

WHERE ARE THE FRUITS OF LOVE?

T. F. Torrance, The Vicarious Humanity of Christ, and Ecclesiology

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Abstract: *The fruits of love should be found in the community of Jesus Christ, the church. But that is often not the case. It may be that the church suffers from "theological anemia" in its Christology and soteriology. T. F. Torrance's doctrine of the vicarious humanity, not just death, of Christ offers an alternative. Based on the eternal trinitarian relationship of love, the Father in love sends the Son, and the Son responds with a perfect response of love to the Father. This is a love that is a free love, not out of a compulsion or need to love. Here is the basis for the free acts of both giving and receiving love in the community of Christ, the church.*

"Sheer Action" as the Fruit of Love

Love is known by "sheer action," Kierkegaard argues. (Perhaps it is silly that one should even "argue" about "action"! Well, SK was always known for irony!) "Disembodied love" is not real love, Ray Anderson contends.¹ Love is known by its fruit. The biblical testimony that "love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1) is not to mean a coercive act. Love builds up, so it does not bulldoze; it does not pulverize, even if it means destroying in order to establish something new, like love in someone else.² No, building up another in love means controlling oneself, not trying to control another.³ But Kierkegaard interestingly claims that the source of this fruit is "the hidden life of love."⁴ In doing so he brings us back to the question of need.

1 Ray S. Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 227.

2 S. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 216.

3 *Ibid.*, 217.

4 *Ibid.*, 10.



We need to love and to be loved. We need community. We need the vicarious humanity of Christ in the life of the church, as suggested by T. F. Torrance and others.

Yet this love presupposes love is in the other person; this can be very presumptuous.⁵ Only the Son can presume that of the Father. That is why we need the vicarious love of the Son. We cannot and should not presume upon the love of another, as much as we need to love and want to be loved. This “sheer action” of love is originally an eternal trinitarian reality within God, the opposite of a disembodied love, love that is only an ideal, a romantic illusion at best, a psychotic dysfunction at worst. In contrast, the triune love is a love that can “believe all things” (1 Cor. 13:7) with the Son and makes his love more embodied all the time, in his body and in the world, as erring and misguided as it is.⁶ That love does not live merely by the empirical, but by the trust of the Son of God.

A Need Fulfilled?

Is the need to love and to be loved a joy of life or a curse? And is it truly divine love if it simply satisfies a need? Is there a need in the triune God to love, or is love eternally a choice, even in God, especially as expressed in the incarnate response of love to the Father by the Son, done for us and in our behalf, in a vicarious way? If God is compelled by his very nature of being “the God of love” to love, would not God be like the mean stepfather, forced by marriage to “love” his stepchildren, but whose acts toward the children are often cruel and spiteful. And what kind of love can be that ignited among the children? They may never see an example of love in their lives.

A need is found, however, when one knows the trustworthiness of the one who is loved. The Son knows that in the Father. Even if the Son doubts in Gethsemane or on the Cross, the love by which he is loved is greater than any doubt he might have. Love does not fear doubt, Ray Anderson reminds us, for it does not spring from reason but from reality, where love says to “doubt love if it dare!”⁷

Jesus Christ reveals God truly, although in human flesh; he is not just a Halloween costume that speaks of God. Torrance’s words are unforgettable: “God’s revelation is identical with himself in the oneness and differentiation of God within his own eternal Being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for what God is

5 Ibid., 219.

6 Ibid., 221.

7 Ray S. Anderson, *Soulprints: Personal Reflections on Faith and Love* (Huntington Beach, CA: Ray S. Anderson, 1996), 72.

toward us in his historical self-manifestation in the Gospel as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he is revealed to be inherently and eternally in himself."⁸ Torrance seems to allow for no wiggle room here; the "historical self-manifestation" in Jesus Christ reveals the eternal God. But he will have a caveat. Yes, the *homoousion* itself of the Nicene Creed theologically tells us "that what God is antecedently, eternally, and inherently in himself he is indeed toward us in the incarnate economy of his saving action in Jesus Christ on behalf."⁹ Since the Son is of the "same substance" of the Father, his incarnation reveals the divine Godhead. The immanence of the incarnation is no barrier to divine revelation. Both the *homoousion* of the Son and the mission of the Spirit from the Father through the incarnate Son "have an essential place within the very life of God."¹⁰ Yet this revelation also reveals that there is a mystery, a limitation, so that one may not read back "temporal and causal connections" of creaturely existence or what is "human and finite" into divine being, otherwise this would be a "mythological projection of ideas" unto God.¹¹ In a way, this would be reading a kind of "natural theology" back into God. The oneness between the Son and the Spirit allows a "signitive, not mimetic" relationship, not one that reads back into God "material and creaturely images."¹² By "signitive" I take Torrance to mean the "sign" that points beyond it, the "witness" common in Torrance's theology that refers beyond itself, in contrast to the *mimesis*, the mimicking, identifying, such as identifying the words of the Bible with God himself, as does rationalistic fundamentalism, a frequent criticism in Torrance's writings.¹³

A mimetic approach might be expected, even welcomed, as a way to involve a genuine "man-Godward" response to the "God-manward" initial movement of divine revelation of love in Jesus Christ. Should we not imitate God's love in Christ? Is this not the *imitatio Christi*? Yet this is where the vicarious humanity of Christ steps in and rules out our audacity in such an independent response.¹⁴

8 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 1.

9 Ibid. 97.

10 Ibid., 97, 99.

11 Ibid., 97.

12 Ibid., 101.

13 See the review of B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 7, no. 1 (1954), 104-8; *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 1980), 36; *Reality and Evangelical Theology*. The Payton Lectures, 1981 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 10, 16ff., 61, 68.

14 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 106.

However, is this true if God has *chosen* these “temporal and causal connections” to communicate who he is? Truly, they are unable to communicate exhaustively who God is. And, like any analogy, they fail at points. Much more, that is true with God. But just because these connections are not exhaustively true does not mean they are not sufficient. Torrance himself often draws the distinction between our ability to *apprehend* God, because of revelation, versus an ability to *comprehend* God.¹⁵ The eternal, infinite God of the universe we will never be able to comprehend, but we can apprehend what we know by his grace, and what we know first of all is *relational*, the relations between the Father and the Son, the love. That love, however, may surprise us. It may, for example, include “obedience,” “worship,” even “faith,” all actions of the Son towards the Father, in response to the Father’s love. We must be careful, of course, not to read our ideas of love into the divine, triune love, but instead be taught what divine love is. This is the challenge, is it not?

Jesus Christ himself, Torrance contends, as “the one and only Form and Image of God given to us,” is “the crucial point of reference” that will “filter away” from our conceiving of God “all that is inappropriate or foreign to him such as, for example, sexual relations or distinctions in gender which by their nature belong only to creaturely beings.”¹⁶ But did not the Creator become the creature in some paradoxical way which we cannot understand in the incarnation? Jesus Christ was a male. There must be stronger, more specific criteria for knowledge of what in the economic Trinity reveals the immanent, or ontological, Trinity. And is Torrance helpful when he speaks of the coordination of the *homoousion* of the Son with the *homoousion* of the Spirit as a criterion? In what way? He is not specific. However, when he continues to speak of the relation between “the homoousial oneness between the economic Trinity and the transcendent Trinity” and “the doctrine of the perichoretic relations within the eternal Communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,” his work provides much more promise. For *perichoresis* speaks of the “mutual indwelling” of love between the persons of the Trinity. The criteria (for what we know in the economic Trinity, such as in the incarnation, that is a revelation of the eternal(immanent or ontological) nature of God) are the acts of *love* which the Spirit leads (Luke 4:1) the humanity of Christ to do in obedience to the Father. The “obedience” of the Son (not understood exclusively in terms of our experience of “obedience,” however), is one example. The Son responds to the Father’s love with obedience, and obedience of love, along with faith, service, and worship, in the vicarious humanity of Christ. How

15 Ibid., 26.

16 Ibid., 107.

can we deny this?

Because we can only approach the ineffable eternal being of God with fear and trembling, we rush to the vicarious humanity of Christ in his priesthood and mediation, realizing that that the only way to know God in a “godly” way is through “godly ways of thought and speech,” the way of worship, which is best exemplified by Christ the High Priest (in Hebrews).¹⁷ The fruit of love is found in our participation in this eternal life of love.

The result of Athanasius’ crusade for the doctrine of the *homoousion* was to emphasize in the church a unity between the Father and Son, finding their unity of love in contrast to the separation found in Arius’ doctrine. Arius could claim that the ontological distinction between the Father and the Son might argue more strongly for love, but the *homoousion* enabled Athanasius to bring love into his understanding of the being of God, the being in God known in God’s acts, as Torrance puts it. Love is therefore essential to who God is. The vicarious humanity of Christ, that man-Godward act, reflects that which is eternal in God, a response of love to love. That is a fruit of love. Love continues to grow. The Father is not the Father without the Son, the very basis for mutual indwelling, the communion of *perichoresis*.¹⁸ Each person of the Trinity retains his individuality, in a union without confusion. *Perichoresis* upholds, and does not destroy, distinctiveness. Reciprocity establishes distinctiveness.¹⁹ The fruit of love is found in reciprocal relations, in community. That is our goal to which we are heading. The fruit of love, in other words, is eschatological. We may be in loneliness now (Kierkegaard!), but we are heading towards community. (Why do the monks always seek a monastery?)

The One Purpose of God’s Love

Yet, Jesus Christ manifests to us God’s love in a particular form: as John McLeod Campbell claims, the very nature of the incarnation is to declare the one purpose of God’s love, including the Father who sends the Son.²⁰ Christ is doing nothing more and nothing less than to draw us to the Father in a life

17 Ibid., 110-11. Cf. Athanasius in his *Orations against the Arians*.

18 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 130, 132.

19 Ibid., 175.

20 John McLeod Campbell, “Campbell’s Introduction (to the Second Edition)” in *The Nature of the Atonement* (Edinburgh and Grand Rapids: Handsel Press and Eerdmans, 1996), 20.

of communion.²¹ The atonement, seen as the development of the incarnation (not separate from it, as is often the case), manifests this one purpose of love and is not, as in many theories of the atonement, God's attempt to reconcile justice and love. Jesus' cry on the cross is a part of the atonement, and however "Godforsaken" it may be, it is still a "presence-amid-absence" (Alan E. Lewis) in which God is there in the midst of our hells.²² What "need" we have to be measured, Campbell continues, is not just our need "but by what God has done to meet our need."²³ We do not see a cross of a criminal as the solution to our need. This is in contrast to "the inadequate and superficial views of the gospel which so often gives peace, even to minds considerably awakened on the subject of religion."²⁴ Our "need" may be for "peace," but it is only our conception of "peace." God's love will not let us be satisfied with that.

God's "Holy Sorrow" of Love

At this point, Campbell brings in the notion of God's "holy sorrow" as a predicate of God's love. God is in sorrow over our sin, over our plight. God's sorrow brings forth in the humanity of Christ a perfect confession of our sins, an "Amen from the depths of the humanity of Christ to the divine condemnation of his sin."²⁵ The Son is the one who says, "Yes, Father, you are right, and we respond with the confession of sin." The Son declares that on our behalf and in our place. This confession of sin, Campbell continues, "has all the elements of a perfect repentance in humanity for all the sin of man – a perfect sorrow – a perfect contrition – all the elements of such a repentance, and that in absolute perfection, all – excepting the personal consciousness of sin . . ."²⁶

Love as Sorrow - Sorrow as Repentance

Love is the motivation for sorrow and repentance, as seen in the story of the repentant woman (Luke 7:36-50). "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much" (Luke 7:47; cf. Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1). Love

21 James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 93.

22 Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 91.

23 Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (1996), 21.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 118.

26 Ibid.

as sorrow is the motivation for penitence. Penitence is not a condition in order to be accepted by God, but as C.S. Lewis remarks, this is "simply a description of what going back to him is like."²⁷ The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) may be more of a description of the atonement than many expect. So also is the sorrow found in the weeping of the woman who anoints Jesus in Luke 7:37-38. In fact, as R. C. Moberly comments, love here is expressed as sorrow. Sorrow does not merely accompany love, but love is expressed as sorrow for her sins.²⁸ But perfect penitence is only possible for one who has not sinned.²⁹ As C.S. Lewis says, "Only a bad person needs to repent; only a good person can repent perfectly."³⁰

Jesus "Hates" His Own Life

In effect, Jesus "hated" his own life to the point of death because he acknowledged the Father's "holy sorrow."³¹ Jesus commands us to give up our lives as he gave up his life. But he does this, Lewis contends, by "helping" our love and reason by God's love and reason, like a parent who holds the child's hands while the child is learning how to write.³²

God Gathers Up Our Love and Reason

Is this adequate, however? Does God just hold our hands so we can love and reason? He does not just enable us (cf. John Cassian, Semi-Pelagianism, and John Wesley), but gathers us up with him to share in his love and reason, made manifest in love as sorrow for sins in the perfect Amen of the Son to the Father, the vicarious humanity of Christ. Lewis can speak of the need for God to become human and for us to share in "God's dying," but this process of "the perfect penitent" is only something we go through "if God does it in us." Saying "in us" is different than saying it is something God does *for* us, on our behalf and in our place. In fact, Lewis concludes that Christ as "the perfect penitent"

27 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 60.

28 R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality* (London: Murray, 1917), 28.

29 Ibid., 43, 117.

30 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 59.

31 Luke 14:26; cp. Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 215: "He had all along said, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.' In actual death He now said so . . . It is an utterance *in death*. He who thus puts their trust in the Father is *tasting death* while doing so."

32 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 60.

is only a "picture." "Do not mistake it for the thing itself; and if it does not help you, drop it."³³ Why then, bring this up in a discussion of "mere" Christianity, which he defines as "what it is and what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not"?³⁴ Perhaps Lewis is more persuaded by the truth of the "perfect penitent," or the vicarious repentance of Christ, than he wants to admit. He certainly celebrates Christ the "new man" as the next step in the evolution of humanity, which has already arrived.³⁵ Christ has taken our place. This "new man" offers an utterly new life to the Father, a communion of unbroken faith, obedience, and worship, a life of love that we cannot offer, but that now we can share in.³⁶

The Entire Vicarious Humanity of Christ

John McLeod Campbell's doctrine of Christ's "perfect confession" of our sins needs to be interpreted as one aspect of the entire vicarious humanity of Christ, as James Torrance argues.³⁷ In a world of needless and pointless suffering, only the Son has the right to believe; only he has the right to call God Father.³⁸ This is not done to condition the Father into loving us, but to manifest the triune being of God as a communion of love, a different doctrine of God than one that is a doctrine more reflecting the influence of Aristotle, Stoic concepts of natural law, Western jurisprudence, and post-Enlightenment thought.³⁹ R. C. Moberly, though not finding an "inclusive humanity" of Christ in Campbell, stresses Christ's identification with humanity as the basis of a "perfect penitence."⁴⁰ The entirety of the vicarious humanity of Christ is a picture of the "wondrous exchange" of the patristic theologians of (2 Cor. 8:9), and how deep and wide that is, as expressed by Gregory Nazianzen:

Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become gods for his sake, since he for ours became man. He assumed the worse that he might give us the better; he became poor that we through his poverty might be rich;

33 Ibid., 61.

34 Ibid., 7.

35 Ibid., 62.

36 James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 48.

37 James B. Torrance, "Introduction" to Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 11.

38 Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Compassion of the Father*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 104.

39 James B. Torrance, "Introduction" to Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 16.

40 R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, 405-6.

took upon himself the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty; he came down that we might be exalted; he was tempted that we might conquer; he was dishonoured that he might glorify us; he died that he might save us; he ascended that he might draw to himself us, who were lying low in the fall of sin.⁴¹

“Becoming like Christ” is coming into that union of love between the Father, Son, and the Spirit. But we are not the ones who are doing the exaltation. We are exalted with Christ by God, with the vicarious humanity of Christ. That is the fruit of love, an actual act of substitution through exaltation, only because, first of all, there has been a humiliation.

Love as a Response by the One Who is Loved

Love is a response by one who is loved. T. F. Torrance dares to say, “Jesus Christ is our human response to God.”⁴² How outrageous that sounds! Is not a response, a faith and obedience to God on our part, a response to what Christ has done for us? So goes the popular theology. But does this objection take seriously enough our desperate situation, for love is both our most desperate need and problem. Jesus’ response to the Father is a response of love. It becomes our response as we are united with him, our humanity united with the totality of his humanity. Jesus is both the Word of God spoken to humanity but also the Word heard by humanity.⁴³ And what he hears is the love of the Father, a love we find at least difficult to hear, but often simply refuse to hear in its fullness, its judgment as well as grace. This is a Word, T. F. Torrance contends, that is heard not just from above, externally, but from within us, because the Word of God in Jesus Christ has taken upon our humanity and we are united with him. This personal union is the real basis of Christ’s call for us to renounce ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him.⁴⁴ The foundation for all of this is that in this act of reconciliation (response) as well as of revelation in the incarnation, the being of God is revealed. The being of God is known in his act, as Barth and Torrance are fond of saying. This means nothing less than the communication

41 Gregory Nazianzen, *Discourse I, 4*, cited by Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), 192.

42 T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ, new edition* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), 80.

43 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 41.

44 *Ibid.*, 42.

of the "mutual indwelling" (*perichoresis*) between the Father and the Son in the Spirit, the essence of divine love. This "plenitude of personal being" in the triune God overflows to us in Christ, creating a "community of personal reciprocity in love, which we speak of as the Church living in the Communion of the Spirit."⁴⁵ The fruit of love proceeds from this eternal love, even if we cannot perceive its foundation with our senses. Faith is that which is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). We do not see Jesus Christ now, Peter writes in his first epistle, yet his readers love Jesus now, and even "rejoice with an indescribable joy" (1 Pet 1:8). Joy becomes the essence of love, even a fruit of love, even though Jesus Christ is not seen at this moment. Faith is knowledge, as Karl Barth reminds us.⁴⁶

The Son responds in love to the Father because he knows he is already loved by the Father. This is our human response to God. We have no other. We have no other place to try to coerce God or to wonder if God loves us. We cannot be "clever" with God to think that we can earn God's love.⁴⁷ This is the story of religion, is it not? In our cleverness, as a "deceiver," Kierkegaard would say, it is we who are surprised that we are loved by one who does not make any demand for reciprocal love apart from the Son who has already met that demand for us and in our place. The one who truly loves, Kierkegaard concludes, by "believing all things," loves even "the deceiver," the one who thought he had to earn the beloved's love.⁴⁸

The "Last Adam" and the Love of God

The apostle Paul sees Christ as the one who takes the place of Adam. Adam is a broken mirror of Christ, whom Paul refers to as "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:44-49), the final Adam, because his origins are in heaven ("the man from heaven" – 1 Cor 15:48-49). He is, in contrast to the first Adam, "a living giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). In Galatians Paul speaks of love as one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). So it should be no surprise that 1 Corinthians 13 (the "love" chapter) should be sandwiched between Paul's discussion of the church as the body of Christ in chapter 12 (especially relevant to that troubled Corinthian congregation) and the eschatology of Christ as the last Adam in chapter 15. In

45 T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 3.

46 Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 22-27.

47 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 240-41.

48 *Ibid.*, 243.

fact, an implicit Adam-Christ contrast may be in chapter 13: love “does not insist on its own way” (1 Cor 13:4) as Adam did, in contrast to Christ. Of course, the Corinthian church is more like Adam than Christ. Corinth was a community, but a distorted community that assumed (in contrast to Paul and his sufferings!) they were already “kings,” already “rich” (1 Cor.4:8). The humanity of Christ is needed to take the place of the fallen humanity of Corinth.

The last Adam is the final word about humanity because he is a heavenly word, “the man from heaven.” It is with him that “love abides” (1 Cor 13:8). The changeableness of human emotion, the passing of time, and the finitude of human love all challenge such a statement: “love abides.” It certainly does not on this earth, at least not always. Falling away from God is not the same as simply falling away from another lover; it is falling away from love.⁴⁹ Love can cease in erotic love and friendship love; the lover can wait for a long time, but then cease to wait. Has the lover really ever been loving then?⁵⁰ Divine love abides; it waits.

Love for the Community

In Wendell Berry’s novel, *Jayber Crow*, the barber Jayber sees his little rural community of Port William in a new light when the love of God takes his place, “like a father with a wayward child, whom He can’t help and can’t forget . . . the love, the compassion, the taking offense, the disappointment, the anger, the bearing of wounds, the weeping of tears, the forgiveness, the suffering unto death.”⁵¹ This is what it means for God to love the world (John 3:16). This love is so deep it assumes our nature. How God has loved makes everything secondary, including “belief.” The community can become a community of love because it knows that it has already been loved. In this context we are reminded that the fruit of the Spirit (“love, joy, peace,” etc.) is social.⁵² That is where love becomes a reality. In the New Testament, the Spirit is not so much an aspect of inner psychology or creative spirituality as he is the “ecology,” an environment, a place of genuine humanity, the humanity of Christ made manifest in our humanity.

49 Ibid., 304.

50 Ibid., 303.

51 Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002), 250-52.

52 Ray S. Anderson, *An Emerging Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 159, 164; T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction (Grand Rapids, 1965)*, 242.

The fruit of love, therefore, comes from an event in the life of God in which he takes upon our humanity in order to perfectly confess on our behalf and in our place, doing something we are unable to do. At the heart of the matter is love as the essential attribute of God, not simply one among many.⁵³ Therefore, decretal Calvinists such as John Owen and Jonathan Edwards should not restrict the mercy and love of God to only the elect. The fruit of love is possible because God is love. The Holy Spirit makes this double movement within God an event within us, enabling us to receive and understand this life.⁵⁴ So we are called on to pray in the Spirit (Rom. 8), knowing that in the Spirit there is a corresponding movement from God to our humanity and from our humanity to God just as there was in the incarnation, indeed, as there is in the Father-Son relationship in the Spirit from all eternity.⁵⁵

The fruit of love is first seen in one person, the one who is the God who loves and the man who is loved, the one in whom is both: Jesus Christ.⁵⁶ Herein the ancient Christological controversies become important: Jesus Christ is not two persons but one, not to be confused, not to be separated (Chalcedon, 451 A.D. He is both the revealing God and the answering man to the revelation, the basis and ground of our answers, the God who loves and is loved. This is the double movement of grace. In contrast, we find it very difficult to both love and to be loved. In Jesus Christ, the covenant established between God and humanity in the Old Testament is kept from both sides, so that he reveals the essential covenantal nature of both the nature of God and the meaning of being human.

The very meaning of being human! The fruit of love says something important about being human, not just about God. This not just an empty-headed religious euphoria about the betterment of things, nor a pessimistic downturn into despair and futility. Jesus Christ really has risen from the dead. Yet this means to confront world history only with love, not with fear or hate.⁵⁷ No other choice has been given to us. Jesus Christ, in his vicarious humanity, has pushed aside any other alternative. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the resurrection of the one who has taken upon himself my humanity, in my place and on my behalf, at

53 Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 73. Contra many Protestant orthodox theologies, such as in Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1933), 67.

54 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 152.

55 Ibid., 152-53.

56 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), 667.

57 Ibid., 717.

an ontological, not merely behavioral, level.⁵⁸ If the double movement of God in the vicarious humanity of Christ bears fruit in love, then reconciliation, not sin or sickness, becomes the presupposition even for therapy, let alone for ministry. There is an "order of being," Ray Anderson suggests, that we might call love between the Father and the Son in the Spirit, that precedes our sin or sickness, which is the only thing that can engineer genuine ministry or therapy. This order of being, Anderson contends, is "belonging," a place where we can be healed, in contrast to any abstraction, where "our believing is conditioned at its source by our belonging" (Polanyi).⁵⁹

The "Hidden" Source of Love

Love, indeed, for it to avoid superficiality, has a source, according to Kierkegaard, that is "hidden."⁶⁰ As the great country rock group The Band put it, "There's no greater love than the love that dies untold."⁶¹ One criticizes the heart that is "worn on the sleeve." It may lack depth or substance. Yet the love "that dies untold" ("hidden"!) bears its own fruit. (Is Kierkegaard thinking of his broken engagement to Regine?) This is a "work of love." This contrasts with those who might give to charity, visit the widow, or clothe the naked, but do so in "a self-loving way."⁶²

Love has a true knowledge; it is not naiveté. It is a misinterpretation of the apostle Paul to read "love believes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7) otherwise. Love knows the beloved, so it is not involved in mistrust.⁶³ Yet there is much that is hidden from lovers. Kierkegaard says it plainly: "Is it not so that one person never completely understands the other?"⁶⁴

Is this ultimate "hiddenness" in the love between the Father and the Son that which bears fruit in our salvation? Is that why the Gospels refuse to describe or picture Jesus (much less the Father and the Spirit!)? The economic Trinity in

58 Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 175.

59 Ibid., 169, citing Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 322.

60 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 11.

61 The Band, "It Makes No Difference," *Northern Lights, Southern Cross* (Capitol Records), written by Robbie Robertson, 1975.

62 Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 13.

63 Ibid., 228.

64 Ibid., 229.

terms of Jesus' maleness, for example, should not be read into the Triune God. So also his race, his hair color, his language (God does not speak Aramaic), etc. As we have seen, Torrance speaks of these as "temporal or causal" or "material or creaturely images."⁶⁵ However, the economic Trinity (how God appears to us) is our only source for knowledge of the ontological or immanent Trinity (who God is in himself). What we know about the love between the Father and the Son is hidden. But what we know has been revealed to us in Christ. We only have the witness of Scripture about it. Therefore, we know the actions of the Son that resulted from that love. The cross, of course, could immediately be interpreted as something other than the result of love, if we did not know the testimony of the hidden love between the Father and the Son. We know it only because of the actions of faith, worship, service, and obedience by the Son in his earthly ministry on behalf of others, the vicarious humanity of Christ. These actions in obeying the Father's will are not outside the realm of the "tragic," (despite David Bentley Hart's protests, for whom there is no "pathos" in God).⁶⁶ As Ray Anderson reminds us, however, there is always something tragic about love; if nothing else, the beloved can always be absent from us.⁶⁷ Are we to retreat to a doctrine of God's *aseity* in order to resist these emotions in the triune God? Is there any other way to interpret the cry of abandonment, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"⁶⁸ What we know about God's love, in other words, is through the "sheer action" (Kierkegaard) of the vicarious *actions* of Christ. This is quite different than a sentimental message of love taught by an ancient, revered religious leader, as many often regard Jesus, even today.

God as a Human Being, Not Just Into a Human Being

These actions of God in Christ are very particular actions, actions within the stuff of human history, God came not just into a human being but as a human being, as T. F. Torrance references from the Fathers.⁶⁹ Love can only be, therefore,

65 Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 97, 101.

66 David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 166-67, 355, 357, 374-76.

67 Anderson, *On Being Human*, 177-78. See also on homosexuality and the tragic in Ray S. Anderson, "Homosexuality: Theological and Pastoral Considerations" in *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 266-83.

68 Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 54.

69 T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 157. See also Christian D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (Lanham, MA: University Press

particular actions of love, not a generic, sentimental, or abstract ideal. So, in *Jayber Crow*, the concrete love Jayber develops for Mattie, the woman he will never marry, and his church, even if it is not returned, becomes the occasion by which he can understand the love of God the Father in the Son. This is genuinely what it means to live by faith alone. What Jayber obtains is "love in my heart."⁷⁰ This love, the love of God for a world that does not love him, is a suffering love, the love that can break one's heart (John 1:10-11).⁷¹ Love can disappoint; love can fail. Our love can be thrown back at us in disregard. Is this not what eternal damnation is? We might become so "locked up in ourselves" that the light of God in Jesus is thrown back at God with such a force that "even the ultimate Love of God" becomes "a kind of hell for us."⁷² The fruit of love, in other words, can be nothing less than suffering. We should not be surprised. The Father has "sorrow" for our sins, but that does not stop the Son from going to the cross. What seems to be the failure of the Father in putting the Son on the cross is really the victory of the Son.⁷³

Such a suffering love is a presence that does not need doubt. He never had any doubts, says T. F. Torrance of himself, not because of the brilliant logic of his theology, but because of his mother. A loving Christian family made knowledge of God "the most natural, intuitive thing of all."⁷⁴ Knowing God through Jesus Christ is concrete and particular, not because of any analogy of being, but because the fruit of that love is seen in loving relationships, of which the parent and the child is foremost to our humanity. The particular is the means by which we know the universal. In a biblical paradigm, the one is always the basis for blessing the many, from Israel to the nations, to Jesus and all humanity.⁷⁵ We can live with the dialectic of joy and despair because, as Paul teaches, "the genuineness of your love" can even be expressed in the less than perfect Corinthian congregation by their concrete acts of love in helping to meet the needs of the Jerusalem church (2 Cor. 8:8). He has a theological reason for believing this, as expressed in the

of America, 1991), 122.

70 Berry, *Jayber Crow*, 247-54.

71 Ibid., 254.

72 T. F. Torrance, "Immortality and Light" in *Transformation and Convergence in the Framework of Knowledge in the Framework of Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 348.

73 Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 54-55.

74 "Thomas F. Torrance" in *Roundtable: Conversations with European Theologians*, edited by Michael Baumann (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 111.

75 James B. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ" in *The Incarnation*, edited by T. F. Torrance, 137-141 and *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 50-53.

next verse: "For you know the generous act (grace) of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul does not simply exhort the Corinthians to love; he points them to "the wonderful exchange," as the Fathers and John Calvin put it, in the double movement of love made manifest in the incarnation itself. The churches of Macedonia are an example to the Corinthians of those who have been objects of the grace of God in the midst of "a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy, and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part" (2 Cor. 8:1-2). The fruit of love is particular because the incarnation was a particular act of God's love.

Such love does not need doubt, yet it is not afraid of doubt either. Love exists because of reality, not of doubt, as Ray Anderson claims, for love springs from reality, the particular, not from reason, our logical configurations.⁷⁶ Reality intervenes, as seen in the incarnation. Doubt has to deal with reality of love, as Jayber did in his love for Mattie. "We cannot know God behind his back," Torrance argues, "as it were, by stealing knowledge of him, for we may know him only in accordance with the way he has actually taken in revealing himself."⁷⁷ God is under no compulsion to reveal himself, but in his personal revelation in Christ we are presented with a reality of love for us that makes a demand upon us because it is the demand of reality. With such love, faith is never far behind. How can one truly love without faith, without trust in the beloved? Such a love, such a faith, is what the Son has for the Father. This is the reality of the incarnation and the basis of the community, the church.

76 Anderson, *Soulprints*, 72.

77 T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 201 n. 3.