

**ON THE ROAD TO BECOMING FLESH:
ISRAEL AS THE WOMB OF THE INCARNATION
IN THE THEOLOGY OF T. F. TORRANCE**

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"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true
God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John. 17:3)

In Jesus Christ, the Father's eternal Son himself has come to be with fallen Israel, and in Israel with the human race in its alienation from God. In him the rich and abounding and beautiful life of the triune God has intersected the broken, sinful, and shame-riddled existence of fallen humanity. Through his incarnate life, death, resurrection, and ascension, the covenant between God and Israel has been filled with nothing less than the Son's own relationship with his Father, and his own anointing in the Holy Spirit, and his own relationship with humanity, and with all creation. Jesus Christ is "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and he is "the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit" (John 1:29-34). He is both the one who brings the very life of the Trinity into our fallen existence, making all that he is and has accessible to us in our terrible darkness, *and* the long awaited and faithful servant of the Lord, who, from inside Adam's fall and from Israel's side of the covenant relationship, loves his Father with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. The very sonship of Jesus now fills Israel's side of the covenant. This "new" covenant is the blessed life of the triune God earthed in Jesus within the "old" covenant between God and Israel, and in Israel with the human race, and all creation.

At the heart of this magnificent vision of Professor Thomas F. Torrance is the *incarnation* of Jesus Christ, the Father's eternal Son and the One anointed in



the Holy Spirit. But the incarnation did not happen in a historical vacuum. So to understand Jesus and his covenant-fulfilling work, we must, as Torrance argues, see him both in the actual historical context in which he entered into human history and in the light of the antecedent eternal relationship he has with his Father and the Holy Spirit.¹

In this paper I will explore Torrance's vision of Israel as *the womb of the incarnation*. In and through his long and passionate dialogue with Israel, Torrance argues, God was at work preparing the "womb for the Incarnation,"² the "womb for the birth of Jesus,"³ or "the matrix for the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ."⁴

This "womb for the incarnation" is an image rich with levels of meaning. On the most general level, it refers simply to Israel as the unique sphere within fallen creation where God reestablishes personal relationship with his fallen creation. More specifically, "the womb" refers to the provisional *way of communion* that God established with fallen humanity within Israel. From a slightly different angle, it refers to a *revolutionary* conceptual matrix of ideas, categories, concepts, and structures of human thought that were hammered out on the anvil of Israel's fallen mind for the reception of the incarnational revelation. Its most precise meaning, however, is far more personal and relational and fiery.

The covenant between God and Israel is a personal relationship of the deepest, most intimate order, in which the Lord is seeking to do the impossible — overcome the contradiction between fallen humanity and himself and establish real communion, union, and oneness. This is a relationship of accommodating love and grace and mercy, to be sure, but it is also one of pain, fear, and enmity. For Israel, like the race at large, is thoroughly fallen, and its way of being is utterly alien to God. So the relationship is one of abiding love and deep conflict. And it is this conflict between the *Lord in person* and *fallen Israel* that forms the

1 *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1983), 13-17. Unless otherwise noted, all citations are to T.F. Torrance.

2 *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford university Press, 1971), 149. See also *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 87.

3 "Salvation is of the Jews," *Evangelical Quarterly* 22 (1950): 166.

4 *Mediation of Christ*, 42.

relational context that becomes the womb of the incarnation. In his incarnation, Jesus will embrace Israel's fallen existence and enter into the contradiction between Israel and God — and he will resolve the conflict in his own experience — thus becoming in himself the one in whom Israel, and the human race, are united with the triune God.

Trinity and Covenant, Creation and Israel

To understand Torrance's vision of Israel as the womb of the incarnation, we must first sketch the overall framework of Torrance's theology within which his thought on Israel is thrown into sharper focus. In a general way Torrance does this for us in several of his characteristically panoramic paragraphs. One such paragraph, from a sermon on the Trinity, will serve as a means of focusing our attention on certain key themes in his thought. While speaking about the communion of the Spirit and sharing in the grace of Jesus Christ, Torrance pauses and sets the gospel of redemption in its wider context.

Behind all that we hear in the Gospel lies the fact that in creating man God willed to share His glory with man and willed man to have communion with Himself; it is the fact of the overflowing love of God that refused, so to speak, to be pent up within God, but insisted in creating a fellowship into which it could pour itself out in unending grace. Far from being rebuffed by the disobedience and rebellion of man, the will of God's love to seek and create fellowship with man established the covenant of grace in which God promised to man in spite of his sin to be His God, and insisted on binding man to Himself as His child and partner in love. God remained true and faithful to His covenant. He established it in the midst of the people of Israel, and all through their history God was patiently at work, preparing a way for the Incarnation of His love at last in Jesus Christ, that in and through him he might bring His covenant to complete fulfillment and gather man back into joyful communion with Himself.⁵

This is a comprehensive statement of Torrance's understanding of the movement not only of redemption but also of creation. Torrance glances back to creation and eternity with God and then forward to Israel and within Israel to the fulfillment of God's purposes in Jesus Christ, through whom God "gathers man back into joyful communion with Himself."

5 *When Christ Comes and Comes Again* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 190.

There are three general points of emphasis in Torrance's thought here that need to be isolated. The first is that creation is set in the context of the grace and love of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Though Torrance does not mention the Trinity explicitly in these comments, they come within a sermon on the Trinity, and the imagery is of the grace and love and communion of the triune God "overflowing" and summoning humanity into existence, so that humanity may have fellowship and communion with God and share in the divine life. Creation is very clearly viewed as the act of the love and grace of God, at the very heart of which is communion and fellowship with humanity.

The second point is that redemption is not separated from the purpose of God in creation. There is a purpose and will behind creation, namely, that humanity should *be* and that we should *live in communion* with God. Torrance sees this "will" and "purpose" as steadfast and unchanging, not rebuffed by disobedience. The creative purpose of the triune God stands. Adam's fall does not change God's heart or will in any way. Thus Torrance says that the one movement of redemption encompassing the Old and New Testament periods "is the movement of God's grace in which he renews the bond between himself and man, broken and perverted at the Fall, and restores man to communion with himself."⁶ Redemption is the restoration and renewal of God's original purpose in creation — real communion between God and humanity.

The third point is that Israel is chosen to be the mediator of God's restoration, through whom God is preparing a way for the decisive fulfillment of his creative purpose for humanity in Jesus Christ. The decision of God in creation that humanity should exist and "have communion with Himself" and "share in His life and glory" and God's resolute determination that this should be so in spite of sin and rebellion is always in the background of Torrance's discussion of redemption and God's dealings with Israel. In the context of the fall of Adam, "God's creative purpose became a redemptive purpose" or an "eschatological goal."⁷ The whole drama of redemption and the calling and election of Israel are viewed within this

6 "The Israel of God," *Interpretation* 10 (1956): 306–7.

7 "The Atoning Obedience of Christ," *Moravian Theological Seminary Bulletin* (1959): 67. See also Torrance, "Aspects of Baptism in the New Testament," in *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, vol. 2, *The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 120.

context. God elects Israel out of all the races of humanity to be the mediator through whom the restoration and renewal of communion with the human race will be carried out and fulfilled.

While Torrance does not provide us with a lengthy discussion of the fall of humanity in Adam, it is clear that he regards the fall as real and catastrophic. The communion established between God and Adam was utterly shattered, and now fraught with *impossibility*. In this respect, two particular emphases surface throughout Torrance's writings. First, sin is not simply guilt before God but the perversion of our being. Sin has affected "the very fabric of human existence."⁸ Second, Torrance is particularly emphatic regarding the devastating effects of sin on the mind. Over against the rise and authority of natural reason, and some strands of Protestant thought that assume the human mind was essentially unaffected by sin, Torrance believed the fall of Adam has so affected the mind of humanity, so marred its capacity for rationality and light, that it is irretrievably lost in its own self-referential judgment and confusion, and thus it is "impossible" for humanity to know God.⁹

It is ultimately the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ that enlightens, for Torrance, the problem of the fall of Adam. The fact that the solution took the death and miraculous resurrection of the incarnate Son of God reveals that the fall was catastrophic, leaving humanity utterly estranged and alienated at the core of its being and thinking. It is against this backdrop that Torrance sees Israel as called by God to begin the long and harrowing movement of reconciliation in which the Lord begins to find a way to do the impossible — reach fallen and alienated humanity in personal relationship.

Torrance expounds God's election of Israel under the twin headings: "Israel was called to be the *Servant of the Lord*" and "Israel was called to be *the bearer of the Messiah*."¹⁰ There is a double emphasis. The first is that Israel was called out to *serve* God in his larger purpose of restoration. From the very beginning,

8 *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976), 47.

9 See "The Place and Function of Reason in Christian Theology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 14 (1942): 34.

10 *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 195–98.

Torrance suggests, Israel was invested with a “vicarious service,”¹¹ a “vicarious mission and function in mediating the covenant purposes of reconciliation and redemption for all mankind.”¹²

The second emphasis is on the fact that Israel was called to be the *bearer* of the Messiah. Salvation is of the Jews, but the Jews are not the Savior; Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God, the Jew from Bethlehem, born right in the midst of Israel, is the Savior. Thus Torrance regards Israel’s history as stretching out in expectation of Christ.¹³ But the idea of “expectation,” while certainly true, can be misleading. For in Israel the Lord is not only teaching people to expect a savior to come; but he is actually *preparing* the way of his coming.

Torrance speaks of this *preparation* in terms of God’s forming Israel into a “womb” for the incarnation,¹⁴ an organic idea that aligns itself with Israel’s being the “bearer of the Messiah.” For Torrance, Jesus Christ and his work stand in the closest personal relation to the work of God in Israel. There is continuity between Israel and Christ not only in the sense that he was born within Israel and that Israel had the expectation of Christ but also in the sense that he was born within God’s action in “opening up a new and living way” in Israel. Israel was called out from the nations to be the people in whom communion between the Lord and fallen humanity could be reestablished and the revolution of reconciliation could

11 *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 87.

12 *Mediation of Christ*, 42. See also 17, 19, 42; and Torrance, “Israel of God,” 311ff.

13 See Torrance’s panoramic statement in “Israel of God,” 306: “The whole historico-redemptive movement revealed in the Old and New Testaments is to be regarded as essentially one. The Old Testament speaks of the Coming One, and the Coming Kingdom; the New Testament speaks of the One who has come, and of the Kingdom as having arrived in Jesus Christ himself. The Old Testament is the revelation of the *verbum incarnandum*; the New Testament is the revelation of the *verbum incarnatum*: the center of gravity in both is the Incarnation itself, to which the Old Testament is stretched out in expectation, and the New Testament looks back in fulfillment.”

14 *God and Rationality*, 149. See also *Theology in Reconstruction*, 145, and *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 87. Evidently this is what is behind Torrance’s enigmatic statement: “At last in the fulness of time when a body had been prepared the Messiah came to do the will of God” (*Theology in Reconstruction*, 198).

begin. This new beginning in Israel forms the womb for the incarnation and work of Christ.

What Torrance envisages here needs to be viewed on two levels. The first concerns the provisional form of communion or the *covenanted way of communion* that God established with Israel. This will give us a general overall picture of the womb for the incarnation and work of Christ. Once this is established, we can then look more specifically at the *mediation of revelation* in Israel. Here we will come to the very heart of what Torrance means by Israel being the “womb” of the incarnation of the Father’s eternal Son.

The Covenanted Way of Communion

For Torrance, the basic feature of the covenant is relational, involving the personal address of the Lord to Israel and the personal response of Israel to the Lord. The whole fact of Israel, Torrance suggests, is a response to the Word of God.¹⁵ Yet God is not naive about the fallen state of humanity or of Israel and thus of the *impossibility of real* relationship. God thus takes responsibility for both sides of the relationship. The covenant includes within it a provision for *human response* to God. This divinely provided response Torrance calls the “covenanted” and “vicarious way of response”.¹⁶ This covenanted way of response was provided “in Israel’s Cult or *leitourgia*,”¹⁷ in which God provided Israel a way of relating to him, within which Israel’s fallen conscience could be cleansed and Israel’s fear of God could be calmed, so that a form of real communion between God and Israel could be sustained. At the very heart of the covenant communion between God and Israel stood the vicarious way of response to God’s law and will, which God himself provided in grace.¹⁸

15 “The fact that *qahal* comes from the same root as *qol*, the word for ‘voice,’ suggests that the Old Testament *qahal* was the community summoned by the Divine Voice, by the Word of God” (“The Israel of God,” 305).

16 *Mediation of Christ*, 37–38, 83.

17 “The Meaning of Order,” in *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, 2:16. For a more detailed exegetical discussion of the cultic liturgy see *Royal Priesthood*, *Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Paper No. 3* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1955), 1–6.

18 See Torrance’s comment: “Hence the very priesthood itself, the sacrifices,

There is here a double emphasis in Torrance's thought. On the one hand, the accent falls on the fact that both sides of the covenant relation were established and maintained by God in grace. Here Torrance contrasts the idea of covenant with that of contract.¹⁹ In a contract, there is a bilateral agreement between two parties, which rests on the fulfillment of certain conditions on the part of each party; whereas, in the biblical covenant, God himself pledges to fulfill *both sides* of the covenant.²⁰

On the other hand, Torrance highlights the "judgment" of grace. While the liturgy established that God in his grace provided the way of relationship, that very grace or divine provision also meant "that man may appear before him in worship with nothing in his hands but the offering or sacrifice God has graciously given him"²¹ and therefore the gift of God's way invalidated or judged every other way, or every other human offering and sacrifice.

Alongside this stress on the freely provided way of response stands another equally powerful emphasis that runs throughout Torrance's discussion of the covenant relation between God and Israel. It is the fact that this way of response was to be cut or circumcised or translated into the flesh of Israel. That was clearly envisaged in the Biblical story in circumcision, "the great sign of the covenant."²² Torrance is no extrinsic ritualist. If communion between God and fallen Israel was to be made personally real in the fullest sense, then the covenanted way

offerings and oblations which the priests alone were consecrated to take in their hands, together with all the liturgical ordinances, were regarded as constituting the vicarious way of covenant response in faith, obedience and worship which God had freely provided for Israel out of his steadfast love" (*Mediation of Christ*, 84–85).

19 The difference between covenant and contract is more thoroughly explored by Torrance's brother, James B. Torrance. See, for example, his essay "Covenant or Contract?", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 no. 1 (Feb 1970).

20 *Mediation of Christ*, 37–38. Cf. Torrance's comment in "Israel of God": "The keeping of the covenant did not depend on Israel's worth, but on the contrary, was conditioned by the pure outflowing love of God in the continuous act for grace, of grace for grace" (308).

21 *The Centrality of Christ: Devotions and Addresses* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1976), 17.

22 "Israel of God," 109.

of communion had to be translated into life and being in the actual, not merely ritualistic, removal of sin and guilt, alienation and enmity.

It was this theme of the circumcision or the embodiment of the covenanted way of communion in Israel's life, Torrance says, that "governed the profound Old Testament conception of 'the servant of the Lord.' . . . The servant of the Lord was the hypostatised actualisation within the flesh and blood existence of Israel of the divinely provided way of covenant response set forth in the cult."²³ Torrance envisages the sacrificial system as being bent forward, as it were, to the "Servant of the Lord as the chosen instrument"²⁴ in whom the covenanted way of communion would become incarnate in the flesh of Israel. But, Torrance suggests, "once the covenant came to be enacted so deeply into the existence of Israel that it was written into the 'inner man,' its whole form would change. It would be a new covenant."²⁵

23 *Mediation of Christ*, 85. Torrance is thinking here particularly of the Isaianic prophecies, of which he comments: "A messianic role was evidently envisaged for the servant in which mediator and sacrifice, priest and victim were combined in a form that was at once representative and substitutionary, corporate and individual, in its fulfillment. As the prophet struggled to bring his vision into focus something emerged which is rather startling. Time and again he spoke about the *ebed Jahweh*, the servant of the Lord who is identified with Israel, and about the *goel*, the Redeemer who is the Holy One of Israel, in the same breath. Thus, the servant of the Lord and the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, were brought together in his prophetic utterance, and yet held apart but only by a hair's breadth, so to speak." In another place he says that in the heart of these Isaianic prophecies concerning the suffering Servant, "The Holy One of Israel and the Redeemer are drawn closely together in an enigmatically anonymous figure in whom the suffering ordeal and priestly destiny of Israel are gathered up, personified and infiltrated with universal significance, and made to point ahead to the consummation of God's redemptive purpose of peace in a triumphant Messianic era which will transcend the history of Israel itself" ("Christian/Jewish Dialogue: Report of the Overseas Council of the Church of Scotland," in D.W. Torrance, *The Witness of the Jews to God* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1982), 141.

24 *God and Rationality*, 158.

25 "Israel of God," 309. Elsewhere Torrance comments about the covenant with Israel in the light of the new covenant. "By its very nature this covenant was not meant to be an end in itself, for through it Israel was steadily and painfully moulded by God into being the instrument of his saving purpose, and made to provide in its

This, Torrance argues, is “precisely what took place in Jesus Christ in the whole course of His obedience from His birth to His death on the Cross, for He fulfilled in Himself the Word of God tabernacling among men, the covenanted way of response to God set forth in the ancient cult, and constituted Himself our Temple, our Priest, our Offering and our Worship.”²⁶ The “total circumcision” was fulfilled at last in the flesh of Christ, the New Covenant inaugurated, “and the new and living way was opened up in the humanity of the Son of God.”²⁷ But this new covenant, Torrance says, “is not an abrogation of the old covenant but a fulfilment of it in which its essential pattern, ‘I will be your God, you will be my people,’ is raised to a higher level of intimacy and communion with God through the pouring out of his own Spirit upon his people.”²⁸

The personal relationship God established with Israel is the unique “sphere” of God’s personal interaction within fallen creation, with and for the whole human race. This covenant relation hinged on God’s grace in the provision of the vicarious way of response to himself through which alone Israel could draw near to and live in communion with the Lord. The covenanted or vicarious way of response constitutes God’s special preparation for the work of Christ, for it is in Christ that this response will be cut into our flesh and be decisively fulfilled as God’s eternally prevailing vicarious provision for communion.

This is one strand that is woven into Torrance’s whole conception of Israel as the womb of the incarnation. It is necessary now to turn our discussion of Torrance’s discourse on Israel on a different axis — that of the movement of divine revelation in Israel.

The Mediation of Revelation

For Torrance, Israel, like the human race at large, is utterly blind and does not know God. Indeed, the fallen mind of Israel is alien to the truth of God. So the

very existence among the nations the basis and provisional form of a new covenantal relationship which would include all nations” (“Christian/Jewish Dialogue,” 140).

26 *God and Rationality*, 158.

27 “Israel of God,” 309.

28 “Christian/Jewish Dialogue,” 141.

Lord takes great measure to accommodate Israel, and meeting Israel where it is in its darkness, God begins to name himself and introduce *new* ideas, such as the Word of God and Spirit of God, the Name of God, covenant, mercy, holiness, grace, messiah and savior, sacrifice and forgiveness, atonement, revelation and reconciliation, prophet, priest, and king, and kingdom of God,²⁹ all of which, together with the basic patterns of worship introduced by the Lord, Torrance calls “the essential furniture of our knowledge of God.”³⁰ Herein lies, for Torrance, the epistemological significance of Israel. Without Israel, and Israel’s long and anguished history, the human race would remain in the dark, trapped in its own self-referential confusion and blind to the truth of God.

In the self-revelation of God to Israel there is, for Torrance, a double adaptation, “an adaptation of divine revelation to the human mind *and* an adaptation of articulate forms of human understanding and language to divine revelation.”³¹ The Lord stoops, accommodates and meets Israel in its carnality, and begins to transform Israel’s fallen mind and thought to receive God’s self-giving and to know him. Israel was elected by God to be the “sphere” within fallen creation within which God’s self-giving could be accommodated to estranged human capacities and alienated human knowing could be adapted to receive the revelation.

It is in probing more carefully into the movement of the double adaptation of revelation and fallen human understanding that we will see more clearly what Torrance envisages as the womb of the incarnation.

1. The two-way movement. Fundamental to this mutual adaptation is a personal fellowship between God and Israel, or a two-way movement from the side of God to fallen Israel and from the side of fallen Israel to God. Torrance refers to this as a “historical dialogue.” This dialogue between God and Israel includes Israel’s human *reception* of God’s self-disclosure, which is given a critical place in the *mediation* of revelation to the fallen human race at large.

29 See *Mediation of Christ*, 28. While this list is not comprehensive it is the only such list that can be found in Torrance’s writings. It is very surprising that Torrance does not here include “substitution” or “vicarious substitution,” as that is one of the most decisive concepts in his thought on the mediation of Christ.

30 *Ibid.*, 28.

31 *Ibid.*, 17.

Torrance envisages revelation as being fulfilled and complete when God is truly and faithfully known within humanity. In *Theological Science*, under the subsection titled "The Possibility of Theological Knowledge," Torrance comments: "Our question is evidently two-fold. (a) How does God give Himself to be known? (b) How does man truly receive and know what is given? There is a two-fold movement, from the side of the object known and from the side of the knower, and both have to be fully considered — the way from God to man and the way from man to God."³² Revelation and reception form, as it were, the obvious sides of our knowledge of God. Torrance is suggesting, however, that the mediation of God's revelation already involves human reception. God mediates knowledge of himself to the fallen race at large through the fulfilling of his self-revelation from the side of humanity toward God. For Torrance, revelation involves not only the unveiling or "uncovering of God" to humanity but also as "the uncovering of the ear and heart of man to receive revelation."³³ It is not that the uncovering of God and the uncovering of the ear and heart of fallen humanity to receive revelation are two different acts. They go together.

F.W. Camfield comments that "a great poem . . . will often have to create the very faculty of understanding and appreciating it."³⁴ In a similar way, H. R. Mackintosh quotes Wordsworth as observing that "every great or original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen."³⁵ These ideas are analogous to Torrance's discussion in two ways. On the one hand, he sees that in Israel, God created in humanity a faculty for knowing himself, a taste by which he is not only relished but also known, and an art by which he is seen. On the other hand, these quotations are analogous in that both view the actual creation of the taste or faculty as the work of the writing or poem itself. The poem itself acts critically and creatively upon the mind. Thus, the unveiling

32 *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 45.

33 *Mediation of Christ*, 20.

34 F.W. Camfield, *Revelation and the Holy Spirit, An Essay in Barthian Theology* (London: Elliot Stock, 1933), 93. See also H.R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1929), 67.

35 H.R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology, Schleiermacher to Barth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, nd), 263.

of God to Israel not only summoned an answering knowing from Israel but also acted critically and creatively upon Israel's knowing and pressed to achieve its end in true and appropriate human understanding.

2. The community of reciprocity. In giving himself to fallen humanity, God called out Israel to be the unique partner of his self-revelation through and in whom his self-communication could be "earthed in human existence."³⁶ This earthing of divine revelation had as its inner dynamic a reciprocity between God's self-giving and Israel's knowing. In Israel the two-way movement involves the corporate knowing of Israel as a "community of reciprocity."³⁷ The concept refers both to Israel as a nation in living dialogue with God and to Israel as a corporate body of individuals in reciprocity with one another.³⁸

Torrance speaks of this in terms of the intersecting of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the covenant relation such that it forms "a coherent community of reciprocity between God and Israel."³⁹ Within this vertical and horizontal covenant relation, Torrance envisages the Word of God as "pressing for fuller realisation and obedient expression within the life and mind and literature of Israel."⁴⁰

The revelation of God is personal and relational. He met, accepted, and related to Israel in the midst of its brokenness and misunderstanding. The Lord creatively used the responses that his self-giving provoked as a means of further address to Israel. When Israel proved disobedient, in other words, God used their disobedience as a means of addressing Israel. At the same time, he used

36 "Christian/Jewish Dialogue," 140.

37 *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 86 and 46. See also *God and Rationality*, 146ff., and *Mediation of Christ*, 22ff.

38 In *Mediation of Christ*, 23, Torrance comments: "The covenant partnership of God with Israel incorporated a brotherly covenant among the members of Israel, and that brotherly covenant was grounded in the covenant relations of God with Israel as a whole. Thus, so to speak, the vertical and the horizontal interrelations of the covenant partnership penetrated each other, constituting a coherent community of reciprocity between God and Israel, and manifesting a community response to the self-revealing and self-giving of God to Israel."

39 *Mediation of Christ*, 23.

40 *Ibid.*, 31-32.

their reactions as a means of deepening his self-communication.⁴¹ The prophet Hosea, for example, spoke of Israel's spiritual adultery, which God used both as a means of revealing the heinousness of sin and the unconditional grace and love of God for his people. In this way Torrance says that "throughout Israel's tradition the Word of God kept creating formal and empirical correlates of its own self-utterance through which it extended its activity in space and time, progressively taking verbal and even written form through the shared understanding and shared response that developed in this people."⁴²

This, however, was far from "an easy or painless process" for Israel.⁴³ God's self-revelation to Israel involved an agonizing struggle. Time and again Torrance speaks of Israel's having "ever to be broken and remade, reshaped, and realigned with the covenant will of God,"⁴⁴ of the conflict of revelation with Israel's "in-built bias against it"⁴⁵ and deeply ingrained habits of thought and understanding.⁴⁶ Revelation means God's self-giving, and reception of God's self-giving means communion with God. But Israel is thoroughly *fallen*. In a lengthy yet moving passage, Torrance comments:

The Jews were chosen to be fashioned by God. But this is the constant marvel of the whole story: all through history, as the Old Testament tells us, the Jews were the most stubborn and stiff-necked people you could imagine. They disobeyed God at every great moment in God's purpose. They knew well they were chosen by God for the special purpose of salvation, yet all through their history they fought against Him. They stoned and abused His messengers. They killed the prophets. They contradicted God to His face, and resisted Him, proving themselves utterly unworthy of His love, and broke themselves again and again upon the Word of God so that they were smitten down in suffering and agony and judgment . . .

And what did God do in the face of all that? He took this stubborn and rebellious people, took them with all their recalcitrance and resistance to His love, and subjected them to ordeal by history and judgment. He used their very

41 "Israel of God," 308.

42 *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 87. See *God and Rationality*, 148.

43 *Mediation of Christ*, 17.

44 "Israel of God," 309.

45 *Mediation of Christ*, 20.

46 *Ibid.*, 18.

stubbornness and the judgment they brought upon themselves in order to train them. By elaborate religious ritual and carefully framed laws, by rivers of blood from millions of animal sacrifices, by the broken hearts of the Psalmists and the profoundest agony of the Prophets, by the tragic story of Israelite politics, and the shattering of their power again and again, God taught the Jews through hundreds and hundreds of years until there was burned into their soul the meaning of holiness and righteousness, of sin and uncleanness, of love and mercy and grace, of faithfulness and forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, atonement, and salvation; the meaning of creation, of the Kingdom of God, of judgment, death, and at last resurrection; the thought of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, and yet the Prophet, Priest and King.⁴⁷

It was through this painful and agonizing relationship between God's self-revelation and Israel's corporate response and corporate understanding and corporate reception of his self-revelation that God's self-communication began to achieve its end in human understanding, and the Word of God began to clothe itself with Israel's language.

It is along these lines that Torrance envisages God as acting creatively on corporate Israel and forging a "whole set of spiritual tools, appropriate forms of understanding, worship and expression"⁴⁸ and bringing into being "ways of human knowing and obedience to his revelation"⁴⁹ that could be used in furthering his self-communication. But Torrance also says that these ways of human knowing and obedience to God's revelation were "assumed into union with it and constituted the human expression in concept and word of that revelation in its communication to man."⁵⁰ That is to say, the answering movement from the side of Israel toward God was "taken up into the movement of the Word"⁵¹ or "taken up into the movement

47 "Salvation Is of the Jews," *EQ* 22 (1950), pp. 165–66

48 *Mediation of Christ*, 17.

49 *Ibid.*, 31.

50 *Ibid.*, 31. Torrance can speak of this fulfillment of revelation from the side of man toward God as revelation providing "a true and faithful human response as part of its achievement for us, to us and in us" (*Ibid.*, 31). This needs serious qualification. The two-way movement through which there was an organic correlation of revelation and human understanding was only beginning in historic Israel. Strictly speaking, it was only in Christ that the true and faithful response for us, to us, and in us was accomplished.

51 *God and Rationality*, 138.

of revelation"⁵² as a "constitutive part of God's revelation to man."⁵³ While Torrance points out that the Word of God "was encountered in historic Israel as yet only in its 'formable' state (to borrow an old Augustinian expression), for it was still in the process of taking shape in the habits of the human mind and speech,"⁵⁴ he nevertheless contends that through the two-way movement involving corporate reciprocity there arose in Israel "appropriate structures of understanding and articulating the Word of God which were of more than transient value, for under divine inspiration they were assimilated to the human form of the Word of God, essential to its communication and apprehension."⁵⁵

3. Revelation and reconciliation. It should be clear by this point that Torrance does not think of divine revelation and Israel as being extrinsically related. The fulfilling of revelation from God toward Israel and from Israel toward God involved much more for Torrance than Israel's extrinsic and mechanical reception and passing on of spaceless and timeless transcripts, so to speak.⁵⁶ If revelation is to achieve its end in human understanding and communion with God, it must do so through the medium of language, for language is the currency of society. But it is not enough, Torrance suggests, for God to hand Israel statements about himself in Israel's community language, for that would mean Israel would be allowed to read its prior "communal meaning"⁵⁷ back into God, which, for Torrance, was

52 *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 85.

53 *God and Rationality*, 138. See also *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 85. In *Mediation of Christ*, Torrance comments: "Throughout that persistent and progressive reciprocity which God maintained between himself and Israel, the Word of God addressed to Israel did not return to him fruitless without accomplishing his purpose of succeeding in the task he gave it. For it laid hold upon the mind and will of this people in a creative way which called forth from it responses that were taken up, purified and assimilated to the Word of God as the means of its ever-deepening penetration into the understanding, life and service of Israel, so that it could be bearer of divine revelation for all mankind" (87).

54 *God and Rationality*, 148.

55 *Mediation of Christ*, 31.

56 See *ibid.*, 24.

57 *God and Rationality*, 147.

inevitably pagan and carnal. If there is to be a real mediation of revelation in Israel's language, then the thought and life of that language must be converted. That is to say, the mediation of revelation in Israel involved a fundamental deconstruction and transformation of Israel's fallen mind and thought, worship and life — indeed, of its whole existence.

On the one hand, Torrance is emphasizing that this transformation was a phenomenon involving corporate Israel's understanding and knowing. On the other hand, he is emphasizing that this conversion was interrelated with Israel's life and being, soul and history. Knowing and being, for Torrance, are inseparable. Hence, the persistent struggle between the Word of God and the mind and will and heart of Israel, between Israel and its Lord, meant living in a movement of conflict and conformity with the Word of God. Indeed, Torrance contends with startling words that to be the recipient of divine revelation meant being the "prehistory of the crucifixion and resurrection."⁵⁸ So Torrance speaks not just of a revolutionary matrix of thought, ideas, concepts, and understanding being forged in Israel but also of Israel's becoming the first form of the incarnation and the kingdom of the Triune God.

We have here three interrelated points of capital importance in Torrance's thought. First, the unveiling of God to Israel was profoundly personal and real. The revelation of God was not just a set of theological facts rippling the surface of Israel's corporate intellect. For Torrance, revelation does not mean the transmission of mere information about God but the personal presence of God himself. To receive the revelation means fellowship and communion — indeed, union with God. The revelation of God thus involved the penetration of the Word of God into Israel's corporate being and soul. Hence, Torrance comments that the Word of God is on the road *to becoming flesh* in Israel or that Israel is, as we saw above, the *prehistory of the incarnation*. The self-giving of God to Israel was so real, so intimate it began to incarnate itself in Israel through communion.

Second, this "first form of the incarnation" necessarily made "Israel stand out as an oddity among the other peoples of the earth."⁵⁹ As the presence of the Lord began to be embodied in Israel, Israel's way of being could only

58 *Mediation of Christ*, 20.

59 *Ibid.*, 18.

appear absurd to the fallen and alienated race at large. But the real presence of the Lord and his life not only made Israel strange and different from the nations; it also created conflict with them.⁶⁰ The very bitterness and enmity that Israel felt in its harrowing relationship with the Lord, the nations around Israel felt because Israel “embodied” the Lord’s presence. Israel became the scapegoat of the world’s rage against God. Herein, for Torrance, lies “the root of anti-Semitism”; for it is “against Israel itself that we vent our resentment.”⁶¹

Third, the mediation of revelation in Israel necessarily involved *reconciliation*. Here, the critical point is that Israel is fallen, carnal, pagan, and therefore thoroughly alien to God. It is one thing to reflect on the creature’s knowing the Creator or the finite’s receiving the infinite; it is quite another when we add alienation, darkness, and estrangement. How could *alienated* Israel receive the revelation of God? How could God reach fallen Israel, and how could alienated Israel actually know God? For Torrance, it was only through suffering, agony, and the most profound and thorough conversion. The self-giving of God has its counterpart not merely in Israel’s intellectual understanding but in Israel’s communion with God, and communion with God is the fruit of the radical conversion of Israel — reconciliation.

The point of supreme importance here is that for Torrance, the unveiling of God to Israel is a real unveiling of *God himself*, not just of facts about God. God is the content of the unveiling. And it is an unveiling of God himself to real Israel, *carnal* and *fallen* Israel, Israel *estranged* and *alienated* from God and at *enmity* with God. The covenant relationship was one of grace and mercy and life, to be sure, but, given Israel’s alienation, it was also one of pain and agony, for Israel’s fallen existence was thrown into the fiery furnace of God’s presence.

The Womb of the Incarnation

We have seen that for Torrance creation is the act of the overflowing love and grace of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with the determined purpose of sharing

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

this trinitarian life with the human race. With the fall of Adam and the shattering of communion between humanity and God, the “original” purpose of God becomes an “eschatological goal.” God, in other words, elects Israel from out of the mass of fallen humanity to be the mediator of his great purpose of restoration for all.

Torrance’s attention thus falls, first, on the reestablishment of “the one all-embracing covenant of the overflowing love of God” with Israel and God’s provision of a covenanted or vicarious way of response, through which Israel could come freely into the presence of God. But in order to move beyond mere ritual into personal reality, this response needed to be translated into the flesh and blood of Israel’s existence.

Second, Torrance’s attention falls on the mediation of revelation. As a basic concept, revelation involves both the unveiling of God to Israel and the uncovering of the eye and ear of Israel to know God. Torrance sees this as forming a very real yet agonizing fellowship between God and Israel, in which the unveiling of God achieves its end in true and faithful human knowing — communion. It is as the unveiling of God meets Israel’s true human knowing that the mediation of revelation completes the circle of its own movement, and real fellowship with God and his fallen creation is restored.

But the mediation of revelation involves, as we saw above, the unveiling of *God* to *carnal* Israel, and thus revelation achieves its end only in and through real reconciliation. Israel’s history is the first form, as it were, of the Word’s assumption of our fallen flesh and of incarnational atonement.

In his vision of the necessary integration of revelation and reconciliation, Torrance avoids Western extrinsic legalism in favor of a thoroughly relational and incarnational understanding of the work of Christ. Israel’s history prepares for the incarnation of the Lord himself, the Father’s eternal Son. He will enter into Israel’s existence, and into Israel’s side of the covenant relationship, taking Israel’s place before the Father. Unlike Israel and Adam, Jesus will love the Father with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. In Jesus, the trinitarian life will set up shop, so to speak, in Israel, and as he lives out nothing less than his own sonship, the one all-embracing covenant of grace will be filled — from Israel’s side — with the Son’s own sonship and life and anointing with the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself — in his incarnate life with his Father and as the anointed one — will become the covenanted way of communion — the way, the truth, and

the life (John 14:6), for Israel and for all humanity. The original purpose of God, which birthed creation and called Israel into covenant relationship, will at last be fulfilled from inside Adam's fall.

Representing Israel — and in Israel, the human race — Jesus will be the vicarious man in whom the provisional way of communion with God will be made abidingly and eternally real for all people. The relationship between God and Israel will be filled with the trinitarian life — forever.

In the history of Israel, God prepares a womb for the incarnation of his Son. To this point we have seen that this womb involves the creation of a revolutionary conceptual framework, forged out of Israel's fallen mind, through which the human race can begin to perceive and know God. And we have seen that, for Torrance, it is impossible for revelation to be detached from Israel's soul and corporate being, and indeed from Israel's relationship with creation. This creates a harrowing and painful ordeal for Israel, for the presence of the Lord is profoundly disturbing, creating conflict with everything Israel is in its alienation. The womb of the incarnation, in its deepest sense, involves fallen Israel's wholesale conflict with the Lord himself, as his self-revelation clashes with Israel's alienation.

Two critical questions emerge here. The first concerns the ground or basis of Jesus' becoming the vicarious man, the substitute and representative of Israel and of the human race. The second concerns the relationship between "the covenanted way of communion" and "the mediation of revelation." As we probe into these two questions we will come to the heart of Torrance's vision of Israel as the womb of the incarnation and reconciling work of Christ.

1. The ground of Jesus' vicarious humanity. Torrance is critical of the way Western extrinsic legalism makes Jesus' substitution on the cross liable to the accusation of legal fiction.⁶² What is the basis of Jesus' suffering in our place? How does what happens to Jesus have any real application to us? What is the connection between Jesus' suffering and guilty sinners? What is the ground of his substitution? While these are difficult questions for the legal tradition, Torrance faces the same questions. What is the ground of Jesus' becoming the vicarious man? Again and again Torrance speaks of Israel's "vicarious mission,"

62 See *God and Rationality*, 63ff; *Mediation of Christ*, 50ff.; and *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 63.

and of the “provisional form of communion” in Israel for all peoples. But what is the basis for positing Israel’s vicarious role? What is the real connection between Israel and the nations? Similarly, what qualifies Jesus, so to speak, to be our representative and substitute, and how real is his substitution? Is his vicarious humanity simply the fruit of God’s command, the product of an arbitrary divine decision that this is the way things should be structured? If so, how far is this position from the fiction of the legal model?

Torrance, following John and Paul and the author of Hebrews (John 1:1–3; Col. 1:115–20; Heb. 1:1–3), believes Jesus to be the one in and through and by and for whom all things were created and are constantly upheld. While the incarnation means that the Father’s Son became a real human being, it is not to be overlooked that the one who became human was no ordinary person, but the Creator and sustainer of all things. As the one in and through and by and for whom all things were created and are sustained, Jesus already has a connection with everyone in history and indeed with all creation — prior to the incarnation. His coming means the coming of the Lord, the connected one, the one in whom all creation exists, lives, moves, and has its being. This is the proper theological ground for the vicarious humanity of Christ.⁶³ When the Father’s Son himself steps personally into human existence, he does so not as an isolated, radical individual but as the one who is already connected to all creation, already the source and sustainer of creation’s existence and life — including the human race. The question is not, on what ground could Jesus be our substitute and representative? The question is, on what ground could it be any other way?

Given who he is, what becomes of him has immediate and profound implications for the human race and all creation. If he dies, we die. If he rises again, we rise again. If he ascends to the Father, humanity and all creation ascends to the Father in him. Jesus’ existence as the Son incarnate is vicarious. His incarnate relationships with the Father and with the Holy Spirit are inclusive.

It is one thing, however, to clarify the ground of Jesus’ vicarious life and solidarity with us in the fact that he is the one in and through and for and by

63 For more on the ground of the vicarious humanity of Christ, see my essays, “The Truth of All Truths,” and “The Cosmic Christ.” These essays are available at www.perichoresis.org.

whom all things were created and are sustained; but that still leaves Jesus too removed from us in our fallen state. He is our representative and our substitute, and we are included in him and what becomes of him, but how does our inclusion actually reach us in our alienation? While Jesus is not merely an external divine gift that is credited to our account in heaven, neither is he merely the one in whom we live and move and have our being. He is the one who crosses all worlds and meets us in our alienation.

One of the most powerful themes throughout Torrance's writings is his unrelenting insistence that Jesus Christ assumed our fallen flesh, without sin. Given that Jesus Christ is the Creator — the one in and through and by and for whom all things came into being and are sustained — we can see the connection that he has with the human race. But though we live and move and have our being in him, we are thoroughly fallen and alien to his life. For Torrance, the vicarious humanity of Christ is of no value at all unless it actually reaches us in our sin and shame. Hence he insists, with the early church, that "the unassumed is the unhealed." Jesus not only became a true human being; he became *flesh*.⁶⁴

This affirmation of the Son's assumption of our fallen flesh is not relegated to obscure footnotes. It appears in explicit form at least sixty-six times in Torrance's writings, and in at least nineteen different publications.⁶⁵ Torrance does not sweep it under the carpet of vague allusion, and neither does he mention it in

64 *When Christ Comes and Comes Again*, 73.

65 See *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 47-50, 53f, 75, 79; *Mediation of Christ*, 48-53, 75f, 81, 92, 98; *Theology in Reconstruction*, 156f, 198, 241; SF, lxxxv; *When Christ Comes and Comes Again*, 20, 41, 73, 74, 106, 107, 165; *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, 1:240-41, 244-45, 253, 2:90, 130; *God and Rationality*, 143; *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelation of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1984), 341; *Theology in Reconstruction*, 167-69; *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988): 4, 133, 157, 162f, 168, 183-88, 267; *Centrality of Christ*, 17ff.; "Atoning Obedience of Christ," 66ff., 75; "The Arnoldshain Theses on Holy Communion," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 15 (1962), 12; "Reconciliation in Christ and in His Church," *Biblical Theology* 11:2 (1961), 30-31; "The Mission of the Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 19 (1966), 129; "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986), pp. 473-76; "Christ's Human Nature," Letter to the Editor, *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (May 1984), 114.

passing in some kind of hurried and embarrassed reservation. He brings it right to the unavoidable center of his writing and sees that the whole mediation of Christ hinges on the Son's taking to himself our fallen humanity, to deny which, he contends, "is to deny the very foundation of our redemption in Christ."⁶⁶

The assumption of our fallen humanity, without sin, means that the one in and through and by and for whom all things were created and are sustained has now reached not only our humanness, but our humanness in its carnal, alienated, and broken form.

2. *The intensification of Israel's conflict with God.* Such a vision is as beautiful as it is shocking. The Father's Son himself became what we are, assuming not a pristine, prefallen form of our humanity, but our fallen flesh itself. In living out his sonship within Adam's flesh, he brought the trinitarian life within Adam's hell and Israel's agony. There remains, however, a real question as to the relevance of Jesus' triumph for us. The problem lies in the fact that the trinitarian life earthed in Adam's fall in Jesus Christ remains contained, so to speak, in him. He knows the Father and life in his embrace, and he experiences the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and has brought his life within our fallen humanity. But in what way does all that Jesus is and has reach us personally?

In turning to our second question, we can see the way forward. What is the relationship between the "covenanted way of communion" and "the mediation of revelation"? Are these two lines of thought in Torrance's discussion of Israel different or unrelated, or are they interrelated? While Torrance himself does not explicitly relate or interrelate the two different aspects of his discussion of Israel, he clearly assumes a profound interrelation. The "covenanted way of communion" had to be "translated into the flesh and blood of Israel." The "mediation of revelation" involved "reconciliation" as its counterpart. When Torrance sets out his discussion of the mediation of revelation, in which the unveiling of God is pressing to achieve its end in human knowing through reconciliation, he is essentially reinterpreting the history of Israel as the covenanted way of communion already being translated into reality in fallen Israel. The ritual is already on the road to becoming flesh. The kingdom is

66 *Conflict and Agreement in the Church*, 1:175.

already coming. The mediation of revelation, with all of its fiery conflict and gut-wrenching struggle, is the covenanted way of communion being translated into the flesh and blood of Israel's existence.

The two-way movement, the unveiling of God and the knowing response of Israel, the giving and receiving of revelation, forms, as it were, *the way of salvation*, the way real communion between God and fallen creation is being restored. What Torrance is actually saying is that in Israel the incarnation of the Son of God is already beginning to happen. This extraordinary relationship is so real, so intensely personal that it produces a fourfold fruit.

First, the relationship between God and carnal Israel means that Israel's fallen mind is thrown into the fiery furnace of divine revelation and a new and revolutionary world of thought, a matrix of unparalleled concepts and ideas about God, about divine-human relationship, about covenant, salvation, and kingdom, which is thoroughly "human" but no less "appropriate" to God, begins to form in Israel's corporate life. This new world of thought is the human conceptual correlate to God's self-giving — the new eyes through which humanity can begin to see and know God.

Second, insofar as Israel is able to receive the self-giving of God, the kingdom emerges in her corporate existence. "This is eternal life, that they may know You the only true God" (John 17:3). To fellowship with God is to know God and to share in God's life, which is shalom. Thus, in Israel's real fellowship with the Lord, the Lord's abounding life begins to express itself in Israel's corporate existence. The kingdom of the Triune God is beginning to emerge in Israel's family relationships and in Israel's relationship with creation.

Third, the extraordinary relationship between Israel and God makes Israel stand out as an oddity among the nations. The covenant was not between God and a perfect people, but between God and a broken people. But as Israel walked with God, her language and way of being, her culture and vision began to embody and express the divine fellowship and life, which not only made Israel different but also called forth hostility from the nations. As the presence of God's life in Israel exposed Israel's own bankruptcy, Israel's presence exposed the bankruptcy of the nations around her. For Torrance, Israel became the international scapegoat on whom alienated humanity poured out its wrath against God.

Fourth, insofar as fallen Israel was unable to walk with the Lord or to receive his self-revelation, there is painful conflict and rebellion. How could fallen, alien, carnal Israel possibly bear the Lord's real presence? It was too much.

It is here that Torrance's thought on Israel leads us beyond Western extrinsic legalism into a truly incarnational vision of reconciliation.⁶⁷ We return here to reflect more carefully on Torrance's insistence that the Israel involved in covenant relationship with the Lord is thoroughly *fallen*. Thus, as we have seen, for Torrance the revelation of God necessarily has its counterpart in the *reconciliation* of Israel's being and thought. And Torrance can, at points, write as though the reconciliation of Israel was all but complete. That, however, is not his main point at all. In Israel we are dealing only with the *preparation* of the womb of the incarnation (or of the womb of reconciliation, salvation, or the kingdom). And this preparation involves not only the beginnings of revelation and reconciliation, and the consequent revolutionary theological categories and ideas that emerged in Israel, and not only the restructuring of Israel's very way of being and the emergence of the kingdom of God, but the preparation also involves *the deliberate intensification of Israel's conflict with God*.⁶⁸

To be the recipient of divine revelation means to walk with God himself, and that means both seeing the light of life and finding hope, and feeling the pain of being stripped naked with all of your illusions laid bare. The presence of the Lord meant there was nowhere for fallen Israel to hide. But who wants to be exposed? Who wants to have their dirty laundry aired, so to speak, before the world? Who can bear the light of life? Adam hid. Israel couldn't, for the Lord would not go away. And his presence meant that the raw nerve of Israel's death and dying and sadness were inevitably jabbed, sending Israel into rebellion, "for the more deeply revelation pierces into the roots of human being the more it intensifies the enmity of the human heart against God."⁶⁹

That intensification, however, is not to be regarded simply as an accidental result of the covenant but rather as something that God deliberately took into the full design of his reconciling activity, for it was the will and the way of God's

67 See my essay, "Bearing Our Scorn: Jesus and the Way of Trinitarian Love." This essay is available on my website www.perichoresis.org.

68 Parts of this section come from my essay, "Bearing Our Scorn."

69 *Mediation of Christ*, 21.

grace to effect reconciliation with man at his very worst, precisely in his state of rebellion against God. That is to say, in his marvelous wisdom and love God worked out in Israel a way of reconciliation that does not depend on the worth of men and women but makes their very sin in rebellion against him the means by which he binds them forever to himself and through which he reconstitutes their relations with him in such a way that their true end is fully and perfectly realized in unsullied communion with himself.⁷⁰

The astonishing point here is that Israel's rebellion was actually anticipated and strategically included in the way of reconciliation. The Lord knew that Israel would not be able to cope with his presence, and would rebel, rejecting not simply its calling but the Lord himself. It is this conflict — indeed, this rebellion of Israel and Israel's rejection of the Lord, all of which was deliberately stirred up by God — that Torrance sees at the heart of reconciliation.

"Reconciliation means sharing in all that the other is."⁷¹ But how could the Lord share in Israel's estrangement and alienation? How could the Lord bridge the gap and truly meet fallen Israel? To be sure, as we have seen, the Lord reaches out in accommodating love and patience with Israel, but such accommodation could only take the relationship so far. If real reconciliation is to take shape in Israel, all the alienation of Adam's fall has to come to the surface. But how? How will the Lord possibly get to the bottom of Adam's fall and so bring about ultimate reconciliation?

Inconceivable as it may sound, the answer is by the Lord himself suffering Israel's wrath and rejection. "If the covenant partnership of Israel with God meant not only that the conflict of Israel with God became intensified but was carried to its supreme point in the fulfilment of the Covenant, then Israel under God could do no other but refuse the Messiah."⁷² And here, Torrance says, "we must clap our hands upon our mouth and speak only in fear and trembling within the forgiving love of God — Israel was elected also to reject the Messiah."⁷³ The deepest meaning of the "womb of the incarnation" is the rebellion of Israel against God — and indeed, Israel's bitter rejection of the

70 *Ibid.*, 38. See also, "Israel and the Incarnation," 6ff.

71 "Reconciliation in Christ and in His Church," 31.

72 *Mediation of Christ*, 43.

73 *Ibid.*, 43.

Lord himself. And it is this rejection that the Lord will suffer in person in the incarnate Son.

In Jesus Christ, the Lord comes in person into Israel's fallen existence. As throughout the covenant relationship, his presence stirred up Israel's fallen animosity and enmity, but in his incarnate presence, that animosity and enmity reaches a boiling point. Israel's response, our response — the response of the human race — to the personal presence of the Lord was intense and simple — *Crucify Him!* And we did.

Pouring our wrath and resentment, our bitterness and pain, out on Jesus, he refused to retaliate or call on legions of angels, deliberately and willfully becoming the scapegoat for our enmity against God. We cursed the Father's Son and damned him. As he bowed before our scorn, suffering personally from our wrath, he met and embraced Israel and humanity in the trenches of our fallen, broken, traumatic existence.

For Torrance, revelation inevitably means reconciliation, and reconciliation means incarnation. Incarnation means becoming what we are. Becoming what we are means suffering from our darkness and wrath. Suffering our wrath means the Lord himself meets us and embraces us as we are at our very worst. In becoming human, submitting himself to our wrongheaded darkness, and allowing Israel and humanity to reject and crucify him, the Father's Son cut the covenanted way of communion into the very core of human alienation from God. In bowing to suffer our curse, the Father's Son earthed his own life with his Father and his own anointing with the Holy Spirit in the cesspool of Adam's pathological world. The trinitarian life of God has now reached and dwells in the darkest hell of human existence. The covenanted way of communion has become human, and not just human, but flesh, and not just flesh, but abiding reality in our rejection of God. "Thus the Covenant will of God for fellowship with man was translated into eternal actuality."⁷⁴ The covenant promise "I will be your God, and you will be my people" has been filled with "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom my soul delights," and "Abba, Father." The blessed Trinity has met the human race as it really is in its terrible darkness, embraced us and drawn us within the trinitarian life and light and love. Through suffering our

74 "Atoning Obedience of Christ," 71.

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scorn and curse, Jesus has filled the fall of Adam, and the old covenant with Israel, with his own relationship with his Father and the Holy Spirit — just as it was planned before the foundation of the world.