

## **ALL OF HIM FOR ALL OF US:**

### **Christ's Person and Offices in John Wesley and T. F. Torrance**

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**Abstract:** *T. F. Torrance's theology has found a warm reception from some theologians in the Wesleyan tradition. This essay examines the similarities and differences in Torrance's and John Wesley's Christologies, specifically concerning the person of Christ and his munus triplex. After sketching the two men's distinctive missions as a background, the essay first considers Wesley's and Torrance's shared commitment to the orthodox dogma of Christ's person and defends both of them against allegations of heterodox tendencies. Secondly, the essay explores convergences and complementary emphases in Wesley's and Torrance's handling of Christ's threefold office, concluding with ways that Wesleyanism can repay its debt of enrichment by Torrance's theology.*

My introduction to T. F. Torrance came at a Wesleyan seminary. My Methodist theology professor, Bill Ury, enthusiastically assigned *The Mediation of Christ*. Given my low-church evangelical Wesleyan background, the book both bothered and beguiled me. I decided that if ever I pursued a doctorate, I would study Torrance's Christology. Meanwhile, Methodist scholar Elmer Colyer published *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, which I eagerly snatched up. Eventually the opportunity arose for postgraduate research under former Torrance student and Nazarene theologian (and now president of the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship) T. A. Noble, at whose invitation Torrance had delivered the lectures published as *The Mediation of*

*Christ*. The circle was complete. This essay springs from and seeks to further the interaction between Wesleyan and Torrancean theology that has shaped me.

## Two Men, Two Ministries

If Great Britain were a human body, Scotland would be its head and England its torso and limbs. This geographical analogy fits the respective missions of T. F. Torrance and John Wesley. Torrance's passion was the conversion of the *mind* — its repentant restructuring in light of Christian truth.<sup>1</sup> He made a career at New College, Edinburgh, teaching and writing toward that end. At a lower latitude, Wesley famously felt his *heart* strangely warmed through faith in Christ as Savior. He spent the rest of his life circulating throughout England (with occasional forays elsewhere) fostering revival and practical discipleship, especially among the early Industrial Revolution's working class. Torrance's calling required him to speak the dialect of academic theological discourse (with a Scottish Reformed accent), while Wesley forsook the life of an Oxford don in order to speak "plain truth for plain people"<sup>2</sup> in his Anglican environs. Their differences should not be overdrawn: Torrance had pastoral experience and ethical concerns;<sup>3</sup> Wesley promoted education and engaged in informed theological dispute.<sup>4</sup> Both men also had wide-ranging intellects and shared interests in Christian antiquity and the scientific advances of

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the epilogue to Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 437-47.

<sup>2</sup> John Wesley, Preface 2-4 to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, The Works of John Wesley, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (hereafter WJW) (repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 5:1-2 (quote from 2). This essay generally cites easily-accessible rather than critical editions of Wesley's writings.

<sup>3</sup> On Torrance's experience as a parish minister and army chaplain, see Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (London: T&T Clark, 1999), 60-83; on Torrance's ethical concerns, see Todd Speidell, *Fully Human in Christ: The Incarnation as the End of Christian Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> On Wesley's promotion of education (of both children and adults), see Herbert W. Byrne, *John Wesley and Learning* (Salem, OH: Schmull, 1997), 187-204; on Wesley's debates over Calvinism, see Allan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate* (Wilmore, KY: Wesley Heritage Press, 1987); for Wesley's most extensive theological treatise, written against a denier of the doctrine of original sin, see *The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, WJW 9:191-464.

their times.<sup>5</sup> Still, recalling the difference between their ministries will curb false expectations as we compare their Christologies. We shall look first at their beliefs about the *person* of Christ, then see how those beliefs impact their views of the *work* of Christ via the doctrine of his threefold office (*munus triplex*).

### **A Common Commitment to Creedal Christology**

For the sake of ecumenical rapprochement and the renewal of orthodoxy, Torrance expended much effort expounding the dogmatic tradition concerning the person of Christ, especially as distilled in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The *homoousion* was never far from his thoughts!<sup>6</sup> Wesley, on the other hand, spent most of his time setting forth the offices and benefits of Christ, leaving his creedal orthodoxy largely implicit. In a landmark study of Wesley's Christology, written under Torrance's *Doktorvater* Karl Barth, Methodist theologian John Deschner notes that Wesley's doctrine of Christ was "absolutely fundamental in his theology, but [one] which he did not emphasize when he preached at street corners."<sup>7</sup>

Wesley's deeply-held commitment to orthodox Christology does surface on occasion. In order to make the cream of classic Christian literature easily and inexpensively available to the common people of England, Wesley edited a thirty-volume series entitled *A Christian Library*. Volume Fourteen includes the

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<sup>5</sup> On Torrance and patristics, see Jason Robert Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers: A Reformed, Evangelical, and Ecumenical Reconstruction of the Patristic Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014); on Torrance and science, McGrath, *T. F. Torrance*, 195-236. Wesley's engagement with the (especially Eastern) church fathers, while real, has been exaggerated by some Wesley scholars. For balanced surveys, see Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991); Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley's Reading of and References to the Early Church Fathers" in S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 25-32. For a sample of Wesley's interest in science, see his two-volume *Compendium of Natural Philosophy* at [wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-compendium-of-natural-philosophy/](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-compendium-of-natural-philosophy/).

<sup>6</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 70-82; Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity*, Great Theologians Series (Farnham, UK: Routledge, 2009), 74: "Even the most cursory exploration of Torrance's theology will disclose the centrality of the *homoousion* for understanding who Jesus is."

<sup>7</sup> John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), xii.

Westminster Shorter Catechism, abridged to exclude material with which Wesley took exception (such as the unconditional election of some and reprobation of others).<sup>8</sup> Wesley's redacted catechism teaches that Christ, "being the eternal Son of GOD, became man, and so was, and continued to be, God and man, in two distinct natures and one Person, for ever" (Question 18). He "became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul . . . yet without sin" (Question 19) and so fulfills the threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King (Questions 20-23).<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Wesley's irenic *Letter to a Roman Catholic* sets out beliefs held by both Catholics and Methodists. Such common beliefs include Christ's *munus triplex*, his being "God of God, very God of very God" (note the Nicene language), and his hypostatic union with a human nature consisting of body and soul.<sup>10</sup> Wesley's *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* are his revision of the King James Version accompanied by concise commentary in the format of one of our contemporary study Bibles.<sup>11</sup> The *Notes*, which became a Methodist doctrinal standard, make such orthodox comments as that Christ shares "unity of essence" with the Father while being "a true man" (Jn. 1:1);<sup>12</sup> that Scripture's wording excludes both Sabellianism and Arianism (Jn. 10:30); that Christ's humanity is "personally united" to his divine nature (Eph. 1:4); and that his human nature included body, soul, and all sinless weaknesses (Jn. 1:14; Heb. 2:14; 5:15). Lastly, when Wesley abbreviated the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England as an additional doctrinal standard for American Methodism, he retained Article Two's ecumenical confession that "the very and eternal God, of one substance with the

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<sup>8</sup> On Wesley's alterations to the Westminster Shorter Catechism and their significance, see Herbert McGonigle, "Wesley's Revision of the Shorter Catechism," [www.usacanadaregion.org/sites/usacanadaregion.org/files/Roots/Resources/Wesleys-Revision-of-the-Shorter-Catechism.pdf](http://www.usacanadaregion.org/sites/usacanadaregion.org/files/Roots/Resources/Wesleys-Revision-of-the-Shorter-Catechism.pdf) [sic].

<sup>9</sup> Available at [wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-christian-library/a-christian-library-volume-14/the-assemblys-shorter-catechism/](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-christian-library/a-christian-library-volume-14/the-assemblys-shorter-catechism/).

<sup>10</sup> WJW 10:81.

<sup>11</sup> For a survey of its characteristics (including formatting and translation value), see Robin Scroggs, "John Wesley as Biblical Scholar," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 28.4 (Oct. 1960): 415-22.

<sup>12</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*; cited in-text by Scripture reference. This and all subsequent citations from Wesley's *Notes* may be accessed at [wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-new-testament-john-wesleys-translation/](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-new-testament-john-wesleys-translation/).

Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man."<sup>13</sup>

### **Wesley on Christ's Humanity: A Hair's Breadth from Heresy?**

Despite these signs of formal assent to creedal orthodoxy, Deschner and other Wesley scholars have charged him with a tendency toward monophysitism, Apollinarianism, or even docetism, an emphasis on Christ's full deity at the expense of his full humanity.<sup>14</sup> Wesley's single alteration to Article Two is taken as symptomatic: the original Anglican article says that Christ took his humanity "in the womb of the blessed Virgin, *of her substance*." Wesley omits those last three words. Similarly, when Wesley abridged the Apostolic Fathers for the first volume of *A Christian Library*, he deleted several of Ignatius of Antioch's references to Christ's birth from David's seed. Wesley's *Notes* contain further suspicious material: for instance, he ascribes Christ's amazement (Mk. 6:6), ignorance of the date of the Parousia (Mk. 13:32), and boyhood growth in wisdom (Lk. 2:40, 52) strictly to his humanity, not to his deity. At Lazarus' tomb (Jn. 11:33-35), Wesley's Jesus experiences emotion only voluntarily and weeps for others' grief and mortality rather than for any personal loss. Most damningly of all, Wesley opines that Christ occasionally escaped his enemies by becoming invisible (Lk. 4:30; Jn. 8:59)!

There is one problem with all this evidence: it is decontextualized. More specifically, it has been torn from the threefold matrix of Wesley's complete corpus, the tradition of exegesis to which he was heir, and the intellectual climate in which he ministered. Thus Wesley's abridgment of Article Two must be seen in light of his intention that the Articles of Religion would not stand alone as the standard of Methodist doctrine; rather, they were to function alongside his sermons and

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 115-48 (p. 131 covers Article Two).

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, 24-28, 31; Scroggs, "John Wesley as Biblical Scholar," 420-21; Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 80-81; for a more complete survey, see Richard M. Riss, "John Wesley's Christology in Recent Literature," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45.1 (Spring 2010): 108-43.

*Notes*.<sup>15</sup> In his sermon “The End of Christ’s Coming,” he combines Galatians 4:4 and Luke 1:35 to affirm that the incarnate Christ was “‘made of a woman,’ by the power of the Highest overshadowing her.”<sup>16</sup> The *Notes* directly teach that Jesus took his humanity “of the substance” of Mary (Gal. 4:4). Likewise, in Volume One of *A Christian Library*, Wesley merely avoids redundancy by omitting several of Ignatius’ later references to Christ’s lineage: Ignatius’ first and last references remain, unedited and explicit in orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup> In terms of the history of exegesis, Wesley’s *Notes* echo explanations of Jesus’ amazement, ignorance, development, and emotions by the very church fathers who established orthodox Christology.<sup>18</sup> Wesley’s milieu also explains his editorial and exegetical emphases. Unlike the era of the Apostolic Fathers, the unorthodoxies stirring in England were not Gnosticism but Arianism, Socinianism, and Deism. Wesley could take for granted a universal belief in Jesus’ humanity.<sup>19</sup> What was doubted was his deity — and here Wesley leapt to the defense.<sup>20</sup>

All three contexts converge in Wesley’s suggestion — and it is only a suggestion — that Christ turned invisible once or twice when threatened with premature execution. Deschner thinks that in these cases “Jesus’ human nature seems to evaporate” and Robin Scroggs takes Wesley to mean that, once invisible to his enemies, Christ “passed through them as if there had been no physical obstacle.”<sup>21</sup> Such statements betray that Deschner and Scroggs equate invisibility

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<sup>15</sup> Deschner, *Wesley’s Christology*, x, 7-8; and Oden, *Doctrinal Standards*, especially ch. 6.

<sup>16</sup> WJW 6:273.

<sup>17</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 7, 18; *Smyrn.* 1 (see also Polycarp, *Phil.* 6-7) at [wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-christian-library/a-christian-library-volume-1/volume-1-the-epistles-of-the-apostolical-fathers-st-clement-st-ignatius-st-polycarp-the-martyrdoms-of-st-ignatius-and-st-polycarp/](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-christian-library/a-christian-library-volume-1/volume-1-the-epistles-of-the-apostolical-fathers-st-clement-st-ignatius-st-polycarp-the-martyrdoms-of-st-ignatius-and-st-polycarp/).

<sup>18</sup> See the comments for each of the above-cited verses in Thomas C. Oden, gen. ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Jason E. Vickers, “Christology” in William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 555-56.

<sup>20</sup> Deschner, *Wesley’s Christology*, 15-18; Vickers, “Christology,” 556; Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 76-77.

<sup>21</sup> Deschner, *Wesley’s Christology*, 31; Scroggs, “John Wesley as Biblical Scholar,” 420.

with insubstantiality. But this is a false equation. Elsewhere in his *Notes*, Wesley's comments on Christ's Easter disappearance at Emmaus (Luke 24:31) and appearance in a locked room in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36) indicate that Wesley thought of Christ as physically exiting and entering without being seen. In short, Christ's invisibility meant miraculous concealment, not dematerialization. Wesley's contemporaries and near-contemporaries Matthew Poole, Matthew Henry, and John Gill all suggest in their comments on John 8:59 that Christ made himself invisible, perhaps by using a concealing mist.<sup>22</sup> Interest in unseen yet physical things and persons was widespread during the lifetimes of Poole, Henry, Gill, and Wesley: pioneer scientist Robert Boyle experimented with air and invisible ink; he and his peers formed a network called "the Invisible College"; and Rosicrucians in France became known as "the Invisibles" due to their reputed skills in self-concealment.<sup>23</sup> However plausible or not one finds Wesley's suggestion, it contains no docetic denial of Christ's embodied, material humanity.<sup>24</sup>

Deschner draws a line from Wesley's semi-monophysitism to his diminution of the significance of Christ's active obedience: just as Christ's divine nature dwarfs his human nature, so the divine wrath which he passively bore on Calvary overshadows the human obedience which he displayed in active ministry.<sup>25</sup> Deschner's analogy feels forced — is Christ's human obedience truly less prominent

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 3:325, also at biblehub.com/commentaries/poole/john/8.htm; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 5:1008, also at www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/john/8.html; John Gill, *Gill's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 5:687-88, also at www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/john-8-59.html. Cf. Wesley's *Notes* on Lk. 24:31, in which Wesley writes that a "supernatural cloud" prevented the disciples on the road to Emmaus from recognizing Jesus.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 2011), esp. 36-37, 57; Philip Ball, *Invisible: The Dangerous Allure of the Unseen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 34.

<sup>24</sup> Although arrived at independently, my conclusions corroborate those of David A. Graham, "The Chalcedonian Logic of John Wesley's Christology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20.1 (2018): 84-103; also at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijst.12228>.

<sup>25</sup> Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, 152-69, esp. 167.

in his crucifixion than in his ministry? — and, as we have seen, his case against Wesley’s Christology falls apart. Still, he is right to question whether Wesley has shortchanged Christ’s active righteousness. We shall return to this issue later in relation to the *munus triplex* and look to Torrance for a solution. Now, however, we must examine whether Torrance himself avoids Christological error.

### **Torrance on Christ’s Humanity: An Unorthodox Approach?**

Wesley is not alone in falling under suspicion of harboring a heterodox Christology. Critics have imagined Apollinarianism in Torrance’s early Auburn lectures and Nestorianism in his career-long insistence that Christ assumed our fallen, alienated human nature. I have made the case elsewhere that these accusations arise from misreading Torrance.<sup>26</sup> To summarize: at Auburn, Torrance does not claim that Christ lacked a human will; rather, his claim is that Christ’s conception was not due to autonomous human will (i.e., Joseph’s or Mary’s initiative). Furthermore, Torrance’s denial of human “personality” to Christ is simply an affirmation of the orthodox doctrine of *anhypostasia*. Young Torrance was no Apollinarian. Nor was he a Nestorian later in life: his references to Christ’s contention with our sinful nature do not mean that Christ’s own human mind and will operated independently of and in hostility to his divine mind and will. The hostility which he battled came from the rest of humanity. So run my previously-published arguments. In what follows, I exorcise a specter of heresy left unaddressed in my earlier work: Bruce McCormack’s charge that the mature Torrance exhibits “Apollinarian tendencies.”

McCormack claims that the essence of Apollinarianism is not its denial of a human mind to Christ but its reduction of his humanity to “a passive instrument in the hands of the Logos” such that “the mind and will that are proper to Christ’s human nature do not cooperate fully and freely in every work of the God-human.” This Apollinarian spirit has continued to haunt the Church ever since Chalcedon, and Torrance is not free from it, despite his emphasis on the Son’s assumption of a

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<sup>26</sup> E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ’s Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 32, 35-40, 161-62.



human mind.<sup>27</sup> The examples cited are a pair of passages from *The Trinitarian Faith* in which, according to McCormack, “the grammatical subject ‘Christ’ is equated, not with the God-human in his divine-human unity, but with the deity in him alone. . . . God the Son is seen as doing something in and to his human nature.” To find the flaw in McCormack’s interpretation, it is necessary to requote from the passages which he quotes:

[T]he Lord transferred to Himself fallen Adamic humanity . . . However, far from sinning in it himself or being contaminated by what he appropriated from us, Christ triumphed over the forces of evil entrenched in our human existence, bringing his own holiness, his own perfect obedience to bear upon it in such a way as to condemn sin in the flesh and deliver us from its power (*Trinitarian Faith*, 161).

and

Through his penetration of the perverted structures of human existence, he reversed the process of corruption and more than made good what had been destroyed, for he has now anchored human nature in His own crucified and risen being (*ibid.*, 182-83).<sup>28</sup>

In these quotes, the grammatical subject “the Lord” refers to the divine Son *simpliciter* only in the very first line, which speaks of his initiating the Incarnation. Thereafter the grammatical subject is always the divine-human Christ, to whom may be attributed such distinctively human acts as (hypothetical) “sinning,” “perfect obedience,” and being “crucified and risen.” This does not entail a change of subject but the acquisition by the same subject of new, human predicates. As Torrance had written only a few pages earlier, “it is an act of God as man, translated into human

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, “The Ontological Presuppositions of Barth’s Doctrine of the Atonement,” in Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical & Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 352–53.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 352n9.

actuality and made to issue out of the depths of man's being and life toward God."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, when *Trinitarian Faith* first introduces Apollinarianism as a heresy, Torrance stresses "the *human agency* of the incarnate Son within the essential conditions of actual historical human existence."<sup>30</sup> Rather than being passive, then, Christ's human mind and will are intensely active in the process of redemption. In becoming incarnate, the divine Logos assumed an ignorant human mind, and with that mind he "learned obedience" (Heb. 5:8) himself and enlightened the minds of others with his saving teachings. With his human will, he "shared all our experiences, overcoming our disobedience through his obedience and sanctifying every stage of human life" vicariously, for our sakes, so that through his obedience and self-sanctification we might cease to be rebellious and instead become sanctified.<sup>31</sup>

Recognition of the vicarious or representative-substitutionary character of Christ's activity is crucial in order to avoid misreading Torrance. When he speaks of Christ's acting upon "human existence," "the flesh," and "human nature" (as in McCormack's quotes), Torrance is not describing a purely divine agent acting upon his own passive, objectified humanity. On the contrary, he is describing a divine-human agent acting not only upon his own concrete humanity but also, through it, upon all humankind.<sup>32</sup> As Torrance puts it, there is a "blessed exchange . . . between the *divine-human* life of Jesus *and mankind* [which] has the effect of finalising and sealing the ontological relations between every man and Jesus Christ."<sup>33</sup> Nor does this mean that only Christ's humanity is active while the rest of humanity is passive. To see how this is not the case, we must return to McCormack's critique.

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 158-59; here, as throughout Torrance's corpus, "man" is used inclusively.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 151 (italics his).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-67, 186-88 (quotation from 167). And Torrance, *Atonement*, 69-70, 160-63, 437-47.

<sup>32</sup> Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 146-90; and *Atonement*, 162.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 182 (italics mine); this sentence is only one sentence removed from the start of McCormack's second Torrance quote and sets the stage for properly interpreting it.

McCormack urges that in order for Christ's human mind and will to be fully, freely active his miracles and sinless life must be the result not of "the direct influence of the Logos within" but of "unbroken dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>34</sup> Such language suggests a zero-sum relationship between Son and Spirit, a notion that Torrance rejected.<sup>35</sup> He would concur, though, that the Spirit frees Christ's humanity to be itself in relation to his divinity. As Torrance writes of the Holy Spirit in *The Trinitarian Faith*,

Through him the eternal Son became man without overriding or diminishing the reality of the human person . . . but on the contrary gave it real subsistence in himself . . . . Far from the presence of the Deity of the Son overwhelming or displacing the rational human person in Jesus, his human mind and human soul, the exact opposite took place. And so it must be said that no human being has such a full and rich personal human nature as Jesus.

But Torrance teaches that what is uniquely true in Christ's case applies analogously to the rest of us: "Far from crushing our creaturely nature or damaging our personal existence, the indwelling presence of God through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit has the effect of healing and restoring and deepening human personal being."<sup>36</sup> Divine agency enables rather than cripples human agency. Torrance elsewhere calls this the "logic of grace": "all of grace" means "all of us," not "none of us."<sup>37</sup> We will revisit this crucial point later, as it provides common ground with Wesley.

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<sup>34</sup> McCormack, "Ontological Presuppositions," 353.

<sup>35</sup> See not only his discussion of the undivided trinitarian relations in *Trinitarian Faith* ch. 6 but also, in his Auburn Lectures, his explicit criticism of Edward Irving for making the same bifurcation that McCormack does: Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 121-22.

<sup>36</sup> Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 230.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Atonement. The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 230; and Colyer, *How to Read*, 117-23; Myk Habets, "The Doctrine of Election in Evangelical Calvinism: T. F. Torrance as a Case Study," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73.3-4 (2008): 340-42, 345-52. Doi: 10.1177/0021140008095442.

For now, suffice it to draw two conclusions. First, as with Wesley, so with Torrance: the charge of heterodox Christology remains unsustainable. Second, Torrance's profound insights into the ontological implications of the Incarnation go well beyond Wesley's simple affirmations of classical orthodoxy. These insights, coming as they do from a Reformed theologian, bear out a dictum by Deschner: "Ontological depth is among the things that Wesleyan christology . . . can learn from participation in the ecumenical christological discussion."<sup>38</sup> As we turn from Christ's person to his offices, we shall see how Torrance's ontological depth can supply Wesley's soteriology with a firm foundation.

### **A Common Commitment to the Threefold Office**

Wesley and Torrance agree that the one Christ in two natures holds three offices. Here both men reflect the influence of John Calvin, who featured the *munus triplex* in his Christology.<sup>39</sup> As we have seen above, Wesley's abridgment of the Westminster Shorter Catechism and his *Letter to a Roman Catholic* both affirm the *munus triplex*, and in his other writings as well he refers to it frequently as a synopsis of Christ's saving work.<sup>40</sup> Torrance's Edinburgh lectures relate his own soteriology to the threefold office,<sup>41</sup> making it a useful paradigm for comparing his teaching with Wesley's. Both of them make room in Christ's offices for the Reformation concerns with active and passive obedience, justification, and sanctification. Admittedly, the *munus triplex* is a somewhat stylized or even artificial soteriological framework.<sup>42</sup> This very artificiality gives it a certain flexibility in terms

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<sup>38</sup> Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, xix.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.15. Calvin's influence on Wesley was mediated through the Church of England: see David Rainey, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Salvation in Relation to His Doctrine of God" (PhD thesis, University of London, 2006), 41.

<sup>40</sup> Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, 73-74, 203-11.

<sup>41</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 58-62, 265.

<sup>42</sup> Adam J. Johnson, "The Servant Lord: A Word of Caution Regarding the *munus triplex* in Karl Barth's Theology and the Church Today," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65.2 (2012): 159-73; and Andrew Purves, *Exploring Christology & Atonement: Conversations with John McLeod Campbell, H. R. Mackintosh, T. F. Torrance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 208n27, who finds Torrance's correlations of Hebrew terms for redemption with the *munus triplex* and incarnational, active, and passive obedience "a bit forced; it is too neatly drawn"; and Torrance's own comments on the *munus triplex* in *Atonement*, 58-59.

of categorizing content, so that it is unsurprising to find differences as well as overlaps in the material that Wesley and Torrance assign to each office. These differences in distribution, as well as the two theologians' differing personal interests, also mean that each of them sees a different office as foundational to the other two. The following diagram sketches these overlaps and differences:<sup>43</sup>

<b>Office</b>	<b>Wesley</b>	<b>Torrance</b>
Prophet	Christ's active obedience; sanctification	Assumption of sinful flesh (w/ original sin); sanctification (foundational office)
King	Impartation of the Spirit; sanctification	Christ's active obedience; impartation of the Spirit; justification
Priest	Christ's passive obedience; justification (foundational office)	Christ's passive obedience; justification

As a young man, Wesley had labored long under the faulty notion that one must become saintly enough before being declared righteous by God. At last he grasped the gospel of the justification of sinners *sola fide*, resulting in his pivotal experience at Aldersgate of a heart strangely warmed. As a result, for Wesley Christ's priesthood is his basic office because our sanctification springs from our justification rather than the reverse.<sup>44</sup> While Wesley concentrates on the theology of Christian experience, Torrance is more concerned with theological ontology. Before the eternal Son could act or suffer humanly, he had to become human, and Torrance associates this assumption of human nature with the prophetic office via John 1:14's "The Word became flesh." Thus Christ's other two offices flow from his

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<sup>43</sup> The diagram combines the sequencing and content of Wesley's *munus triplex* from Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, chs. 3-6 (pp. 74-83 give Deschner's rationale for his sequencing) with Torrance's correlations in *Atonement*, 58-60 and his content on 106-108, 115-16 and in Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 80-81.

<sup>44</sup> Isaac Hopper, "'Christ Alone for Salvation': The Role of Christ and His Work in John Wesley's Theology" (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2017); Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, 74, 76.

being as Prophet.<sup>45</sup> In addition, Torrance wishes to nail our forensic justification and reception of the Spirit to a real condition of righteousness and holiness — not as found in ourselves but in Christ. Thus the prophetic office is primary because God has not just pardoned our sinful acts or superficially pasted the Spirit onto us but has reached to the roots of our sinful being and healed it in the self-sanctification of Christ.<sup>46</sup> In what follows, we will compare Wesley's and Torrance's treatments of each office in more detail.

### **Christ the Prophet**

Wesley and Torrance concur that Christ's prophetic teaching ministry was integral to his redemptive mission. Both of them describe him as enlightening our sin-darkened minds and as doing so not simply through verbal instruction but through incarnation.<sup>47</sup> Wesley's *Notes* affirm that the Son of God assumed "our miserable nature, with all its innocent infirmities" (Jn. 1:14; Heb. 2:14, 5:15) and so experienced weariness (Mt. 8:18, 27:32; Jn. 4:6), deep sorrow and terror (Mt. 26:37, 39, 41; Mk. 14:33; Heb. 5:7), and physical pain (Mt. 27:34, 46), yet was wholly without sin. As Wesley preaches in "The End of Christ's Coming," Jesus was "the only one born of a woman 'who knew no sin,' who, from his birth to his death, did 'all things well;' doing continually 'not his own will, but the will of Him that sent him.'"<sup>48</sup> In this way he teaches by setting an example of the holy life to which we are called. Wesley was greatly shaped by the then-popular "holy living" school (embodied in the writings of Thomas à Kempis, Henry Scougal, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law), which described the authentic Christian life in terms of the "imitation of Christ" (*imitatio Christi*). Such imitation included not only outward conduct but, more fundamentally, inward character, with virtues like humility and gentleness constellating around a singlehearted intention to glorify God in everything.<sup>49</sup> This

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<sup>45</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 59-60; and *ibid.*, *Incarnation*, 64.

<sup>46</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 53-54, 125-34, 328.

<sup>47</sup> Wesley's *Notes* on Mt. 1:16; Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 186-88; *ibid.*, *Atonement*, 437-47.

<sup>48</sup> WJW 6:273-74.

<sup>49</sup> Geordan Hammond, "John Wesley and 'Imitating' Christ," *Wesley Theological Journal* 45.1 (2010): 197-212.

was the quality of Christian existence that Wesley and his Methodists pursued as a this-worldly holy possibility for believers. Wesley used a variety of biblical phrases to speak of this holy possibility, among them “entire sanctification” (drawn from 1 Thess. 5:23), “perfect love” (1 Jn. 4:17-18; and Mt. 5:43-48), and “Christian perfection” (a far too easily misconstrued term based on the King James Version’s translations of, e.g., Job 1:1; 1 Kings 15:14; 1 Cor. 2:6; Phil. 3:15; Heb. 5:13–6:1).<sup>50</sup> But two of his phrases suggest his debt to the *imitatio Christi* tradition: to have “the mind of Christ” (Phil. 2:5) and to “walk as he walked” (1 Jn. 2:16).<sup>51</sup> To that end, Wesley’s *Notes* present Jesus as a role model in his active obedience in meeting temptations (Mt. 4:1; Mk. 1:12), demonstrating virtues (Mk. 3:5; 9:39; Lk. 7:36, 13:32; 1 Pet. 2:22–23), and hallowing human development by his progress from infancy to adulthood (Lk. 2:40, 43, 52).<sup>52</sup>

Torrance goes beyond Wesley in his view of the educative impact of the Incarnation. Thanks to McCormack’s quotes, we already have sampled Torrance’s pervasive insistence that Christ assumed fallen human nature and penetrated into the depths of our depravity. Such graphic language signals a richer conception than Wesley’s of the connection between incarnation and sanctification. Torrance sees Christ’s earthly life not simply as an exemplar of holy living to emulate but as actually healing human nature within himself, renewing our alienated mind into “the mind of Christ.” Torrance supports this view exegetically. When Luke 2:52 says the boy Jesus “increased” in wisdom, Torrance detects in the original meaning of the Greek word *prokopto*, “to beat out with blows,” the implication that Jesus advanced

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<sup>50</sup> Note well: Wesley did not simplistically read the KJV’s term “perfection” and anachronistically project a current popular construal of perfection onto the word. Quite the opposite: Wesley knew the original biblical languages and, while keeping the KJV’s term, waged a decades-long struggle to grasp and communicate the biblical content behind it. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, WJW 11:366-446, is a survey of this struggle.

<sup>51</sup> For Wesley’s most extensive exposition of this doctrine, including its biblical phraseology, see his *Plain Account*.

<sup>52</sup> Wesley was familiar with Irenaeus: see Wesley’s *Letter to the Rev. Dr. Conyers Middleton*, WJW 10:21-22, 33-40, 78-79. Wesley’s *Note* on Lk. 2:43 both borrows from Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* 2.22.4-6 and rejects its fancy that Christ lived to old age.

in wisdom despite the resistance of fallen human ignorance.<sup>53</sup> The “flesh” assumed by the Word (Jn. 1:14) refers to human nature in its fallen state. When Romans 8:3 says that Christ came “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” this means not a mere similitude to sinful flesh but a concrete instantiation of it. As the Apostle Paul puts it elsewhere, “For he [God] hath made him to be sin” (2 Cor. 5:21 KJV).<sup>54</sup> Wesley’s *Notes* on these verses are tamer. Young Jesus’ growth in wisdom has no agonistic quality about it (Lk. 2:40, 52). The term “flesh” in John 1:14 indicates a complete human nature, not a corrupt human nature. We have sinful flesh; what Christ has is a sinless resemblance to it (Rom. 8:3). Following the mature Augustine, Wesley translates 2 Cor. 5:21 as “*He made him a sin offering.*”<sup>55</sup>

What would Wesley have thought of Torrance’s “ontological healing” theory of the Incarnation? When Torrance presented his view at a World Council of Churches meeting, premiere Wesley scholar and Methodist theologian Albert Outler protested, “Was humanity therefore fallen on purpose? Is humanity sinful in itself?”<sup>56</sup> Maybe Wesley himself would have asked the same questions. On the other hand, Wesley’s one-time mentor William Law later published a pair of works mediating the teachings of the Kabbalah-influenced mystic Jakob Boehme. In response, Wesley vigorously opposed a number of Law’s theosophical speculations and deviations from received orthodoxy. Yet Wesley never rebuked Law for repeatedly writing of Christ’s incarnation in language that anticipates Torrance, for instance:

He was made Man for our Salvation, that is, He took upon Him our fallen Nature, to bring it out of its evil crooked State . . . . If the Life of fallen Nature, which Christ had taken upon Him, was to be overcome

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<sup>53</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 64, 106.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-64, 199, 255-56, and across Torrance’s corpus.

<sup>55</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *In Evangelium Johannis tractatus* 41.5-6; *ibid.*, *Enchiridion* 41. On the evolution of Augustine’s exegesis of this verse, see A. Bastiaensen, “Augustine’s Pauline Exegesis and Ambrosiaster,” in Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt, eds., *Augustine: Biblical Exegete*, *Collectanea Augustiniana* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 47-50.

<sup>56</sup> Faith and Order Commission Paper, No. 23, in *Minutes of the Working Committee, July 1956, Herrenalb, Germany, Commission on Faith and Order, World Council of Churches*, quoted in Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Human Nature of Christ in relation to Original Sin, with special reference to its Soteriological Significance* (London: Epworth, 1962), 172-73.



by Him, then every Kind of suffering and dying, that was a giving up, or departing from the Life of fallen Nature, was . . . necessary . . . . And therefore the Sufferings and Death of Christ were, in the Nature of the Thing, the only possible Way of his [sic] acting contrary to, and overcoming all the Evil that was in the fallen State of Man.<sup>57</sup>

Arguments from silence are, of course, inherently weak. Perhaps Wesley found such language objectionable but chose to ignore it to focus on what he deemed to be Law's more egregious claims. Yet the tantalizing chance remains that Wesley was open to Law's early version of the view that Torrance later championed.

### **Christ the King**

Taken in isolation, Wesley's account of sanctification as *imitatio Christi* could promote Pelagian self-effort. But Wesley complements Christ's exemplary prophetic office with his empowering regal office. As resurrected King, Christ subdues the evil in our hearts and conforms us to his image, progressively establishing his kingdom within us by means of his Spirit of grace.<sup>58</sup> Wesley's important sermon "On Working out our own Salvation"<sup>59</sup> sets this process beneath the banner of his trinitarian

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<sup>57</sup> William Law, *The Spirit of Prayer and The Spirit of Love*, ed. Sidney Spencer (repr. Cambridge: James Clarke, 1969), 249 (italics original); and 35, 47, 190, 250. Wesley's expansive critique of Law's works appears in WJW 9:466-518. For analyses of Law's influence on and clashes with Wesley, see J. Brazier Green, *John Wesley and William Law* (London: Epworth, 1945); Eric W. Baker, *A Herald of the Evangelical Revival: A Critical Inquiry into the Relation of William Law to John Wesley and the Beginnings of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1948). For Boehme's and Law's possible roles in the rise of the modern "fallenness" view in Christology, see Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity*, 9-11.

<sup>58</sup> Wesley, *Notes on Mt. 1:16*; his sermons "The Way to the Kingdom," "On Sin in Believers" (esp. 3.8), and "The Repentance of Believers" (esp. 3.4) in WJW 5:76-86, 144-70.

<sup>59</sup> WJW 6:506-513.

vision of divine and human agency in salvation, a vision that avoids false oppositions between monergism and synergism.<sup>60</sup> To this sermon we now turn.

Wesley's sermon text is Phil. 2:12-13, "Wherefore work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." He begins by noting the wider religious context of the Philippian letter: unlike the moral theism which formed the apex of pagan theologizing, the Gospel uniquely reveals the Son and Spirit of God and their roles in redemption. The verses immediately prior to Wesley's text describe the Son's *kenosis* in becoming human and dying for our sins. What Christ has done for us objectively, as described in the preceding text, the Spirit applies to us subjectively, as described in Wesley's text. Wesley takes its second clause first: the fact that all our good willing and doing results solely from God's working strips away all conceit or fantasy of human merit. "If we know and feel that the very first motion of good is from above, as well as the power which conducts it to the end; if it is God that not only infuses every good desire, but that accompanies and follows it, else it vanishes away; then it evidently follows that 'he who glorieth' must 'glory in the Lord.'"<sup>61</sup> The Spirit's work begins with universal prevenient grace, the light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world (Jn. 1:9), without which fallen human nature would be devoid of conscience or any inclination toward God and the good. The Spirit's work continues by granting the graces of repentance and faith,

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<sup>60</sup> These terms are slippery. Colyer, *How to Read*, 120-21, makes monergism mean God does all and we do naught, while synergism says God and we each do part. If so, monergists should be quietists and synergists, self-congratulatory, but typically neither is the case. Habets, "Doctrine of Election," 352-53, writing of Arminianism, defines and decries synergism as "meritorious" human contribution independent of grace *à la* Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism. Yet he affirms a "non-synergistic co-operation" with grace that "make[s] salvation a reality in the present tense." Evangelical Arminians deny Habets' definition of synergism and concur with his affirmation of non-meritorious, grace-enabled cooperation with God that makes salvation present: see Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 17-19, 30-31, 80-81, 97-178, 200-220. And Paul's use of *synergeo/synergos* (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1; 1 Thess. 3:2; Mk. 16:20). For Wesley's synthesis of monergism and synergism (defined differently than by Colyer and Habets), see Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 11-15, 73-81, 155-68, 195-228, 288-92.

<sup>61</sup> Wesley, "On Working out our own Salvation" 1.4, WJW 6:509.

justification and sanctification, progressively perfecting the mind of Christ in us.<sup>62</sup> It is within this framework of the constant initiative by which “God worketh in you” that Paul urges his readers to “work out your own salvation.” Wesley quotes an imagined opponent who protests that “if we allow that God does all, what is there left for us to do?” He dismisses this question as “the reasoning of flesh and blood . . . . For, first, God works; therefore you *can* work. Secondly, God works; therefore you *must* work.” That is, God’s grace makes us *able to respond*, hence *responsible*.<sup>63</sup> Wesley counsels his hearers to cooperate with the grace already at work within them rather than resisting it, thus courting God’s judgment.

What would Torrance make of this sermon? There is a clear resonance between Wesley’s central premise and Torrance’s “logic of grace.” Like Wesley, Torrance rejects fallen human oppositional logic: “All of grace” truly does implicate “all of us.”<sup>64</sup> As Torrance wrote early in his career, Christ “has come not to manipulate human beings, but to bring them to decision . . . . He brings their whole beings under the sovereignty of His Word, [so] that He makes them *responsible*, and so for the first time truly personal.”<sup>65</sup> Confronted by Christ with that decision, one gains the ability to say “yes” or — absurdly — say “no” and so fall back under the very judgment that he bore in our stead.<sup>66</sup> Like Wesley’s, Torrance’s view of the relationship of divine and human agency succumbs to neither a monergism of irresistible grace nor a synergism of human autonomy. Torrance points to two precedents: the Virgin Birth and the hypostatic union. In the Virgin Birth, God rather than man (i.e. Joseph) takes the initiative in Jesus’ conception, yet without erasing Mary’s response of faith to God’s grace: “Let it be to me as you have said.” The Holy Spirit overshadows her to produce the hypostatic union, in which Christ’s

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<sup>62</sup> Wesley’s sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” WJW 6:43-53.

<sup>63</sup> Wesley, “On Working out our own Salvation” 3.1-2, WJW 6:511 (italics his). And the title of Randy L. Maddox’s study of Wesley’s theology: *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

<sup>64</sup> See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992), xii.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “Predestination in Christ,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941): 112 (italics his).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

humanity has no existence independently of the Word, yet truly and concretely exists in union with the Word without any separation or fusion between the divine and human natures. So too “there is a kind of hypostatic union between Grace and faith, through the Holy Spirit,” between the divine and human decision in salvation. Electing grace gives the human response of faith a wholly dependent yet wholly real existence.<sup>67</sup> The two decisions coexist without separation or confusion. Torrance draws parallels between soteriological missteps and Christological heresies: those that separate the divine and human are Pelagianism (corresponding to adoptianism or ebionism) and synergism (corresponding to Nestorianism and Arianism), while those that confuse the two are determinism (corresponding to docetism) and the notion of “mystic infused grace” (corresponding to Eutychianism).<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, Torrance’s extensive grounding of divine and human agency in the Virgin Birth and hypostatic union underscores the difference of emphasis between Wesley and himself. For Wesley the accent falls on our subjective, sequenced, and fluctuating appropriation of salvation within the communion of the body of Christ.<sup>69</sup> Wesley’s default mood is the (Spirit-enabled) imperative while Torrance’s is the incarnational indicative of Christ’s objective once-for-all accomplishment. Thus Torrance ties Christ’s kingly office to his active obedience to a much greater degree than Wesley does. At his baptism, Christ has repented for us, believed for us, and received the Spirit for us. Throughout his

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 130. Note the implicit *anhypostasia-enhypostasia* couplet. Torrance treats the Virgin Birth expansively as a paradigm for salvation in his Auburn and Edinburgh lectures: see his *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 115-21; *ibid.*, *Incarnation*, 87-104.

<sup>68</sup> Torrance, “Predestination in Christ,” 129-31. Torrance’s complex, imperfectly coordinated sentence structure tangles these lines of correspondence. Wesley’s synergism and line that God “infuses every good desire” (see above) should not be confused with the Nestorian-like synergism and Eutychian-like “mystic infused grace” in Torrance’s typology. In these cases, common terminology does not equal common conceptuality. For critiques of Torrance’s typological uses of heresy, see Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers*, 193 and E. Jerome Van Kuiken, “Convergence in the ‘Reformed’ Theologies of T. F. Torrance and Jacob Arminius” in Keith D. Stanglin, Mark G. Bilby, and Mark H. Mann, eds., *Reconsidering Arminius: Beyond the Reformed and Wesleyan Divide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014), 126.

<sup>69</sup> This last line is crucial: Wesley spurned any purely private pursuit of salvation. See Preface 3-5 to his and Charles Wesley’s *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, WJW 14:320-321. Part 2.4 of “On Working out our own Salvation” envisages working out one’s salvation within a sacramental, serving community.

earthly life, he has waged costly yet victorious warfare against the power of evil, thereby sanctifying the human mind and will. Triumphant resurrected and ascended to heaven, he has poured out his Spirit on all flesh. His active obedience is imputed to us so that we may genuinely participate in his righteousness. Once we grasp Christ's "total substitution" for us, Torrance is confident that we will gladly light our own small candles of repentance, faith, righteousness, and holiness from Christ's royal bonfire.<sup>70</sup>

### **Christ the Priest**

Wesley and Torrance share a broad field of concord regarding Christ's priestly office. Both teach that, for our justification, he has borne the wrath of God against sin so as to provide a full atonement for the sin of the whole world. Neither has any patience with the doctrine of limited atonement or the view of unconditional limited election that undergirds it.<sup>71</sup> God's grace is as wide as it is deep. In Wesley's words, grace is "free in all" (owing nothing to human merit; the prevenient ground of all human goodness) and "free for all" (excluding no one).<sup>72</sup> Or as Torrance puts it, grace is as extensive as it is intensive.<sup>73</sup>

Once again, Torrance adds greater depth to Wesley's doctrines. First, Wesley's explanation of the atonement is largely a forensic, penal substitutionary account.<sup>74</sup> Torrance does not deny this perspective but sets it on an ontological basis: the reconciliation of divinity and humanity in the Word's hypostatic union with fallen flesh. Because the Word is the agent through whom all were made, his assumption of human nature has saving significance for all humankind; in this way

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<sup>70</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 114-26, 235-39; *ibid.*, *Atonement*, 265-71, 328; *ibid.*, *Mediation of Christ*, 81-86, 92-98. The term "total substitution" comes from Colyer, *How to Read*, 117 (de-italicized). See Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, 154-67 on Wesley's reticence to preach the imputation of Christ's active righteousness due to antinomian abuses of the doctrine.

<sup>71</sup> Wesley, "Free Grace," WJW 7:373-86; *ibid.*, Methodist Articles Two and Twenty in Oden, *Doctrinal Standards*, 131, 143; Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate*; Torrance, "Singularity," 225-56; *ibid.*, *Atonement*, 120-25, 181-92.

<sup>72</sup> Wesley, "Free Grace" 2-4, WJW 7:373-74.

<sup>73</sup> Torrance, "Predestination in Christ," 115.

<sup>74</sup> Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, 150-54; Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 94-98.

Torrance can charge the doctrine of limited atonement with a Nestorian division between Christ's divine creative action and his human redemptive suffering.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, Wesley knows no alternative to Calvinist unconditional partitive predestination except a (diluted) Arminian conditional partitive predestination, in which God foreknows who will believe and who will not and elects or reprobates accordingly.<sup>76</sup> Torrance makes predestination radically Christocentric: all humanity is both elect and reprobate in Christ, who suffered the damnation due us so that we might live through him.<sup>77</sup> Lastly, Wesley's doctrine of universal prevenient grace finds firmer footing in Torrance's theology of ontological healing.<sup>78</sup> The "light that enlightens everyone coming into the world" (Jn. 1:9) is the Word who became flesh blind and deaf to God (Isa. 42:19) and awakened the human mind and will in himself to the good, the true, and the holy. Thus in Christ human nature has been made receptive to God, and it is this receptivity that the Spirit, now poured out on all flesh, grants to all who share humanity with Christ.<sup>79</sup> The hypostatic union is the hidden heart of prevenient grace.

In addition to the Atonement, Wesley and Torrance also concur that Christ's priestly office continues in his intercession for us. Torrance stresses Christ's heavenly priesthood as the nexus of orthodox — rather than Pelagian — worship. In our prayers and adoration, we do not "do it ourselves" but join the Son's ongoing

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<sup>75</sup> Torrance, "Singularity," 244-45; *ibid.*, *Atonement*, 185-86.

<sup>76</sup> "Diluted" because for Wesley predestination is a secondary soteriological doctrine whereas for Arminius it is a primary, and primarily Christological, doctrine. Here Arminius is closer to Torrance. See W. Stephen Gunter, "The Loss of Arminius in Wesleyan-Arminian Theology" and Van Kuiken, "Convergence," in Stanglin, Bilby, and Mann, eds., *Reconsidering Arminius*, 71-90 and 113-35, respectively.

<sup>77</sup> Torrance, "Predestination in Christ," 110-11, 119, 125-26, 139n67.

<sup>78</sup> For recent attempts to ground the Arminian-Wesleyan doctrine, see W. Brian Shelton, *Prevenient Grace: God's Provision for Fallen Humanity* (Anderson, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 2014) and Ben Witherington III's review at *The Bible and Culture* ([www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2015/10/10/prevenient-grace-by-w-brian-shelton/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2015/10/10/prevenient-grace-by-w-brian-shelton/)).

<sup>79</sup> Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 227-31, 248-51; *ibid.*, *Incarnation*, 121-26.

prayer and adoration of his Father.<sup>80</sup> Wesley speaks similarly: his *Notes* on Rom. 1:8 offer an epigram that would delight Torrance: "The gifts of God all pass through Christ to us; and all our petitions and thanksgivings pass through Christ to God." The continuing mediation of Christ plays a crucial role in Wesley's understanding of "Christian perfection." Such "perfection" is neither absolute, angelic, or Adamic, for Christians remain with minds and bodies damaged by the Fall and so inevitably come short of thinking or doing just as they should. Thus Wesley insists that even Christians in whom the mind of Christ is most fully formed must pray, "Forgive us our trespasses" and rely on Christ's continuing application of his atonement to them through his advocacy before the Father. The "perfection" for which Wesley contends is simply complete devotion to God, such that the love of God excludes pride, self-will, and other evil dispositions. But God's love filling one's life does not make a person infallible; consequently involuntary transgressions still occur and require Christ's mediation. In addition, the gift of holy love is inseparable from the Giver. One cannot have the mind of Christ apart from Christ! There is no stockpile of sanctity within ourselves on which we may draw. We only share experientially in Christ's love, mind, and holiness in a moment-by-moment manner as his constant mediation makes these blessings available to us.<sup>81</sup>

### **Conclusion: A Tree and a Triple Offer**

We have suggested throughout this selective survey of Wesley's and Torrance's Christologies that Torrance enriches Wesley by stressing the objectivity and unity of salvation in Christ, especially in the doctrine of ontological healing. These emphases can help Wesleyans to put down deep dogmatic, theo-ontological, and Christological roots, finding nourishment and stability instead of rotting away from moralism or

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<sup>80</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 271-76 and especially Thomas F. Torrance, "The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy," in *ibid.*, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 139-214.

<sup>81</sup> Wesley, *Plain Account* §25, qq. 1-14, WJW 11:414-19.

blowing about in the winds of theological vagaries and spiritual neuroses.<sup>82</sup> In return, Wesley offers gifts to Torrance. The perennial tendency of a strongly objective theological approach is to drift into intellectualism and spiritual lethargy, if not antinomianism — to become but a deep-rooted stump.<sup>83</sup> This is emphatically *not* to pin such charges on Torrance himself! Yet the tendency remains, latent and liable to emerge in a weaker soul or later generation.<sup>84</sup> Just as Torrance can save Wesley's descendants from doctrinal and spiritual subjectivism, so Wesley can warn Torrance's heirs off the opposite dangers. Wesley challenges his listeners ever to grow, to pursue Christlikeness of inward and outward life to the praise of God's grace, to put forth branches toward heaven and bear fruit. To conclude with a play on Christ's threefold office, let me sketch Wesley's threefold offer to contribute to spiritual growth among Torrancians.

First, Wesley's *prophetic (theological) offer*: One strength of Torrance's Edinburgh lectures in Christology is their rehearsal of Christ's personal history, the way of the Savior from heaven to Bethlehem to Calvary to heaven again. This *via salvatoris* tends to replace a *via (or ordo) salutis* in Torrance's thought. By contrast, Wesley has a well-developed *via salutis*<sup>85</sup> of prevenient grace, personal conversion, progressive sanctification, and "Christian perfection," an *ordo* honed over his lifetime of practical ministry and with much pastoral value as a general template for Christian experience. Fear of subjectivism may make one wary of Wesley's *ordo*. Well did Luther warn of the *incurvatus in se* of sin! But when the heartsore Wesley

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<sup>82</sup> Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, xviii, suggests that a deeper conception of the ontology of Christology as the ground of both "the moral imperative" and "the indicative of grace" could "help Wesleyanism correct a certain tendency toward moralism and thus actually strengthen its emphasis upon holiness in heart and life." See 37.

<sup>83</sup> Wesley had to confront antinomianism in his ministry. See his sermon, "The Lord Our Righteousness" 19-20, WJW 5:244-45; *ibid.*, *Plain Account* §25 q34, WJW 11:430-31.

<sup>84</sup> Already Torrance's allies have had to defend his views against such abuses: see Colyer, *How to Read*, 117-23; Habets, "Doctrine of Election," 348n76; Speidell, *Fully Human in Christ*. What Torrance's critics misperceive sooner, his followers are liable to later. All theologies struggle to maintain nuance and balance over time.

<sup>85</sup> Some Wesley scholars play the terms *via salutis* and *ordo salutis* against one another: see Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 157-58, 330n2. For an apt rebuttal, see Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, 307-310. My own use of the term *via salutis* is as a more dynamic-sounding synonym for *ordo salutis*.



heard Luther's preface to Romans read at Aldersgate, he pivoted away from himself toward Christ and found subjective peace and joy as the side effect of his turn to the objective. Gazing at Christ, we see ourselves reflected in his eyes and gain his perspective on us. Just so, the *via salutis* is best conceived as the reflection or transposition of the *via salvatoris* into our own lives.<sup>86</sup> Christ re-scripts our story to fit his. Thinking these *viae* together shields Wesley's way from subjectivism, for Christ's saga is the metanarrative to which our stories conform. Viewing the two *via-à-via* also keeps Torrance's way from so overwhelming us with Christ's story that we can only stutter or mutter when asked how it shapes our own in practice.

To single out one correspondence between the two *viae*: Torrance's theme of Christ's sanctifying assumption of sinful flesh parallels Wesley's motif of Christians' entire sanctification. Torrance stresses the forming of the "mind of Christ" in Christ himself; Wesley, its formation in us. These are correlatives rather than contraries. T. A. Noble recently has shown that the Torrancian doctrines of ontological healing and total substitution are bedrock on which Wesley's doctrine may be built.<sup>87</sup> As Torrance teaches, "all of grace" means "all of us" — both extensively and intensively. Wesley's "Christian perfection" merely works out the implication of that intensiveness.<sup>88</sup>

Second, Wesley's *regal (organizational) offer*: Wesley and his Reformed colleague, George Whitefield, both saw remarkable spiritual revival under their preaching. Multitudes of irreligious Britons and Americans repented and embraced the Gospel. Yet Wesley's converts had a staying power that Whitefield's often

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<sup>86</sup> Deschner, *Wesley's Christology*, 60, suggests briefly that Wesley parallels Christ's personal history with our experience of the *ordo salutis*. For a book-length exposition, see Timothy L. Boyd, *John Wesley's Christology: A Study in Its Practical Implications for Human Salvation, Transformation, and Its Influences for Preaching Christ* (Salem, OH: Allegheny, 2004).

<sup>87</sup> T. A. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People. The Theology of Christian Perfecting* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

<sup>88</sup> Here I echo Scottish Methodist John Findlater, *Perfect Love: A Study of John Wesley's View of the Ideal Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Leith, [1914]; repr. Salem, OH: Schmul, 1985), 82-84, who argues that Wesley's doctrine of "perfect love" is the logical extension of the Reformed doctrine of divine sovereignty. See also Purves, *Exploring Christology*, 100-101, who wishes that Torrance had explored more the doctrine of progressive sanctification.

lacked. The reason was practical: Wesley organized his followers into discipleship groups. Wesley intended Methodism to be a renewal movement within Anglicanism rather than the rival that it later became, and so these groups supplemented the local Anglican churches — “little churches within the church,” as the Pietists who originated the idea had called them. He arranged the groups into an interlocking series, an *ordo societatis* patterned after his *ordo salutis*, with groups for “seekers” (to use today’s parlance), new converts, those pursuing entire sanctification, backsliders (anticipating today’s Alcoholics Anonymous), and so on. These groups preserved their members from subjectivism and promoted spiritual growth.<sup>89</sup> Just as the Savior himself passed through birth, childhood, and youth to adulthood, sanctifying each stage of development, so Methodists, supported by their groups, progressed from spiritual infancy to maturity. The *viae salvatoris*, *salutis*, and *societatis* form a cord of three strands not easily broken. Torrancians may adapt Wesley’s system to nurture spiritual growth rooted in Christ’s total substitution.<sup>90</sup>

Third, Wesley’s *priestly (liturgical) offer*: Thomas Torrance and especially his younger brother James taught that Christ’s eternal priesthood makes him the great worship leader through whom we worship.<sup>91</sup> Here as elsewhere the Torrancian theoretical framework may be filled in by Wesleyan practical content. John Wesley and especially his own younger brother, Charles, produced a wealth of hymnody that expresses orthodox, evangelical doctrine doxologically. As the Wesleys knew, the genius of the hymnic genre is that it transmits the faith memorably in a form accessible even to children, the blind, and illiterate adults, and all while inculcating not just truths about God but wholehearted worship of God. Torrancians will find the

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<sup>89</sup> D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki, 2016). Matthew Nelson Hill, *Evolution and Holiness: Sociobiology, Altruism and the Quest for Wesleyan Perfection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), relates the groups’ effectiveness nonreductively to sociobiological theory.

<sup>90</sup> I recommend Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed, 2013) and David E. Fitch, *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016). See also Grace Communion International’s spiritual formation program for ministers and church workers (<https://www.gci.org/foundations>).

<sup>91</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement*, 273-76; James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

Wesley hymns a rich resource for liturgical renewal. Not only may the hymns themselves be reused (preferably with careful updating of their language); they also may serve as a pattern for new songs that creatively combine sound doctrine, scriptural idiom, and current musical styles. A living orthodoxy demands doxology. Thus it is apt to end an essay on Christ's person and offices with a Wesley hymn:

O Filial Deity,  
Accept my new-born cry!  
See the travail of thy soul,  
Saviour, and be satisfied;  
Take me now, possess me whole,  
Who for me, for me hast died!

Prophet, to me reveal  
Thy Father's perfect will:  
Never mortal spake like thee,  
Human prophet like divine;  
Loud and strong their voices be,  
Small, and still, and inward thine!

On thee my Priest I call,  
Thy blood atoned for all:  
Still the Lamb as slain appears,  
Still thou stand'st before the throne,  
Ever off'ring up my prayers,  
These presenting with thy own.

*PARTICIPATIO*

Jesu, thou art my King,  
From thee my strength I bring:  
Shadowed by thy mighty hand,  
Saviour, who shall pluck me thence?  
Faith supports, by faith I stand,  
Strong as thy omnipotence.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Hymn 186, stanzas 1, 6-8 in John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodists*, in Richard P. Heitzenrater, gen. ed., *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 7:314-15. On this hymnal as an authoritative source of Wesley's theology, see 1-22 and Hopper, "Christ Alone for Salvation," 233-52.