God must conform to philosophical requirements quite independent of the triune God's self-revelation in Christ, through the Spirit and in the word written. This approach meant that Torrance made space for themes rather unfamiliar in Western theology. Here I am thinking specifically of the way he so rigorously adapted a doctrine of theosis into his architectonic theology,² the way he was able to work out the implications of the trinitarian ground and grammar of theology in his epistemology, and the way he was able to incorporate mystical themes into his scientific dogmatics. This is not to suggest that Torrance merely adopted existing theologies into his theology. Instead, what we find in Torrance's works are highly nuanced understandings of such things as *theosis*, the *visio Dei*, and mysticism. I will suggest that precisely because of the presence of many of these themes in his theology, Torrance may be regarded as a theological mystic—but one *sui generis*.

II. THE *VISIO DEI*

Within the Great Tradition, the theme of light occupies an exalted place, with notable roots in the New Testament's Johannine literature, which defines God as Light that is foreign to all darkness (1 Jn 1.5) and defines Christ as the Light of the world who sends out his disciples to be as lights to the world (Jn 8.12; cf. Mt 5.14–16). The New Testament is also unanimous in its teaching that the saints and angels see God's face directly (Mt 18.10; 1 Cor 13.12; 1 Jn 3.2). If God reveals himself to humankind as Light and is able to be anticipated by them, can he also be inaccessible and transcendent, as Scripture affirms? This was the question put to the Hesychasts by Barlaam the Calabrian in the form of a bitter accusation. The Hesychast monk Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) undertook to answer Barlaam in his *Apodictic Treatises* (1336), followed by a series of letters in which he refuted Barlaam's theses, in his famous *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* (1338–1341), and finally in his *Hagioretic Tome* (1340). An essential piece of Palamas' reply was to develop the distinction between the *essence* of God

2 On Torrance's doctrine of *theosis*, see M. Habets, "Reforming *Theosis*," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 52, ed. S. Finlan and V. Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 146–67; and M. Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming).

and his uncreated *energies*.³ Torrance rejects the Orthodox distinction between the essence and energies of God for a more personalistic account, though he never ventures a full-scale critique of the distinction, perhaps on account of his close relations with the Eastern Orthodox Churches.⁴

The Nicene Creed represents the Son as Light proceeding out of Light. These themes have played an important part in the Christian tradition, especially within Byzantine Christianity, and have been intimately linked with doctrines of theosis.⁵ This is evident within Reformed theology. Thus Jonathan Edwards spoke analogously of theosis as the shining forth of light. As an example of such language, Ramsey cites Edwards' statement that believers are "little suns, partaking of the nature of the fountain of their light."⁶ According to Torrance, for Christ to be Light necessitates his being Word also, for the two are hypostatically related. "The very Light of God could not be consistently Light," Torrance writes, "and certainly could not be known as such, if Jesus Christ were not also Word of Word as well as Light of Light, and thus immutably, eternally God of God as both Light and Word."⁷ This conclusion is drawn from the deduction that, if Jesus Christ is of one and the same being with God (*homoousios*) as incarnate Son, this must apply to him also as incarnate Word of God.⁸ This is consistent with the entire tenor of Torrance's method and theology: what God is toward us in his self-revelation in Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh, he is in his own divine being.

Torrance forcefully reasons that "God is himself the supreme Light, unapproachable and invisible," and yet, "he is illuminatingly present in the world of thought."⁹ How? God is visible through the things he has made but is only

3 See G. I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. L. Sherrard (1963; repr. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 104–10.

4 See T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 187–88.

5 See V. Lossky, *The Vision of God*, trans. A. Moorhouse (1963; repr. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 25–44; and *idem.*, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1944; repr. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 217–35.

6 P. Ramsey, in J. Edwards, *Ethical Writings: The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, ed. P. Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 343, 347, cited in M. J. McClymont, "Salvation as Divinization: Jonathan Edwards, Gregory Palamas and the Theological Uses of Neoplatonism," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. P. Helm and O. D. Crisp (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003), 139. Cf. J. Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light. Immediately Imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine," in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. J. E. Smith, H. S. Stout, and K. P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

7 T. F. Torrance, *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 107.

8 Torrance cites John Reuchlin (1455–1522), the German humanist and great-uncle of Philip Melancthon, as first articulating this connection. *Ibid.*, 106.

9 *Ibid.*, 87.

knowable through the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. True knowledge of God, even of his uncreated and invisible Light, is “seen” and “known” only in Christ. In his own words, “Through the mystery of the invisibility of light God guards and reflects the mystery of his own invisible Light before which our creaturely finite minds falter and fail, but nevertheless he allows us, as St Paul expressed it, to ‘see’ him darkly or indirectly as in a mirror.”¹⁰ Drawing heavily on the insights of John Philoponos of Alexandria and John of the Cross, Torrance develops a theology of Light—both scientifically and theologically. God is unapproachable in the radiance of his pure Light. As one cannot look at the sun and see, one cannot see God and live. According to John of the Cross, this is so for two reasons. First, God is unapproachable because of the sheer invisibility of his uncreated Light. God is infinite and transcendent, and our finite capacities have no means by which we may see or comprehend this Light. Second, “God is unapproachable for us because of the inability of our impure minds to bear the sheer purity of his divine Light.”¹¹ The utter holiness of God, which consumes all evil and impurity, overwhelms the sight of the sinner.

Torrance draws from this the following significant conclusions concerning knowledge of God. First, God must establish a degree of reciprocity between himself and humankind in which his uncreated Light adapts itself to the lowly understanding of fallen minds so that men and women may be elevated to communion with God in such a way that they may have access to him beyond their creaturely capacities.¹² This is a clear affirmation of theosis defined as the “elevation” of the person to communion with God.¹³ Second, the reconciliation accomplished between God and humanity must ensure that guilt is expiated, sin is forgiven, and defilement is removed so that our minds may be equipped to “see” the divine Light. This is accomplished through the “two-fold relationship between God and humanity mediated through the incarnation and passion of God’s beloved Son in Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ Drawing on and updating Irenaeus’ commentary on the prologue of St. John’s Gospel, Torrance writes,

We may express this today by saying that in Jesus Christ God’s own transcendent Light in personal and concentrated form has moved directly into the physical world of luminous phenomena created by him and become uniquely man within the contingent structures and objectivities and patters of existence shaped and governed by the primacy of created light in the universe.¹⁵

10 Ibid., 91.

11 Ibid., 93.

12 Ibid., 93.

13 Torrance connects a theology of light to the concept of theosis in T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (1988; repr. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 139, fn.102.

14 Torrance, *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture*, 94.

15 Ibid., 95.

In Christ, the invisible Light of God is made visible and the “indissoluble oneness” with the eternal Word and Love of God is made accessible to humankind. Jesus Christ is the “Light of the world,” and it is only in and through him that we are enlightened and may see and come to know the invisible God. Jesus Christ is thus “Light of Light” and “God of God”—the two terms being synonymous—“the constitutes in the reality of his divine-human person both the invisible radiation and the creaturely reflection of the eternal Light which God is.”¹⁶ By becoming one with us in our human nature and condition, the incarnate Son is both the eternal Word of God and a human word, both the uncreated Light of God and created light, in the indivisible unity of his life and person.¹⁷

The incarnation shows us what true humanity is; it reveals what true “seeing” or “knowing” God consists of,¹⁸ for it is an accurate reflection (Calvin’s “mirror”) of the uncreated Light in a created human subject. In sermonic tone Torrance writes,

Jesus was completely and absolutely transparent with the Light of God. There was no darkness in him, nothing unreal, no deceit, no insincerity. He was utterly true and genuine, translucent with the sheer Truth of God himself, the one point in human existence where the divine Light shines through to the world purely and truly, unimpeded and unclouded by any distortion or refraction. Far from being less human because of that, he was more human than any other, indeed perfectly human, for with him the divine Light which is the source of all human life and light had its perfect way. He was so perfectly the man that he ought to have been that there was no gap in his nature resulting from a lapse from true humanity, as a result of which he was obliged to be what he was not but ought to be. The union between his human life and the humanizing Light of the Creator was unbroken, so that it is through him that the eternal uncreated Light of God shines through to us.¹⁹

“Transparency” in this discussion functions as an analogy for theosis.²⁰ To experience theosis is to become in a sense transparent. The goal of theosis is to

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 101–2.

18 Jesus Christ is both “luminous Word” and “audible Light,” *ibid.*, 101.

19 *Ibid.*, 96. In case he is misunderstood Torrance adds, “Jesus was not just the most perfect man, the most human being that ever lived, shot through and through with divine Light, but God himself in his divine Light living among us as man” (*ibid.*, 97).

20 There is an interesting parallel in the doctrine of theosis articulated by Jonathan Edwards in response to a clergyman’s objection that he taught that believers could participate in the divine *essence*, not simply in the divine *nature*: “A diamond or a crystal that is held forth in the sun’s beams may properly be said to have some of the sun’s brightness communicated to it; for though it hasn’t the same individual brightness with that which is inherent in the sun, and be immensely less in degree, yet it is something of the same nature,” Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, vol. 8, 640 (see 636–40). This is not to suggest that the language of participating in the divine *essence* is to be recommended,

reflect God's uncreated Light fully and completely, without spot or blemish—to mirror God absolutely. This is not possible for the darkened sinful vessels that we are, and consequently only in the incarnate Light of the Son is theosis realized.

It is the living Light of God himself actively lived out among us as a human life, which continues to bear directly, personally, intimately upon the ontological depths of our human existence, searching, judging, cleansing, healing and renewing, and remains for ever the one light-bearing and life-giving Life for all mankind.²¹

The incarnate Son of God is the Light of God and the light of the world, and it is only as one is united to this Light that one can apprehend it, reflect it, and be light oneself.²² "Since it is in this enlightening and saving Life of the crucified and risen Jesus that the eternal Light and Life of God himself are mediated to us in a form in which we can share in death as well as life, it is through union and communion with Jesus that we are enabled to see the invisible God and live."²³

All the familiar themes of theosis are represented here, this time illuminated by a theology of light (pun intended). This is a remarkable description on Torrance's part, one that cuts through much of the confusion and debate between Eastern and Western views of mystical knowing and light, and brings to the fore the christological aspects of theosis. Christ alone is the true human, and he alone is able to participate fully in the divine nature, for he shares that nature in his hypostatic union. Through participating in the humanity of Jesus Christ, the believer is also drawn into the Light and life of God, "deified" without losing his or her created humanity in the process. To see God is to know God, and to know God is to know the incarnate Son who has made him known. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor 3.18).

III. MYSTERY AND MYSTICISM

When the themes of light, knowledge, the *visio Dei*, and theosis are found in close proximity, it is not unusual to find some appeal made to the concept of mysticism in order to account for the ultimate experience of God. While Torrance utilizes each of these concepts, he repeatedly rejects all allegations that his is a mystical theology. Torrance rejects mysticism in favor of a highly developed notion of participatory knowing and personal indwelling in which the categories of light, vision, sight, and knowing come to the fore. In place of mysticism,

given as it is to such misunderstanding.

21 Torrance, *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture*, 97.

22 See C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (London: Fontana, 1965), 106–7 for the same thought in his discussion of the glory that is to be experienced at the resurrection.

23 Torrance, *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture*, 99.

Torrance adopts the category of mystery and uses a doctrine of theosis in order to explain the spiritual aspect of personal participation in God (spiritual union).

Because doctrines of theosis deal with the communing of the creature with the Creator, some form of mystery, or what is often termed mysticism, is involved. This mysticism must, however, be defined carefully. It is wrong to conclude that Torrance is a “mystic” or that his doctrine of theosis parallels that of Eastern or Western mysticism directly. Certainly there are, within his theology, mystical influences and themes with certain aspects of theosis contributing in part to this. Torrance’s attitude to the mystical tradition includes positive and negative elements. Like Calvin, Torrance does see union with Christ as an implied “mystical union” (*unio mystica*); however, such is his reticence over the word “mystical” that he prefers to speak of the “mystery of union” with Christ, a formula that he believes avoids unacceptable aspects of the notion of mysticism.²⁴

In order to identify what Torrance rejects in the concept of mysticism, we may note his comments on Eastern apophaticism and on the Western mystical tradition. Torrance traces the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of apophaticism back to Neoplatonic and pseudo-Dionysian philosophies in which “the human spirit ‘takes-off,’ as it were, in a wordless and conceptless mystical vision of God.”²⁵ According to Hesychast teaching, as one example, unceasing prayer performed with the right bodily posture will eventually achieve “the union of the mind and heart.” As McClymont reminds us,

In time, such prayer led on to a visionary experience by which it became possible for select individuals, in this present life and with their bodily eyes, to see the divine light, which was taken to be identical with that light that surrounded Jesus at the moment of his Transfiguration. In the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, the light seen by Hesychasts was a manifestation of the “energies” of God, which he took to be distinct from the divine “essence,” and yet uncreated and eternal just like the “essence.”²⁶

For Orthodoxy, this vision of light forms the final goal of theosis. An examination of Torrance’s theology of light and cognitive union with Christ would make it clear that he rejects such an Eastern apophatic theology. Torrance does not eschew all apophatic reticence in our knowledge of God,²⁷ but he rejects a doctrine of

24 While Torrance never uses the term “mystical union” in his work, he does affirm what Calvin meant by the term. See J. Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20–21, ed. J. T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.11.10 (and 2.12.7 within the context of a discussion on divorce based on Mat 19.4–6 “the two shall become one flesh”).

25 Torrance, *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture*, 104.

26 McClymont, “Salvation as Divinization,” 144–45.

27 T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).

apophaticism or negative theology as developed by such Eastern Orthodox writers as Lossky and Ware.²⁸

In its own way, the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition of theology endorses some form of conceptless mysticism in its formulation of the “Beatific Vision.” The Beatific Vision, a mute or wordless vision of God, functions as the goal of salvation in many Western, especially Latin, theologies. Aquinas rejected the necessity of a connection in the divine understanding (*intelligere*) and speaking (*locutio*). In response to the question posed by Peter Lombard as to how God and the blessed converse with one another, Aquinas gave the answer that they converse “wordlessly” through intellectual vision alone.²⁹ Having examined Torrance’s theology of the Incarnate Son as both Word and Light of God, it is equally clear that Torrance rejects Latin forms of mysticism as well.

Within both Eastern and Western constructions Torrance locates the same problem, arrived at by different routes, of a wordless or mute God behind the God of the economy. To counter these constructions Torrance turns to Athanasius, Hilary, and Anselm, who affirmed with Nicene theology that God’s being is intrinsically eloquent and not mute, for his Word dwells essentially in him.³⁰ Here we have the first steps in holding together the twin themes of sight and sound, Light and Word. This means, in Torrance’s view, that the Light of God is not simply a mystical and mute experience but is intensely cognitive (cf. Jn 3.36; 6.30, 40; 12.39–40). Torrance identifies the ascetics of the patristic period as one model of how this cognitive participation may be attained: by way of *askesis* or spiritual discipline.³¹ We see in this example an attempt to know God in a way that is worthy of him:

To know God and to be holy, to know God and worship, to know God and to be cleansed in mind and soul from anything that may come be-

28 See Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 13–29; and K. Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (London: Mowbrays, 1979), 12–32. For a good overview of Eastern versus Western approaches to the topic of apophaticism and mystery, see D. B. Clendenin, “The Mystery of God: Apophatic Vision,” in *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 47–70. For a discussion of Platonism and the East, see Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 64–65.

29 Torrance, *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture*, 105.

30 This is another way in which the economic Trinity is to be read back into the immanent Trinity in basic conformity to Rahner’s trinitarian principle that “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.” See K. Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. J. Donceel (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 22. This is not to imply that Torrance endorses Rahner’s axiom *simpliciter*.

31 This is both an important insight into Torrance’s thinking and in some senses a surprising one. Given Torrance’s aversion to mysticism, he is clearly not advocating the early ascetic’s flights of mystical experience, but rather the rigorously practical way in which they applied themselves wholly to a vision or knowledge of God. It also highlights Torrance’s familiarity with the Eastern tradition of knowledge/vision of God, and so, by extension, it supports the thesis that Torrance advocates a form of mysticism. See for instance: Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 103–20; and Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, 75–85, 87–115.

tween people and God, to know God and be committed to him in consecration, love and obedience, go inseparably together.³²

Torrance's theology asserts that the only way to know God is to become like God.³³ The way to become like God is to be united to the incarnate Son and, through his humanity, participate in the divine nature.

Characteristically, it is to Athanasius that Torrance turns for the foundation of his doctrine of human participation in the divine; in particular, he looks to Athanasius's treatment of the *enousios logos* and *enousios energeia*. *Enousios logos* refers to the Word/Reason inherent in the *ousia*, or being, of God; *enousios energeia* refers to the activity or movement of power inherent in the *ousia*, or being, of God.³⁴ God's Logos inheres in his own being eternally, and that Logos has become incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ we have cognitive access into the being of God, into his divine intelligibility or Logos. Likewise, if God's *energeia*, or "act," inheres in his being, and that act has taken the form of Jesus Christ in the incarnation so that he is identical with the action of God, then we know God in accord with the acts of his being, consistent with his activity in disclosing himself to us.³⁵

Two important implications follow. First, God's being as Logos means that God's being is a speaking being. Hence, there can be no thought of knowing God in his mute being, for apart from his Word there is no such god (thus rejecting a tenet of Latin mysticism). Second, God's *energeia* or act inheres in his being, and this means that God's being is in his act and his act is in his being (thus rejecting a tenet of Eastern apophaticism).³⁶ It naturally follows that what the Greek patristic theologians termed *theopoiēsis*/theosis is essentially the consubstantial self-giving of God to humankind through Christ and in his Spirit.³⁷ This leads Torrance to affirm that

in virtue of his divine reality and presence incarnate within mankind he acts upon people in an utterly divine and creative way, making them partake of himself through grace and thus partake of God. Θεοποιησις [*theopoiēsis*] or θεωσις [*theosis*] was used to describe the unique act of

32 T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 26.

33 This is strikingly, and not surprisingly, similar to the mystical experience of deification in the theology of Gregory Palamas. See Mantzaridis, "The Moral Aspect of Deification," in *The Deification of Man*, 61–85. Cf. 63–64.

34 T. F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1980), 151.

35 *Ibid.*, 151–52. This is one of the reasons why Torrance rejects the Eastern Orthodox distinction between the essence and energies of God. The identity of the Being and Act of God in Christ Jesus will not allow this. See further in M. Habets, "Article Review: 'Reformed Theosis?' A Response to Gannon Murphy," *Theology Today* (forthcoming).

36 Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 152–53.

37 Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 139.

God incarnate in Jesus Christ, but act which inheres in his divine being and is inseparable from it.³⁸

Thus, we can see a basic difference between Torrance's theology and Eastern Orthodoxy. The *homoousion* means that God reveals himself not simply through his impersonal energies but in a very real way through his personal essence: in the incarnation God gives himself in grace.³⁹ Unlike Palamite divinization, theosis in the Nicene theologians represents communion through Jesus Christ in the Spirit. Torrance is insistent that in Jesus Christ we can know God. Torrance does not, however, contend that we may know all there is to know about God. Properly speaking, we may apprehend God but never comprehend him. In expressing this apophatic reticence,⁴⁰ Torrance acknowledges the place of mystery in his theology.

IV. TORRANCE AND THE MYSTERY OF KNOWING GOD

Given that Torrance has argued that theologians must find a place in their inquiry into the knowledge of God for *mystical theology*,⁴¹ one may be forgiven for thinking that Torrance adopts a notion of Christian mysticism.⁴² However, Torrance is not prepared to have his theology characterized as "mystical" in any preconceived way.

I am not concerned at all with what textbooks on mysticism or mystical theology are concerned.... What I am concerned with in theology is *humility before God*, not with some special or esoteric way of thinking!... The fact is that I do not work with any so-called mystical tradition. Nor do I operate with some mystical theology, but simply endeavor to try to show that at certain crucial and decisive points where humility in thinking, or, if you like, some form of apophatic thinking, is in place.⁴³

38 Ibid.

39 See, for instance, Torrance's critique of Palamism for its strong distinction between the procession and the mission of the Spirit, which "drive[s] a wedge between the inner life of God and his saving activity in history," in Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 187.

40 "Apophatic" is used in a weak sense, not in the stronger or literal sense of much Eastern Orthodoxy. V. Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, trans. I. and I. Kasarcodi-Watson (1978; repr. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 2001), 13.

41 Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 123.

42 James Houston in a Regent College lecture called Torrance an evangelical mystic (J. M. Houston, "Traditions of Spirituality – A Historical overview: Lecture Two: 'Reflections on Mysticism – How Valid is Evangelical Mysticism?'" Unpublished Lecture [Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, 1990], cited in J. H-K. Yeung, *Being and Knowing: An Examination of T. F. Torrance's Christological Science* [Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1996], 191), as did K. A. Richardson, "Revelation, Scripture, and Mystical Apprehension of Divine Knowledge," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 185–203.

43 T. F. Torrance, "Thomas Torrance Responds," in *The Promise of Trinitarian*

In responding to claims that he espouses a form of mysticism Torrance remarks, “I find the word ‘mystical’ rather strange, for I have very rarely spoken of mysticism or of mystical knowledge.”⁴⁴ How exact is Torrance’s definition of “mysticism,” and what is it he rejects so rigorously?

Mysticism can be characterized quite simply as a search for an experience of immediacy with God.⁴⁵ One could go further and say that true *Christian* mysticism, if it is to be Christian at all, is a direct consequence of a doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁶ This form of mysticism would appear to be entirely congruent with Torrance’s theology in that the mystic is not content to know about God but longs for communion with the triune God.⁴⁷ According to Louth, the very heart of mysticism is “the search for God, or the ultimate, for His own sake, and an unwillingness to be satisfied with anything less than Him; the search for immediacy with this object of the soul’s longing.”⁴⁸ Important in this definition is the essential role union with God plays. The French reformist theologian Jean Gerson (1363–1429) defines mystical theology as an “experiential knowledge of God attained through the union of spiritual affection with Him. Through this union the words of the Apostle are fulfilled: ‘He who clings to God is one spirit with Him’ (1 Cor 6.17).”⁴⁹ Dennis Tamburello draws several important points from this. First, this definition of mysticism rejects any interpretation that would argue that “a soul loses itself and its creaturely being and receives true divine being, so that it is no longer a creature nor does it see and love God through creaturely existence.”⁵⁰ This immediately rules out any notions of a literal “essential union” between creature and Creator. Second, union with God always has a cognitive

Theology, 328–29.

44 Ibid., 324. What Torrance takes Richardson to mean is that “mystical” really means intuitive knowledge, or non-logical knowing that arises under the constraint of reality upon the mind, as was typified by the scientific work of Albert Einstein and Clerk Maxwell. This definition Torrance is prepared to accept but not the label “mysticism.”

45 See for instance: A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), xv.

46 This is the basic position of J. Houston in “Spirituality and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance*, ed. T. A. Hart and D. P. Thimell (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981), 48–69. See B. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 340–41.

47 Houston (“Spirituality and the Doctrine of the Trinity,” 67) concludes that “A real knowledge of God can only be participatory knowledge.... Since God exhausts all our definitions of himself, and indeed overturns them when we try to put him within them, we can only seek by his Spirit to ‘know him’ as the Reality and Substance that *is*.”

48 Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, xv.

49 Selections from “*A Deo exivit*,” “*Contra curiositatem studentium*” and “*De mysyca theologia speculative*,” 64–65, cited in D. E. Tamburello, *Union With Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 11. Gerson’s definition reflects a genuine medieval usage of the term and also brings out the focus on “union with God” that is central to mysticism.

50 Tamburello, *Union With Christ*, 11.

component. While the content of mystical union will always be experiential, it is an experiential knowledge that is in view.

It is well known that the formative period for mysticism in Christian history was the first five centuries. It is not coincidental that the first five centuries were also the formative period for theology; mysticism and theology have often been bound up with one another, particularly within patristic theology. Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa are prime examples of those who express both. Considering the importance he affords Athanasius within the history of Christian thought, Torrance's aversion to all forms of mysticism is somewhat surprising. One would at least expect Torrance to side with a nuanced, but nonetheless mystical, theology. It can be argued that Torrance tends to undermine his commitment to a theology of union and communion between God and humanity, emphasizing cognitive union to the relative neglect of mystical and spiritual union.

In light of the definitions of mysticism by Louth and Gerson, it is obvious that Torrance is not rejecting these forms of mystical apprehension. By rejecting mysticism *tout court*, Torrance's articulation of the Christian life, theology, and spirituality is weakened if not obfuscated. It is apparent that Torrance has adopted an inaccurate definition of mysticism, which leads him to an *a priori* exclusion of mystical elements within his own theology at precisely the points at which it should be evident.

Torrance speaks of knowledge of God that is sacramental in nature. By "sacramental" knowledge Torrance means the truth of God that is communicated to us in the form of mystery (*mystērion*).⁵¹ Torrance adopts the concept of mystery in theology from Barth. "By 'mystery' Barth does not refer to anything a-logical or irrational, but on the contrary to full, complete and self-sufficient rationality, the rationality of God, who is so fully rational that he does not need to be interpreted in terms of anything outside of himself."⁵² Torrance writes,

"Mystery" of this kind expresses the objective depth of rationality.... Mystery means that our knowledge contains far more than we can ever specify or reduce to clear cut, that is, delimited, notions or conceptions, and is concerned with a fullness of meaning which by its very nature resists and eludes all attempts to reduce it without remainder, as it were, to what we can formulate or systematize.⁵³

51 Torrance uses the category of mystery on numerous occasions: T. F. Torrance: *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 1: *Order and Disorder* (London: Lutterworth, 1959), 265; *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 2: *The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 82–92; *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 149–50; and *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 140–45.

52 T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910–1931* (1962; repr. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 82.

53 Torrance, *Theological Science*, 150.

This form of mystery elicits recognition, reverence, openness of mind, and wonder.⁵⁴ However, Torrance fails to recognize that mystery of this kind is inherently Christian *mysticism*.

Torrance wants to preserve the ontological gulf between God and humanity and yet maintain the relational unity of the two in Jesus Christ. This, however, is not best achieved by a rejection of mysticism, but as is the case in Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa, by a rejection of non-Christian senses of mysticism. In rejecting forms of mysticism not compatible with the Gospel, Torrance could have made good use of “mysticism” and affirmed certain strands of the Christian tradition which he has overlooked.

Like Barth, Torrance sees the mystery of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ as the heart of Christian theology. According to Barth, God makes himself known as the One who is Unknowable.⁵⁵ In line with Rahner, there are three fundamental mysteries of Christian theology: the mystery of the Trinity, the incarnation, and the divinization of humanity in grace and glory.⁵⁶ We see in these three mysteries a direct parallel to the concerns of Torrance, the essence of whose theology may tentatively be stated as the mystery of the trinitarian God who loves us in Christ and calls us to participate in this mystery through Christ by the Spirit. For this reason mystical themes are arguably present throughout Torrance’s theology.

Yeung argues that a fuller treatment of the concept of mystery within Torrance’s theology would reduce his tendency toward over-intellectualism.⁵⁷ While the charge of over-intellectualism may not in fact be accurate, Yeung’s call for a more sustained treatment of mystery within Torrance’s work is welcome, and his own work contributes to this lacuna, albeit Yeung does not distinguish between Torrance’s definition of illegitimate, namely Platonic (*Mystik*), forms of mysticism, from legitimate Athanasian mysticism that sees the path to wonder and awe following knowledge, not bypassing it (*Mysticismus*). In thus modifying and guarding his language of mysticism, we are reminded of Barth’s reticence toward mysticism as well when he states that we should never use the term mysticism “unless we state precisely what we have in view when we speak of ‘mysticism’—and it would have to be a mysticism *sui generis* in this context.”⁵⁸ Taking into account what it is precisely that Torrance wants to affirm and what

54 See T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (1976; repr. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 193.

55 “God himself veils Himself and in the very process—which is why we should not dream of intruding into the mystery—unveils himself,” K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956–1975), I/1, 192. Through the incarnation this unveiling through veiling takes place. One is reminded of Luther’s comments of the theology of the cross and the *Deus absconditus*. See G. O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

56 K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, IV: *More Recent Writings*, trans. K. Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 73.

57 J. H-K. Yeung, *Being and Knowing: An Examination of T. F. Torrance’s Christological Science* (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1996), 192.

58 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, 539.

it is precisely he wishes to reject, one may, tentatively suggest that Torrance is a mystical theologian—*sui generis*.

I have no doubt that were Torrance reading the title of this essay today, he would be not only horrified, but annoyed that I have suggested he were a theological mystic. However, I trust that upon reading the essay his fears would be somewhat relieved and he would even appreciate the evaluation of his work and the place of mystery within it for which I have argued. On a personal note, let me record my profound appreciation for Torrance's theology and for Torrance himself. I only had the opportunity to meet Professor Torrance once, briefly in early 2004 in Edinburgh, and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to thank him in person for his work, for his witness, and for his enduring legacy to the church.

Myk Habets is a lecturer in systematic theology and director of the R. J. Thompson Centre for Theological Studies at Carey Baptist College, Auckland, New Zealand. He is the author of Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance (Ashgate, forthcoming), and has published articles on various areas of theology in such journals as Scottish Journal of Theology, New Blackfriars, Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Theology Today, and American Theological Inquiry.

THOMAS F. TORRANCE ON EUCHARISTIC SACRIFICE

George Hunsinger

According to Geoffrey Wainwright, eucharistic sacrifice “is likely to be the area of greatest difficulty for classical Protestants on the way to an ecumenical Eucharist.”¹ Protestants, he notes, “are still likely to balk at the idea from Vatican II that the Church or the faithful ‘offer the divine victim to God.’”² He continues, “Clearly, there is still theological work to be done towards an ecumenical Eucharist in so far as its sacrificial nature is at stake.”³ Wainwright even states that eucharistic sacrifice may be a more difficult problem to solve than that of eucharistic ministry: “I would suggest that settlement of the meaning of eucharistic sacrifice is logically prior to the question of the disabling ‘defectus’ which Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism alleges in the ministry of those who preside at the Lord’s Table in the Protestant churches.”⁴

Wainwright does not elaborate on the barriers to a settlement with classical Protestantism. Obviously, they are mainly two: First, that the sacrifice of Calvary is unrepeatable; and second, that the eucharist is not a meritorious work. Can the eucharist be understood as a “sacrifice” in a way that honors the unrepeatability of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice on the cross? Furthermore, can it be conceived as a “sacrifice” in a way that prevents it from functioning as a “meritorious work”? The first of these questions will be considered here, with reference to the work of Thomas F. Torrance.⁵

Torrance’s contribution of to the question of eucharistic sacrifice is at least threefold. He developed an integrated conception of Christ’s person and work, he showed how the cross and the eucharist can be held together in a pattern of unity-in-distinction, and he explained how Christ’s vicarious humanity allows *participatio Christi* to be grounded in grace alone. In addition, he also connected eucharistic sacrifice with Christ’s ascension.

First, Torrance developed an integrated conception of Christ’s person and work. The person of Christ, he explained, cannot be separated from his work, nor his work from his person, for “his person and his work are one.”⁶ As the Incarnate

1 Geoffrey Wainwright, “*Ecclesia de Eucharistia vivit: An Ecumenical Reading*,” *Ecumenical Trends* 33 (October 2004): 129–37, on 132.

2 Ibid., 133.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 134.

5 Both questions are considered at greater length in my book, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), from which the material in this essay has been excerpted.

6 T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers &

Son, Christ “confronts us as he in whom person and word and work are indissolubly one. It is his own person that he communicates in his words and deeds, while his words and deeds do not only derive from his person but inhere in it.”⁷

As Christ’s person and work are one, so also are his Incarnation and Atonement. The two are necessarily inseparable and mutually implicated in each other. For Torrance, as for the great patristic theologians on whom he relies (like Athanasius and Cyril), the Incarnation reaches its fulfillment in the Atonement, while the Atonement finds its essential premise in the Incarnation. That was the point of Torrance’s insight that we are not saved by the death of Christ, but by the person of Christ in his death.

“Atoning reconciliation,” Torrance wrote, “takes place within the personal being of the mediator. . . . In him the Incarnation and Atonement are one . . . for atoning reconciliation falls within the incarnational constitution of his person as mediator.”⁸ By virtue of his resurrection from the dead, Christ himself is “the living Atonement, who prevails eternally in his intercession before God, and who avails perpetually for us here and now as the propitiation for our sins.”⁹ Resurrection means “the real presence of the whole Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ His earthly life and passion, including his unique and unrepeatable sacrifice on the cross, “far from being past, persist through the triumph of the resurrection over all corruption and decay.”¹¹ The risen Christ mediates himself to faith as the living Atonement in the eucharistic worship of the church. The Lamb who has been slain but is alive forevermore offers us his body and blood that we may participate in his vicarious self-offering to the Father.¹² Christ’s expiatory sacrifice is one with his person: *He is the expiation [hilasmos] for our sins* (1 John 2:2).

Torrance’s second contribution was to show how the cross and the eucharist are held in a unity that does not violate but reinforces their distinction. The one perfect and indivisible act of Atonement in Jesus Christ assumes two different forms. First, the *constitutive* form is the cross while the *mediating* form is the eucharist. Second, the cross is always central, constitutive and definitive, while the eucharist is always secondary, relative and derivative. The eucharistic form of the one sacrifice does not repeat the unrepeatable, but it does attest what it mediates and mediates what it attests. What it mediates and attests is the one whole Jesus Christ, who in his body and blood is both the sacrifice and the sacrament in one. As the sacrifice, he is the Offerer and the Offering. As the sacrament, he is the Giver and the Gift. The Son’s sacrificial offering of himself to the Father for us on the cross is the ground of the Father’s sacramental gift of his Son to the faithful

Howard, 1992), 63.

7 T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 48.

8 Torrance, *Mediation*, 63.

9 Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 55.

10 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 135.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 120, 111.

in the eucharist.

The cross was styled by Torrance as the “dimension of depth” in the eucharist.¹³ The eucharist has no significance in itself that is not derived from the cross and grounded in it. Therefore, the cross alone is the saving “content, reality and power” of the eucharist.¹⁴ It is a matter of one reality, one priestly sacrifice of Christ, in two different temporal forms. The eucharistic form here and now participates in, manifests, and attests to the incarnational form of the sacrifice there and then. What took place in the perfect tense is finished, indivisible, and all-sufficient. What takes place in the eucharistic sacrifice is not a matter of repetition but of participation, manifestation, and witness. The real presence of the one Jesus Christ—who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8)—gives the faithful a share here and now in the salvation once accomplished there and then. Christ’s real eucharistic presence is the presence of his personal being and atoning self-sacrifice.

Mention may be made of a third contribution: namely, Torrance’s idea of Christ’s vicarious humanity. Christ himself, Torrance proposed, functions vicariously as our human response to God. It is by grace through faith that the faithful are given to participate in Christ’s perfect human offering of himself to God. Eucharistic mediation and participation provide an answer to the question of repetition that so worried the Reformers. These ideas also address the problem of the mass as a meritorious work. In the eucharist the living Christ re-presents himself in his vicarious humanity—that is, in his body and blood—so that the faithful are given an active, though secondary and derivative, participation in it. Recall Calvin’s view that it is in and through the priesthood of Christ that we “offer ourselves and all that we are to God” (II.15.6). Torrance has shown that there is no reason why this, the self-offering of the faithful, should not be given a eucharistic location. The body and blood of Christ’s vicarious humanity, by which Christ unites the faithful sacramentally to himself, are the very same body and blood by which he graciously includes them in his own perfect self-offering on their behalf to God.

The event of Passover allowed Torrance to deepen his incarnational view of how the cross and the eucharist were one. He wrote:

The early Christians called [the message of Good Friday and Easter] the *Pascha* in view of the *Passover* which was celebrated in Israel at that time and in which Christ fulfilled his own *Passion* as the *Paschal Lamb*. Jesus Christ was regarded as constituting in himself the great Passover from death to life, from man-in-death to man-in-the-life-of-God, from damnation to salvation, from destruction to new creation. But that *Pascha* which he accomplished in himself for our sakes is proclaimed as the great *Pascha* which he has accomplished for the Church and for the

13 See George Hunsinger, “The Dimension of Depth: Thomas F. Torrance on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 155–76.

14 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 82.

world. It is, then, in that profound unity and continuity, ontologically structured in and through the Person of Christ as Mediator, that the resurrection was understood as forming with the crucifixion the great Paschal Mystery of our salvation.¹⁵

The paschal mystery of the eucharist meant that Christ himself was present in the sacramental form as the living Atonement.

Finally, like Calvin and the general Reformed tradition, Torrance developed the idea of Christ's ascension. Unlike them, however, he applied it to the question of eucharistic sacrifice. Torrance distinguished three aspects of Christ's priestly office in his ascension: his eternal self-offering, his perpetual intercession, and his continual benediction.¹⁶ These will be discussed, briefly, in reverse order. According to Torrance:

(i) The ascended Christ's eternal benediction is his sending of his Spirit. It is this gift that creates union and communion with Christ. Through this benediction the faithful *live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sakes died and was raised* (2 Cor. 5:15).

(ii) The ascended Christ's perpetual intercession, in turn, is his continual prayer before the Father. By his Spirit he takes up the church's prayers into his own continual intercession, where they are purified and perfected. Because Christ's being is in his act, however, his perpetual intercession is finally inseparable from his person. His perpetual intercession and his eternal self-offering are one.¹⁷

(iii) Finally, the ascended Christ's eternal self-offering provides a basis for understanding eucharistic sacrifice. Christ's priestly sacrifice and oblation of himself are multifaceted. In one sense they are necessarily over and done with. But "in their once for all completion," noted Torrance, "they are taken up eternally into the life of God and remain prevalent, efficacious, valid, [and] abidingly

15 Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 49.

16 *Ibid.*, 115–18.

17 A subtle issue arises at this point. One view, represented by Milligan (whom Torrance follows), stresses that the intercession and the offering of Christ in his ascension are inseparable. Another view, as taken by Tait, insists that it is not the atoning sacrifice but only its efficacy, which can be eternal, because the sacrifice was finished on Calvary. Over against those who have contended that if the sacrifice is eternal it cannot have been historically completed, Tait is correct. Whether Milligan makes this error is not clear. Torrance however avoids it, since he acknowledged that Christ's atoning sacrifice on Calvary is completed, perfect and sufficient in itself. See William Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord* (London: Macmillan, 1894); Arthur J. Tait, *The Heavenly Session of Our Lord* (London: R. Scott, 1912). For a critique of Torrance that sides with Tait, see Peter Toon, *The Ascension of Our Lord* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984). Toon fails to grasp that for Torrance, Christ's finished historical self-offering is inseparable from his person. On the other hand, for examples of the error that Tait rightly rejects, see R. J. Coates, "The Doctrine of Eucharistic Sacrifice in Modern Times," in *Eucharistic Sacrifice*, ed. J. I. Packer (London: Church Book Room Press, 1962), 127–53.

real.”¹⁸ Christ’s historical self-offering on Calvary has taken place once-for-all and needs no repetition. But since the Offerer and the Offering are inherently one, Christ’s atoning sacrifice is taken up, through his resurrection and ascension, into the eternal presence of the Father. His self-offering “endures for ever as the one, perfect, sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world.”¹⁹

The eucharist must be seen to have a twofold aspect. It involves feeding on Christ through the reception of his life-giving flesh (communion) while it also means worshipping the Father in the Spirit through the Son, in union with his eternal self-offering (sacrifice). “Eucharistic sacrifice means that we *through the Spirit* are so intimately united to Christ, by communion with his body and blood, that we participate in his self-consecration and self-offering to the Father.”²⁰ We thus “appear with him and in him and through him before the Majesty of God in worship, praise and adoration with no other sacrifice than the sacrifice of Jesus our Mediator and High Priest.”²¹ “It is his one sufficient and once for all offering of himself for us that is our only sacrifice before God.”²² “What we do as we gather together in Christ’s name is to offer Christ to the Father, for he who has united us to himself has gathered up and sanctified all our worship and prayer in himself.”²³

There is, therefore, one sacrifice common to Christ and his church: that is the highpoint of Torrance’s teaching. What he says about the eucharist runs parallel to what he said in another place, following Athanasius, about baptism, namely, that there is “one baptism common to Christ and his church.”²⁴ “Because he is baptized,” wrote Athanasius, “it is we who are baptized in him.”²⁵ The baptism of the faithful is not another or separate baptism alongside the baptism of Christ. It is rather a participation in his one vicarious baptism as undergone for their sakes. Just as Christ’s baptism is vicarious, encompassing and inclusive, so the same is also true of his atoning sacrifice on the cross. The sacrifice of thanks and praise that is offered by the faithful in the eucharist is taken up into the one atoning sacrifice of Christ, enacted on their behalf. His completed and perpetual self-offering, as sacramentally re-presented in the eucharist, serves as their means of eternal access to the Father of all mercy and righteousness.

The sacrifice common to Christ and his church is seen as one sacrifice in three modes:

(i) the once-for-all and historical mode in which the work of expiation was completed,

18 Torrance, *Space Time and Resurrection*, 115.

19 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 133.

20 *Ibid.*, 134; emphasis in original.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 117.

23 Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 212.

24 Torrance, “The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church,” in *Theology in Reconciliation*, 82–105.

25 Athanasius, *Oration Against the Arians* I.48, in *Athanasius*, ed. Kahled Anatholios (London: Routledge, 2004), 106.

(ii) the ascended and eternal mode by which its efficacy never ends,

(iii) the daily and eucharistic mode through which the faithful come to dwell in Christ and he in them as his sacrifice continually becomes theirs and theirs his.

While these different modes remain truly distinct, they also form an inseparable unity. It is the unity of a single great sacrifice. It was once accomplished on the cross, then elevated in its efficacy to eternity, on which basis it is re-presented in the Word and by the Spirit for daily participation, reception, and acknowledgement by the Church. The sacramental means for this daily participation, reception, and acknowledgement is the eucharist as communion and sacrifice.²⁶

George Hunsinger is the Hazel Thompson McCord Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

²⁶ I use the word “daily” here both literally and metaphorically, in conformity with the discourse of Chrysostom.

BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*. Robert T. Walker, ed. IVP Academic Press and Paternoster Press, 2008.

From the IVP Academic and Paternoster presses comes a new and significant addition to the corpus of one who was perhaps the greatest theologian working in the English language during the 20th century—Thomas Forsyth Torrance (d. 2007). Torrance’s christology lectures, delivered during his tenure as Professor of Christian Dogmatics at the University of Edinburgh and New College, are now coming to print as a two-volume set. The first volume—*Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*—rolls off the presses at the end of 2008, while the second volume—*Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*—is planned for release in 2009. Although anyone who even casually engages with Torrance’s work will recognize the central place that christology plays within it, we have heretofore had from him only limited discussions of the topic.¹ These two posthumously published volumes fill that lacuna, and then some! Robert Walker—the editor of this material, who is both Torrance’s nephew and a student who heard these lectures delivered in the late 1960s—puts it well when he notes that these volumes “represent the nearest equivalent to the dogmatics that [Torrance] had hoped to write himself” (vi).

It must be noted here at the outset that this review is composed on the basis of an advanced, un-proofed copy of this volume graciously provided by the publisher. As such, references to page numbers and other features of the volume may prove to be incorrect or at least incomplete when compared to the final, printed version. That said, there are both salutary and negative aspects to this volume’s structure. One of the salutary aspects is that, in addition to a standard table of contents, the reader is provided with a synopsis of the volume. This synopsis is basically an analytical table of contents, revealing the many sub-divisions in the work and helping the reader better to grasp the shape of the whole. As a result, when turning to the text itself one is better prepared to make connections between points made in divergent locations, as well as to see how decisions made in one section pay off in another. Such a bird’s-eye view is especially valuable when dealing with Torrance’s sometimes tortured prose.

There are negative aspects regarding the volume’s form, however, due to the editor’s commendable desire to make this volume easily accessible to begin-

1 We have, for instance, Torrance’s lectures from his time as Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Auburn Theological Seminary during the academic year of 1938–39: Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002). There is also his short but rich treatment of the subject: Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992).

ning theological students. This has led him to rearrange some of the material. Although in some cases the result is positive, such as the editor's incorporation of a classroom handout on "The nature of 'scientific dogmatics'" into the text itself (cf. 4–6), there are other cases where it is negative. One such instance is found in the distinction between endnotes and footnotes, where the latter contain "more technical discussions" (6n8). Indeed, whole sub-sections of material in Torrance's original structuring have been removed from the main text and tucked away in this fashion. While the editor notes that they have been thus removed because they are "much more technical and historical in nature," "more philosophical in tone," and are "therefore of less immediate relevance to the ordinary reader" (308e2), that they truly are of less relevance is questionable. For instance, some of this material—excised from the end of the first chapter—contains discussions of Bultmann and the quests for the historical Jesus that would be of great value to the reader embarking upon Torrance's extensive engagement with Scripture, and especially the Gospels' depiction of Jesus in the second chapter.

A second instance is found in the transposition of the bulk of what was originally the second chapter to the second of this two-volume rendition, that is, from the more strictly christological section to the more strictly soteriological section. What has been moved is a discussion of "The biblical witness to Jesus Christ" (32) and, although it is not stated, the motivation for this structural change is most likely a desire to keep the more soteriologically orientated discussions together in the second volume and the more christologically orientated material together in the first. Such a strict compartmentalization is, however, directly contrary to one of Torrance's great convictions, namely, that "We cannot...think of [Christ's] person apart from his atoning work, or of his atoning work in abstraction from his person" (37).² A certain formal abstraction is necessitated due to the linear nature of human language and thought, but Torrance always strives to think these two aspects in their unity. For instance, even in this first volume ostensibly concerned more with Christ's person, we find discussions of Christ's active and passive righteousness (cf. 81) as well as reference to the patristic arguments for Christ's divinity on the basis of his saving work (cf. 195). The editor is thus guilty of reinforcing in these volumes a bifurcation that Torrance self-consciously strove to overcome in these very lectures.

1. Extensive Engagement with Scripture

Having treated some of the volume's more formal qualities, the remainder of this review will undertake to give the reader a taste of its material offerings. Torrance's extensive engagement with Scripture is a good place to begin. The editor rightly notes that these "lectures provide what is effectively an extended theological commentary on the bible" (v). Indeed, Scripture is Torrance's primary conversation partner throughout, and some sections are given over entirely to

2 Similar statements abound throughout Torrance's corpus. See, for instance, Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 62–67, Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 154.

providing a theological reading of biblical texts. Before discussing some of the material results of Torrance's extended engagement with the biblical text, a more formal point should be made along these lines, namely, that the way in which Torrance has structured his treatment of Christ's person is in accord with his understanding of theology as a science.

1.1. Theological Science

Torrance's basic affirmation here is that "Scientific thinking is not 'free thinking', but thinking bound to its chosen object" such that "each science allow[s] its own subject matter to determine how knowledge of it is to be developed" (5). Theology, then, must pursue knowledge in the manner determined by its object, the living God. This makes theological methodology different than "astrophysics," to use Torrance's example (6).³ The locus of knowledge of God is, for Torrance, found in Jesus Christ, but the way in which theology is to understand Jesus Christ is not identical to the way in which historical science does, precisely because "the fact that God became man is an event that cannot be appreciated by ordinary historical science" (6). While the historical aspect is important—Christianity is predicated upon the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth—the proper mode for perceiving the incarnation of God as this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is faith. Thus, the historical and theological must be held closely together. This is precisely how Torrance understands the New Testament witness to Jesus. "Without ceasing to be the historical Jesus Christ, he is presented to us throughout the New Testament as God and saviour, true God and true man" (12). What we find in Scripture is "Christ clothed with his own gospel," or "a fact-in-interpretation" rather than "bare historical fact as such" (13). The way in which Torrance proceeds from this point and structures the remainder of the volume conforms to this unity-in-distinction or dialectical tension between the historical and the theological. Torrance begins his investigation proper in chapter two with an extensive examination of Scripture before concluding in its final pages with a brief, heuristic outline of "the doctrine of the union of God and man in Jesus Christ" (82). Chapters three through five are then given over to further and more detailed interaction with the biblical witness before chapter six returns to give a fuller account of the hypostatic union as the fruit of this engagement. Throughout this volume, Torrance has sought to let what Scripture says about Jesus be the determining factor in his christological account.

1.2. The Virgin Birth and Mary

One particular example will provide a more concrete taste of Torrance's engagement with Scripture, namely, his treatment of Mary and Christ's virgin birth. Torrance turns to the biblical text as soon as he broaches the topic, and he proceeds to analyze what the New Testament has to say about it. He treats the synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John and the other Johannine writings, and the Pauline epistles. This exegetical leg-work provides the foundation for the more dogmatic analysis that Torrance will later provide. The synoptics, for instance,

3 For an extended treatment of theological and scientific method, see Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

make much of Mary but go out of their way to marginalize Joseph—“Joseph is not significant” (88)—and Paul’s treatment of Christ as the New Adam emphasizes “Jesus’ heavenly origin” (94). Torrance draws a number of related dogmatic points from this material, but their primary thrust is that the virgin birth “repudiates all synergism,” excluding “the idea that God and man are co-equal partners” (99). The virgin birth sets aside human autonomy, shows the inadequacy of human ability, brings a new humanity out of the old, and—in doing all this—provides “a pattern or norm for all our understanding of grace” (101). It is here that Torrance provides something of a Protestant mariology. In agreement with Roman Catholic accounts, Torrance affirms that “God takes the initiative” in approaching Mary. But, in disagreement with those accounts, Torrance states that Mary “has nothing to do in this matter except what is done in her under the operation of the Spirit,” and he describes her response as “an act of glad and thankful and humble submission and surrender to the will of God” (101). Here Mary does not cooperate in God’s work in an active way, but responds with faith and thanksgiving to the work that God begins in her.

Now, all this is well and good—the reader might say—but what precisely does it have to do with the virgin birth? That is, what about all this necessitates that Christ’s birth be virginal? Certainly the virginal quality of his birth makes it more clear that in Christ we have to do with the gracious initiative of God, but if the reality of the virgin birth can only be affirmed through the work of the Holy Spirit—as Torrance maintains (cf. 102–4)—would it not then be possible, through the work of the Holy Spirit, to affirm that in Christ we have to do with the gracious initiative of God even if the biblical witness did not maintain his virgin birth? Maybe so, but Torrance sees more at work in the virgin birth than simply the demonstration of God’s gracious initiative. It is also, for Torrance, an affirmation of Jesus’ humanity. “That Jesus was born of the virgin Mary means that he was a genuine man, that his humanity was not Docetic” (98). Such an argument may strike the reader as odd, for it is hard to imagine how affirming that Jesus’ birth was devoid of the usual human reproductive act supports the notion that Jesus is human in the same way that the rest of us are human. Torrance cites Ignatius as a patristic example of the virgin birth deployed in this manner, but fails to provide a citation. The reader who brings questions like these to Torrance’s text will not find answers, and so we might regret that Torrance did not extend his treatment in these directions.

1.3. Christological Dynamism

Torrance’s extensive engagement with Scripture gives his christology in this volume a dynamic character, and this is precisely what Torrance is aiming for. This can be seen in the way Torrance structures his material. The three chapters that Torrance devotes to the biblical witness concerning Christ are structured according to different aspects of the hypostatic union. The first, chapter three, is concerned with the ‘Once and For All Union of God and Man in Christ;’ the second, chapter four, deals with the ‘Continuous Union;’ and the third, chapter five, deals with the ‘Mystery of the Union of God and Man in the Person of Christ.’

The temptation is to think of chapters three and five as dealing with a ‘static’ hypostatic union that brackets off the ‘dynamic’ union treated in chapter four, but that would be incorrect. Each of these chapters deals with the union in dynamic terms. In every case it is a relation that is in the process of becoming. Chapter three deals with its foundational breaking into time with the virgin birth, chapter four treats its extension throughout Christ’s life, and chapter five accounts for how we come to know about this union and implications that it has for our knowledge of God. Throughout, as has been reiterated numerous times, Torrance is primarily concerned with what Scripture has to say about Jesus.

This continuous becoming, beginning with the virgin birth and extending through the life of Christ, constitutes Christ’s office of mediator. It is here in chapter four that we find the heart of Torrance’s scriptural engagement and, one might argue, his christological emphasis in these lectures. Throughout his life, Jesus Christ lives as one perfectly faithful to God and therefore as one perfectly faithful to humanity. This is where Torrance’s well-known language of Christ’s ‘vicarious humanity’ comes into play and we find what is perhaps a summary of Torrance’s entire christological-soteriological understanding: “Jesus lived out among humanity a life of utter obedience and faithfulness to the creator and Father. As such he was the perfect image of God on earth, for in him the will of God was done on earth as it is done in heaven. . . . Therefore in him our humanity is restored to its perfection in communion with God, and in him God’s word and will is perfectly reflected and directed toward man” (116).

Torrance situates his elucidation of this in chapter four by establishing the mediatory union of God and humanity in Jesus with reference to election and substitution. Taking obvious but not documented cues from his teacher Karl Barth (we will leave it for the reader to decide where and to what extent Torrance succeeds in following Barth),⁴ Torrance closely associates election and substitution. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that “election and substitution combine” in Jesus where “the election of one for all becomes ultimate fact in our existence” (109).

4 That Torrance is following Barth in this material is clear. It is very likely that Torrance would be doing so since the years during which these lectures were delivered correspond almost exactly to those during which Torrance was engaged in the great project of translating Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Both the lectures and the translation project began in 1952; the translation project ended in 1977 while the lectures continued through 1978. However, three pieces of textual evidence will prove the point. (1) Torrance titles one of his sub-sections “The judge and the judged” (113), a clear allusion to Barth’s well-known subsection entitled, “The Judge Judged in Our Place.” See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–75), 4.1, §59.2. (2) Torrance refers to “a steadfastness from both sides,” that is, from the side of both God and humanity in Jesus Christ (113). This is an unmistakable allusion to Barth’s discussion of “steadfastness on both sides.” See, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2.2, 124. (3) Torrance writes that Jesus engages the estrangement between God and humanity “both as the elect one and as the electing one, as the chosen man and as the choosing God” (113). This is yet another unmistakable allusion to Barth, this time to his oft repeated reference to Jesus as “electing God and elected man.” See, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2.2, 78, 143, 424, et al.

As the ‘ultimate fact in our existence,’ Jesus lives a life of faithful obedience to the Father. In so doing, Jesus undid Adam’s disobedience by replacing it with obedience—“Jesus achieved from within our estrangement a life of perfect and unbroken fellowship with the Father in which his whole life not only corresponded in the amen of truth to the Father’s will, but in which he offered in our name a life of perfect faith and confident and trust and love and thanksgiving and praise” (124)—and thereby opening “the kingdom of heaven to all believers” (125). Jesus achieved reconciliation between humanity and God by establishing a human life of perfect obedience to God, even under “all the judgment and chastisements of the divine wrath against our sin” (124). We can look forward to the publication of the second volume of these lectures to see how Torrance will flesh-out this basic soteriological point.

It is this dynamic depiction of Christ’s life of obedience to the Father that is the basis of Torrance’s account of the hypostatic union, and he brings it to bear on traditional christological issues. Here we find discussions about the debates surrounding and affirmations set forth at Chalcedon, as well as the Reformation era debates about the *extra-Calvinisticum*, *communication idiomatum*, and the rigorous elaboration of the *anhypostasis* and *enhyposstasis* concepts. It is in this chapter, more than any other, that the reader is introduced to the sorts of things that one expects to find in classroom lectures on christology. But, it is also in this chapter that Torrance reveals the historical insight that motivates his dynamic account of the hypostatic union:

A study of the history of the doctrine of Christ makes it clear that if we try to state the doctrine of Christ purely in substantive or ontological terms, without adequate attention to his action and saving mission in history, then we fail to do justice to the New Testament revelation, and replace the understanding of the living Christ by a static dogma about him. But if, on the other hand, we try to state the doctrine of Christ in terms of action alone, in purely verbal terms, without adequate attention to the eternal being and person of Christ as God and man in one person, then we fail to do justice to the New Testament revelation, and replace the authentic Christ by a modern construction, in fact by a Jesus dressed up in the ideas and clothes of our own time. (182–83)

What we find in this sentiment is a variation on a theme that we have already encountered, namely, Torrance’s insistence that the person and work of Christ be thought together. But it is even more complicated, and concrete, than that:

There needs to be a reconstruction of the whole classical doctrine of Christ in such a way as to bring together the patristic emphasis on the being-of-God-in-his-acts and the Reformation emphasis on the acts-of-God-in-his-being. This involves a rethinking of the classical doctrine apart from the deistic and cosmological and epistemological dualisms that undermined doctrine in the post-patristic and in the post-reformation times, in the post-patristic when the emphasis on the being of God be-

came detached from his acts, and in the post-reformation when the emphasis upon the acts of God became detached from his being. (85)

So, instead of the more simple and abstract notion of thinking together God's being and act, Torrance wants to bring together insights from the theological tradition that have conceived of God's being as present in his act and his act as definitive of, or perhaps even constitutive of, his being.⁵ His aim is to thereby break through the influence of outdated philosophies—dare we even say, of metaphysics?—on the Christian theological tradition. To the extent that Torrance allows his christology in this volume to emerge from the biblical witness, and we have seen that he has done so to quite an extensive degree, he has made headway toward this goal. But, to the extent that Torrance has not coupled this christological reflection with similar reflection on God's being and attributes, there is still more to be done. Indeed, Torrance's references to the 'being of God' in this volume retain something of the abstract character that he worked so hard to extricate from the christology presented here.

1.4. Conclusion

The goal of this review has been to introduce the reader to an interesting and rewarding new contribution to Thomas F. Torrance's published corpus. It is a volume that will be of interest to many different types of people. Torrance's students will undoubtedly be happy to add to their libraries this voice from their past. Beginning students in theology may be enticed to it through a desire to see what one of the last century's leading theologians had to say about Christ. Those of us who have grown to appreciate Torrance's work without ever having the privilege of being his students in Edinburgh will be thankful for the opportunity to get to know a different side of him. Finally, however, it is this reviewer's hope that the theological community at large will recognize in this volume a theologian who is up to something interesting if finally incomplete, and who is attempting to go beyond the theological tradition precisely by going through the theological tradition—a quality that is increasingly hard to find.

W. Travis McMaken
Princeton Theological Seminary

**Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*. Hermeneia.
Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007, lxx + 1140. \$90.00**

With the present commentary on Romans, Robert Jewett has significantly advanced scholarly discussion on Paul's most debated epistle. Jewett, Guest Pro-

⁵ It is interesting that bringing these two strands together is precisely what Torrance thinks Barth accomplished with reference to the doctrine of God in *Church Dogmatics* 2.1. See, Thomas F Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 19–20.

fessor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg, has produced a commentary which is surprisingly conversant across a broad spectrum of fields not regularly utilized in scholarly research of Romans. Shaped by the social, rhetorical, and missiological functions of the letter, Jewett's reading of Romans challenges dominant interpretations which have typically neglected these approaches.

A particular strength of Jewett's work is that he does not merely offer critical and exegetical comment on the text. Rather, throughout the commentary he argues the thesis that Romans is primarily a missionary document composed with the purpose of paving Paul's way to preach the gospel to the barbarians in Spain. Jewett's focus on the missiological character of the letter is a significant contribution to Pauline studies in general and Romans scholarship in particular. The formative nature of Paul's missionary vocation is commonly neglected in scholarship. Jewett demonstrates throughout that Paul's theology was not composed in the abstract, showing instead that it was shaped by his desire to preach to those who had not previously heard the gospel. Jewett's aim then is to interpret each verse of Romans as part of Paul's effort to gain support for his mission to Spain. It is at this point that Jewett demonstrates the breadth of his expertise in utilizing material on the first century situation in Spain, a topic seldom brought into discussions on Romans. Jewett especially highlights the particular difficulty of language barriers in evangelizing the Spanish barbarians and argues that Paul needed the support and aid of the Roman Christians along with their contacts in Spain to adequately prepare for the Spanish mission. Jewett sees this missiological situation as formative for Paul's understanding of the righteousness of God which, according to the author, does not discriminate against certain cultures or ethnicities and, in this particular case, against the barbarians in Spain.

Another important feature of Jewett's commentary is his insistence that Romans cannot be interpreted apart from the sociological context of first century Christianity in Rome. Against the dominant traditions which have interpreted Romans as an abstract theological system, Jewett treats the letter in light of the extensive amount of historical and sociological information available on the ancient city of Rome. Central to the social context of Rome was the culture wide system of honor where the primary quest in Roman public life was to gain honor while avoiding shame. In this system the elite held almost exclusive possession of the means by which one gained honor while the poor, slaves, and barbarians were normally excluded from qualifying for honor in society. Thus, for Jewett, Paul's declaration of his debt to both barbarians and the foolish (1:14) followed by his announcement of the indiscriminate power of the gospel for salvation (1:16) represents Paul's belief that God's impartial righteousness topples the system of honor and shame. Jewett believes this line of argument lays the theological foundation for Paul's ethical parenthesis to the splintered Christian groups that they should welcome, and thus honor, one another in fellowship (14:1-15:13). For Jewett, this is tied to the missiological nature of the letter in that Paul's desire to see a unified Christian community in Rome stems from his need to use Rome as a base of operations for his mission to Spain.

The methodological aspect of this commentary is also strengthened by the author's use of classical rhetorical categories in interpreting the epistle. The validity of rhetorical criticism as a method in Pauline studies has been hotly debated in recent years. There is, however, a growing contingent of scholars who consistently show that Paul utilized rhetorical techniques conventional in his day. Jewett follows those scholars, seeing Romans as a piece of Christian rhetoric which was intended to persuade its audience of the author's point of view. He argues that the standard rhetorical means of persuasion are plainly apparent in Romans, and he highlights the oral nature of the text reminding the reader that Romans was originally intended to be heard rather than read. The present commentary significantly advances scholarship by demonstrating once again the importance of rhetorical critical categories in the study of Paul's Romans.

Jewett's interpretation of the widely debated phrase "righteousness of God" is certain to be criticized (1:17; 3:22, etc). He takes the all important phrase to be a subjective genitive "referring to God's activity in this process [restoring the whole creation] of global transformation" (142). The evidence for this interpretation is compelling and has gained ground in recent scholarship. However, Jewett fails to adequately deal with the semantic arrangement of 1:17. Paul's declaration that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel is substantiated by the quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 where the *status* of righteous for the one who has faith is certainly in view. More work is required to show how "righteousness" may take two different meanings within the same verse.

Another weakness of Jewett's interpretation of Romans comes in his downplaying the issue of individual sin highlighting instead the corporate sinful nature of a society that operates in categories of honor and shame (146, 276). While the corporate dimension of sin is valid and should be acknowledged, it is no reason to undermine the importance of an individual's standing before God. The issue of individual sin before God and against others should not be relegated to a minor theme if only for the reason that society itself is made up of individuals. While there is a distinction between the individual and the group, the one doesn't come without the other. That Paul is equally concerned with the individual may be seen in the repeated use of the second person singular in Romans 2.

Despite these weaknesses, Jewett's commentary remains a landmark contribution to Romans scholarship. The sheer breadth and depth of this volume are to be commended. His extensive interaction with primary and secondary sources is truly amazing and makes this commentary an essential tool in locating sources for research. Jewett's focus on the missionary character of the letter and his discussion of the situation in Spain has established a new standard in Romans scholarship. His understanding of the social and rhetorical aims of the letter rightly challenges many dominant interpretations of Romans. I am pleased to recommend Jewett's *Romans* as a remarkable piece of scholarly advancement in the study of Paul's most discussed letter.

Matthew P. O'Reilly
Asbury Theological Seminary

Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008, 317 pp. \$32.99.

Bruce McCormack's 1995 work on *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* is one of the towering monuments of Barth studies. It casts its shadow over all subsequent interpretation of Barth, just as it has corrected or relativised much earlier work in the field.

Since 1995, McCormack has been producing a steady stream of essays on Barth's theology – essays which have continued to expand the horizons of Barth-interpretation in many directions. Broadly speaking, McCormack's full corpus of essays can be divided into three categories: historical studies, focusing especially on Barth's relation to the nineteenth century; studies of Barth's relation to contemporary theology (especially to contemporary evangelicalism—although unfortunately none of the essays on evangelicalism appear in this collection); and finally, constructive essays on the contemporary significance of Barth's theological ontology.

The essays selected for this volume (all of them previously published, but some appearing now in English for the first time) are organised under these three broad categories. In the first section, McCormack explores Barth's relation to the 19th century, particularly the traditions of Schleiermacherian theology and Kantian philosophy. Against the common tendency to find in Barth a complete break with Schleiermacher and with Kantian foundationalism, McCormack situates Barth within the broad Schleiermacherian tradition of “mediating theologies.” He argues that Barth's thought remains wedded to neo-Kantian categories (even if, admittedly, “Kant is no longer Kant by the time Barth is finished with him”), and he shows the extent to which Barth remained “a nineteenth-century theologian” who was deeply preoccupied with the questions and problems of the Schleiermacherian tradition.

If Barth's project was born of an effort to overcome theological historicism and psychologism, this was in fact a struggle not against Schleiermacher but against Troeltsch—even if Barth himself persistently confused Schleiermacher with Troeltsch, and imagined that a root-and-branch repudiation of the latter had to entail a rejection of the former. Throughout Barth's career, however, he shared many of Schleiermacher's fundamental concerns, and he agreed with Schleiermacher that post-Kantian dogmatics had to be shaped by the epistemological “turn to the subject” and by the problem of the limits of human knowing.

In this set of historical interventions, McCormack's antipathy to “postmodern” readings of Barth is never far from the surface. For McCormack, postmodern and non-foundationalist appropriations of Barth's thought are based on flawed understandings of Barth's own questions and contexts—and also on a failure to grasp the real priorities for contemporary constructive theology. The essays in the book's second section bring this critique explicitly to the foreground. McCormack analyses and critiques the “postliberal Barth” of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck,

together with the “postmodern Barth” of Walter Lowe and Graham Ward. He finds more promise in the work of John Webster—although he observes that, at times, “Webster’s Barth can come across as a bit too ‘premodern’,” too closely wedded to the assumptions of classical metaphysics (p. 164). In any case, McCormack’s main point is that English-language research tends “to move much too quickly to ‘use’ of Barth’s theology before having acquired a proper understanding” (p. 165), so that Barth’s theology too easily becomes a mirror of our own contemporary assumptions and commitments. In short: “The followers of Frei and Torrance must look elsewhere for resources for their various projects” (p. 294).

While McCormack’s historical work on Barth is peerless for its depth, range and sophistication, his own recent constructive engagement with Barth’s thought represents a major event within contemporary theology. The essays collected in the third section of the book provide a sample of this recent theological engagement with Barth – beginning with the widely discussed *Cambridge Companion* essay on “Grace and Being,” where McCormack proposes a critical correction of Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity. The argument here is that Barth ought to have reversed his ordering of Trinity and election: properly understood, Barth’s own doctrine of election entails that God’s decision to be God-for-us is the ground of God’s triunity. Simply put: according to its own internal principles, Barth’s dogmatics ought to begin with the doctrine of election, not with the doctrine of the Trinity.

In chapter 8, a magisterial essay on “Karl Barth’s Historicized Christology” (previously published in German), McCormack continues to pursue this revisionist reading of Barth, by exploring Barth’s own revision of Chalcedonian christology. Before developing his doctrine of election, Barth’s thought contained significant traces of “the abstract metaphysical ontology which underwrote the Christology of the Chalcedonian Council” (p. 207). It was only with the development of his doctrine of election that he was able to excise this metaphysics from his thought; the turning-point here was his insight that Jesus Christ is the subject of election, so that election is “a free act in which God assigned to himself the being God would have for all eternity” (p. 216). God’s decision to be God-for-us is an event in which God differentiates himself into the three modes of being—Father, Son and Spirit.

The gap between Jesus Christ and the eternal Son is thus eliminated; the second mode of being in God simply *is* Jesus Christ. Indeed, this insight can lead McCormack to support Bertold Klappert’s challenging remark that “Barth does not think incarnationally.” For Barth, there is no absolute metaphysical subject which unites itself to a human “nature.” Rather, there is a divine decision in which humanity is taken up into the event of God’s own being, so that “the human history of Jesus Christ is constitutive of the being and existence of [the second Person of the Trinity]” (p. 223).

In these highly creative readings (and constructive revisions) of Barth, McCormack is pressing towards the articulation of a striking new theological ontology. One often feels that, where theological ontology is concerned, John Milbank’s project is the only game in town—and McCormack’s work now represents one of

the only thoroughgoing counter-proposals to Milbank's ontology available in contemporary theology. While Milbank's ontology is structured by hierarchical and participatory categories, McCormack articulates an ontology structured by actualistic categories and by a radically historicised doctrine of God. While Milbank's thought presupposes an ontological state of primal harmony, peace and fecundity, McCormack issues a direct challenge to "the Trinity of peace and perfection" (p. 276), and he envisions instead a Trinity of act and decision, centred on the insight that "the death of Jesus Christ in God-abandonment . . . [is] an event in God's own life" (p. 189). Although McCormack has never directly engaged Milbank's work, his essay on "Participation in God" (chapter 9) shows how much is at stake in the question of creaturely deification, and in the ontological categories through which "participation in God" is understood.

In all this, McCormack's writing is shaped by Barth's thought and by the distinctive problems of modern German theology; but his proposals have a much wider theological significance, and they deserve close attention and deep reflection.

Within the narrower field of Barth studies, of course, McCormack's work is not only a towering presence: it is also highly contentious and divisive. As McCormack himself observes, his recent work on ontological actualism "has incited a controversy that threatens to divide Barth scholars in the English-speaking world into two rival camps" (p. 295).

It seems to me that this division is not something to be lamented, but it is a productive and important conflict that brings fundamental questions to the foreground. The future of Barthian dogmatics, I believe, lies not in any incarnational realism, nor in the recovery of a metaphysical Chalcedonian objectivism, but instead in a far-reaching appropriation of Barth's christological actualism. And for such an appropriation, there is no better guide than the work of Bruce McCormack.

Benjamin Myers
The University of Queensland

Gerrit Scott Dawson (ed.), *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Saviour*, London: T&T Clark, 2007, pp. viii+179, \$35.95 (paperback).

I remember where I was the first time I read *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology*, by Elmer M. Colyer. And I remember the doxology that accompanied the reality that someone had finally put together an introduction—and a stunning one at that—to the thought of the most significant British (and arguably English-speaking) theologian of last century. I also remember thinking that as richly profitable as Colyer's introduction is, its

size (393 pages) and depth would probably be a barrier to many who are not ready for a Torrance main course, and I hoped that someday someone would write a briefer (but no less constructive) entrée to T. F. Torrance's thinking.

Finally, with the arrival of *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Saviour*, that day has come. The book is precisely what its editor, Gerrit Scott Dawson, claims: a welcoming and accessible introduction "for those just testing the Torrance theological waters, yet intellectually rigorous enough for serious engagement by fellow scholars" (vii), opening up and inviting us to explore new theological vistas.

The volume consists of a diverse collection of papers delivered in March 2006 at the First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge, Louisiana (USA). It was the largest-ever gathering of scholars (many of whom are former students of a Torrance; a testimony in itself to the ongoing contribution that the Torrances have made, and continue to make, not just in Scotland but around the world) who had come together specifically to reflect on (and celebrate) the theological distinctives and contributions of a family that has for more than six decades had an extraordinary influence on theological and pastoral work, the brothers Torrance—David, Tom and James. The church team, and T&T Clark, are to be congratulated for hosting such an exceptional event, and publishing its fruits.

The anthology begins with a piece by David Torrance wherein he briefly but illuminatingly introduces us to the Torrance family traditions and theological values that have informed their Christ-centered theology. On the way, he gives us an insight into the devotional and pedagogical life of the home in which he, Thomas and James were raised—a life characterised by family worship, prayer and the reading and memorization of Scripture. As children, the Torrances were introduced to Luther on *Galatians*, Robert Bruce on the *Sacraments*, and Calvin's *Institutes*. He properly reminds us that the Torrances, though deeply honored by the consideration given to their work, would wish to resist any suggestion of a "Torrancian theology": "We have given our understanding of the Word of God. We encourage members of the Church to read the Bible and discover for themselves what God is saying and discover whether what we have said helps towards a deeper understanding of the gospel once committed to the saints and treasured by the evangelical church through the centuries" (1). As this volume bears witness, many have certainly been so helped.

Andrew Purves explores *the* christological question: "*Who* Is the Incarnate Saviour of the World?" and its priority over the attendant 'How' questions. He attends to the significance and priority of beginning all theology with the person of Jesus Christ. Christology precedes soteriology, and ought be given first and controlling place in any creed. He argues that Jesus Christ is him who entered into our weak, fallen, and rebellious humanity, penetrating to its very heart in its alienation and rebellion in order to redeem humanity and all creation. He suggests that evangelicals are too often not radical enough in thinking through the meaning and centrality of Jesus Christ, too ready to replace him in priority with foundationalist, previously determined and independently derived, theistic and metaphysical assumptions that are then "clamped down upon the gospel" (29).

In his compelling essay, Elmer M. Colyer turns our attention to T. F. Torrance's thinking on the atonement, reminding us that this Torrance's mission has been to clarify the deep structures that are embedded in the very reality of the gospel itself. Colyer is concerned to highlight that in no sense (and at no stage) does the incarnation drive a wedge between the three persons. A significant proportion of his essay, however, is given to the matter of Christ's assumption of fallen humanity and the need to qualify the judicial elements in the atonement in light of the tendency in Western theology, from the fifth century on, to embrace the notion that Christ assumed a 'perfect' or 'neutral' human nature. This Torrance coins the '*Latin heresy*,' suggesting that Christ's atoning sacrifice, in this view, can only be understood in terms of *external* relations between Christ and humanity's sin. The '*Latin heresy*,' it is understood, undermines believers' assurance and confidence that our great High Priest really has entered the brink in his full identification with humanity, and so can truly sympathize with us in our weakness. Torrance, Colyer writes, "develops a participatory scientific theology in which our actual knowledge of God, that comes to us in and with God's atoning self-communication through Jesus Christ and in his Spirit, calls into question all alien presuppositions and prior conceptual frameworks embodying what we think we know about God, for everything in theology has to be related to God's Trinitarian self-revelation and self-communication to us in the gospel" (33). Like Purves, Colyer concludes his essay with a brief recapitulation of T. F. Torrance's twin rejection of the two heresies (as Torrance sees them) of limited atonement and *universalism*.

The important notion of Christ's assumption of *fallen* humanity, found so richly in the work of John McLeod Campbell and replayed in the Torrance's theology, is further taken up in Gerriât Scott Dawson's study, "Far as the Curse is Found: The Significance of Christ's Assuming a Fallen Human Nature in the Torrance Theology." Dawson grants considerable space in his paper to the *posse non peccare* debate in christology. Douglas F. Kelly outlines T. F. Torrance's realist epistemology, arguing that Torrance's biblical and scientific realism is "his greatest contribution to the theological life and mission of the Church for ages to come" (75).

In Alan J. Torrance's moving essay, "Towards a Theology of Belonging: Key Themes in the Theology of J. B. Torrance," Alan honors his father by reaffirming truths that lay at the centre of his father's, and his own, theological heart: the distinction between indicatives and imperatives in the covenant, a filial rather than legal relationship between humanity and God, and evangelical versus legal repentance. Significant space is devoted to the great overarching theme of all these: covenant. God's covenant with humanity is unconditioned by human response, is unilateral and is not—in any sense of the word—a contract. He writes: "To translate God's covenantal relationship into contractual terms in order to manipulate people into either repentance or conversion clearly amounts to a betrayal of the life of the Body of Christ and the form of our participation in God's Triune life. It is to supplant the free, loving and transforming activity of the Holy Spirit, with the worldly manipulation of people's self-interest—by either the use of fear or the promise of reward" (106).

Graham Redding, who was one of Alan's students in New Zealand, offers us a helpful reflection on Reformed theology and current trends in worship entitled "Calvin and the Café Church." Commenting on the emerging church, he suggests that "many developments and experiments in worship that accompany talk about the emerging church are taking place in a theological vacuum. Ignorance of the classic liturgies and what they have meant to the Church down the centuries, ignorance of the liturgical theology of Calvin and Knox, and ignorance of the role of ordained ministry, will lead ultimately to an impoverishment of Reformed worship and a detachment of corporate worship from its Reformed, early church and indeed Jewish roots. Some would argue that that is happening already. Marva Dawn, for example, talks about the dumbing down of worship right across the Church. That which we regard at one time as bravely navigating uncharted waters could with the benefit of hindsight turn out to be symptomatic of us having lost our way" (131).

Gary W. Deddo's essay reminds us just how practically- and pastorally-informed the gospel that the Torrance brothers have dedicated their life to preaching is, with weighty pertinence for how we understand and practice prayer, social justice, racial reconciliation, worship, evangelism, church renewal, mission, and pastoral ministry—indeed, all of life. The Christian life truly is a participation in Christ's continuing ministry.

The final chapter, "The Hermeneutical Nightmare and the Reconciling Work of Jesus Christ," is an offering from one of James Torrance's former students, C. Baxter Kruger, wherein he creatively reiterates the revelation of the Father's heart in the ministry of the Father's Son. Echoing many of the themes in his books, and not least his latest publication *Across All Worlds*, Kruger—with all the passion of an evangelist who is convinced that what he has to share really is *good news*—contends that Jesus wants his Father known. He is passionate about it. He cannot bear for us to live without knowing his Father, without knowing his heart, his lavish embrace, his endless love—and the sheer freedom *to be* that works within us as we see his Father's face. Jesus knows the Father from all eternity. He sits at the Father's right hand and sees him face to face, sharing life and all things with him in the fellowship of the Spirit. How could Jesus be content, Kruger asks, to leave us in the dark with no vision of his Father's heart? How could the Father's Son be indifferent when we are so lost and afraid and bound in our mythology? Burning with the Father's love for us, inspired with the Spirit's fire, the Son ran to embrace our broken existence, baptizing himself into our blindness. He braved the seas of our darkness to come to us. Why? So that he could share with us his own communion with his Father in the Spirit, and we could know the Father with him, and taste and feel and experience life in his embrace (157).

The volume helps to clarify many of the areas of contention in the Torrance tradition (for example, the notion of Christ's assumption of fallen flesh, the rejection of any suggestion of limited atonement, and christological universalism receive adequate treatment by not a few of the essayists), while recapitulating some of the great themes of the gospel so central to the heart and thinking of its main proponents. I would have loved to have seen included a paper identifying

the critical sources to the Torrance brothers' thinking, especially Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, John Knox, Robert Bruce, Thomas Erskine, Edward Irving, John McLeod Campbell, Karl Barth, and others. (McGrath's biography of T. F. Torrance is most helpful here). The collection betrays some of the realities of repetition that inevitably accompany any group of papers which concern themselves with the heart of any tradition. This, however—at least to this reviewer—is a picaresque and inconsequential price to pay for being reminded of such significant realities and of the enormous debt we owe to this extraordinary family for faithfully re-making these gospel realities known. *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Saviour* is the most accessible introduction of which I am aware to T. F. and J. B. Torrance's exceptional legacy and thought, serving as a brilliant teaser to go and read the primary works themselves. Each contributor explores the contemporary relevance of Torrance christology, and areas of ecclesiology, missiology, pastoral ministry, and epistemology are all helpfully attended to. Those who devour this excellent entrée will no doubt go on to indulge likewise with the main course (I suggest *The Mediation of Christ*, and *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace*). A delight to commend.

Jason A. Goroncy
University of St Andrews

A. Philip Brown II, Bryan W. Smith (Eds.), *A Reader's Hebrew Bible*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, pp. xxviii + 1,652. \$49.99.

Following the success of its New Testament companion, Zondervan has published *A Reader's Hebrew Bible*. The purpose of this text is to provide students of biblical Hebrew and Aramaic the necessary tools for sustained reading of the Hebrew Bible in the original languages. *A Reader's Hebrew Bible* is an invaluable resource for students of biblical Hebrew which will allow them significantly increased time in the text at an earlier level of study than previously possible.

The Hebrew text of this edition is the Leningrad Codex which is very similar to the texts found in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) and *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ). An appendix at the back of *A Reader's Hebrew Bible* helpfully lists the consonantal and pointing differences between the text of the Leningrad Codex and the text used in BHS. Only 27 differences exist; so, students should find it easy to move between the critical editions and the present edition.

A Reader's Hebrew Bible boasts a number of other strengths to commend it. Foremost is the running lexicon at the bottom of each page in which all Hebrew words with a frequency fewer than 100 are footnoted, excluding proper nouns. In the Aramaic portions of the text, all words that occur less than 25 times are footnoted. The footnotes list the stem and provide stem specific glosses from *A He-*

brew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament and *Brown-Driver-Briggs*. The running lexicon is the most important feature of any reader's Bible enabling the reader to spend more time in the text rather than thumbing through the pages of the lexicon. There is also a glossary in the back of the book containing all words that occur 100 times or more making this reader's Bible the only book needed for sustained reading in the Hebrew text.

The glosses are context specific which will help students to achieve the goal of sustained reading. Readers should remember that glosses are not intended to convey the full meaning of a word and should not be depended upon for detailed exegetical work. Glosses are helpful, as the editors indicate, in that they help the reader produce a fairly literal rendering and familiarize the reader with typical Hebrew and Aramaic expressions (xvii).

The editors have designed the text to facilitate easy transition from the reader's Bible to critical editions. The prose sections are justified with no line breaks between verses, and the paragraph breaks in *BHS* are generally followed. Each verse in the poetic sections begins on a new line. Poetry is differentiated within a prose section by an indent from the right margin. Given the difficulty in distinguishing Hebrew prose from poetry, *A Reader's Hebrew Bible* generally follows the majority consensus in *BHS* and modern English translations for identifying poetry.

The large format is somewhat bulky being about the size of most study bibles. It is available in a nice Italian Duo-Tone binding and measures 7.2 x 9.9 x 2.1 inches. The light brown cover and silver page edges are aesthetically pleasant. Like many Bibles, the thin pages allow the words on the following pages to be seen through the page. This, however, is not a sufficient weakness to keep students from purchasing and benefiting from this text.

The editors of *A Reader's Hebrew Bible* have provided an invaluable tool which will enable students of biblical Hebrew and Aramaic to more easily achieve sustained reading of the text in the original languages. Students will enjoy the fruit of their effort at an earlier stage of learning than was previously possible. The ability to read continuously will likely motivate students to devote more time to learning Hebrew and Aramaic. I happily recommend *A Reader's Hebrew Bible* as an invaluable resource for reading the Hebrew Bible in its original languages.

Matthew P. O'Reilly
Asbury Theological Seminary

THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Yvette Joy Harris, MDiv Middler

GENERAL EDITORS

Cambria Kaltwasser, MDiv Middler

Benjamin Edward Heidgerken, MDiv Middler

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

Peter Kline, MDiv Senior

COPY EDITOR

Daniel Escher, MDiv Senior

FINANCIAL MANAGER

Yaw (Attah) Edu-Bekoe, PhD student

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Daniel Escher, MDiv Senior

Paranee Sun, MDiv Senior

SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER

David Berge, MDiv Senior

PUBLICITY MANAGER

Colleen Nelson, MDiv Senior

WEBMASTER

Chris TerryNelson, MDiv Senior

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Jonathan Camery-Hoggatt, MDiv Junior

Matthew Bollinger, MDiv Middler

Elizabeth Dias, MDiv Junior

Nicholas DiDonato, MDiv Middler

Craig Downey, MDiv Junior

Nate Dresback, MDiv Junior

Andrew Harmon, MDiv Junior

Stephen Hawkins, MDiv Junior

Patrick Heery, MDiv Junior

Esteban Hernandez, ThM

Chris Holmes, MDiv Junior

Paul Kurtz, MDiv Middler

Carrie Littauer, MDiv Junior

Miriam Diephouse McMillan, MDiv Middler

Ross Moret, MDiv Junior

Jonathan Myers, MDiv Junior

Eric Peltz, MDiv Junior

Travis Pickell, MDiv Junior

Christine Shander, MDiv Junior

Kelly Shriver, MDiv Junior

Daniel Simmons, MDiv Junior

Matthew Warren, MDiv Junior

Princeton Theological Seminary
PO Box 821
Princeton, NJ 08542

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 190
Princeton, NJ