

**T. F. TORRANCE'S UNAPOLOGETIC THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS
AND JESUS' BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE**

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Abstract: *At the heart of T. F. Torrance's theology is a pattern of exchange — in the incarnation, the Son of God takes what is ours only to make what is his ours. This pattern of exchange also frames Torrance's biblical exegesis, of which Jesus' baptism in the Gospel of Mark is a prime example. He interprets Jesus' baptism as a clear indication of his assumption of fallen flesh and vicarious repentance. This reading goes well beyond what biblical commentators think the passage intends. The distance between Torrance's theological interpretation and a historical-critical reading of Jesus' baptism raises two questions that this essay shall address. First, what is the basis for Torrance's hermeneutic? Second, does his unapologetic theological approach help us to grasp the meaning of Jesus' Baptism? I will argue that Torrance's unapologetic theological reading of Jesus' baptism illumines the Markan Christology implicit in the Gospel's narrative.*

Introduction

At the heart of the theology of T. F. Torrance stands the pattern of exchange: the Son of God's descent to take what is ours only to make what is his ours by his ascent to the Father. This pattern hinges on the idea that Word assumes not just flesh in the abstract but our flesh as it is — fallen, alienated, and in rebellion against its Lord and Creator. The incarnation therefore describes the gracious condescension of the Son of God into human existence under divine judgment and



the godforsakenness epitomized in the psalmist's cry, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.*"¹ For Torrance, this mystery of the incarnation is revealed in the baptism of repentance in which Christ

took the divine judgement into his mind and innermost being, acquiescing in it, accepting it willingly, and at the same time offering himself willingly to the Father. In this way he entered into the depths of judgement and sorrow for our sin in a way we never can do. And he wrought out in our human nature and in our human soul complete agreement with the Father in his righteous condemnation of our sin, his grief and sorrow over our rebellion and alienation. In vicarious penitence and sorrow for the sin of mankind, Christ met and responded to the judgement and vexation of the Father, absorbing it into his own being.²

The mystery of the incarnation includes the vicarious and atoning nature of Christ's entire life as he assumes our sinful flesh and exchanges it for his righteous humanity in his messianic mission.

This pattern of exchange lies at the center of Torrance's theology because he believes that it is the structural logic of the Bible itself. This is evident in his biblical exegesis of Jesus' baptism in the Gospel of Mark. Torrance sees the Old Testament logic of exchange in the motifs of Israel as God's chosen, beloved son and as God's servant applied to Jesus. These identify him as "the Son of the Father who is sent on his mission as the suffering servant in fulfillment of God's covenant will."³ The servant songs of Deutero-Isaiah (40-55) are reconfigured around Jesus as "the Son of Man" so that the meaning of "ransom for many" is universalized as "ransom for all."⁴ Furthermore, Christ's mission as the suffering servant begins in baptism

¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 61.

² Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 70.

³ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 69; Thomas F. Torrance, "The Sacrament of Baptism," in *Conflict and Agreement in the Church* Volume Two (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960), 107-8.

through his ontological solidarity with sinners, assuming fallen flesh under divine judgment. His obedience in our place and on our behalf begins in the banks of the Jordan, far before he enters the shadow of Gethsemane or treads the stony road to Golgotha. Torrance draws this connection from the apparent linking of Jesus' baptism to the giving of his life as a ransom for the many in Mark 10:35-45. Commenting on the phrase "the baptism with which he is being baptized" in 10:39, Torrance notes that Jesus' passion is something he undergoes in the "continuous present."⁵ He draws the implication that Christ

was solemnly and lawfully consecrated at his baptism, into that passion that he was thrust right away in his temptations when he was tempted to evade the cross but in which he chose the way of suffering and shame for our sakes. And so, all through his obedient life until the garden of Gethsemane and the prayer wrung out of him there with strong crying and tears, 'Not my will but thine be done,' it was finally in that passion that he fulfilled the rule of the suffering servant and sealed it with his blood on the cross.⁶

The atoning work of Christ on the cross touches every aspect of our life because in the incarnation the Son of God assumed fallen humanity into oneness with himself as he lived in obedient communion with the Father. By connecting Jesus' baptism with his crucifixion, the Gospel of Mark highlights the Son of God's descent into the utter alienation of fallen humanity, taking our place to share with us his righteous humanity. He takes our inability to repent and exchanges it for *his* repentance. He takes our disobedience and exchanges it for *his* obedience. He takes our

⁵ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70. Torrance also sees the language of descent and ascent of Old Testament liturgy in the New Testament's presentation of baptism (*ibid.*, 76).

unfaithfulness and gives us *his* faithfulness instead. He takes our unrighteousness and gives his *righteousness*.⁷

While Torrance interprets Jesus' baptism as a clear indication of his assumption of fallen flesh, recent biblical commentators do not even broach the idea. The main question at hand is not whether the Son assumed fallen flesh but whether early Christians were embarrassed about the fact that their sinless savior underwent a ritual for the cleansing of sinners.⁸ Morna Hooker's solution to this dilemma reveals the predilection of commentators to prefer historical reconstruction over christological reflection:

It is unnecessary, and indeed unwarranted, to explain the baptism of Jesus, as some modern commentators have done, as a vicarious act of repentance, or an identification with sinners. If John's baptism was intended to be for the New Age, the rite which gathered together a holy people of God who affirmed in this act of committal that they

⁷ George Hunsinger captures the "dimension of depth" that the vicarious humanity gives to Torrance's account of baptism as a sacrament. This dimension of depth refers to the objective reality and power of Christ's vicarious humanity, grounded in the hypostatic union with the Son, and of Christ's finished work into which the believer is united; George Hunsinger, "The Dimension of Depth: Thomas F. Torrance on the Sacraments," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 139-160. As Torrance states, baptism "must be interpreted in coherence with the whole Gospel of the incarnation, in a dimension of depth going back to the saving work of God in Jesus Christ, and as grounded so objectively in that work that it has no content, reality or power apart from it"; Thomas F. Torrance, "The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church," in *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996), 83.

⁸ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 164. There is some discussion about whether the baptism indicates Jesus' own act of repentance, his formal solidarity with the people, or his leadership of a movement. For example, C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 52. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 67. Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 2001), 44. William L. Lane argues that Jesus offers vicarious repentance as the "one true Israelite"; *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 56. But Francis J. Maloney judges that Jesus' baptism is a matter of historical memory and as such cannot "bear the weight of speculation"; *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 36.

were ready for his coming, then it was natural for Jesus to associate himself with this movement, and to join those who by baptism showed that they looked for the coming Kingdom of God.⁹

Rather than entertain the possibility of a christological statement, Hooker seeks a plausible historical reason for why we find Jesus standing in the row of sinners in the Jordan River. If there is a primary christological riddle to be solved, it appears to be the latent adoptionism in the allusion to the sonship language of Psalm 2:7.¹⁰ According to many commentators, Mark presents Jesus' baptism as a clandestine coronation of the messiah in the Davidic line, in which his true identity is momentarily glimpsed but will remain veiled until his crucifixion.¹¹ In sum, assumptions about the development of doctrine or the historical origin of the story direct the reader's attention.

Torrance is, of course, aware that his reading diverges from historical-critical interpretations here in this passage (and elsewhere). He writes, "I make no apology, therefore, for trying to interpret the Bible in the light of the logos of God's self-revelation which it conveys."¹² For Torrance, one must begin with the reality of God's divine being and action in the world in order to perform a truly historically sensitive and informed reading of Scripture. He thus claims, "So far as the biblical texts are concerned, this calls for an unashamed theological exegesis and interpretation of them, if only to control our historico-critical research so that it may be properly objective."¹³ Torrance makes no apology for reading Scripture in light of the revelation it conveys, because this is in fact the only way to grasp its meaning. In short, without an explicit theological approach to biblical interpretation, the meaning of Scripture is mangled by methodologically excluding divine action and being in history.

⁹ Hooker, *St. Mark*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 2001), 44.

¹⁰ Marcus, *Mark*, 160.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹² T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 5.

¹³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 42.

This divide between Torrance's theological interpretation and a historical-critical reading of Jesus' baptism raises two questions that this essay shall address. First, what is the basis for Torrance's hermeneutic? Second, does his unapologetic theological approach help us to read Mark's account of Jesus' Baptism? To put the question plainly, has Torrance discerned the meaning of the text or has he projected his theology into the text by emphasizing the assumption of fallen flesh and vicarious repentance? In order to answer these questions, we must first reckon with the way in which Torrance's Christology informs his doctrine of Scripture, and then consider his critiques of the operative dualism between the theological and historical in the practice of biblical studies. This will enable us to appreciate his description of theological interpretation as "depth-exegesis." Finally, we shall consider the ways in which Torrance's unapologetic theological reading of Jesus' baptism illumines the Markan Christology implicit in the Gospel's narrative.

The Nature of Scripture and the Reality of Christ

Torrance's hermeneutic is the result of his decision to subordinate the task of biblical interpretation to the reality of God's being and action in the world in Jesus Christ. According to Torrance, the biblical texts must be understood as conditioned by the reality of God's self-revelation in space and time, both in God's dealings with Israel and in Christ. It is after all these first order claims about God's activity that form the basis for Scripture's authority as that which mediates divine revelation to us. Scripture's authority thus rests not on the biblical texts themselves but on the revealing and reconciling God to which they witness.¹⁴ The words of Scripture "bear witness to what is other than and beyond themselves and which is true, if it is true, apart from them."¹⁵ Scripture's ontology is fundamentally semiotic — it points beyond itself to the reality of God, to the One whose being and action undergird and enfold the words of Scripture. The interpreter must always be cognizant of this distinction between *signum* and *res*, so as not to collapse the two. This distinction is

¹⁴ As Torrance states, biblical texts are revelatory "not because of what they are in themselves but because of the divine revelation mediated in and through them" (*Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 95).

¹⁵ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 6.

maintained by properly subordinating Scripture to the divine reality and not vice versa.

Torrance's well-known commitment to the scientific nature of the knowledge of God drives his concern to map the ontological structures of the biblical witness. Objective knowledge requires the object under study to shape the very structure of human thought.¹⁶ A scientific approach to knowledge, then, is a mode of inquiry that is determined by its object. In the case of the Bible, the object under consideration is ultimately that to which the words of Scripture bear witness. Therefore, biblical interpretation takes its *ratio* from the divine action and being that Scripture seeks to mediate, rather than treating Scripture as though it were just another literary product of its time and place. The unique ontology of Scripture requires a distinctively theological method of interpretation.

Not only does Scripture point beyond itself to its grounding and goal of Christ, but it does so with an innate intelligibility grounded in the Word made flesh. In virtue of the Creator's incarnation, God's self-revelation is "an intelligible, articulate revealing of God by God whom we are enabled to apprehend through the creative power of his Word addressed to us, yet a revealing of God by God which is actualized within the conditions of our creaturely existence and therefore within the medium of our human thought and speech."¹⁷ According to Torrance, the assumption of creaturely reality establishes the conditions for the communication of God's identity to human beings. In the hypostatic union, "space and time provide the rational medium within which God makes Himself present and known to us, and our knowledge of Him may be grounded objectively in God's own transcendent rationality."¹⁸ As a result, Scripture does indeed reveal God intelligibly and objectively, even as God's identity transcends our creaturely comprehension. To put the matter another way, the incarnation establishes the ontological conditions for epistemic access to God's identity through the biblical witness.

¹⁶ T. F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 9.

¹⁷ Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 85.

¹⁸ Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, 24.

Torrance's account of the ontological relation of Scripture includes another movement — revelation is not only given by God but also as received by humans through God. As God reveals himself in Jesus Christ, he also provides the faithful human response to God as the fully human one. God "reveals himself to us, not only from without or from above, in the advent of his Son as the incarnate Savior among us, but also from below, in a movement of his Spirit in which through his presence within us he meets himself from our end, thereby bringing us within the circle of his knowing of himself and his revealing of himself through himself."¹⁹ Torrance insists that since God's self-revelation comes through the incarnation, revelation and reconciliation are inseparable. The Son's assumption of human nature includes our human nature in his unbroken fellowship with the Father and transforms it. The hypostatic union between God and humanity in Christ structures reality so that divine revelation "already includes a true and appropriate and fully human response as part of its achievement for us and to us and in us."²⁰ Reconciliation penetrates the ontological structures of the divine-human relation such that revelation occurs within the movement of God toward humanity in Christ and — just as important — within the movement of humanity in Christ toward God.

This way of delineating the objective and subjective sides of knowledge of God within the divine economy plays out in Torrance's strong account of the production of the biblical texts as themselves under the controlling force of reconciliation. He writes that the apostles (those who are united to Christ within the sphere of reconciling revelation),

provide us with the divinely appointed, the divinely prepared, and there the normative realization and actualization of revelation and reconciliation In other words, it is the point of view of the Apostles which is the point of view which Christ means us to have of him. Their point of view is the point of view of those who have been forgiven and reconciled by Christ, the specifically Christian point of

¹⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons*, 2d ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 32.

²⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 131.

view. And as such it is the divinely guided and inspired point of view from within the perspective of redeemed sinners, providing us with the definite and normative pattern of response to revelation and reconciliation which God himself has willed and constituted in the Church.²¹

Christ and the Spirit enfold the apostles, who, though finite and fallible, have their words shaped and converted to become Holy Scripture. Torrance continues, "The revelation of God objectively given and subjectively realized in the Person and work of Christ now through the Spirit subjectively takes shape in the mind of the apologetic Church in final form."²² As John Webster observes, Torrance offers very little description of the "textual culture" of Scripture — that is, of "how texts are produced, disseminated and appropriated."²³ This is no doubt a weakness of his. Nevertheless, Torrance's view that the divine reality of Christ dictates the formation of the biblical text has exegetical implications. This can be seen in his handling of the motif of the "Messianic Secret" in the Gospel of Mark.

The trope of the "Messianic Secret" was made famous at the beginning of the 20th century by William Wrede. According to Wrede, the key to understanding the Gospel of Mark is the secret messianic identity of Jesus, which he initially discloses but then repeatedly censures until his identity is laid bare in the crucifixion.²⁴ Torrance considers this gradual unfolding of Jesus' identity to be a byproduct of the proper mystery of his identity as the Word made fallen flesh. It is "the ultimate mystery of the blood of Christ, the blood of God incarnate, a holy and infinite

²¹ Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 136.

²² *Ibid.*, 137.

²³ John Webster, "T. F. Torrance on Scripture," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65, no. 1 (2012): 60. Webster continues, "This may suggest that the promised integration of Word and words, *res* and *signum*, has not been fully achieved It is not simply that Torrance's work as a whole is exegetically light, but that so firm is his conception of the ostensive nature of scripture that he does not linger over the textual sign, fearing, no doubt, that this may arrest the movement of hermeneutical intelligence in pressing through to the *res*" (60). For a similar critique, see Darren Sarisky, "T. F. Torrance on Biblical Interpretation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 3 (2009): 342.

²⁴ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co. LTD, 1971).

mystery which is more to be adored than expressed."²⁵ Faced with revealing the infinite mystery of atonement, Jesus must slowly initiate his followers into his enigmatic mission to reach Golgotha. Torrance emphasizes Jesus' self-revelation of his identity as a demonstration of his authority:

On the one hand (as the evangelists make clear) he exercised a sovereign control over all his *acts*, and bringing even the reactions of people against him under the mastery of his purpose, refused to come to the supreme purpose of his life, "to give his life a ransom for many," until the hour of God arrived. On the other hand he restrained his *words* revealing this purpose and communicated them only as the pattern of his mission began to unfold in its actual course, making his words and acts proceed *pari passu* in the one mission of revelation and reconciliation.²⁶

Notice that Jesus remains sovereign over the perception of his identity even as he must accommodate himself to his hearers by slowly coordinating his words and acts. Consequently, Jesus' disciples and, in turn, the writers of Scripture bear witness to his identity with a unified theological and historical retelling of his life, death, and resurrection. Positioning the interplay between the writers of Scripture and Christ's reconciling revelation allows Torrance to see the Messianic Secret as a witness to the incomprehensible mystery of the atoning death of the Son of God.

Contrast this unitary vision of the objective and subjective dimensions of revelation with the wedge Wrede drives between the historical and theological. By challenging the fundamental assumption about the literary nature of the Gospel of Mark, he pushed biblical scholars to invert their exegetical approach in light of the nature of the Messianic Secret.²⁷ Instead of a kernel of historical truth encased in the elaboration of the miraculous and theological, we find only the doctrinal view of

²⁵ Torrance, *Atonement*, 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5. Torrance continues, "Jesus deliberately reiterated what he had to say, for he had something very definite and important to communicate to them, though clearly they shrank from receiving it" (*ibid.*, 6).

²⁷ Wrede, *Messianic Secret*, 129.

the community interpolated into a historical setting.²⁸ For example, the inability of the disciples to grasp the meaning hidden in Jesus' parables does not represent his actual relationship with the disciples; instead, the disciples are a literary device employed by Mark to convey the community's epistemological conviction that revelation happens in retrospect of the resurrection.²⁹ But Wrede does not intend to cede the historian's control of the meaning of the Gospel narratives over to the church and its theologians. Discerning the dogmatic construal of Jesus remains fundamentally a historical task because "the community could not have a picture of him that fell short of their own interests in matters of faith."³⁰ The theological — in contrast to the historical — nature of the Gospel emerges as the historian reconstructs the Markan community and its dogmatic convictions about the identity of Jesus that it wished to enshrine in the sacred text. As a result, "Markan Christology" becomes a circumlocution for the historical reconstruction of the Markan community and its aspirations to cement their traditions in the Gospel. In Torrance's view, this exegetical approach conforms the text to a host of metaphysical and historical assumptions rather than allowing the divine action and being in the history of Christ to determine one's hermeneutic.

Unapologetic Theological Interpretation as "Depth-Exegesis"

According to Torrance, God's triune self-revelation requires an approach to reading the Bible that can account for the undergirding reality of the Word made flesh to which Scripture points. He calls this method "depth-exegesis," an approach he learned from his teacher William Manson.³¹ The name signifies the hermeneutical

²⁸ Ibid., 90-91.

²⁹ Ibid., 103. The standard historical-critical approaches of Wrede's day sought to understand the Gospel narrative as historical or psychological presentations. But Wrede argued that Mark must be treated as a presentation of Jesus primarily motivated by dogmatic and theological conviction. Wrede's literary-theological approach better accounted for the Messianic Secret than any historical or psychological explanation for the disciples' inability to understand Jesus' rather straightforward parables.

³⁰ Ibid., 89.

³¹ Thomas F. Torrance, "Introduction," in William Manson, *Jesus and the Christian*, ed. with introduction by Thomas F. Torrance (London: James Clarke; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 9.

goal — to penetrate below the “surface” of the text to the divine reality to which it bears witness. This interpretive method is grounded in the ontological underpinning of Scripture, in the unique revelation of the Triune God in Jesus of Nazareth. In this way, “depth-exegesis” is properly scientific, conforming its mode of study to the nature of Scripture as a witness to the revealing and reconciling reality of the Triune God.³² Torrance’s method has three interrelated facets.³³ (1) The interpreter must have his or her habit of thought determined by the deep inner-logic that unites the entire corpus of Scripture. (2) The text under consideration must be read in light of the whole of the New Testament’s coherent pattern of the revealing and reconciling *ratio* of the Trinity so evident in the trinitarian logic of Christ’s descent and ascent.³⁴ (3) Depth-exegesis sees the historical and theological components of Scripture as unified by the “intrinsic intelligibility given them by divine revelation, and within the field of God’s objective self-communication in Jesus Christ.”³⁵

The full depth of Scripture’s meaning can be reached only when one’s reading strategy comports with the reality of Christ as fully God and fully human.³⁶ Therefore, Scripture must be interpreted “in the light of the epistemic and ontological relation between the historical Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, and God the Father.”³⁷ The “unbroken relation in being and act between the Son and Father”³⁸ in the person of Christ means that historical investigation of Jesus cannot proceed as though he were just another figure in history among many others. In other words, the reality of Christ as a “predicate of the Son or Word of God” demands a different method than the one that governs historical-critical study of

³² Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 37.

³³ See *ibid.*, 37-50.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 43. Torrance argues that the New Testament does not simply provide a smattering of information that must be pieced together to form the doctrine of the Trinity; rather the very structure of thought reflects an intrinsic Trinitarian logic.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁶ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 30.

³⁷ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 48.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

the Bible.³⁹ Historical-critical approaches are incommensurate with the biblical narrative because biblical logic depends on categories that defy the range of concepts available to the historian. The historian is thus faced with two alternatives: either shoehorn Jesus into pre-existing categories or adopt the New Testament's witness to the theological metaphysic internal to the biblical narrative. Torrance writes, "The key to this theological interpretation of the New Testament is found in the New Testament itself, in the way in which its presentation of the historical Jesus and its presentation of the risen Jesus are empirically and conceptually integrated with each other under the divine authority (εξουσία) of his self-identifying and self-authenticating reality as the incarnate Lord."⁴⁰ The Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are indivisible on account of the ontological reality of God's union with creaturely reality in Christ. This indivisibility is intrinsic to Jesus, the divine-human subject, whose unique human history remains unintelligible apart from his divinity as the incarnate Son.⁴¹

The dual fact of Jesus Christ as true God and true human means that Jesus is open to historical investigation. Rather than providing a substitute for historical and literary study, Torrance's theological exegesis demands greater historical and literary analysis of a given text precisely because of the ontology of the incarnation to which interpretation is subordinated. The doctrine of the hypostatic union provides the conceptual space to speak of divine agency in the world through Christ in non-competitive terms. This gives a metaphysical basis for the unified account of the theological, historical, and literary elements in Scripture. Torrance's appreciation for Manson's "depth-exegesis" in the first place largely stems from his ability to draw together the theological, historical, and literary layers of the New Testament. The key to Manson's success is a method "in which the literary forms are interpreted in their historical actuality, without divorce either from the spiritual realities to which they refer us or from the prophetic religion and culture stemming

³⁹ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 27; see also Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 230.

⁴⁰ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 44.

⁴¹ Thomas F. Torrance, "The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 7 (1954): 251.

from the Old Testament to which they go back."⁴² According to Torrance, Manson's exemplary method exhibits five commitments: (1) sensitivity to the reception history of texts; (2) recognition of the Old Testament as providing intelligibility to the New; (3) attention to the genre of New Testament writings as confessional theological documents; (4) appreciation of Jesus' founding of the church on a radical break with existing social, cultural, and moral norms; and (5) emphasis on the impress of divine action in Christ and the Spirit upon the early Christian communities.⁴³ These same five commitments also characterize Torrance's theological interpretation.⁴⁴

Torrance's Critique of Historical-Critical Interpretation

We now turn to examine Torrance's critique of historical-critical exegesis in order to set the contours of his approach in relief. As we shall see, the principal difference between Torrance's depth-exegesis and historical-critical interpretation is metaphysical. Torrance argues that when the reality of God and God's self-revelation are not taken into account, "the Bible is treated, and interpreted, in such

⁴² Torrance, "Introduction," 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10-14.

⁴⁴ Torrance's biblical theology came under heavy fire in James Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). Barr critiques Torrance for what Webster calls "illegitimate correlations of grammar and forms of thought; deriving meaning from etymological sequence; allowing theological judgements or undisciplined associations across the biblical corpus to determine semantic matters; [and] scant attention to language use" ("T. F. Torrance on Scripture," 52). Torrance accepted that he was wrong about some of his use of vocabulary (he had leaned on Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* for his definition of some biblical words), including his use of the Old Testament for interpreting the New; Thomas F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* (Edinburgh, New York: T&T Clark, 1999), x. But he refused to accept that Barr's criticisms posed any real challenge to his biblical interpretation. Torrance thus re-published *Royal Priesthood: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* in its original form, stating, "It is not surprising that by denigrating the objective reference of biblical language that Barr should find so many biblical theologians 'obscure,' for he fails by his conflation of semantics with syntactics to deal faithfully with their language in accordance with their intention with using it" (*Royal Priesthood*, x-xi.). Webster succinctly describes the real source of disagreement: "What Barr did not grasp was that the engine of Torrance's word studies was a theology of biblical language as a sign of revelation, possessed of a depth by virtue of its relation to the realities to which it testifies and not simply terminating in its syntactic surface" ("T. F. Torrance on Scripture," 52).

a way as to bracket off the surface text and the phenomenal events it may describe from the objective, intelligible depth of God's active self-revelation." Historical-critical methods cannot access the depth and richness of biblical texts because they ignore the ontological reality that undergirds them and to which they gesture. This approach is "predetermined by uncritical epistemological assumptions" about its own metaphysic, which, in turn, precludes the kind of hermeneutic necessary to penetrate beneath the surface of a text to mine it for its full meaning.⁴⁵ Unless the historical and literary nature of a text is articulated with reference to the basic ontological reality of God's union with creaturely being, our understanding of the nature of history itself is distorted. According to Torrance, modern day biblical interpretation remains hamstrung by its unreflective methodological naturalism.

Torrance's many critiques of various biblical interpreters boil down to a single charge — a dualistic split between the theological and the historical.⁴⁶ He sees the bifurcation of the theological and historical as evidence of severing the Bible from its "deep roots in divine revelation." Without this ontological relation, the historical and theological lose "the consistent substructure that holds them conceptually and meaningfully together."⁴⁷ This substructure, as we have seen, refers to the objective and subjective sides of revelation that are grounded in Christ's reconciling union with humanity.⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Torrance can state the problem in terms of adherence to a scientifically outdated "receptacle notion" of space and time, which cannot conceive of a noncompetitive account of God and the world. The dualism between history and theology arises from excising the "message of the Christian Gospel from any essential relation to the structures of space and time."⁴⁹ True exegesis must be theological in nature because a theological ontology is internal to the material

⁴⁵ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 3.

⁴⁶ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 48.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁸ For an account of Torrance's notion of dualism, see Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity*, *Great Theologians* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 39-43. As Molnar rightly argues, Torrance finds in the Nicene notion of *homoousion* an analogy for overcoming dualistic thinking and properly ordering the relation between divine and human being and action (*ibid.*, 54-58).

⁴⁹ Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, v.

content and grammar of the incarnation, in which God stands in unique relation to creation. The incarnation and resurrection “form the basic framework in the interaction of God with mankind in space and time, within which the whole Gospel is to be interpreted and understood.”⁵⁰ This is the requisite conceptual apparatus to describe the movement of the Son of God in history.

According to Torrance, when the divine economy becomes extraneous to the definition of Scripture, the consciousness of the early worshipping community becomes the *de facto* defining reality and object of study of the biblical text.⁵¹ Here, the production of Scripture is conceptualized within the dichotomy of history and theology. This same dualism then reinforces the way in which Scripture is to be interpreted. Scripture, it is thought, re-presents the Jesus of history through the eyes of faith in a theological work of literature. Where biblical scholars see a hermeneutic that is attentive to the historical, social, cultural, and psychological ingredients of a biblical text, Torrance detects a counterfeit construal of history, cordoned off from divine action. This metaphysical framework seals off the divine economy from the historical conditions out of which it arose, and thus imposes on the Bible an alien account of the way the world is.⁵² In one of Torrance’s more polemical statements, he avers, “The real Jesus of history is the Christ who cannot be separated from his saving acts, for his person and his work are one, Christ clothed with his gospel of saving grace. The so-called Jesus of history shorn of theological truth is an abstraction invented by a pseudo-scientific method.”⁵³ Despite his strong criticisms, Torrance believes that historical-critical investigation remains essential to the task of interpretation. His complaint is that the historical critical method simply fails to account for history *qua* history because its epistemology presupposes both an unscientific and a-theological view of reality.

⁵⁰ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 20.

⁵¹ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 36.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 9.

Torrance's view is not unlike the one espoused by Robert Jenson in his distinction between the "Jesus of history" and the "historian's Jesus."⁵⁴ Jenson notes that the question "who is Jesus?" is a question of identity — that is, of what enables "identity with myself across time."⁵⁵ Answering this question is no simple matter. A definition of identity is not self-evident and always requires a venture into the realm of ontology and metaphysics. Jenson frames the dilemma for the biblical interpreter this way: "You cannot accurately pick out Jesus of Nazareth without in fact simultaneously picking out the second person of the Trinity, and you cannot accurately pick out the second person of the Trinity without in fact simultaneously picking out Jesus of Nazareth." This forces a decision upon us: "Unless we are willing to reject the historic teaching of the church at its very heart, we must obey the rule: when we ask about the identity of Jesus, historical and systematic questions cannot be separated."⁵⁶ Jenson thus concludes that the church's dogma is a "necessary hermeneutical principle of historical reading, because it describes the true ontology of historical being."⁵⁷

Like Jenson, Torrance believes that rendering a true historical account of Jesus requires dogmatic concepts that entail a theological metaphysic. Both think so because Jesus is not just another instance of a human being as such but rather the incarnate Son of God. But, as we have seen, Torrance also extends this logic to his doctrine of Scripture. His objection to the intrinsic bifurcation of theology and history in biblical interpretation rests on two interrelated claims. First, Christ's encounter with his disciples and the apostles results in the "reorganization of the human consciousness," in which the divine-human reality of Christ is objectively apprehended.⁵⁸ Moreover, the "revelation of God objectively given and subjectively realized in the Person and work of Christ now through the Spirit subjectively takes

⁵⁴ Robert Jenson, "Identity, Jesus, Exegesis," in *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 48.

⁵⁵ Jenson, "Identity, Jesus, Exegesis," 44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁸ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 42.

shape in the mind of the apologetic Church in final form."⁵⁹ Second, Torrance argues that form criticism continues to operate with a pseudo-scientific epistemology that is philosophically untenable. It is simply not the case that "the basic data of science are gained from direct observations without any theoretical or interpretive ingredients."⁶⁰ Therefore, the theological elements of Scripture are not merely *a priori* reflections on the otherwise conceptually unfiltered observations of the Jesus of history. While the philosophy of science has progressed, historical critical methods remain in the thrall of a now defunct epistemology. Unless the divine-human reality of Christ is assumed, biblical interpretation will stop short of rightly apprehending its fullness.

Here, we must be careful not to misunderstand Torrance's unapologetically theological reading. He does not simply begin with theological commitments and then find those commitments confirmed in his reading of the Bible. Torrance does admit that his approach is an "essentially circular procedure," but every coherent system entails circularity.⁶¹ He writes,

What we are concerned with here is the proper circularity inherent in any coherent system operating with ultimate axioms or belief which cannot be derived or justified from any other ground than that which they themselves constitute . . . [W]hen we are concerned with a conceptual system or framework of thought which includes among its constitutive axioms one or more ultimates, for which, in the nature of the case, there is no higher and wider system with reference to which they can be proved, then we cannot but operate with a complete circularity of the conceptual system.⁶²

There is no way of verifying either the metaphysical naturalism undergirding the interpretive practices of biblical studies or the theological metaphysics guiding Torrance's work, for both are ultimate beliefs for which no appeals to independent

⁵⁹ Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 137.

⁶⁰ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 8.

⁶¹ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 15

⁶² *Ibid.*, 15.

verification can be made. Torrance reminds us that this same phenomenon exists in biblical studies as it does in the field of physics. The belief in the “laws of logic” and the belief that there is order in the universe are necessary presuppositions for the intelligibility of the discipline. Neither the demonstration of the laws of logic nor the proof of order are possible without assuming and employing the very thing it seeks to affirm.⁶³ This is not unique to physics; it is simply a basic feature of human knowing.⁶⁴

Torrance’s Theological Interpretation and Markan Christology

We are now able to appreciate the sophistication of Torrance’s theological exegesis of Jesus’ baptism in the Gospel of Mark. The method of Torrance’s exegesis corresponds to the theological logic of Jesus Christ as the divine-human subject united to the Person of the Son. This ultimate belief constitutes the very intelligibility of reality. It is a theological metaphysic at odds with historical-critical approaches to the Bible, which are not any less metaphysically neutral or epistemically circular than an unapologetic theological approach. The advantage of Torrance’s approach is that his method seeks to adopt the thought-forms given in the Bible rather than impose an alien, secular metaphysic.⁶⁵ As we have seen, even the concept of “history” is metaphysically loaded and thus not adequate to guide our study of Jesus. If theological categories form the rational structure of Scripture, then only a theological approach can hope (but not guarantee) to exegete the intrinsic logic of the Bible. In what follows, we will trace the convergences between Torrance’s theological interpretation and Markan Christology.

⁶³ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 16.

⁶⁴ Torrance argues that circularity is not unique to theological claims. He asserts that “how ideas are related to the realities we experience and apprehend cannot be specified in any area of human knowledge, let alone the knowledge of faith, for this is a relation of an ontological kind which by its very nature eludes, and therefore vanishes in the face of, analytical explication and formalization; yet it is in and through that very relation that we can attain general knowledge of the realities concerned” (*Space, Time and Resurrection*, 11).

⁶⁵ Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 40-41.

Torrance's deployment of christological categories to understand Jesus' baptism coheres with the Gospel of Mark's primary purpose of to present the identity of Jesus. According to Joel Marcus, the very first verse clearly sets the agenda for the entire Gospel by declaring "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" and is then reinforced by continuous "who" and "what" questions posed about the identity of Jesus (Mark 1:24, 27; 2:7; 4:35-41; 5:7; 6:2; 8:4; 8:24-33; 11:28; 14:61; 15:2).⁶⁶ The hinge of Mark's narrative is Jesus' question to Peter — "But you, who do you say I am?" (8:29) — and his response that the Son of Man must suffer and die and rise from the dead (8:31). As the Roman centurion watches the final breath of life leave the crucified Jesus, he declares, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (15:28). Both of these pronouncements correspond to the opening line of the Gospel: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Despite these clear declarations of who Jesus is, his identity remains shrouded in mystery throughout the Gospel. Although Wrede's thesis has largely been debunked, his chief insight that Jesus' identity cannot be fully revealed until his death (and resurrection) continues to have purchase among modern day scholars.⁶⁷ This coincides with another mystery internal to the logic of Mark's narrative: Jesus has a divine identity as the embodied presence of the God of Israel and yet he suffers and is tempted as he prays in Gethsemane and unleashes his cry of dereliction on the cross.

⁶⁶ Joel Marcus, "Identity and Ambiguity in Markan Christology," in *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 132-136. On whether the title "Son of God" is part of the original text, see Marcus, Mark, 141.

⁶⁷ Marcus himself believes that this "ambiguity probably reflects the tradition-history of Mark's Gospel: it is likely that Jesus' distress in Gethsemane and his cry of dereliction are historical memories (who would have invented them?), whereas the passion predictions, at least in their present form, are products of the early church" ("Identity and Ambiguity," 141.) He reasons that if Jesus had really predicted his death and resurrection to his disciples, they wouldn't have been caught so off-guard when the events occurred. Richard Hays notes that Wrede's thesis does not succeed at the narrative level. It contorts the basic narrative of Mark since "most of Jesus' injunctions to silence have nothing to do with the title 'Messiah' or with expectations connected to it"; *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Baylor, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 45. In short, Wrede's attempt to merge the Jesus of history with the Jesus of faith in the trope of the Messianic Secret fails on literary grounds.

This mysterious tension in Jesus' identity is introduced in his baptism. In this covert coronation, the heavens are ripped open, the Spirit descends, and voice from heaven declares, "This is my beloved son, with you I am well pleased" (1:10-11). The heavenly declaration weds Davidic kingly sonship (Psalm 2) with the suffering servant (Isaiah 42), possibly under the shared theme of covenant.⁶⁸ The baptismal setting itself creates the tension, without naming it directly. Jesus, the anointed divine Son who is elected as righteous sufferer is positioned in the place of an unrighteous sinner. Mark connects the baptism scene to the wilderness testing by having Jesus "immediately" (εὐθὺς) driven into temptation before he can even catch his breath. This suggests that, as the Servant, Jesus suffers as the one who stands in the place of the sinner as a formal representative, as it were, but as one who is really able to be tempted as a human. This tension is exacerbated by Jesus' anguish in Gethsemane as he prays for God to take his cup before aligning his will with the Father's. If we methodically bracket out the distinction between divine and human natures, then the narrative breaks down. If Jesus is not human, his hard-won obedience is simply a performance; if Jesus is not divine, then he really is a sinner.⁶⁹ But neither option can account for the complexity of Mark's Gospel. Torrance's claim that Jesus has assumed fallen flesh is an attempt to do justice to this complexity by making explicit what is implicit in Mark's narrative. But even if Torrance goes beyond what Mark implies, he does so by reading Mark with the rest

⁶⁸ Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997), 121-123. Mark has piled on so many allusions and echoes from Israel's Scriptures that commentators are unsure of how to order properly all of the images to render the intended mosaic. Like Watts, Hays sees the Son and the Servant fused in Jesus (*Echoes of Scripture*, 48). However, Hooker does not see "any basis for the common assumption that Jesus is here shown as accepting the mission of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Even if we accept the tenuous link with Isa. 42.1, there is no hint whatever in Mark 1.11 of the later passage from that book, and no reason to suppose that Mark saw any connection between them" (*St Mark*, 248). Her position is the minority view.

⁶⁹ Jenson has argued for a similar logic internal to the narrative of Jesus' temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane in "Identity, Jesus, Exegesis," 52-53. Marcus also recognizes that this dilemma is innate to the Gospel narrative, but instead of reaching for theological categories he frames the problem as close to Mark's idiom as possible. The aporia is thus between "the all-knowing seer" and the cry of dereliction ("Identity and Ambiguity," 140-146). For an account for the necessity of the ontology of Jesus as the incarnate Son to uphold the intelligibility of the biblical narrative, see Jonathan Lett, "Narrative and Metaphysical Ambition: On Being 'In Christ,'" *Modern Theology* 33, no. 4 (2017): 618-639.

of the biblical canon. Since Scripture gestures beyond itself to the reality of Christ, who transcends the closed boundaries of discrete books, Mark's witness works in concert with the witnesses of Philippians 2:5-11 and the Book of Hebrews.

Torrance also reads Mark within the reality of God's history with Israel. Although Torrance deploys the conceptual tools of the hypostatic union and a "two natures" Christology, his exegesis is driven by his reading of the Old Testament. In fact, these "cognitive instruments" are put in service of articulating the reality of articulating the servant-son of deutero-Isaiah fulfilling God's covenant will for Israel as the embodied presence of the God of Israel in Jesus of Nazareth.⁷⁰ Torrance's emphasis on the ontology of the incarnation leads him to foreground the centrality of Israel and the Old Testament for a proper understanding of the New. There is an essential relation between Israel and Christ because the Son of God has assumed Jewish flesh as one under the covenant and, as Torrance insists, "to this very day Jesus remains a Jew while still the eternal Son of God."⁷¹ For this reason, "the knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the Jews are all bound up inseparably together, so that when at last God came into the world he came as a Jew."⁷² Torrance emphasizes that the covenantal history of Israel into which Christ is born is imbued with deeply revelatory significance. This is so because God always reveals himself within the contingency and particularity entailed by space and time. Torrance writes,

Divine revelation did not just bear upon the life and culture of Israel in some tangential fashion, rippling the surface of its moral and religious consciousness, but penetrated into the innermost centre of Israel and involved itself in the concrete actuality and locality of its existence in time and space, so that in its articulated form as human word it struck home to Israel with incisive definiteness and specificity.⁷³

⁷⁰ Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation*, 17.

⁷¹ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 43.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷³ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 15.

The significance of this belief extends beyond the claim that the incarnation and God's dealings with Israel are two sites of God's reconciling revelation. Instead, God's revelation in and through Israel serves to form their social, cultural, religious, and intellectual life to be particularly primed for the fullness of divine revelation to arrive in the incarnation. In fact, Israel is elected for the purpose of one day bearing the Son of God — to be the "womb for the incarnation of his Word and a matrix of appropriate forms of thought and speech for the reception of his revelation in a final and definitive form."⁷⁴ If divine revelation has prepared the very structures of Israel's social, cultural, political, and religious life for the incarnation, then the New Testament must be read in its native setting, the history of Israel and its Scriptures.⁷⁵ Therefore, Christ must be understood in the terms instantiated by God's revealing encounters with Israel, without abstracting these biblical thought-forms from their particular context "in revelation."⁷⁶

Torrance draws on the logic of the suffering servant to supply the vicarious and substitutionary pattern of exchange that Christ initiates in his baptism. As we have seen, Jesus enters into ontological solidarity with estranged and fallen humanity by taking the place of the condemned sinner, including assuming fallen human nature. Mark's depiction of a truly human Jesus beset by weakness and temptation fits with this claim. While the vicarious nature of his life is only hinted at by the allusion to the servant song of Isaiah 42 in his baptism, Jesus' explanation of his baptism — that he will "give his life as a ransom for many" — reveals its fundamental vicarious character (Mark 10:45). This is the hermeneutical key by which Torrance unlocks the full theological import of Jesus' baptism. It explicitly links his beginning to his end as chosen son and suffering servant. The divine

⁷⁴ Torrance, *Evangelical Theology and Reality*, 87. This conviction can also be seen in Torrance's coordination of the revelation of the Old and New Testaments as, respectively, the "*verbum incarnandum*" (word requiring to be incarnate) and the "*verbum incarnatum*" (word incarnate); *Incarnation*, 45. According to Torrance, "If in the divine purpose, the incarnation came at a particular point in time, in the history of Israel, it was clearly of design: it is at this point in the context of history of Israel that Jesus is to be understood. If we are to be faithful to the witness of scripture we cannot but start in the same way" (ibid., 37-38).

⁷⁵ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 41.

⁷⁶ Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 144.

identity of Jesus is revealed as he stands condemned with sinners and as he dies as one abandoned to sin.

Mark's Gospel appears to be constructed on the logic of the vicarious and substitutionary life of Jesus, but what about the grammar of exchange? Again, Torrance uses Jesus' dialogue with his disciples about his baptism and passion in Mark 10:38-45 to capture the full meaning of Jesus' baptism. When James and John ask to sit at the right and left of Jesus in his glory, he responds, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink, and to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" James and John disagree. "We are able," they protest. Jesus replies, "The cup that I drink you will drink. And with the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized. But, to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom yet has been prepared" (10:38-40). Torrance's sermon on Mark 10:32 for the 1981 Warfield Lectures at Princeton Seminary displays the grammar of exchange and the hermeneutical work it can do for a theological interpretation of scripture. Because this sermon is unpublished, I quote from it at length here:

Think of the baptism of Jesus. John the Baptist was baptizing sinners *eis metanoian*, into repentance, into judgement and amendment of life. And then came Jesus and stood in the row of penitence, asking to be baptized as one of them. John was aghast but Jesus insisted. It was a vicarious baptism. He was baptized as a sinner, baptized into repentance. It was not his own repentance into which Jesus was baptized but ours, for his baptism was on our behalf. He was baptized with us in such a way that he made baptism--his baptism--as Calvin puts it, common between himself and us. He united himself with us in order that working from within our failures and weaknesses he might make what is ours his and give us what is his.

And baptism signified the way in which he fulfilled his ministry and lived his whole life, and so, Mark tells us, 'Jesus said, "I have a baptism with which I am being baptized."' A daily continuous baptism. His sharing our condition, the condition of which we ought to repent, in order to unite himself to us and thus to unite us to himself . . .

For the baptism was Jesus' baptism into their condition, and it was because he made their sinful condition his own that they could share his baptism and his cup. He made it possible because he united himself completely to what they are and gave them that union . . .

Jesus had laid hold of them in their sin and shame in all their betrayal, and he had used that as the very instrument by which to bind them to him forever, and to bind himself to them forever. It was for sinners he died, and therefore it is by our sin that he binds himself to us and us to himself. And he died to take our place, taking all our sin and shame upon himself and thus constituted the disciples and us one body with him. Now that is a bond that nothing can break. No unfaithfulness, no shame, no betrayal on our part can break it because it is a bond forged out of the very sins and failure and sin and guilt and shame of mankind. A bond made with them in their sin and failure and in spite of it. That is the breath-taking mystery of our union with Christ . . .

Even our unrepenting repentance. Even our twisted distorted faith. Even our unworthy prayers and devotion. All that Jesus takes on himself, he drinks to the full, shares it to the full with us. And the last bitter drink, far from letting it divide us from him, he makes it precisely into what binds us to him.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Torrance's exegesis highlights the relationship between doctrine and biblical interpretation. He unapologetically reads Scripture through the lens of the doctrine of the incarnation. This theological hermeneutic enables, rather than hinders, him to capture the Christology at the center of Mark's Gospel. The intelligibility of Mark's narrative structure depends on the logic of Christ's two natures to tell us who Jesus Christ is. Torrance's interpretation draws heavily on dogma, such as the doctrines of *anhypostasia*, *enhypostasia*, and *communicato idiomatum*. But he is careful not to transpose Scripture into dogmatic categories. Instead, his theological metaphysic

⁷⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, "Sermon on Mark 10:32," *The Theology of Nature* (Warfield Lectures, Princeton Theological Seminary Media Archive, 1981).

funds a hermeneutical procedure that engenders an elegant and simple interpretation, as we see in his sermon from the Warfield Lectures. Ultimately, his exegesis terminates in first order claims about God's being and activity to bring salvation in Christ through the pattern of substitution and exchange. This is the dimension of depth that characterizes Scripture and awaits those who will allow their approach to be determined by the reality that undergirds it and to which it points, Jesus Christ.