T. F. TORRANCE AND APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

Kevin Chiarot, PhD
Senior Pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church
kchiarot@frontier.com

ABSTRACT: *This article seeks to set forth and explore the theological architecture of T. F. Torrance's conception of the church's life, ministry, orders, and continuity. Relying primarily on Torrance's earlier work in the ecumenical movement, we seek to sketch his remarkably integrated, biblical-theological and, crucially, Christological, and thus eschatological, presentation. This will entail an account of the incarnate Christ crucified, now risen, ascended, and coming again, and of the church as the pneumatically formed body of this Christ. This structurally primitive frame creates the "time of the church" in which her relation to the apostolic foundation, her priestly ministry of Word and Sacrament, and her orders and continuity can be expounded. Out of this positive theology will emerge, at nearly every point, Torrance's sharp critique of historically held notions of ecclesial continuity or apostolic succession.*[1]

I. The Christological Correction: Christological Eschatology

For Torrance, the proper theological procedure for dealing with the doctrine of the church is to start with the doctrine of Christ.[2] This means, in addressing the divisions in the church, "we must wrestle with the profound issues of Christology and Soteriology."[3] Although Chalcedon rightly defined the doctrine of Christ, the church before the Reformation[4] had not carried out a "Christological correction

1 Realizing that there are competing conceptions of apostolic succession, we shall use a general definition: A continuous ministerial succession, usually episcopal, which, whether by divine right or hallowed tradition, can be used to identify and secure the church's continuity in history, and to guarantee the validity and fidelity of her orders, sacraments, and, in some cases, her dogmatic pronouncements.

2 T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church: Volume I: Order and Disorder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 12.

3 *CAC I,* 13.

4 "Indeed the whole movement of the Reformation may well be regarded as a Christological criticism of the notions of Church, Ministry, and Sacraments as they had developed…in strange detachment from the high Christology of Nicea and Chalcedon."

in the form of the ministry and the shape of the liturgy."[5] Torrance often sees this "correction" as an analogous, second-order application of Chalcedonian Christology to ecclesiology. For example:

> [A]s in Christ the divine nature and the human nature are hypostatically united in one Person without separation and without confusion, so in a parallel way and on another level the Church is united to Christ through a personal relation of communion *(koinonia)* in which Christ and His Church are neither to be separated from one another nor to be confused with one another.[6]

> More basically, when the hypostatic union is given "an analogical extension into the sphere of the Church," the analogy is not "as God and Man are related in Christ so the divine and the human are related in the Church," but rather "as God and Man are related in Christ so Christ and the Church are related."[7]

Whatever one thinks of the Chalcedonian analogy and its various deployments, we hope to demonstrate that it is the resurrection, the ascension, the gift of the Spirit, and the Parousia which are doing the theological heavy lifting and not Chalcedonian orthodoxy *per se.*[8] The *sui generis* character of the God-man makes these types of analogies treacherous,[9] and while Torrance will invoke them, the bulk of his "Christological correction" lies more in an exposition of the *loci* we have indicated. For our purposes this entails a rigorous outworking of what it means for the church to be the body of the crucified, now risen, ascended, and advent Christ. Put differently, the Christological correction Torrance carries out is pervasively eschatological.

We take as programmatic for our task Torrance's statement that "eschatology

---

CAC I, 230. Ibid., 79.

5 Ibid., 37.

6 Ibid., 110.

7 Ibid., 202-203, 231, 246.

8 This is true even given Torrance's dynamic reconstruction of the (static Chalcedonian) hypostatic union to entail the whole historical life of Christ. See T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 201, 204; *CAC I,* 240. Even on Torrance's expansive reading of the hypostatic union, it is unveiled as perfected at the resurrection. Thus, while the atonement would be the "hypostatic union at work," consideration of the resurrection, the ascension, the gift of the Spirit, and the Parousia would be fruits which repose upon the hypostatic union and not constitutive aspects of the union itself.

9 Not only are they analogies of things on different levels of being (Christ and the church), but one could ask if the comparisons are not more illustrative of difference than similarity.

is simply a thoroughgoing application of Christology to history."[10] The supreme importance of eschatology is obscured when it is divorced from the doctrine of Christ.[11] It is in this "Christological Eschatology"[12] that "the deepest difference between 'protestant' and 'catholic' theology in regard to the church is to be found."[13] Indeed, "if the doctrines of Christ and the Church have themselves suffered from arrested development in the Reformed Churches that is undoubtedly due to the failure to think eschatology into the whole."[14] The whole of the church's life and ministry is eschatological because, dogmatically speaking, the Christological frame in which she exists as the body of the *eschatos Adam* is intrinsically eschatological. Thus, Christological eschatology is the form that Christological correction of the church takes. Describing Barth's giving up of a timeless eschatology thought of in terms of an eternity/time dialectic for a more faithful New Testament understanding, he writes:

> Here the whole content of eschatology is thought through Christologically in terms of the incarnation, the God-manhood of Christ, and the events of the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. In this way eschatology is nothing but a thoroughgoing expression of the doctrine of grace as it concerns history, while the important word is not *eschaton* (the last event) but *Eschatos* (the last one).[15]

---

10 *CAC I,* 63. This is history understood in terms of Christ as the First (*protos*) and Last (*eschatos*). Torrance attributes this same view of the relation of eschatology to Christology to Calvin. *CAC I,* 98, T. F. Torrance, "The Eschatology of the Reformation," in *Eschatology: Four Papers Read to The Society for the Study of Theology* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1952), 58. A fuller statement is "eschatology properly speaking is the application of Christology to the Kingdom of Christ and to the work of the church in history." T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 43.

11 *CAC I,* 99.

12 The term is Torrance's coinage. Ibid., 227. We note here that Torrance's eschatology as a whole has been examined recently. See Stanley S. MacLean, *Resurrection, Apocalypse, and the Kingdom of Christ: The Eschatology of T. F. Torrance* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012). This is, the author says in the introduction, a "more historical-descriptive than analytical-descriptive" work. Torrance's eschatology is studied here in its unfolding historical order. We are, in this paper, trying to do something quite different. We are arguing that Torrance has constructed a mini-dogmatics of ecclesial continuity and seeking to understand its internal order.

13 *CAC I,* 63. The eschatological element was "thoroughly purged from Catholicism at Trent." Ibid., 56.

14 Ibid., 201.

15 *Incarnation,* 309. Note that here the Chalcedonian union of God and man is not exclusive but concatenated with the other *loci* which will concern us. On the *eschaton/ Eschatos* distinction see T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T

Let us turn to a consideration of the frame this Christological eschatology creates for ecclesial reflection.

II. Christological Eschatology: The Body of Christ and the Spirit

The church is the body of Christ. This is, for Torrance, "no mere image or metaphor . . . it is essential reality," which the other images of the church enrich and serve.[16] The body analogy is the "the most deeply Christological of them all, and refers us directly to Christ Himself as the Head and Savior of the Body." This is highlighted by the use of "body" at the inauguration of the Supper as a term which applies to both Christ and the church.[17] Among other things, its value lies in directing our focus away from the church as a "sociological or anthropological magnitude," or an "institution or a process," directing us rather to the church "as the immediate property of Christ which He has made His very own and gathered into the most intimate relation with Himself."[18]

Critically, this means "Christ is Himself the essence of the Church, its *Esse.* That fact immediately relativizes and makes ultimately unimportant the endless and tiresome discussions about what is of the *esse* or the *bene esse* or the *plene esse* of the Church."[19] The church, then, is not an "independent hypostatic reality," and we must formulate our doctrine of her as "His body, and His servant, not in any sense an *alter Christus.*"[20]

Formulating this entails rejecting any cleavage between an "ontological" and an "eschatological" view of the church.[21] For, as his body, the church is an "ontological reality, enhypostatic in Christ and wholly dependent on Him."[22]

Clark, 1976), 151-52.

16 *CAC I,* 230, 238.

17 Ibid., 105, 220.

18 Ibid., 106.

19 Ibid. Alternatively, "Christ clothed with His Gospel is the essence of the Church." Ibid., 107.

20 Ibid., 15-16.

21 Ibid., 249.

22 Ibid., 248. Torrance uses, with caution and analogically, the an-enhypostasia couplet historically used in Christology, with respect to the church. Here *anhypostasia* means the church has "no independent *hypostasis* [personal existence – KC], apart from atonement and communion through the Holy Spirit." *Enhypostasia* would mean the church is given real personal existence through incorporation into Christ. *Anhypostasia* accents the church as eschatological event, *enhypostasia* accents ontological reality. On the analogical and ontological nature of the "body" metaphor, see *Royal Priesthood,* 29-30.

The danger of thinking primarily in terms of ontological incorporation into the incarnate One is that "we tend to entertain the false conception of the church as a *Christus prolongatus* or an extension of the Incarnation."[23] The church's "real and substantial union," ontological union, is fully eschatological, for it is union "with the Risen, Ascended, and Advent Lord."[24] It is important, at this point, to see that, while the church does have a relation to the historical Jesus, it is a relation that exists always and only on the other side of the resurrection, the ascension, and the gift of the Spirit:

> The relation between Christ and His Church is the *irreversible* relation between the Head of the Body and the members of the Body. That relation of irreversibility belongs to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit through whom alone the church is given to participate in Christ and be His Body, and through whom the Church is given continued being only as the servant of the Lord.[25]

As such, this relation exists in an eschatological frame:

> The relation between Christ and His Church is the relation between the First-Born of the new creation and the body which still awaits redemption, although sealed by His Spirit and given an earnest of its inheritance yet to be revealed.[26]

This means that the relationship between Christ and the church "is to be formulated in terms of the doctrine of the Spirit and Eschatology."[27] Pneumatology, then, is the inner substance of Christological eschatology for it is through the Spirit that the church becomes the body of Christ between the penultimate and ultimate acts of redemptive history.[28] Put differently, in forming the church as the body of Christ, the Spirit engenders a relationship of *koinonia* which is neither one of identity with Christ nor pure difference:

> It is a *sui generis* relation grounded upon the act of the Trinity in Christ Jesus, and is manifest in the Church. It is upon this that the eschatological relation in

23 *CAC I,* 249. By "extension" of the incarnation Torrance means a linear, historical extension.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 232-33. This irreversibility means the church is a predicate of Christ, never the reverse. Ibid., 184, 247.

26 Ibid., 233.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 17. "All the mighty acts of God have taken place in Christ, and we await only His final Parousia; the Church lives between the penultimate and the ultimate acts of the *Heilgeschichte.*"

> the New Testament is also grounded: the very relation that forms the content of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.[29]

The eschatological Spirit then, and not any "divinizing of the human element," may be spoken of as the "divine nature" of the church. More precisely, it is by the Spirit of the risen Christ, the head of the church, the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18),[30] that Christ functions as the only divine element in the church.[31] The Spirit alone, and not the apostles or bishops, is the *Shaliach*, the personal representative who is the very presence of Christ, the Gift which is identical with the Giver.[32]

Where the role of the Spirit is "superseded or dropped out of sight the church comes to be more or less identified with a hierarchic institution operating with a false objectivity."[33] To identify personally the apostle-bishop, and not the Spirit, with Christ Himself, is to forget that the Spirit is both Giver and Gift, and it runs the danger of treating the Spirit as something which can be passed on, thus "unbending" the Spirit's relation to the church into a straight line, and turning eschatology into temporal succession.[34]

The Spirit, poured out by the church's ascended head and Lord, inhibits the imprisonment of the church's life in a *codex iurus canonici*, lifts it up, and directs it away from itself to find its true life and being in Christ above.[35] Even as gift, the Spirit remains the transcendent Lord of the church (2 Cor. 3:17), the One who determines, in sovereign freedom, the nature of her *charismata,* and thus her ministry.[36] Put differently, the church is not "a Spirit-bearing structure . . . The structure of the church is not the medium but the expression of the Spirit."[37] The significance of this cannot be overstated. The Spirit-wrought union of the Church with Christ is the inner form of her life, the inner substance of her continuity:

---

29 Ibid., 44. "The relation between the Church and the Body of [of the risen] Christ is one of *koinonia* and *abiding,* and is eschatologically conditioned." Ibid., 51.

30 *Royal Priesthood,* 66.

31 Ibid.

32 See the extended discussion of the *Shaliach* concept in relation to the Spirit in *CAC I,* 24, 38-45. This is not to say that the apostles and bishops do not represent or speak for Christ. It is simply to affirm that only the Spirit is *Shaliach* in the primary sense of personal identity.

33 Ibid., 18.

34 Ibid., 45.

35 Ibid., 18.

36 *Royal Priesthood,* 66.

37 W. H. Vanstone, "The Ministry in the New Testament," in *The Historic Episcopate*, ed. Kenneth M. Carey (London, Dacre Press, 1954), 40; Cited by Torrance in *Royal Priesthood,* 73.

> The inward form which the Covenant takes is the communion of the Spirit through which the apostolic Church is given to share in the love and life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is that communion in the very life and love of God . . . that is the inner substance and heart of the apostolic succession or continuity in the apostolically-founded Church.[38]

Thus, the essential unity of the church is the "unity of the *One Spirit* and the *One Body of Christ.*"[39] "Because this risen and ascended Christ gives His life-giving Spirit to the Church, the Church becomes *One Body* and *One Spirit* with Him."[40] This is simply the correlate of the fact that Christ Himself is the church's *esse.*

III. The Body of the Crucified, Risen, Ascended and Advent Christ

Having established the Christological eschatology which, through the Spirit, establishes the church as the body of Christ, let us consider the church more closely as the body of the crucified, risen, ascended, and advent Christ. These *loci* are not additions to, but a perspectival explication of, the theological frame we have already established. Our concern here is not with anything like a full exposition, but rather to sketch what this conception of the body of Christ means for the time of the church, the pattern of her ministry, and, preliminarily, for the nature of her continuity.

First, the church is the body of the crucified and risen Christ. The great principle here was enunciated in 1952 at the *Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, at Lund:

> What concerns Christ concerns His Body also. What happened to Christ uniquely in His once and for all death and resurrection on our behalf, happens also to the Church in its way as His Body…so that the way of Christ is the way of His Body.[41]

---

38 *CAC I,* 26. Alternatively, in Christ, the form that God's "Covenant-Communion" with his people "takes is the Church, the Body of Christ." T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church: Volume II: The Ministry and The Sacraments of the Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 123.

39 *CAC I,* 237.

40 Ibid., 268. "It is the sphere where through the presence of the Spirit the salvation-events of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension are operative here and now within history, the sphere where within the old creation the new creation has broken in with power." *Royal Priesthood,* 23.

41 Lund Report, 7-8.

In the incarnation, the taking of the form of a servant, and throughout the whole of Christ's life, "man is confronted with the ultimate things," and "the judgment of God is brought to bear on man as never before." Christ acts as both God the judge and man bearing that same judgment throughout his life of obedience, climactically so at the cross. This atoning substitution requires, as its ecclesial correlate, the church to follow "by way of self-denial and crucifixion; by letting Christ take its place and displace its self-assertion" even as, by incorporation into his resurrection body, she receives his life.[42] Thus, following the fundamental Christological analogy:

> [She] can only live her life by putting off the old man and putting on the new, by ever refusing to be conformed to the pattern of this world and through her participation in, and her conformity to, the death of Christ, by being renewed in the power of His resurrection.[43]

It is important to grasp that, for Torrance, as for Paul in the passages Torrance regularly adduces in this connection (2 Cor. 4:10-12; Phil. 3:10), death and resurrection are not adjacent, much less discrete, realities in the church's life. They mutually involve one another. Yet, even this mutual involution needs to be carefully teased out. It involves a *logical* order: we carry about in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body – death, then life. But the cross and its pattern of life is never superseded, but rather enabled, confirmed, and permanently established by the resurrection life of Christ: we who are *alive* are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake. In the language of the Philippians text: we are, by the power of his resurrection, conformed to the likeness of his death. Stated differently, the church's existential union with the crucified Christ is pre-conditioned decisively by the resurrection, for she is united to him as his body only on the resurrection side of redemptive-history. More broadly, in an important and oft-repeated phrase of Torrance's, the risen and ascended Christ sends us back to the historical Christ.[44]

Thus, cruciformity is the basic form of the church's existence, yet it is an eschatologically conditioned, resurrection induced and sustained cruciformity. It is cruciformity nonetheless,[45] and Torrance highlights its ecumenical importance:

It is safe to say that if this doctrine of *the Suffering Servant* is not only made central in our doctrine of Christ, but is made normative for our doctrine of the form and order of the Church, then most of the major differences between the

42 *CAC I,* 244-45.

43 Ibid., 63. Thus the pattern of her life is essentially cruciform. Ibid., 235.

44 Among many examples, see ibid., 114, 231-32.

45 *Royal Priesthood,* 34.

churches can be cut clean away.[46]

Thus, for Torrance, it is critical to see that the church "in history shares in the humiliation of Christ in the form of a servant."[47] Christ's humiliation and exaltation correspond to the two conditions of the church, one of humiliation, the church militant, and one of glory, the church triumphant. Yet, the church is only the church triumphant through faith. Analogous to the Christian, she is *simul justus et peccator*.[48] In history, then, shaped by this eschatological tension, she goes forth under the cross in the form of a servant, and this servant-form decisively shapes and determines her thinking about ministry, order, and continuity:[49]

> . . . the Church has *as its essential pattern in history the death and resurrection of Christ.* That was one of the great insights of the Reformation. The Reformers used to point to the fact that the messianic community in Old Testament times was always subject to judgment and being plunged into disaster and death, but that God intended that in order to show by the destruction of the temple, by the abrogation of the cult, and the break in the continuity of the priestly succession, that the Kirk in all ages has her life and continuity in a marvelous preservation, in being constantly called out of death into life. If the essential pattern of the Incarnation, *death and resurrection,* was manifest in the Church before the Incarnation, how much more after it, when the Church as the Body of Christ goes out into history bearing about in her the dying and rising of the Lord Jesus?[50]

If the church's dying and rising as the body of Christ entails non-conformity to the fashion, the form, the pattern, and the schematization of this world (Rom. 12:2), then outward or historical form can never bear the church's *essential* structure.[51]

Surely the essential form of the visible Church wherein she images her Lord

---

46 *CAC I,* 139.

47 Alternatively, this is cast in terms of Christ's movement of descent and ascent, his *katabasis* and *anabasis. CAC II,* 189; *Royal Priesthood,* 38-9.

48 *CAC I,* 47. Torrance, describing Luther's experience, calls justification "an eschatological act of pure grace which anticipated Christ's ultimate vindication of the sinner at the final judgment." *Eschatology* 41.

49 *CAC I,* 81-82, 250-251. In Calvin's words "it is appointed to the Church, as long as it has its pilgrimage in the world, to engage in warfare continually under the cross." T. F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), 125.

50 *CAC I,* 62. We shall return to the relevance of Israel's historical ordeal for ecclesial continuity when we take up the priesthood of Christ and the church.

51 Ibid., 203-204.

is to be found in her humble service in which the great reconciliation already wrought out in the Body of Christ is lived out among men, and the church in life and action becomes sacramentally correlative to the life and passion of Jesus Christ.[52]

This relativizing of outer form is simply a correlate of the reality that Christ himself is the church's *esse*, and that her essential unity is pneumatic union with the *eschatos Adam.* "If we have no authority for holding that such a structure or form belongs to the Church as the final eschatological and ontological reality, have we any right to say it belongs to the *esse* of the Church?"[53]

While this relativizing does not eliminate the importance of order for Torrance but rather frames and shapes our approach to it, it does entail that, as the body of the crucified and risen Christ, the church, including her teaching and her orders, remains subject to the searching judgment of the cross. "All conceptions of order have to be determined by the servanthood of the Church under the Cross."[54] Thus, atonement is the road to unity. "There is no other way for the Church, and so no other way to reunion, than by the way of the Cross, for it is the Cross which is the way to the Resurrection of the One Body."[55]

Let us shift the focus of this discussion of the church as the body of the crucified and risen Christ to the resurrection proper. As we have indicated, the church as the body of the *risen* Christ highlights her being situated in the eschatological tension of the "already" and the "not yet," between the penultimate and ultimate acts of God in redemptive-history. Because we are united to the risen Christ who was *raised* for our justification (Rom. 4:25) eschatology is an essential, constitutive feature of faith.[56]

Because we are united to Christ, anchored to Jesus who in our flesh has risen from the dead and now lives on the resurrection side of death and wrath

52 Ibid., 204. The form of the church imaging the form of Christ cannot be seen in any structure or hierarchy conceived of as belonging to the *esse* of the church. Ibid.

53 Ibid., 205. Note that this last point is in the form of a question. Torrance is aware of the difficulty of drawing dogmatic conclusions from the final eschatological form of the church as seen in the Apocalypse.

54 Ibid., 253. See *Royal Priesthood,* 33.

55 *CAC I,* 246. See Ibid., 277-78.

56 Ibid., 65, 98. This is yet another aspect of eschatology being the application of Christology to the church. Eschatology is not an addendum to faith but, citing H. R. Mackintosh, it is "the fiber of the living strand." It bears something of the eschatological cast that characterizes all the scriptures. *Incarnation,* 298. Faith has "an inner eschatological form." Ibid., 306. Faith requires the eschatological gap between the already and the not yet for that is the very frame of its existence in the new time which has come in Christ. *CAC I,* 313.

and darkness, we are eternally anchored to hope. That is the cardinal fact upon which eschatology hinges.[57]

As the body of the risen Christ, the church is already risen with him and shares in his eschatological life. His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. Indeed, as the first-fruits, the firstborn of the new creation, his resurrection means that the general resurrection of the dead, the eschatological harvest, has already begun.[58] This entails a certain freedom and detachment from the church's own history, tradition, practices, procedures, and legal enactments, for the church lives in the risen One as having died to the past.[59]

The reason for this is that "in Him the new creation is already a fact, and it is in Him that its continuity is a living dynamic reality . . . in him . . . there is *new time*: the temporal continuity of the new creation in indissoluble union with the eternal God."[60] The whole appearance of Christ is a kind of intrusion, an eschatological invasion of this new time, and thus the fulfillment of the purposes of creation. This reality is sealed by the resurrection:

> The Birth, Life, and Death of Jesus Christ all speak of the most complete interpenetration of history, and indeed of a desperate struggle with the terrible continuity of its sin and guilt, but they receive their truth and validity in the Resurrection where the continuity of sin is decidedly broken and yet where there emerges the new continuity in time. Here the visible continuity of history is judged as an empty husk, the worldly succession of the church as an ecclesiastical shell, and yet the new is seen to be one continuous act with the first creation. Here where the iron-grip of guilt-laden history is broken we have the great salvation-events which are creative of the Church as continuous with the living Body of the resurrected Jesus Christ.[61]

Notice that the fulfillment of the purposes of creation is included here, yet Torrance warns that this cannot be interpreted merely teleologically. It is not that the church does not have a *telos,* an end, but the difference between a

57 Ibid., 99.

58 Ibid., 113. Torrance uses the suggestive analogy of the birth of a baby's head as meaning the birth of the body inevitably follows.

59 Ibid., 113-14,

60 Ibid., 213. Torrance holds that there is something like a hypostatic union between eternity and time in the God-man. Yet, even if we reject this, the general point he is making stands. The new creation, and thus the time of the age to come, has arrived in Christ. See *Royal Priesthood,* 49.

61 *CAC I,* 213. The real life of the Church lies in its participation in the resurrection, in the new creation, and so in its detachment from the forms of this present evil age. Ibid., 314.

Greek ideal end and the *eschatos* which has broken into time in Christ goes to the core of the gospel.[62] Rather the teleological end is intrinsically eschatological for it comes through the appearance and resurrection of the *eschatos Adam.* It is precisely as eschatological act that the *telos* is, in an already-not yet fashion, achieved. Teleologically heavy accounts of fulfillment will mute the radical disruption and transcending of the continuity of this present age, and will tend to lead to linear, historical conceptions of the church and her ministry which see them as a prolongation of the incarnation, and thus as a historical continuation of his decisive, once for all work.[63]

The church's continuity, then, is not found on "the level of the contingent . . . but in the living continuity of the new creation behind the forms and fashions of the fallen world but interpenetrating it through the gospel."[64] The time of this age is sin-laded, guilt-impregnated time, irreversibly passing away into death and corruption. It is what Brunner calls "crumbling time." But "in the resurrection of Christ there emerges a new time…flowing against the stream of crumbling time."[65] This does not mean the abrogation of the church's historical existence, but it does mean that her continuity "is determined by the new time of the risen Lord."[66] No conception of historical succession can bypass the resurrection, but rather, because the church is the body of the risen Christ, her ministerial order must be thought out in terms of the relation of the resurrection to history.[67]

If we ask what this thinking out of the implications of the resurrection for historical ecclesiastical order means for Torrance, we could sum it up in two words: ambiguity and relativization. Order is relativized because the church lives from beyond itself, beyond its space and time, as the body of the risen Christ. She is the new creation in the midst of crumbling time. The New Jerusalem comes down from above, from the already present eschatological future, and it is from there that the church and her orders receive their validation and vindication. She is eschatologically pulled, not historically pushed, into the future. Order is ambiguous because the new time which has come in Christ does not sit lightly with, or float above, this present age, the form (*schema)* of which

62 *Incarnation,* 304. Neither is this the Jewish eschatological conception of two linear ages. *CAC I,* 307.

63 Ibid., 61-2, 236, 256.

64 Ibid., 214.

65 *Royal Priesthood,* 50.

66 *CAC II,* 24. *Royal Priesthood,* 56. "If the ministry of the Church is the function of the Body of Christ, then we have to think of that in terms of His risen Body, and of the relation of the resurrection to history." Ibid., 42.

67 Ibid.

is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31). The new creation, the new time, interpenetrates, judges, breaks up, and flows against the stream of crumbling time. Thus, the church lives in a situation where simple linear historical analysis has become impossible, and to seek it is a grievous misreading of her time, continuity, and order. Her orders, as with her life in general, are free gifts of the free Spirit of the Lord, *charismata,* which are never under her possession or control. As such, her orders, as with her life in general, cannot be *schematized to this aeon* (Rom. 12:2), they cannot be thought of adequately in terms of the linear ordering principles, the *stoicheia* of this age.[68] Order in the church is essentially a product of Christological eschatology, the inner substance of which is pneumatological:[69]

> Because she is already a resurrected body the church cannot claim, without arresting repentance, and quenching the Holy Spirit, that in this fallen world historical succession is of the *esse,* the very nature of the church.[70]

One last point is in order concerning the church as the body of the risen Christ. As participating in his risen body as the one new man and the new creation, in her "is manifested the perfect oneness in which all human divisions disappear (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28)."[71] This eternally grounded yet eschatologically conditioned oneness gives to the church a wholeness, a catholicity, which, while difficult to manifest in the conditions of our fallen time, nevertheless precludes seeing the church as a historical prolongation of the incarnation. To do that would be to confound "the wholeness of the risen Christ with a historical catholicity here and now."[72]

---

68 See the discussion in *Royal Priesthood,* 52-57. There Torrance expounds *stoicheia*, often translated "elemental principles," from a cluster of New Testament texts as entailing walking, or proceeding (historically) in a way. The term, while disputed, is used positively if proceeding according to the Spirit or Christ is in view, and negatively if proceeding according to the law or some cosmological principle other than Christ is in view. On the various possible meanings of *stoicheia*, all of which Torrance sees as sharing the idea of succession in time, and on its ability to become a legal principle of bondage, see *CAC I,* 256-57. The disruptive nature of the new time upon the old is, for Torrance, a general feature of apocalyptic literature. *Eschatology,* 61; *Incarnation,* 301. On the inadequacy of a purely linear conception of time as, for example, in Cullman's *Christ and Time*, see *Incarnation* 333. On the New Jerusalem's descent see ibid., 338. We should mention in this connection Torrance's fondness for the image of the church in *The Shepherd of Hermas* as an elderly woman who gets progressively younger. *CAC I,* 96; *CAC II,* 200; *Royal Priesthood,* 48.

69 Ibid., 67-68. Even defining the church merely in terms of "marks" or activities, as with Luther, can obscure "its essence as the risen Body of Christ within history." *Eschatology,* 51.

70 *Incarnation,* 343.

71 *CAC I,* 267.

72 *Incarnation,* 343-44. *CAC I,* 49-51. The church's eschatologically conditioned unity

Let us shift the discussion to the church as the body of the ascended Christ. Torrance has a remarkably thick and fully developed doctrine of the ascension, and we do not intend to expound that here.[73] For our purposes, much of the material on the ascension and the resurrection naturally overlaps. Nevertheless, there are unique issues concerning the church's order, continuity, and time which are highlighted by the ascension.

In the ascension, Christ, as at the transfiguration and on the road to Emmaus, vanishes from ongoing empirical history, having "withdrawn Himself from sight," and from the right hand of God the Father Almighty pours his Spirit out on the church. Thus, here, the distinction between Christ and the church, the inability to resolve the essence of her life into linear historical relations or to conceive of her as a prolongation of the incarnation, comes starkly into view. Nevertheless, as the gift of the Spirit indicates, Christ refuses to be separated from his body.[74] However, the ascension establishes this unity as the unity of those raised and *hidden* with the withdrawn and ascended Christ in God. While it in no way excuses the scandal of our divisions, this is an ontologically prior and ineradicable unity from which comes the possibility of healing and union. Torrance applies Paul's instructions in Colossians 3 to the nature of the church's oneness:

> If you are risen with Christ, then seek your oneness above. For your divisions are dead and your oneness is hid with Christ in God. When he who is your oneness will appear, then your oneness will appear with Him in glory. *Mortify therefore the divisions of your members which are on the earth*."[75]

This paraphrase is marvelously helpful, for it is a virtual summary of all we have said to this point on Torrance's framing of the questions of ministerial order and ecclesial continuity. This is the Christological eschatology which establishes, in the Spirit, the church as the body of the crucified, risen, ascended, and advent Christ, removing the essence of her life, her unity, and her continuity from any simple historical calculus and yet calling her to manifest that unity in history.

The ascension does two other critical things. First, it points the church back to the historical Jesus as he is revealed in the apostolic foundation handed down in the New Testament scriptures. "That is the place where the risen and ascended Lord chooses to meet his church and to keep Covenant with it, in the historical

---

both interpenetrates and transcends history. Ibid., 196, 211.

73 See T. F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 265-314; *Space, Time, and Resurrection*, 106-58.

74 *CAC I,* 114, 198, 310. *CAC II,* 21. On Christ's "vanishing from out of sight" see *Incarnation,* 344.

75 *CAC I,* 268-69.

Jesus crucified for the world's salvation."[76] What is crucial here is not simply Torrance's oft-repeated axiom that "the ascended Christ drives us back to the historical Christ," but also the concomitant reality that we meet in doing so: not the historical Jesus as the first disciples met him - that would be impossible since the resurrection and the ascension have intervened - but rather the *ascended* Christ who, at the beginning of the process, drove us to the life and ministry of the historical Jesus enshrined in the apostolic foundation.[77] Thus, there is a kind of triangular, or perhaps circular, relation.[78] The ascended Christ drives us back to the historical Christ where we meet the ascended Christ. This not only shows us the complexities of the time relations involved in the church's life, it also clearly means that we cannot abide a linear historical succession from the present back to the historical Jesus conceived of as essential to the church's life and ministry. This is, in its most theologically architectonic form, what Torrance is after when he speaks of bypassing the ascension, or of seeing the church as a prolongation of the incarnation and its ministry as an *alter Christus*. The new time of the ascended Christ, the time of the historical Jesus, and the fallen time of the church are pneumatically related, and the tensions they involve are basic to questions of order:

> In all Church order we are concerned with *the time of Jesus on earth* when God's Son condescended to enter within our fallen time in order to redeem it, but also with *the time of Jesus ascended into Eternity* who yet bestows Himself upon us in time through His Spirit. The time of the church will therefore be defined by the relation of the Church in history to the historical Jesus Christ, and to the ascended and advent Jesus Christ; the church's life, worship, fellowship, and ministry are all ordered with regard to that twofold time,

76 Ibid., 114.

77 "But even when we turn to the historical Jesus we can no longer make contact with him as did the disciples before his crucifixion and resurrection. We must seek to contact him, therefore, not after the flesh but after the Spirit. We go back to the historical Jesus, to the gospel story, but there it is with the risen and ascended Lord that we make contact." *CAC I,* 311; *CAC II,* 23, 199-200. "We make contact with the historical Jesus *as risen and ascended*, not just as on object for historical investigation by the canons of credibility available for all other events in fading time." *Royal Priesthood,* 58. See also T. F. Torrance, "The Trinitarian Foundation," in *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, ed. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 92-3; *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 133-35, 147.

78 The triangle can be conceived in slightly modified and wider form if we include the *Parousia*. "Thus the doctrine of the Church must be thought out in terms of triangular relation between the Church and the historical Christ, the risen and ascended Mediator, and the Christ who will come again in His full Humanity as well as Deity." *CAC I,* 231-32.

> heavenly and earthly, historical and eternal. No adequate understanding of the order of the church can overlook that twofold involvement in time.[79]

Torrance, alternatively, speaks of this twofold time as horizontal and vertical time. Horizontal time is ordered historical succession, and vertical time is the time in the Spirit in which the church participates in the time of the ascended Christ. It is vertical time which enables the church to escape being merely a historical construct trapped in "guilt-fettered time" and the irreversibility of its "piled-up determinisms."[80] The church, which is undoubtedly a historical reality, knows that its true life is hid with the ascended Christ in God "beyond the passing and successive forms of this age."[81] Thus, it is the ascension which creates the essentially eschatological character of the church's faith, which has not yet become sight, for the Christ in whom she trusts is, in Calvin's words, "not without propriety . . . said to be absent from His people, till He return again clothed with a new sovereignty."[82]

In this time of faith not yet become sight, of grace and not yet glory,[83] the gifts of the ministry are gifts of the ascended Lord, "the only Apostle and Bishop of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25)" who is personally present and represented by the Spirit.[84] Only in the Spirit can the two times created by the ascension be related. The Spirit "links the historical Jesus and the ascended Lord," and "through the Spirit we can think of Christ as historically absent and as actually present."[85] Thus, the church's orders must be open to the ascended Christ and his intervention in this situation of eschatological tension, and must never seek an over-realized eschatological capturing of the order to be fully revealed in the new creation:[86]

> Because of the resurrection and ascension, the coherent and ordered sequences of the Church's life and mission are essentially *open structures*, and more like scaffolding which is necessary for the erection of a building but which is cast

79 *CAC II,* 23.

80 Ibid., 25. Horizontal time supplies the material content while vertical time, through the Spirit of the ascended One, supplies the immediacy of actual encounter. *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 147.

81 *CAC II,* 24.

82 *Kingdom and Church,* 112.

83 The ascension means the church is, if you will, both in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and on the isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:9-10). *Royal Priesthood,* 59.

84 Ibid., 41.

85 *Space, Time, and Resurrection* 134-35.

86 *CAC II,* 197. In the ascension the whole question of church order is withdrawn from the arena of our disposal. *Royal Priesthood,* 72-82.

> away when the building stands complete. Hence we can never identify the patterns of the church's life in worship or ministry with the real inner forms of its being in the love of God but may regard them only as temporary forms which will fall away when with the advent of Christ the full reality of the new humanity of the Church as the Body of Christ will be unveiled.[87]

The second thing the ascension does in Torrance's exposition, in addition to driving us back to the historical Christ, is "direct the eyes of the Church forward to the day when Christ will keep His promise and return to judge the quick and the dead and reign in glory."[88] The ascension directs us to the *parousia* of Christ, and this means that the triangular relation to which we have referred can be expressed as entailing the historical Jesus, the ascended Lord, and the advent Christ.[89] Let us consider the church under the rubric of the body of the advent Christ.

"Eschatology concerns the Parousia of Jesus Christ the King of the Kingdom." What Torrance is after here is the fact that the *parousia*, strictly speaking, consists of the whole manifestation of Christ from his birth through his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and second advent. The two advents are, if you will, two poles, two modes, of the one great all-inclusive *parousia*. "The link between the two advents is the Parousia of Christ through the Spirit, the abiding Parousia." Thus, for Torrance, the *parousia* conceived in this manner is not merely the culminating event of the second advent, rather it is coterminous with what we have called Christological Eschatology, the inner substance of which is Pneumatology.[90] In this sense, the *parousia* entails and underwrites

87 *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 137. Two of Torrance's oft-repeated ideas occur here. First, there is a distinction between the church's inner, dogmatic form - its essential relation with Christ in the Spirit - and its outer, ecclesial or juridical form. *CAC I,* 93, 130-34, 235. Second, order, for all its importance, is ultimately scaffolding. As a corollary of its relativized and ambiguous status that we discussed above, it is also provisional. *CAC II,* 18. *Kingdom and Church,* 138. While Torrance is generally consistent on the *esse* of the church, yet somewhat confusedly he can say "the ministry is utterly essential to the building up of the Church, and belongs to the *esse* of the Church in history, but it is essentially scaffolding that God uses . . ." The point seems to be that the ministry has a certain historical necessity but, given his overall theological architecture of the church, that does not entail false notions of its continuity and succession. *CAC I,* 102.

88 Ibid., 114.

89 Ibid., 231-32.

90 Ibid., 309. "It was not till the middle of the second century that the Church started to speak of two advents of Christ and so to use the word parousia in the plural – at least I am not aware of any earlier use of it." Later in his career Torrance asserts that the plural arises with Justin Martyr and Hippolytus. *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 144.

virtually all we have said to this point. The doctrine of the church, the body of the *eschatos Adam* who has become life-giving Spirit, is eschatological, with all the disruptions that at every point our time entails. "The Church is constituted throughout history as the place of meeting and worship under the vaulted arch of the one indivisible *parousia* of Jesus Christ which spans the first and second advents."[91]

Just as the ascended Christ drives us back to the historical Christ enshrined in the apostolic foundation of the church where we indeed meet him as ascended, so also, at the same time, this dynamic drives us out and forward to the coming Christ. "There is no other road to the Parousia of the risen Jesus, the Lord of glory, except through the Jesus of Humiliation, the Jesus of Bethlehem and Judea and Galilee and Calvary." Thus, "eschatology and world-mission belong together."[92]

This consummating of the *parousia* is near precisely because its two poles, the two advents of Christ, are held together in the Spirit. The end is near because the end has appeared in Christ, and its absolute nearness impinges on the church through the eschatological Spirit.[93] This present and future reality, having and hoping, is difficult to grasp, for it is not two phases of a linearly related project. Torrance cites Jesus in John 5:25: "The hour is coming and now is' to illumine the mystery. It is our ever-present tendency to unbend the triangular eschatological relation into a straight line. Yet, "the relation between the *today* and the *eschaton* is much more a tension between the hidden and the manifest, the veiled and the unveiled, then between dates in calendar time."[94] The distance of the ascension stands in contrapuntal relation, through the Spirit, to the nearness of the *parousia* in glory.[95]

Nevertheless, this future and final advent of Christ reminds the church acutely that its being one body with Christ is a reality which is not yet consummated:

---

91 Ibid., 153.

92 *CAC I,* 311-12. *Royal Priesthood,* 58-59. *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 156.

93 *CAC I,* 312-13. Thus, Torrance gives no credence to the notion that the New Testament writers were mistaken concerning the second appearing of Christ. Its nearness is a theological necessity and seeing it as mistaken represents being captured by a purely linear view of the church's time. *Incarnation,* 334.

94 Ibid., 315-316, 334. See *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 152-153.

95 *Royal Priesthood,* 45. This means that a key aspect of the eschatological structure of faith in Christ, the *eschatos Adam*, is belief in the nearness of the *parousia. Incarnation,* 311. The ascension introduces an *eschatological pause* in the heart of the one great *parousia* which enables us to speak of the first and second advents of Christ. *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 145, 152.

> Between the 'already One Body' and the 'still to become One Body' we have the doctrine of the ascension and the advent of Christ, the ascension reminding us that the Church is other than Christ . . . the advent that the Church in its historical pilgrimage is under the judgment of the impending advent, while already justified in Him. . . . Because the Church is at once in the old creation and in the new creation the advent of Christ in glory is inevitably imminent, for the new creation is always knocking at the door of the old. . . . On the other hand, Christian eschatology envisions a relation between the present and the future which is just as decisive and inescapable as the ascension. 'Now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).[96]

These two features of the eschatological relation give the church a new orientation to the succession of time in this age. "The Church is summoned to look beyond its historical forms in this world to the day when Christ will change the body of our humiliation and make it like unto the Body of His Glory (Phil. 3:21)."[97] The coming of the Lord in glory will reveal the provisional "scaffolding" nature of much of the church's juridical life. The church that lives in this expectation and hope, casting itself under the judgement of the cross, will not neglect "the ministry and the oracles and the ordinances of the New Covenant" but will use them as they must be used "by the Body of the crucified, risen, ascended and advent Christ."[98]

The Christ whose presence in the life and ministry of the church is also a coming, a *parousia* not yet unveiled, reminds the church that her living continuity in the new creation in Christ is not yet fully revealed, and thus it is not something which can be mastered or imprisoned in the current space-time structures of this age:[99]

> If the given unity of the Church is essentially eschatological then the validity of all that she does is conditioned by the Parousia and cannot be made to repose upon any primitive structure of unity already complete in the natural realm . . . So we must think of the validity of the Church's ministry . . . not in terms of history alone but in terms of a divine act which entails the eschatological suspension of all earthly validity.[100]

96 *Royal Priesthood,* 46.

97 Ibid. The church's new time in Christ is "concealed under the form and fashion of old time, or (shall we say?) under the likeness of sinful time." *Incarnation,* 335.

98 *CAC I,* 115.

99 Ibid., 46, 52.

100 Ibid., 198.

In other words, it is the *parousia* which, even more than the resurrection and the ascension, makes clear that the New Jerusalem comes down from above. The advent Christ validates the church and her orders from the end, from the future:

> This means that the Church is constantly summoned to look beyond its historical forms to the fullness and perfection that will be disclosed at the *parousia* and must never identify the structures it acquires and must acquire in the nomistic forms of this-worldly historical existence with the essential forms of its new being in Christ himself.[101]

Far from passively accepting current divisions, Torrance sees his eschatological vision as impinging radically upon them in judgment:

> Because its true life and unity are lodged in a future that penetrates back into the present, we must understand the disunity of the church in history as even now under the attack of the unity that is yet to be revealed.[102]

This last citation highlights something that we should make explicit as we close this section. Torrance abhors the visible fractioning of the church. The extent of his writings on the subject in the early portion of his career testify to his passionate engagement in the early ecumenical movement. There is almost no aspect of the issues involved, nor salient feature of the various ecclesial traditions, including his own Scottish Presbyterianism, which is left unexamined or immune from criticism. In addition, Torrance makes numerous practical suggestions for bridging the gaps between churches. However, what we have tried to highlight to this point is the frame within which, Torrance insists, all must be set if genuine progress is to be made. Christological Eschatology, the inner substance of which is Pneumatology, is of foundational and pervasive importance, for the church is the body of the crucified, risen, ascended and advent Christ. This substantive ecclesiological vision reorients the time of the church decisively, and prevents seeing her continuity as something which can be read off the linear time structures of this fallen age. As such, questions of order and continuity are relativized and intrinsically ambiguous.

IV. The Apostolic Foundation

We turn now to the apostolic foundation to which the ascended Christ sends the church to encounter the historical Jesus.

---

101 *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 157.

102 *CAC I,* 279. Torrance is a thoroughly eschatological ecumenist.

> The Church on earth is founded historically upon the apostles commissioned by Christ, but founded supernaturally by the baptism of the Spirit sent by Christ at Pentecost; so that the Church has a double relation to Christ, historically though the apostles, and supernaturally through the Spirit.[103]

While the apparent "historical-supernatural" dialectic here is unfortunate, it is clear that Torrance sees the apostolic foundation, and the church's relation to it historically, as itself supernatural, since it is the product of the incarnate *eschatos Adam,* the structurally enduring fruit of his first advent, and a result of his all-embracing *parousia.* This is simply another way of speaking of what we have called the triangular relation, or the horizontal and vertical relations Christ has established with the church. At no point, then, is the historical sub-eschatological. What is in view here is simply that the church does have real historical and simultaneously trans-historical relations to Christ.[104]

These two elements are not dialectically related. They are "grounded in the New Covenant which Christ has established in His Body and Blood." [105] This is a critical point about the time of the church which advances the discussion. The various disruptions of linear time created by the intrusion of Christ, and the new time-relations created by that intrusion, hold together in Christ. This means that the fidelity of God himself in the covenant fulfilled in Christ undergirds the church's continuity.[106] More fully, the fact that the outward works of God are one and indivisible means the Holy Trinity is the *esse*, the inner form of the church's life, and the ground of her continuity:

> It is the covenanted faithfulness of Christ which undergirds the whole foundation of the Church and the whole of its continuity throughout all the changes and chances of history. But as part of the Covenant, and in fulfillment of the promise of the Covenant, God bestowed upon His Church the Holy Spirit through whom the Church as founded upon the apostles is given to have communion with Christ. . . . The inward form which the Covenant takes is the communion of the Spirit through which the apostolic Church is given to share in the love and life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is that communion in the very life and love of God . . . which is the inner substance and heart of the apostolic

---

103 Ibid., 25.

104 *CAC II*, 23-24. The church can in no way detach itself from the fullness of time in Jesus, yet: "It is only within the time of the historical Jesus that the new time of the risen Jesus breaks in upon the Church in history, and gives it to share and abide in the new time of the new creation."

105 *CAC I,* 25.

106 *CAC II,* 28-29.

succession or continuity in the apostolically-founded Church.[107]

This continuity depends upon the unique character of the apostolate, and the chosen, epochal, once-for-all character of the apostles whose obedience is uniquely assimilated to Christ's own obedience in the founding of the church:

> Here in the foundation of the New Covenant the apostolic obedience is knitted into the obedience of Christ, or rather, the obedience of Christ in fulfillment of the Covenant draws into itself the obedience of the apostles. . . . Because this is grounded in the New Covenant it is not a pattern and structure of obedience that rests upon its own persistence, but reposes upon the faithfulness of God in the Covenant which undergirds the apostolic obedience to Christ, sanctifies and secures it in Christ, and gives it an architectonic function in the foundation of the church on earth.[108]

Formed around the historical Jesus as the nucleus of the church, and later empowered by the Lord, the Spirit, for their unique role, in the apostolate "we do not have the initial stage of a continuous process, but the perpetually persisting foundation of the Church and its grounding in the incarnational Revelation and Reconciliation."[109] The apostolic word, like the apostolic obedience, is assimilated by Christ to his word from whence it derives its authority and receives its permanently enshrined place in Holy Scripture.[110] The apostolate is the unique human end of the revelation of God in Christ, and thus the apostolic word is uniquely empowered by the Spirit. It is as particular and as unrepeatable as the incarnation, the ascension, Pentecost, or the New Testament documents.[111] In this context Torrance makes an intriguing eschatologically-colored point: "Only the apostles were appointed by Christ to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The eschatologically laid foundation is, unlike the ministry which proceeds upon it, an eschatologically enduring feature of the church's order.[112]

---

107 *CAC I,* 26. Again notice the distinction between an inner continuity in the life of God and an outer continuity of the church's public ministerial life.

108 Ibid., 25. See Ibid., 216.

109 Ibid., 26.

110 Torrance holds that Scripture, while it is the supreme authority, cannot be abstracted from the apostolate. Neither can it be separated, historically or theologically, from the Rule of Faith (which took later form as the Apostles' Creed), or from the faithful ministry descended from the apostles.

111 Ibid., 41-42, 50, 88, 215, 309. *Royal Priesthood,* 28.

112 *CAC I,* 27. Also, *CAC II,* 38-39. See Luke 22:30; Matt. 19:28. To return to Torrance's earlier cautiously raised questions about the final state of the church depicted in the book of Revelation, we note that the twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb permanently establish the apostolic uniqueness. The overcomers,

Thus, in the strictest sense, there can be no apostolic succession for the apostolic function cannot be transmitted. The apostles do not have hands laid on them,[113] but lay hands on others who obtain a ministry dependent on and subordinate to them, a ministry "of a quite different character and order, and without their judicial or magisterial authority."[114]

There is, however, a two-fold secondary sense in which we can speak of the church's apostolic ministry and succession. First, there is the church's obedience to, and proclamation of, the apostolic doctrine and *kerygma* now sealed in Holy Scripture:

> And so apostolic succession means that the Church as the living Body of Christ apostolically begotten through the incorruptible Word of God continues in being in history, in reliance upon the Covenant promises of Christ. This Church continues to be apostolic in that it continues throughout its movement and change from age to age to be schooled in the apostolic tradition, and determined by the apostolic Gospel. It is therefore a succession through the Spirit in obedience, in mission, a succession of service, of faith and doctrine, all in the continuity of the redeemed life of the people of God.[115]

While this statement includes the oft-repeated Protestant assertion that apostolic succession is succession in apostolic doctrine, Torrance's formulation is much more robust. Not only does he point out that succession can take many non-juridical forms such as mission and service, but what he is doing above is simply further explicating the Christological Eschatology, the inner substance of which is Pneumatology, now with the added referent of the eschatologically laid, yet concretely historical, apostolic foundation.

---

all the faithful (Rev. 3:21) are also given throne access, and while the twenty-four elders, the presbytery of heaven representing all the saints (probably of both dispensations), is depicted, there is no eschatological counterpoint to any historical hierarchy. The outer form of the church, its scaffolding, is torn away, and its inner eschatological form on the apostolic foundation and in communion with the Holy Trinity is revealed. We do not desire to press this point unduly. We are aware that the Scriptures, the gospel, and the Sacraments are also not present in the New Jerusalem. Yet what these things point to, communion with the Triune God, is now fully realized and present. On the question of *order* there are indeed eschatological counterpoints in the twenty-four elders and the apostolic foundations. The absence of any hierarchical correlate is, at least, intriguing.

113 Rather, they share in a unique way in Christ's High Priestly self-consecration and anointing. *CAC II,* 38-39.

114 *CAC I,* 27. Torrance considers the idea that the bishops were successors of the apostles to be a post-apostolic development. All subsequent ordinations bind the church to its once-for-all consecration in Christ and the apostolic foundation. Ibid., 38-57.

115 *CAC I,* 28. See *Theological Dialogue,* 116.

This apostolicity is a property, crucially, of the whole body of the crucified, risen, ascended and advent Christ, for if what we have contended for earlier is true, then continuity and succession are matters which pertain first and foremost to the whole reality of the body of Christ. In other words, this is a fuller statement of what the essential life of the church, as Christ's body, consists of in history. In Christ and through the Spirit, she has her life in the Triune God in and through the apostolic foundation laid by that same Triune God in Christ through the Spirit.

The second way one can speak of apostolic succession "is of a ministerial succession within the apostolic succession of the whole church." This is not a self-perpetuating continuity, but one dependent on, and subordinate to, the living Word and the apostolic foundation. Its relation relative to the Word is not architectonic, but rather one of obedience.[116] The ministry is subordinate to Christ and to what it ministers (Word and Sacrament),[117] and it cannot be abstracted from the wholeness of the continuity and succession of the Body of Christ. While the ministry is necessary for the church in history, Torrance speaks forcefully of isolating it from the whole body's life in Christ:

> It is a fundamental error to abstract the ministry from that wholeness and to make it an essential and self-sufficient line of ministerial succession . . . To isolate ministerial succession into an independent principle is to make it demonic, for it is to usurp the place of Christ himself in Word and Sacrament.[118]

Ministerial succession, as we have seen, is bound up with the relativity and contingency of our fallen time. This does not mean it is not an inestimable good, but everything finally depends on the covenant fidelity of Christ himself to his whole body within which ministerial order has its rightful place. Thus, ministerial succession which loses its subordination to Holy Scripture is a false succession no matter if it is unbroken or ancient. Yet, a succession which is broken can be knit back together, and "its defects are more than amply made up in the coherent succession of the whole apostolic tradition."[119] This is problematic for traditional

116 Ibid., 88.

117 Ibid., 133.

118 Ibid., 28-29. "To establish the validity of the ministry on grounds independent of the authority of the living Church (e.g. by linear succession of episcopal consecration), and then to judge whether a church is part of the Body by whether it has a valid ministry, is to invert the whole New Testament conception" (J. A. T. Robinson, *The Historic Episcopate,* 15). Cited by Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 72. We shall look at the ministry of Word and Sacrament below.

119 *CAC I,* 30-31. Put differently, the inner and outer forms of the church are not coterminous in history, ibid., 133-34.

notions of apostolic succession but axiomatic for Torrance, since the true source and ground of continuity is Christological and pertains to the wholeness of the church as the Body of Christ.

Since it is in this ministerial succession that church relates historically to the apostles, let us look more closely at it. The first thing to be done is to distinguish between functions unique to the apostles and functions passed on to others ordained by them:

> The apostles had unique functions which they could not and did not pass on; but they did act as presbyters in ministering the Word and Sacraments and exercising a pastoral oversight in the Church. These functions as administered by the apostles themselves were necessarily fulfilled in a unique way in conjunction with their unique authority in the Word, and when separated from the apostles' unique ministry, they inevitably assumed another and subordinate character. There was no direct extending of the apostolic ministry into the continuing ministry of the Church. Some of their functions, however, came to be exercised by others, and underwent a change of character appropriate to ministers who were not themselves apostles, that is, who had no authority in the direct mediation of Revelation and in forming the New Testament witness.[120]

However, to merely differentiate between the non-transferable and the transferable features of the apostolic ministry (or, more precisely, of the ministry of Christ handed on through the apostles), and to find in the latter a *direct* lineal historical relation to the historical Jesus is a mistake. It flattens out the church's historical relation to Christ because it bypasses the resurrection and the ascension, thus causing the church's "supernatural" relation to Christ through the Spirit to drop out of sight. "The ministry has a transcendent source in the gifts of the Holy Spirit sent down by the ascended Lord upon His Church." It also says too little about the wholeness of the church's ministry in Christ:

> The New Testament . . . boldly speaks of the Church as participating in the whole ministry of Christ. He fulfills His ministry in a unique and unrepeatable way, but the Church's ministry is to be undertaken with reference not to a part but to the whole of His ministry. Christ is Prophet, Priest, and King, and the Church's ministry is to be correlatively prophetic, priestly, and kingly.[121]

120 Ibid., 31.

121 *Royal Priesthood,* 36-37. Apostolic succession cannot be transmitted because its real substance has to do with "the complete Body of Christ, the all-inclusive fullness or wholeness which, precisely because it is that, cannot be thought of in terms of the more or less of historical succession." This is the wholeness, the catholicity if you will, of the risen Christ himself into which we are incorporated. *CAC I,* 217.

The correlation in view means that the church's ministry is neither identical with Christ's nor another ministry separate from his. It is a participation in the whole of his ministry, in subordination and service, in the holistic relation of Head and members. The conjunction of these two points, the bypassing of the resurrection and ascension in establishing historical connection, and the failure to see the creaturely, analogical wholeness of the church's ministry as the body of Christ, leads to viewing the church as a prolongation of the incarnation, to wrong notions of Eucharistic sacrifice as prolonging the one sacrifice of Christ, and to the notion that the church's ministerial priesthood is the prolongation Christ's priesthood handed on initially to the apostles.[122]

Thus, the passing on of the ministry from generation to generation through the laying on of hands "is only a sign of the real thing, namely the communion of the people of God in the divine life and love which they receive from Jesus Christ Himself through His Word and Spirit."[123] The ministry, even when it is faithful and well-ordered, belongs to the outer form of the church and can only function as a sign of its inner dogmatic continuity and life.[124] As such a sign it attests to the church's being bound to the historical Jesus, yet "historical succession does not secure or guarantee the binding of the Church to Christ, for He, the risen and ascended Lord, is not bound by the forms of fallen time."[125] In other words, the well-ordered ministry attests to the triangular relationship which, through the historical Jesus and "under the creative impact of the risen Lord and his Spirit,"[126] is now seen to include the epochal, perpetually persisting apostolic foundation.

---

122 *Royal Priesthood,* 36-37.

123 *CAC I,* 33. "That is surely the real substance of the apostolic succession, continuity in the ministry of the Risen and Ever-Present Christ." Ibid., 214-15. Behind the continuity of the church's witness is the living continuity of the Word itself. Ibid., 218.

124 *CAC I,* 133. Torrance does not think that the precise form of the ministry can be read out of the New Testament, nor can a direct reading of form and order arise from the Eucharist. Ibid., 33; *CAC II,* 195; H. J. Wotherspoon and J. M. Kirkpatrick, *A Manual of Church Doctrine according to the Church of Scotland*, rev. and ed. T. F. Torrance and Ronald Shelby Wright (London, Oxford University Press, 1954), 83. Yet, even a dominically appointed institution "cannot perpetuate in the continuity of space and time the risen Jesus Christ." *CAC I,* 46. In the nature of the case, given Torrance's architecture of the church, order is an outward and subordinate sign only. Nevertheless it is, for the Reformed, a *de fide* concern: "The Church and Ministry themselves belong to the articles of saving faith, so that for us the ministry is a *de fide* concern. *Credo unam sanctam ecclesiam.*" Ibid., 93.

125 *CAC II,* 26.

126 *Theological Dialogue,* 92.

V. Priesthood, Ministry, and Continuity

Torrance sees the Old Testament priesthood as having a double character reflected in Moses and Aaron. Moses is the unique mediator of the Word and, subordinate to him, is Aaron "the liturgical priest who carries out in continual cultic witness the actual mediation that came through Moses." Thus, the cultic priesthood is dependent upon the mediation of the Word.[127] Without obedience to the Word the cult becomes a mockery. When the priesthood became independent and perverse, "hardened by sin in the very use of the ordinances of grace," God would send the prophets who, in criticizing the cult, announced what Torrance calls "a prophetic and eschatological suspension of priestly liturgy" in light of the Day of the Lord (Amos 5:18).[128] Ultimately, the temple, and Israel's false security in it, is destroyed (Jer. 7:1ff.).

After the exile, Torrance see the situation as hardened into what he calls "liturgized law and legalized liturgy." It is a situation where there is no room for the Word of God. Into this situation steps Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who fulfills both aspects of the priesthood: mediation of the Word of God to man and a perfect human response of atoning obedience to God.[129] He "forces the priesthood into its proper function as witness to the Truth."[130] Before we further explicate Christ's priesthood, let us briefly say a word about its implications for the issue of historical continuity.

As his baptism in response to John's eschatological preaching and his use of it as the ground of his authority over the temple (Luke 20:1-8) show, Jesus' ministry is not authenticated by existing ecclesial authority.[131] Indeed, pushing the matter further back, in his virgin birth there is both continuity with Israel's history and an eschatological disruption of that continuity from above.[132] After mentioning the virgin birth and its relation to Israel's history, Torrance connects it to Christ's priesthood:

Accordingly, one of the basic facts the New Testament has to tell us is that

---

127 *Royal Priesthood,* 3-5.

128 Ibid., 5-7. *CAC I,* 121-122.

129 *Royal Priesthood,* 7; *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 113. Christ as both divinely provided redemption and flesh and blood sacrifice of obedience is adumbrated in the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. *Royal Priesthood,* 6.

130 Ibid., 9; *CAC I,* 121-122.

131 *CAC II,* 191.

132 *CAC I,* 212. For a fuller exploration of this see Kevin Chiarot, *The Unassumed Is the Unhealed: The Humanity of Christ in the Christology of T. F. Torrance* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 87-102.

> . . . the priestly continuity of the Aaronic succession was broken by another continuity that is without beginning and without end after the order of Melchizedek.[133]

This means that "the New Israel is not founded upon a priestly continuity on the stage of history but precisely upon the continuity of the prophetic-apostolic witness." Thus, there can be no purely linear continuity with Israel. Jesus Christ recapitulates and transcends the whole redemptive history of Israel. The church, then, has no socio-political or institutional continuity with Israel, but is rather is grafted into her "contrary to nature (Rom. 11:24)."[134] The apostles, themselves spanning the Old Israel and the New Israel, establish the foundation of the New Testament church and "provide it with its essential continuity with the one Church of God throughout the historico-redemptive activity of God's grace among men." Critically, Torrance continues, "this Hebrew rooting is an indispensable element in the proper conception of the Church's apostolic succession."[135]

While Torrance does not enlarge this point, his extensive writings on the church's relation to Israel indicate that he means at least two things. First, questions of historical continuity and schism must come to terms with the historical, yet not purely linear or institutional, manner in which Christ fulfills Israel's history and grafts the church into her. This means that ultimately unity is grounded in the covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ.[136] Second, the schism between Israel and the church, inasmuch as it subsists in history, is theologically and not just historically prior to the intra-ecclesial division of the Christian era.[137] This reaffirms that, while giving the church her rooting in and (albeit historically imperfect) union with Israel, the manner of Christ's fulfilling and transcending Israel's history is the same frame in which the church's divisions are to be seen and addressed. In other words, Christological Eschatology, or the Christological "correction," is the appropriate medicine for addressing all the divisions of the one people of God throughout redemptive-history. [138]

---

133 *CAC I,* 212.

134 Ibid., 212, 285-287. Torrance feels that the church's relation to Israel involves "some of the most difficult problems in our divisions." Ibid. 284.

135 Ibid., 299.

136 The covenant and God's faithfulness to it, grounds "the continuity of the Church in unbroken perpetuity from the beginnings of God's dealings with the race." Ibid., 95.

137 Ibid., 299.

138 Indeed, for Torrance, Israel's own jagged pre-Christian continuity points in this direction. Through the covenant with its attendant blessings and curses, its disruptions, its exile and restoration motifs, Torrance sees the adumbration of the church's historical continuity with the crucified and risen Christ. See the citation for footnote 50 above.

In the priesthood of Christ, then, "we pass beyond the conception of Aaronic priesthood to priesthood of another order."[139] He is priest "not on the ground of a legal ordinance but in a royal and sovereign way on the ground of his own endless Life."[140] In this new order of priesthood a number of distinctions are important. First, "priesthood cannot be predicated of Christ and of the Church univocally." He fulfills his ministry in a unique way and the church participates in his ministry in a correlative but entirely subordinate way.[141] The two priesthoods are not of the same genus, and the church's priesthood can in no way exercise control over Christ.[142] This means, again, that the "ordained ministry or priesthood is in no sense an extension of the priestly ministry of Christ or a prolongation of his vicarious work."[143]

Second, the New Testament does not apply the term "priest" (*hierus*) to the ordained ministry but only to Christ, and, in the plural, to the corporate priesthood of the church.[144] Paul uses priestly language in relation to the atonement, but mainly in reference to the "liturgy" of the Christian life. Christ is, the Epistle to the Hebrews tell us, the *Leitourgos* in the heavenly sanctuary. The whole church participates in its servant manner in his liturgical work (Acts 13:2; Rom. 15:16, 27; 2 Cor. 9:12; Phil. 2:17, 25).[145] Thus, Christian priestly ministry is primarily corporate. It is the work, the rational service, of the whole church as the Spirit-endowed body of the ascended Christ:[146]

> [T]he corporate nature of the Church's participation in Christ's ministry is extremely important for it affects our views both of order within the Church and of the continuity of the ministry. The corporate ministry of the Church and the ministry of Christ are related to each other, *not as the less to the greater, not as the part to the whole,* but *as the participation of the Church in the whole ministry of Christ.*[147]

---

139 *Royal Priesthood,* 14.

140 *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 114.

141 *CAC I,* 251. Of course this is true of Christ's prophetic and kingly ministry as well. Torrance says the church's ministry is related to Christ's by substitutionary incorporation or substitutionary participation.

142 Ibid., 195.

143 *Royal Priesthood,* xv. By "in no sense" Torrance means in no non-analogical, univocal, purely historical sense.

144 Ibid., xv, 35.

145 Ibid., 15-17.

146 Ibid., 22.

147 Ibid., 36. Within the *koinonia* of the Spirit the ministry takes on an essentially corporate form. *Theological Dialogue,* 117; *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 118.

Third, because the church's participation in the ministry of Christ is fundamentally corporate, the ordained ministry (or priesthood), which arises out of the royal priesthood of the whole body, "has to be given primarily a corporate or collegial expression."[148] Thus, drawing on Calvin and Cyprian, Torrance argues for a corporate episcopate where, within the equality of ministers in presbytery, one of their number is set apart as bishop. This "political distinction of ranks," as Calvin called it, implies no hierarchy or dominion over the other presbyters, but rather is a kind of moderating presidency within the one episcopate held *in solidum* under Christ, the Chief Bishop.[149]

What is to be avoided here is a notion of hierarchy which views the church's ordained ministry as a kind of transcription of a heavenly pattern:

> . . . a hierarchic ordering . . . imports . . . a notion of monarchy which conflicts with the mode of connection which the members of the body have with one another. It gives the episcopate a mediatorial function independent of the Church as the Body of Christ. Such a notion of hierarchy strikes at the root of the corporate priesthood of the whole Church as the Body of Christ. It isolates the episcopate from the Body and makes the Body hang upon a self-perpetuating and self-sufficient institution.[150]

Even as the church's liturgy is not a transcription of the heavenly liturgy,[151] so her ministerial priesthood is not a transcription of the heavenly priesthood of Christ. The relation between the two is pneumatic and thus sacramental and eschatological. The ministry, as "temporary scaffolding," points beyond itself to the new creation where the corporate priesthood will endure but the corporate episcopate will pass away.[152]

Yet, the ministry still has an important role to play as a sign of the continuity of the whole body of Christ, a continuity historically mediated through baptismal incorporation into Christ and the ministry of Word and Sacrament. These three things together - baptismal incorporation, ministry of Word and Sacrament, and

148 *Royal Priesthood,* 36, 81. The theme is commonplace: *CAC I,* 67, 82, 101, 130, 138.

149 *Royal Priesthood,* 88-92; *CAC I,* 97. It is not our intention here to examine the details of Torrance's polity proposals. Our concern is with his basic theological architecture of continuity. Calvin, of course, viewed his position on this matter as in basic concord with the ancient church.

150 *Royal Priesthood,* 92.

151 "Thus the liturgical forms of earth, no matter how beautiful and adequate we may make them, are ever being judged as earthly by the New Song of Heaven, ever being rendered as fragmentary and revealed as essentially imperfect." Ibid., 96. See *CAC II,* 176.

152 *Royal Priesthood,* 96-97.

the episcopate as sign, all within the *koinonia* of the corporate priesthood of the body of the ascended and advent Christ built on the persisting apostolic foundation - form the full architecture of Torrance's conception of ecclesial continuity:

> This fully Christological interpretation of the continuity of the Church and its ministry cuts away from the bottom those false ideas and false notions of apostolic succession . . . and enables us to recover a true doctrine of apostolic succession in which both the corporate episcopate and the historic episcopate are given their proper place, as well as the priesthood of the whole baptized membership of the Church.[153]

VI. The Ministry of Word and Sacrament

An axiom of the Christological correction for the ordained ministry in the church is that the ministry is subordinate to, and has no authority over or apart from, what it ministers.[154] The Word is the supreme divine authority in the church, the scepter by which the risen and ascended Lord rules and governs his church.[155] Thus, the ministry must never displace or obscure the face of Christ or assume priority over the mighty acts of God in him. Doing so entails forgetting that "Christ clothed in His gospel" is ever present in the church, and that "his finished work is abiding and effective reality from generation to generation."[156] Ministerial succession in proclaiming the gospel, namely its use of the power of the keys, is upheld by Christ's own Word and Spirit. "The continuity of the ministry depends entirely upon that Word which is Christ's own Word and which he will unfailingly fulfill."[157]

Kerygma, which Torrance takes to be the act of preaching and the content of what is proclaimed,[158] is "preaching with an eschatological result, such that the original event, Christ incarnate, crucified and risen, becomes event all over again in the faith of the hearer." In this proclamation Christ himself, the incarnate and risen Word, is mightily at work,[159] and it is the Spirit of the risen Lord which is

153 *CAC I,* 138.

154 Ibid., 82, 88-89.

155 *CAC II,* 55. *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 120-121.

156 *CAC I,* 15; *CAC II,* 51.

157 *CAC I,* 29. "Behind the transmission and continuity of the witness there is the living continuity of the Word itself." Ibid., 218.

158 "It is such preaching that in it Jesus continues to do and to teach (Acts 1:1) what he had already begun before and after the Crucifixion." Ibid., 208. See *CAC II,* 158.

159 *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 119.

his *shaliach*, his personal representative, though the minister may be spoken of as representing Christ in a secondary sense.[160]

Thus, this "eschatological repetition,"[161] or soteriological replication, in the hearer means that the very proclamation of the gospel partakes of and exhibits the triangular relation which characterizes the whole of Torrance's Christological Eschatology. The preaching of the gospel drives us back to the apostolic foundation where the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:6), hid from the foundation of the world, is forever enshrined. Yet, the mystery itself is not transmitted; rather, through the preaching of the Word in the power of the eschatological Spirit, men are given to participate in it.[162] This entails time-relations, of course, for the church "extends the corporeality of the Word" in the world. Yet, because the Word which creates the church is never captured within the contingencies of history, these relations are sacramental and eschatological.[163] In the *kerygma* the church, driven back to the historical Christ, tastes of the powers of the age to come and stands already on the side of the resurrection.[164]

The Word and the sacraments are ordered such that without the Word made flesh there would no sacraments, yet the sacraments bring the Word to its proper fulfillment. Nevertheless, this fulfillment of Word and sacrament belongs to the already-not yet tension of history and awaits an eschatological consummation. The Word and the sacraments span the life of the church in the last days, "holding together the First Coming with the Final Coming in the one *parousia* of Him who was, who is, and who is to come."[165] In particular, the sacraments enshrine the continuity of the church's being in history[166] while simultaneously setting forth the eschatological tension of the church's time:

> The full consummation of the act is eschatological, but until Christ come, the sacrament holds together in one here and now the "*Son thy sins be forgiven thee,*" and . . . the "*Arise take up thy bed and walk*" (Mark 2:5, 10, 11). As

160 *CAC I,* 41-42; *CAC II,* 72.

161 Eschatological repetition is to be set over against merely linear temporal repetition where the cleric repeats the function of Christ's priesthood and the Eucharist repeats his sacrifice. *CAC I,* 42; *Incarnation,* 343.

162 *CAC I,* 218-219.

163 Ibid., 206-207.

164 *CAC II,* 158, 166. *Royal Priesthood,* 48.

165 Ibid., 63. Calvin makes the same point, see *Kingdom and Church,* 126. The Word, which is the ordering element in the church's life "fulfills its ordination in the celebration of the Sacraments." Together, Word and Sacrament imply a *charisma* of oversight (*episcope*). Ibid., 76.

166 Ibid., 70.

> long as we wait for the redemption of the body we have the sacraments, for it is the redemption of an already purchased possession that we wait for…The Parousia therefore will mean not so much the final consummation of the act in terms of linear time (though it must also mean that . . .), as the unveiling of a new creation which already in Christ is reality.[167]

More precisely, the two sacraments respectively enshrine the "once and for all" nature of our union with Christ, and its "eschatological repetition." Baptism does the former and the Lord's Supper (with its "as often as . . . until He come") the latter.[168] Broadly speaking, Torrance associates baptism with once-for-all justification and the Supper with ongoing sanctification.[169] This is the deepest theological rationale for there being just two sacraments. Together, the two dominical ordinances demonstrate "eschatological once-for-allness and eschatological continuity which come together in realized *wholeness* only when the teleological end (*telos*) and the eschatological end (*eschaton*) are fulfilled in one another at the Second Advent of Christ."[170]

Yet, Christian baptism, which Torrance sees as reposing on Christ's baptism in our place at the hands of John,[171] maintains a foundational significance. It is within baptismal incorporation that the Eucharist has its significance.[172] Baptism's relevance for our topic is that it makes visible nearly the whole array of themes we have sketched thus far:

> Let us have the full biblical teaching about Baptism as involving death and resurrection in Christ, and incorporation into His living Body, the sphere where the mighty salvation-events are operative by the power of the Word and Spirit

167 *CAC I,* 209.

168 Ibid., 41; *Incarnation,* 330.

169 *CAC I,* 47, 65-66, 258-260. Both sacraments are eschatological and have to do with the whole Christ. Yet, baptism emphasizes the completed, abiding reality, and the Supper its repeated eschatological insertion into our history. See *CAC II,* 146, 164; *Royal Priesthood,* 33; *Incarnation,* 338-339; *Space, Time, and Resurrection,* 150.

170 *CAC I,* 49. If baptism and the Supper are not held together properly, "the essential relation between the finished work and the future consummation tends to be radically misunderstood, as when the whole sacramental relation and operation is divided up into seven stages of increase in 'grace'." *CAC II,* 146. The relationship between Baptism and the Eucharist is upheld in the Word; it is a *kerygmatic* relation. Ibid., 156.

171 T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 82-105. Torrance links the baptism at the hands of John with the "baptism in blood" at the cross. Thus, Christ's whole incarnate atoning life and death grounds the church as the one Body of the Lord. We are baptized into the Baptized One. *CAC I,* 241-242; *CAC II,* 112-115, 128; *Royal Priesthood,* 34.

172 *CAC II,* 156.

> for our salvation, and we shall strike at the heart of many of our difficulties . . . not least in regard to the nature of the Church and Ministry, and their continuity.[173]

As such, no linear succession of bishops can "be made to usurp the function of Baptism, which is the supreme eschatological act whereby we are initiated into the once and for all historical events in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."[174] This is the sacramental coordinate of the continuity of the one body and the one priesthood of Christ which the whole church echoes. Baptism "is the primary eschatological act of the gospel whereby we are ingrafted into the wholeness of Christ."[175] Where this baptismal primacy is de-emphasized and stress is placed on the Eucharist and the need for episcopal ordination to administer it, "apostolic succession almost inevitably means the adding up of something in history, and the biblical doctrine of the Body of Christ as an all-inclusive eschatological magnitude tends to be lost."[176]

Thus, the sacraments – baptism and within baptismal incorporation the Eucharist – both point backward and forward and, like the Word, exist in the tension of the triangular relation.[177] With the *kerygma,* they belong to the eschatological reserve between the first and second Advents of Christ, and because of them the church is not simply suspended dialectically between these two moments.[178] They are neither mere attestations nor memorials nor historical repetitions, and the presence, the real *parousia* of Christ in them, always holds the final *parousia* in reserve.[179] In both, the essential mystery is hidden in and recedes from sight

---

173 *CAC I,* 95.

174 Ibid., 199.

175 Ibid., 217. Baptism is our consecration to priesthood in Christ reposing on his prior self-consecration. *CAC II,* 37. See *Royal Priesthood,* 22.

176 *CAC I,* 217.

177 In what we might call a variation on the triangular relation, Torrance speaks of the church, by means of baptismal incorporation and the Eucharist, as a great arch spanning history supported by two pillars, the indivisible events of Christ's first and second Advents. The "on the night he was betrayed" and the "till he come" bind the two moments, past and future, together. *CAC II,* 170-171. See *Incarnation,* 301, 327.

178 *Royal Priesthood,* 48. In them the church is called to reach out to the *parousia*. Therefore, in the sacraments we are given clearest picture of the redemption of all things, time included. See also, Ibid., 63.

179 *CAC II,* 138-139. Indeed, there is in every Eucharist a point where the "real presence of the *Eschatos* suspends the liturgical action and makes it point beyond itself for validity and order." Ibid., 179. Every Eucharist involves "an eschatological suspension of historical continuity and the order and authority which that involves." Ibid., 190.

into the ascension.[180] By them we are incorporated and sustained in a wholeness which cannot, any more than the *parousia* of which they partake and to which they point, be subject to the time series of this age.[181]

Thus, Torrance holds, a strange inversion has occurred in the history of the church's reflection on matters of historical validity and continuity. In sublimating the eschatological dimension of the sacraments and seeking validity in some linear historical order, the church has sought a "validity reposing on the very thing the sacraments are designed to transcend." At the very place where the time of this age is invaded and its continuity transcended by an eschatological act of God, the validity of the act has been subjected to purely historical categories. The very existence of the sacraments, Torrance contends, should have prevented this. In the case of the Eucharist it has led to the irony that the very thing "designed as the medicine for our sinful divisions, has been made to rest so much for its validity upon chronological sequence within history that it has actually become the great obstacle to unity among the Churches." [182]

Yet the sacraments remain a medicinal judgement upon our divisions. In them the church's call to be conformed to the death and resurrection of Christ is perpetually enacted in her history in anticipation of the judgment and resurrection at the *parousia.*[183] The way of carrying about in the body the death of Jesus that the life of Jesus might be manifest is "the way of Baptism and Holy Communion."[184] To be baptized is to enter the sphere of both union and judgment, for it is the sacrament of Christ's obedience which displaces our disobedience.[185] "It is therefore through baptismal incorporation into Christ that our sinful divisions are brought under the mortification of the Cross and are destroyed in Christ." Baptism, then, through which the church is "given unity of the Spirit, a perfected reality to be kept," is the "primary enactment and expression of the oneness of the Church." Within that oneness through judgment

180 Ibid., 138-139, 167. See *Kingdom and Church,* 129-130.

181 *CAC II,* 26-27. "The whole significance of the sign is bound up with the fact that the ascension comes in between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his second Advent . . . The sacramental signs are charged with the real presence, but it is a presence which is also yet to come." Ibid., 161.

182 *CAC I,* 199. For this reason, among others, Torrance believes that intercommunion should be practiced now as a key portion of the road to unity rather than only as the finished result of unity. *CAC II,* 153-55, 191-202.

183 *CAC I,* 62.

184 Ibid., 245-246.

185 *CAC II,* 123.

the Eucharist is given as both the church's "agony and its supreme joy,"[186] so that continual death and resurrection in Christ might bring healing and reconciliation. The Eucharist does not add anything to the wholeness of baptismal incorporation, but it is a renewal, a re-insertion, of the Church's oneness as the Body of Christ into our divided humanity.[187] Thus, at the Supper, "we eat and drink judgment on our sin and division."[188]

Turning, then, to the question of division over orders, at the Lord's Supper the church "allows its order or historical structure to be called into question by that which comes from beyond history and is not expressible in terms of history alone."[189] In the nature of the case, the sacramental and eschatological relation which the Eucharist sustains to orders, namely its mediation of the presence of the Son of Man, the Lord of the Eucharist, means that the sacrament cannot be subordinated to the church's historical orders. In the triangular relation in which it subsists, it "stands above the institutional continuity of the Church and *can never be made relative to it.*"[190] In the Eucharist both the "*nomos*-form of historical succession" and the order the church derives from the risen Lord are both present. Here, then, the church must allow itself and its orders to be ordered and formed from above by the real presence of Christ. To abstract the order of the ministry from the real presence and action of the living Lord and then use it to judge the church or the validity of its ministry, Torrance says, "would be the essence of self-justification."[191] The judgment of the Eucharist must be allowed to break up the "hardened forms of the Church's Liturgy, into which eschatology is continually being transmuted,"[192] for in the "midst of history with all its divisions and heart-rending failures," the Supper proclaims and enacts a unity which is eschatologically validated.[193]

The eschatological triangular relation, then, in relativizing linear notions of continuity and unity, also provides the very frame out of which they come under redemptive judgment. The church's unity, and the holy assault on the irrational disruptions of that unity, both come from the future, from the power of the age to come, from the one all-inclusive *parousia* of the *eschatos Adam.*

186 Ibid., 172-173.

187 *CAC I,* 259-261, 267, 274; *CAC II,* 168, 171.

188 *CAC I,* 278.

189 *CAC II,* 196.

190 Ibid., 197-198; *Royal Priesthood,* 106.

191 *Royal Priesthood,* 71-72.

192 *CAC II,* 197-199.

193 Ibid., 200-202.

That future, the presence of the new creation anchored in the midst of the world's estrangement and veiled by the eschatological pause the ascension creates in the one *parousia* of Christ, is enshrined in the holy sacraments.[194]

VII. Conclusion

We have attempted to demonstrate that in Torrance we find a consistent, integrated dogmatics of ecclesial continuity. The shorthand designation for this is Christological Eschatology. But, as we have seen, that Christological Eschatology unfolds into a large and coherent architectural whole. The inner heart of this Christological Eschatology is the work of the Spirit of the incarnate crucified, risen, ascended and advent Lord. Through the Spirit of the *eschatos Adam*, the church is united to that Christ as one body and one royal priesthood. It is in that union that her true *esse* and her abiding continuity persist. Thus, she is a concrete historical entity, but not merely so, for she is an "eschatological magnitude." She lives out of another time, from another order, and as such she is the new creation in the midst of history's divisions and trauma.

Her time, then, is the time of this age as it is invaded by the power of the age to come. While a precise description of just what the age to come does to "this present evil" age is elusive, *that* it disrupts the church's continuity from being a purely historical phenomenon is plain. It creates what we have called, following Torrance, the triangular relation. Put simply, the ascended Christ drives the church back to the historical Christ where she meets the ascended Christ. Yet, clearly this is not the fullest form of expressing the mystery. While Torrance never attempts a complete statement, the full explication of his teaching would yield a more robust statement and indicate the complexity involved:

> In fallen time (already invaded by the new time) the church meets the One who, having entered fallen time as an eschatological intrusion (the first advent of the one indivisible *parousia*), is now risen and ascended and exists in the new time of eschatological glory. And that One drives the church back to another time, the apostolic foundation, which itself, while fully historical, is the product of the first advent of Christ, his historical life, death, and resurrection, *and* the gift of the eschatological Spirit of that same Christ once ascended. There the church meets the ascended *and* coming Christ in the already-not-yet tension, the eschatological pause between the two moments of the one indivisible parousia.

Of course this could be stated differently, but its very cumbersomeness supports Torrance's oft-repeated claims that the church does not live by linear historical

194 Ibid., 163-164.

order alone. Having, from all angles, approached this mysterious time of the church, Torrance also sets forth the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments as remarkably knitted into, displaying, and upholding this multi-faceted triangular order. There is a genuinely provocative and stimulating dogmatic contribution in the seamlessness by which this architecture of continuity moves from Christological Eschatology, to the Spirit, to the one body of Christ, and finally, to the Word and the Sacraments. The resultant case regarding the church's *esse* and continuity, and the corollary that orders are relative and ambiguous scaffolding, is strong. And the arguments against at least some traditional notions of apostolic succession are also weighty. It is precisely because Torrance's case does not rest on a piece of exegesis here and a piece of historical evidence there but upon a Christologically determined theology of ecclesial continuity that it has such force.

What, we ask in closing, would it take to rigorously reply to Torrance? One suggestion is that, perhaps, he overplays his hand on the notion of orders, or any ecclesial-juridical forms and acts, as partaking of the *schemata,* the *stoicheia* of the age. While he acknowledges that one can use the *schema* without being schematized to them, his criticisms and cautions here are applied only to orders. Yet it is clear from the New Testament that the whole life of the church, and any aspect of that life, can be conformed or schematized to this age and its elemental principles. While there may be more of a temptation in questions of order given that, for Torrance, law itself is often viewed as part of the form and fashion of this age, the problem is not restricted to the matter of order. Torrance would be better off, we contend, by not coupling his critique to this *schemata/stoicheia* polemic so tightly. He himself points the way when he says that even a dominically appointed institution cannot perpetuate the church's essential continuity in the risen Christ. In other words, even granting a divinely given ministerial order, it would still be, on Torrance's reading, a subordinate sign of the inner reality of the church's continuity in Christ. It could not, in the theological structure Torrance has enumerated, secure or guarantee the church's apostolic succession.

What would be needed, then, is a notion that ministerial orders themselves, not simply as a sign but in their essence, partake of and exhibit the Christological Eschatology which grounds ecclesial continuity even as the Word and the Sacraments do. Put differently, orders would have to be shown not simply to point to the triangular relation which defines the church's time but also to intrinsically belong to the triangular relation. This is, we think, a tall order. It entails more than the fact that the baptized and communing body belongs to

the triangular relation. Ministers, of course, belong to the triangular relation. But do ministerial orders *per se* do anything more than point to it? Even if orders could be shown somehow to have the same eschatological characteristics as Word and Sacrament, as what they minister, it would still remain to show that the validity and continuity of the one depended on the other.[195] What is clear is that Torrance has made a biblical and formidable contribution to the discussion.

195 One can get a small taste for how the conversation here might go by reading the correspondence between Torrance and Florovsky in Matthew Baker, "The Correspondence between T. F. Torrance and Georges Florovsky (1950-1973)," in *T. F. Torrance and Eastern Orthodoxy: Theology in Reconciliation*, eds. Matthew Baker and Todd Speidell (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 286-324. Baker notes that, in contrast to what he calls Torrance's "negative dialectic" between history and eschatology, Florovsky holds that the church simply is "a 'proleptic eschatology' constituted in the sacraments . . ." Ibid., 288. This seems to indicate, perhaps, the direction we suggested above. The episcopal succession simply is, in its association with the Eucharist, a decisive part of the eschatological triangular relation. As Baker puts it: "*Through the historic episcopate*, each local church is inserted into the eschatological community of the Twelve and the Jerusalem Church, the reconstituted Israel." Ibid., 288-289, italics mine.