

AN ESSAY-REVIEW

**of Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds.,
The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies
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*Much of the discussion of the Pauline expression *pistis Christou* has been polarized between the options of "faith in Christ" as a personal act of the believer at the beginning of the Christian life, and the "faith of Christ" as a model of Christian discipleship. This polarization is evident in the collection of essays edited by Michael Bird and Preston Sprinkle, *The Faith of Christ* (Hendrickson, 2009). In the course of interacting with the contents of the essays in this volume, we will attempt to break the impasse by suggestion that "the faith of Christ" is an expression Paul uses to describe what happens in Christian liturgy, as Jesus the High Priest leads the congregation to the throne of grace in public worship. The faith of Christ is literally the way confident access to the presence of the Father is opened up to the mystical body of believers.*

The Greek expression *pistis Christou* has been the source of a great deal of discussion in the theological literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This 2009 volume marks a major collection of scholarly input on the linguistic and conceptual issues at stake in the varied interpretations of the phrase, with an emphasis on the Pauline data. Here we intend to summarize and interact with the volume, and note (at the end) how the insights of Thomas F. Torrance may help in bringing about a resolution. Allow me to state from the outset what it appears to



me is missing in the equation. In my judgment, theological scholarship has too often failed to appreciate the ecclesiological context of the New Testament literature, and in particular the cultic setting of the reading and appropriation of the New Testament books. Scholars tend to ask questions of New Testament phrases and expressions from within their abstract world of concepts and ideas, extracted from the concrete context of liturgical worship which shapes the language of the sacred biblical texts. I believe the handling of the phrase *pistis Christou* to be exhibit A in the illustration of this problem. How I think this all works will become evident as I interact with the contents of this scholarly contribution to the *pistis Christou* discussion. But allow me to simply state up front that I believe Paul uses the expression *pistis Christou* (and its derivatives) specifically to refer to the “faith” which draws worshippers to the throne of God’s gracious presence through the confidence which their mystical union with Christ provides, as their Great High Priest in heaven. I contend that it is neither identical to Christ’s historical “faith” in God during his mortal life, nor is it exactly to be understood as a reference to the “faithfulness” of Jesus Christ as Messiah in contrast with Israel (though that is all true); rather *pistis Christou* is a supply of confidence which is given by Christ to believers, and exercised among those in the gathered congregation who approach God through the merits of their heavenly mediator, husband and head of the body.¹

This book on the *pistis Christou* debate has (after an introductory chapter) five sections: 1) Background of the debate; 2) Pauline texts where the key expression is employed; 3) an analysis of different hermeneutical approaches; 4) a consideration of the non-Pauline evidence; 5) historical and theological reflections. Let us begin with the first three chapters, which introduce the background to this debate.

¹ See Hebrews 4:16; 6:19-20; 7:25; 9:13-14; 10:1-2, 19-25.

Michael Bird, "Introduction: Problems and Prospects for a New Testament Debate"²

Bird's introductory chapter basically sets the stage for the volume, showing why this issue has aroused such intense interest from the fields of biblical scholarship and theology. He notes the wide-ranging implications of the two contrasting translations of *pistis Christou*. The objective genitive ("faith in Christ") makes the gospel message one which centers on the "act of placing one's faith in Jesus," whereas the subjective genitive ("faith of Christ") depicts Christianity as the call to "join the church that lives out in a concentric pattern the faith that Jesus displayed" (p. 3). In other words, what is at stake here is "nothing less than the very architecture of the Christ-event and the nature of the summons to faith and the life of discipleship that flows from it" (p. 2). Bird notes that this debate impinges on "a whole constellation of issues about the nature of salvation, the person and work of Christ, the contents of faith, the character of the church, and even Bible translations" (p. 3).

I certainly agree that the "character of the church" is at stake in this debate, but I'm not sure that Bird fully grasps what is being lost in the back and forth of the polarities. What is constantly assumed in the literature is that the issue is either "faith in Christ" as a human act which initially brings one into the sphere of redemption, or the "faith of Christ" as the finished, saving work of the historical Jesus on our behalf, which provides the paradigm and new impetus for Christian behavior.

But what if it is neither of these exactly? What if by the "faith of Christ" Paul and other early Christian writers have in view the weekly faith of the community itself, which comes to its concrete realization in the act of cultic worship, in which the earthly members are drawn to the Father and spiritually nourished by their Great High Priest? In other words, perhaps we should think of the "church" and its "faith" less as an abstract concept and more as the performance of a liturgical

² Michael F. Bird, "Introduction: Problems and Prospects for a New Testament Debate," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 1-14.

script, a service in a temple setting, in which Christ himself is always the priestly mediator of the Church's elevation into the heavenly sphere by the faith which he supplies to his justified though sinful body.³

Debbie Hunn, "Debating the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Twentieth-Century Scholarship"⁴

Hunn's chapter is essentially a literature-review on the subject of *pistis Christou*. Thus it is mostly a summary of what various scholars have had to say, with little independent contribution of her own. However, Hunn's own perspective does leak out from time to time. For example, she chides Thomas Torrance twice in what is mostly a detached summary of the scholarship. First she faults him for the illegitimate transfer of theological concepts into biblical vocabulary, with his argument that *pistis* in the New Testament, given its association with *dikaioisune* in the Pauline literature especially, has as its backdrop the Hebrew idea of the demonstration of God's faithfulness to His people. Hence, "faith" is always grounded upon something "active," upon an "efficacious reality, the reality of God in covenant relationship" (p. 16). Hunn describes this approach as a "faulty path" (p. 17). Secondly she rejects Torrance's suggestion that *pistis Christou* is a "polarized expression" which simultaneously embraces both the divine faithfulness and the human response that faithfulness elicits in one linguistic reality (p. 25). Again she complains that this amounts to "overloading a phrase with theology," which then "overloads the reader's mind as well" (p. 25).

So while Hunn does not come to any firm conclusions of her own as to whether this expression should be read as a subjective or objective genitive, she does express confidence that importing theological constructs onto the biblical grammar will only impede scholarly progress. Apparently Torrance is a prime

³ See the prayer of Psalm 143:1-2: "Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness. Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous" (NKJV). All Bible translations here are NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Debbie Hunn, "Debating the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Twentieth-Century Scholarship," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 15-32.

example of this unhelpful tendency. In point of fact, we will suggest, more careful attention to Torrance's highlighting of the religious backdrop of God's commitment to the fulfillment of his covenant, could have saved biblical scholars from the blind spots that have created the present impasse of many decades. For (to borrow Torrance's phraseology) the "efficacious reality of God in covenant relationship" is precisely, for Paul and other early Christian writers, what was enacted in the saving mission of the Son of God, and this efficacious reality (which the Law of Moses could only bear witness to) is the sum and substance of Christianity, as concretely realized in the cultic "service" of religious worship "in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6).

Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, "Πίστις with a Preposition and Genitive Modifier: Lexical, Semantic, and Syntactic Considerations in the πίστις Χριστοῦ Discussion"⁵

Porter and Pitts come down firmly on the objective genitive side ("faith in Christ"). Their approach is structured by four steps (p. 36): 1) a discussion of "the role of lexical semantics in sense disambiguation"; 2) offering "a description of the Greek case system"; 3) reframing the debate "in terms of lexis and case"; 4) analysis and results. According to these scholars, much of the analysis found in the literature wrongly assumes that "the selection of a case form determines the lexical meaning of its head term" (p. 36). Rather, linguistically, the function of the genitive is to *restrict* the meaning of the head term, in this case *pistis* (p. 36). They then offer a description of the Greek case system to further substantiate the point (pp. 38-46). What one must *not* do is predetermine what "kind" of genitive is employed in these phrases, and after that seek to determine the lexical usage of *pistis* (whether "faith" or "faithfulness").

In section three Porter and Pitts discuss lexis and case (pp. 47-8), for it is necessary first and foremost to "disambiguate" the meaning of *pistis*, before

⁵ Stanley E. Porter, "'Πίστις with a Preposition and Genitive Modifier: Lexical, Semantic, and Syntactic Considerations in the πίστις Χριστοῦ Discussion,'" in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 33-56.

proceeding further with the discussion of the genitive. This then brings them to their fourth section, which involves an analysis of the construction under consideration in the disputed verses, involving “a prepositional specifier with πίστις as the head term and a nominal modifier” (p. 49). Their most important observation regarding the articular use of *pistis* is “that what may be called an ethical usage (‘faithfulness’) is not present when the preposition is used with an intervening article modifying the head term” (p. 49). They further argue that when “a connection with an individual needs to be established, an article is typically employed to establish a referential connection” (p. 50). And they conclude that every time the noun *pistis* occurs in the New Testament “as an anarthrous head term preceded by a prepositional specifier, it has an abstract function unrelated (possessively) to an explicit participant in the discourse” (p. 51). In short, they see little linguistic evidence for the subjective genitive reading of *pistis Christou*.

Leaving aside the lexical question of faith and faithfulness as translations of *pistis* (and the related matter as to whether “faith” in the register of biblical language already entails the idea of commitment to the object of trust in view), let us assume that Porter and Pitts have safely established “faith” as the approximate meaning of the term *pistis*. There are nonetheless some problems with their analysis. First, they sidestep Philippians 3:9 with an inadequate discussion (p. 50) — a verse which employs διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ (“through the faith of Christ”) — asserting that if it is not abstract (simply “faith” without a possessive modifier) then it is “arguably” doctrinal (as in “the faith” which is believed). While they say this is arguable they offer no argument to that effect.

What if it is neither abstract nor doctrinal? The resulting translation of Philippians 3:9 might then be something like: “and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (AKJV). This translation has been offered by the Authorized King James Version for centuries. There is no reason then, to presume that the lack of an article with *pistis* means we must choose only between abstract or doctrinal meanings.

Second, they also sidestep Romans 4:16 (p. 50), which says, “so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also

to those who are of the faith of Abraham” (ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβράαμ). Although (as Porter and Pitts point out) this construction occurs with a proper name form which is not declined, the name “Abraham” still functions here as a genitive modifier of the head noun *pistis*. Even if understood as possessive it is still alluding to the exercise of Abraham’s faith in Genesis, and thus is not only intended to show the possession of this faith, but also identifying Abraham as the one who exercised that faith which he possessed (cf. Genesis 15:6). This opens the door to taking similar anarthrous uses of *pistis* with “Christ” or “Jesus Christ” likewise as subjective genitives. This would include the disputed occurrences of *pistis Christou* in Galatians 2:16; 3:22; Romans 3:22, 26.

Third, Porter and Pitts are too cavalier in their handling of Ephesians 3:17, assigning it an abstract meaning (p. 49). Here *pistis* is used with the article: “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (διὰ τῆς πίστεως). What has become of their principle then, that in the use of *pistis*, when “a connection with an individual needs to be established, an article is typically employed to establish a referential connection” (p. 50)? Would a referential connection to Christ not be an obvious application of this rule? One of the uses of the article which they identify is “to help connect faith to a particular participant” (p. 50). Paul is speaking of how Christ dwells in the hearts of the congregation during public worship, as the assumed setting of verse 18 makes clear: “with all the saints” (my translation, cf. AKJV). In other words, Christ dwells in the hearts of the worshipping congregation by the faith which God supplies to the church as the body of Christ (simultaneously head and members), not by a humanly effected faith in Christ which is offered up to God in worship.

This serves to connect the thought of verse 17 with the previous statement: “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Yes, this is the (received) faith of the congregation, but it is also simultaneously the gift of faith which comes from the supply of Christ’s indwelling presence in his mystical body. This also provides a nice parallel with the later thought of verse 19: “and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (my

translation, γινῶναί τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ), which also contains a subjective genitive.

If we can understand that in the cultic setting of worship there is granted to the body a knowledge of the love of Christ, why then can the body not also receive from their living head the faith of Christ whereby they have access to God in the first place? This also helps us to understand rightly the imagery of Ephesians 3:12: "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him" (AKJV). That the setting here is again the corporate worship of the Christian body is made clear by the immediate context of verse 10: "to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church."⁶

Before moving on, it is worth noting that Porter and Pitts do not seem to consider this alternative reading. They do say that most of those who opt for the translation "faith of Christ" do not "want to suggest that Paul thought a person was justified in some way by Christ's exercise of faith" (p. 51). I for one would indeed suggest that "in some way" to be the proper understanding of Paul's usage of *pistis Christou*, for it is precisely Christ's confident access to the presence of the Father (enacted in the weekly liturgy) which brings salvation to us, as the work of our Great High Priest who sympathizes with our weakness and reconciles us to God by the faith He supplies to His mystical body.

In addition to Ephesians 3:17, it may be instructive to look at other articular uses of *pistis* to which Porter and Pitts assign an abstract meaning (p. 49). In Colossians 2:12 we read: "buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Here being "raised" with Christ is said to occur "through faith" (διὰ τῆς πίστεως). But through whose faith? It is certainly not the faith of the believer alone, for Paul says that this faith brings the newly raised believers up from the metaphorical grave "with Him" (συνηγέρθητε), which is to say that it is by the power of Christ's resurrection that the believers themselves are made alive. But if the new Christians come up out of the grave, not alone, but only with Christ, is Christ then not also the source of that faith whereby the two parties come out of

⁶ Cf. also the later references to "the whole family in heaven and earth" (v. 15) and "glory in the church" (v. 21).

the grave together? If Christ is the source of the faith which is exercised by the believers in union with Him in their resurrection to new life, then this would also make Christ the efficient cause of the faith of those believers. The faith of the resurrected believers which is first concretely expressed in the sacrament of baptism is simultaneously the faith of Christ as well, for he is the head and they the members of the "body" which comes out of the grave.

Another articular use of *pistis* to which Porter and Pitts assign an abstract meaning is Acts 3:16. But this usage is explicitly not a mere abstract "faith"! The very faith whereby the lame man was healed is said to be "the faith which comes through Him" (ἡ πίστις ἣ δι' αὐτοῦ). The verse reads in full: "And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." This explicitly identifies the faith whereby believers on earth enjoy the benefits of salvation to be simultaneously the faith which is supplied by Jesus from heaven.

The next four chapters of the volume deal in a focused manner with the Pauline evidence.

Douglas A. Campbell, "The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Romans 3:22"⁷

Campbell's chapter develops a detailed argument based on Romans 3:22 and Paul's understanding of Habakkuk 2:4b as a messianic proof-text. Campbell sees "fidelity" as the basic meaning of *pistis* in these debated contexts (p. 62), and he sees the gospel as the revelation of Christ's fidelity to the Father which then elicits a faithful response from the believer (p. 68). This is all fully in keeping with Pauline theology. One will find in this chapter a stimulating discussion of the issues, especially as it relates to Paul's use of the expression ἐκ πίστεως, for Campbell believes this functions as kind of shorthand for the Habakkuk reference (p. 58).

⁷ Douglas A. Campbell, "The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Romans 3:22," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 57-72.

I might wish to nuance a couple of things differently, for thus far I am not quite convinced Paul uses the term *pistis* to speak of “fidelity” in any of these disputed texts (though I think the related ideas of commitment and fidelity are already entailed in the notion of trust). Nor am I ready to see Habakkuk 2:4 as a messianic proof-text in quite the way he sees it, though I do think he is on to something.

Campbell makes the excellent point that according to Romans 1:17 the righteousness of God is revealed by faith. How then can this refer to the believing response of the Christian? As he puts it: “The gospel, when preached, makes God’s saving act in Christ known or ‘visible.’ And ‘faith’ then responds to that prior disclosure as an act of affirmation, and not the act of disclosure itself” (p. 68 italics original). This seems to me to be a crucial point that is frequently overlooked in these discussions. So if I may respond to this insight and apply it to my own paradigm, I would only adjust the argument in the following manner.

Romans 1:17 reads as follows: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith (ἐκ πίστεως) to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” But whose “faith” is revealed to faith? It is interesting that Paul apparently sees two parties in Habakkuk 2:4. One party is the source of faith, and one party is the recipient of faith: “from faith to faith.” But are there two parties in Habakkuk 2:4? When the verse is read in its original setting there certainly are: “Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.” The just shall live by “his” faith! This introduces the other party assumed in the Pauline exegesis, by whose faith the just shall live; and this must be where Paul gets the idea of “from faith to faith.”⁸ Although Habakkuk does not identify this source of faith for the justified, it is no doubt related to the hope of the preceding verse: “For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Habakkuk 2:3). The source of life and justification (Jesus the Messiah) will arrive (cf. Hebrews

⁸ Why then does Paul not include “his” in the citation of Habakkuk 2:4? Probably because of the ambiguity involved (cf. LXX), for “his” could also mean God’s “faithfulness,” whereas Paul is reading it as a reference to the Messiah’s “faith” as the basis of justification and life for the Christian.

10:37), but in the meantime those who “wait” for that day must themselves patiently exercise faith that the vision will be fulfilled (cf. Hebrews 10:38-39).⁹

So in short, whereas Campbell sees in the language of Habakkuk 2:4 a reference to the Messiah as the “righteous one” who is resurrected because of his fidelity to God, I see a reference to the justification of the believer, by the work of the Messiah who puts his trust in God, whose unbreakable trust in God is somehow also the means whereby sinners can be justified and gain access to the Father. This sounds a lot like Isaiah 53:11: “By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.”

Despite these minor differences, I certainly agree that Habakkuk 2:4b, and Paul’s citation of it, is crucial to understanding Romans 3:21-22: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference” (AKJV).

R. Barry Matlock, “Saving Faith: The Rhetoric and Semantics of πίστις in Paul”¹⁰

In Matlock’s essay we get another detailed defense of the objective genitive reading of *pistis Christou* (“faith in Christ”). Matlock focuses on four texts: Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:22; Galatians 3:22; and Galatians 2:16.

His first discussion centers on Philippians 3:9 (pp. 75-8). He rightly notes the contrast Paul makes between “my own righteousness” and that which is “from God” at the beginning and end of the verse (p. 76). However, not only does he miss the fact that Paul seems to be thinking in terms of the source of righteousness more than the means of obtaining it, he also misses the role that the “faith of Christ”

⁹ Note how in Hebrews 10:37-39 — directly citing Habakkuk 2:3-4 — drawing back to destruction is equivalent to abandoning the congregational worship (10:25), which entails drawing near to God through the flesh and blood of Jesus “in full assurance of faith” (10:19-22).

¹⁰ Barry Matlock, “Saving Faith: The Rhetoric and Semantics of πίστις in Paul,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 73-90.

plays in the central lines; for just as God's righteousness is to be preferred to Paul's own righteousness, so also the benefit which comes from the faith of Christ is to be preferred to that which comes from the Mosaic Law: "and may be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is from the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (my translation). In other words, the faith of Christ is the means whereby God supplies to the believer a righteousness which improves on whatever the Law can offer. There are two alternative sources of righteousness then, that which Jews still seek to find in the Law and the Temple, and that which Christians now enjoy through the faith of Christ and his body the church. It must be granted to Matlock though, that the faith of believers is in view at the end of the verse, when it says that this righteousness is bestowed by God "on the basis of faith." So how can the faith of Christ be simultaneously both Christ's own faith and also the basis upon which God offers righteousness to the believer?

Paul explains this at the beginning of the verse: "and may be found in him." To be "in Christ" is to be his mystical body, and in that body whatever belongs to the head belongs to the members, and is shared with the members in their experience of union with him. This happens in a setting which is superior to that of the Mosaic Law, for the setting of the Law and the experience of its saving benefits was the old Jerusalem Temple, whereas the setting for the experience of the benefits of the New Covenant is the new Christian liturgy, whereby we (the members) become one with Christ (the head) in the performance of his heavenly approach to the Father: "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3), "through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Romans 5:2). For God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6), "in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through the faith of Him" (Ephesians 3:12, my translation).

Paul in many places assumes the simultaneous action of head and members in the performance of Christian worship, "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17). And again:

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12).¹¹ And again: “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

Matlock also highlights the connection between Philippians 3:9-10 and 1:29 (p. 78), noting the juxtaposition of faith and suffering in both passages; but I do not see how this helps the objective genitive reading of *pistis Christou*. Surely 3:9-10 speaks of knowing Christ, not simply as one knows an external object of faith, but as a participant in his mystical life: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (3:10). To “know him” in verse 10 is to participate in his suffering, death and resurrection to new life. Would this not indicate that verse 9 likewise has in view a participation in his faith as the means whereby we can be accepted in the presence of God?¹² In other words, we have the boldness to approach the Father because of our union with Christ our advocate who is Himself entirely acceptable to the Father. This is what it means to be “righteous” or blameless before God, or justified (cf. Ephesians 1:3-4).

Next Matlock discusses Romans 3:22 (pp. 79-81). In his discussion of this verse, Matlock highlights verbal and conceptual parallels with Romans 1:16-17 and 10:11 to support the objective genitive reading (“by faith in Jesus Christ”). There is indeed no doubt that each one of these texts assumes the faith of believers. But we have already seen that in Romans 1:16-17, Paul actually sees two parties exercising faith, and he draws this out of Habakkuk 2:4b. The just do live by faith, though not a faith of their own performance, but a faith which they receive as a gift from above in union with Christ. The just shall indeed live by “his” faith (Habakkuk

¹¹ Note how “Christ” stands here for the whole body, head and members together. This provides an exact parallel for “the faith of Christ” enacted in Christian worship.

¹² Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:8-13, where Paul concludes with, “And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak.”

2:4). As for Romans 10:11, it certainly does speak of believing on Christ. But the question is, where does this come from, and how does Paul use the expression *pistis Christou* to get at that idea? Here we would do well to pay attention to the surrounding context, especially Romans 10:8, which says that the “word of faith” resides in the heart of those who confess the Lord Jesus, and 10:17, which says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

In order to understand this language, we must back up to 10:4-8, which says that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4). This means that Christ is the true source of the believer’s righteousness. How this righteousness is received is spelled out in verses 5-8 which contrast righteousness by “doing” (v. 5), with righteousness by “believing” from the heart (vv. 6-8). It is the word of faith, residing in the heart (v. 8), which causes men to confess with the mouth, and call on the name of the Lord (vv. 9-13). It is the word of God in the heart which causes hearing and faith (v. 17). Clearly, the original form of that word of God in the setting of Deuteronomy 30, from which Paul’s OT citations in verses 6-8 are taken, was the Law of Moses. What then is the new covenant expression of the word of God for the Christian? Paul answers that question by his glosses in verses 6-7 — the new covenant word from God which elicits faith from us by abiding in the heart is Christ himself. It is Christ who trusts and approaches the altar of God in heaven with complete confidence and perfect vision, and he supplies this confidence before the Father with the weak, living members of his body on earth, so that they in union with him can now “call upon the name of the Lord” (10:13).¹³

But before moving on we should return to Romans 3:22. Paul says that the righteousness of God is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (3:21); “even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (AKJV italics added). This is a close parallel with Paul’s expression “from faith to faith” in 1:17, which as we have seen is based on the notion of the faith of Jesus Christ being the justification and means of life for those who receive faith from him. His faith brings faith to them, or to put it the other way, their faith

¹³ It should go without saying that “calling on the name” is a liturgical act in the Bible. Cf. Psalm 116:12-17.

is the faith they received from him. The way Paul puts it in Romans 3:26 is, "that He might be just and the justifier of the believer by the faith of Jesus" (my translation).¹⁴

Matlock then discusses two verses in Galatians. First is Galatians 3:22: "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) might be given to them that believe" (AKJV). Unfortunately, the discussion is sidetracked by Matlock's rebuttal of Hays' claim that the book of Genesis does not talk about "faith in Christ," and so that cannot have been Paul's meaning here. I will not dispute the point, as I think Matlock wins an easy though trivial victory (pp. 81-3). Genesis was surely understood by Paul to address the topic of faith in Christ. But what of the verse itself? The first thing which should be noticed is that Galatians 3:22 assumes the same structure we have seen in Romans 3:22 and Romans 1:17. That is to say, it assumes that there are two parties involved, each of whom exercises faith, one of whom receives that faith from the other: again "from faith to faith." The faith of Jesus Christ is also the faith of believers as members of his mystical body. Secondly, we should note that the next two verses speak of two eras: "But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:23-24).

This is crucial — "before faith came." Faith is not something first done by believers. Faith comes first to us and is revealed to us. But what does Paul mean by the "coming" of faith? This will surely answer for us what Paul means in the previous verse by the "faith of Jesus Christ" in verse 22. It is crucial that Paul says it is only by being brought to Christ by the tutor of the Law that we can be "justified by faith"!

The faith of Jesus Christ in Galatians 3:22 is simply the liturgy or public worship of the New Covenant, no longer regulated by the tutor of the Mosaic Law, but now regulated by the Spirit of God in the mystical liturgy of the body of Christ. How do we know this is what Paul is speaking about? Apart from the obvious fact

¹⁴ I translate "the believer" here because the justified person in view is plainly the believer in light of verse 25 ("through faith").

that much of the Sinai Covenant (which Paul surely has in mind in 3:23) was devoted to regulating worship (Exodus 25 – Leviticus 16), we have the fact that this faith is now said, with the coming of the blessing of Abraham (3:14), to be newly “revealed” (3:23). The Law was a tutor to bring us to Christ, but now this new faith has been revealed to us (3:23-24). With the passing away of the old covenant, and with it the priestly code of Exodus and Leviticus, what would desperately need to be revealed to God’s people in its place? Clearly the newly acceptable form of worship, which of course gathered around the core of the Lord’s Supper ritual instituted by Christ on the night of his betrayal (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The old covenant form of worship pointed ahead to Christ as a tutor, but the new covenant form of worship receives its Eucharistic shape from the priestly work of Christ. Nor do we need to infer this only, for regulations pertaining to acceptable worship provide the explicit subject matter of the following chapter. The worship of the old covenant was an administration of childish slavery, superseded by the superior service of the new covenant (Galatians 4:1, 7). The church and its new and heavenly administration of God’s covenant has freed God’s people from the bondage of the old covenant forms of worship (4:1-5; 4:21-5:1). “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years” (4:9-10). So as far as the argument of Galatians is concerned, the “faith” of Jesus Christ is (we might say) the logic of Christian worship, in which we have access to the Father through the performance of the memorial of his sacrifice, which is the blood of the new and better covenant (1 Corinthians 11:25; Romans 5:1-2; 12:1-2).

The final text discussed by Matlock is Galatians 2:16 (pp. 83-6). Matlock makes much of the contrast between the “works of the law” and “faith in Jesus Christ” which he sees as key to the logic of the argument. After all, is not trusting in Jesus Christ the exact opposite of performing the works required by the Mosaic law for one’s justification? I would understand the logic of Galatians 2:16 somewhat differently. First of all, the expression “works of the law” does not naturally set up a contrast between what a person does versus whom a person believes. The plural “works” (not “work” importantly) suggests that we are speaking here of a set of

rituals, a performance which is found in the law of Moses; this priestly performance was also a way of life which the Law set before Israel and demanded of her.¹⁵ The most natural contrast to that would be, not believing in Christ, but whatever Christ now sets forth as his new expectation of his church, in place of the Law — which is at the same time the sharing and priestly performance of his “faith” through the mystical body of Christ in the presence of God the Father: “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24). Do this now, instead of performing the rituals of the Mosaic law. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The most startling contrast between the “works of the Law” and the “faith of Jesus Christ” is lost in the traditional debate between objective and subjective genitive. For Paul is contrasting the rituals given by Moses (“works of the Law”) under the terms of the Sinai covenant which Israel was obligated to perform in order to maintain her place as a holy priesthood, with the living and present action of Jesus Christ in the midst of the Christian congregation, whereby he as our Great High Priest, by his promise and presence, mediates between us and God and brings his mystical body (head and members) into the very presence of God the Father in the performance of Christian worship. This liturgical act is the “faith of Jesus Christ” in Galatians 2:16: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (AKJV).

It is also crucial to note the flow of thought here. After insisting that “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ,” he then adds, “we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of

¹⁵ In other words, the “works of the Law” are the set of rituals which the Sinai covenant delivered to Israel to perform in order that she might be a holy priesthood in the world. The “faith of Jesus Christ” would then be, not simply a set of rituals for the church to perform, but the heavenly action of Jesus Christ in the world to fulfill in the church what the old rituals could only anticipate. For Paul, the “works of the Law” could never bring salvation, but were only types that pointed the elect in Israel to faith in Christ, whereas the “faith of Jesus Christ” is the liturgical fulfillment of what the Law pointed to, thus making our salvation a reality. See further Paul L. Owen, “The ‘Works of the Law’ in Romans and Galatians: A New Defense of the Subjective Genitive,” *JBL* 126/3 (2007): 553-77.

Christ, and not by the works of the law." Paul could not have been more clear that being justified by the faith of Christ is something which is made possible by believing in Jesus Christ. If the "faith of Christ" were to be translated "faith in Christ" here, we have an obvious and redundant tautology. In that case we would have instead expected simply, "we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by Christ." As it is, the addition of the words "faith of" makes it clear that there are two notions in mind here. The believer puts his or her trust in Jesus Christ in order that the "faith" of Christ (something distinct from and prior to the believer's own faith) might now be of personal benefit for justification. To summarize, in terms of the Pauline gospel, we put our own weak and imperfect trust in Jesus Christ in order that his perfect faith before the Father, as our mediator and head, might carry us with him into the heavenly realms, as members of his mystical body.

Paul Foster, "Πίστις Χριστοῦ Terminology in Philippians and Ephesians"¹⁶

Foster's study (pp. 91-109) focuses on Philippians 3:9 and Ephesians 3:12. In his discussion of the Philippians passage,¹⁷ he offers a carefully balanced summary of arguments in favor of both subjective and objective genitive readings. While admitting that the evidence is evenly balanced, Foster leans toward the subjective genitive (p. 100), in light of the parallel constructions in Romans 3:3 and 4:16 (p. 94), and the fact that in the 24 or so cases in Paul's writings where the noun *pistis* is followed by a name or pronoun, reference is always made to the faith of the individual involved (p. 96).

Foster also has a helpful discussion of Ephesians 3:12, which is too often overlooked in these debates: "in whom we have the boldness and access in confidence through τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ." While Foster is uncertain of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, he still sees this text as relevant insofar as it may illumine

¹⁶ Paul Foster, "Πίστις Χριστοῦ Terminology in Philippians and Ephesians," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 91-110.

¹⁷ "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9 AKJV).

the reception and understanding of the Pauline language on the part of his earliest followers (p. 103). His study provides a helpful discussion of the surrounding context of the verse, noting the use of participatory language (pp. 103-04), the emphasis on the Christian believer's access to God through the sacrifice of Christ (pp. 105-06), and the point that the faith in view is explicitly said in Ephesians 2:8 to be God's gift and not a human action (pp. 106-07)! Such considerations again push Foster in the direction of the subjective genitive reading (p. 107).

I will take one point of departure from this excellent essay. Foster sees in Ephesians 3:12 "a subjective genitive which denotes Christ's act of faithful obedience in undergoing a death that enables previously alienated Gentiles to have access to God" (p. 107). I would say rather that we have here a subjective genitive which denotes Christ's act of approach to the Father on our behalf, whereby the church has access to God in the public performance of Christian worship. This shift of focus from the historical work of Christ on earth to the present work of Christ in the congregation (and simultaneously in heaven) better accounts for numerous details of Paul's language in the surrounding context: 1) the reference in verse 10 to the "manifold wisdom of God" which is put on display "by the church"; 2) the fact that verse 12 itself is speaking of the believers' present access to God through Christ (and not the past work of Christ which made it possible); 3) the fact that verses 14-15 presume the corporate worship of "the whole family in heaven and earth" (which would include Christ and all the saints); 4) the reference in verses 16-17, not to what Christ did in the past, but to the present indwelling of Christ in the midst of the church ("that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"); 5) the reference to comprehending the love of Christ "with all the saints" in verses 18-19; and 6) verse 21 which concludes this section with "to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever."

Richard H. Bell, "Faith in Christ: Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections on Philippians 3:9 and Ephesians 3:12"¹⁸

Richard Bell's essay looks at the same two verses from the opposite side of the debate (pp. 111-25). In reference to Philippians 3:9, in addition to the presumed contrast between a human righteousness based on Law and God's gift of righteousness through faith in Christ (which begs the question as to the nature of the language entailed), Bell has three additional arguments for the objective genitive (p. 114): 1) the parallel with the knowledge of Christ in verse 8; 2) the anaphoric use of the article with "faith" at the end of verse 9; 3) the "striking parallel" with Philippians 1:29. Let us consider each of these in turn.

First of all, does the reference to the "knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" in verse 8 indicate that we should understand verse 9 as a reference to faith in Christ? This would all depend on what sort of knowledge is entailed here. If the knowledge is to be understood as a matter of intellect and cognitive content, then perhaps; but Paul does not seem to use "knowledge" here to speak of cognitive content (parallel to "faith in Christ"). A glance ahead to verse 10 shows that the "knowledge" entailed is the experiential knowledge of mystical union which grants participation in the reality of Christ: "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." It is not so much a matter of knowledge "of" Christ as "knowing Christ," or as he puts it at the end of verse 8 and continuing into verse 9, "that I may gain Christ and be found in Him." The setting of Christian worship is precisely where God finds the believer "in Christ," as Paul said at the beginning of this passage: "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (3:3). The liturgical setting of this text points to the "faith of Christ" as the means whereby one might be found acceptable in the presence of God with the confidence that comes with being "found in Him."

¹⁸ Richard H. Bell, "Faith in Christ: Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections on Philippians 3:9 and Ephesians 3:12," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 111-128.

What about the “righteousness which is from God by faith” at the end of verse 9? This is perfectly understandable in light of the fact that one must believe in order to be found “in Christ Jesus” (v. 3) or “in him” (v. 9), so as to offer acceptable worship to God. To trust in Christ’s access to the Father for one’s own access to God is precisely what it means to have “faith,” and that faith is performed through the church’s worship in the gathered assembly. So the reference to the believer’s faith is entirely understandable in this context, and it is actually the subjective genitive reading which avoids reducing this to a tautology. And in that light, the anaphoric use of the article with “faith” at the end of the verse (ἐν τῇ πίστει) is also entirely understandable, since the faith of the believers (the members) is also the faith of Christ (the head), who together approach God as a mystical body in the liturgical act of the church.

Philippians 1:29, it does conjoin faith and suffering in much the same pattern as 3:9-10, but just as both passages speak of participation in Christ’s sufferings, so we should understand both passages to reference participation in Christ’s faith. Believing in Christ is the performance of the act of coming to God through the faith he supplies, and not through the rituals of the Law, or the worthiness of one’s own efforts and merit. None of the other points made by Bell in response to the subjective genitive reading (pp. 116-17) overthrow the argument being made here.

As for Ephesians 3:12 (pp. 120-24), Bell again argues for the objective genitive reading, but his strategy is mainly one of default. If it can be demonstrated that the context of the verse is not dealing with the faithfulness of Christ as demonstrated historically through his death on the cross (as argued by some defenders of the subjective genitive) then the objective genitive is the presumed winner of the contest. But Bell shows no sensitivity to the liturgical setting of the passage, as seen in the surrounding context of verses 10, 14-15, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21 —not to mention the disputed verse 12 itself! Therefore, it never occurs to him that it is actually through participation in the faith of Christ, or the faith of his mystical body, that we have “boldness and access with confidence” to the presence of God in public worship.

Whereas thus far the chapters have addressed detailed questions of Pauline exegesis and theology, the remaining three sections of this volume deal with

broader issues of interpretation, and texts outside the Pauline corpus. The remainder of this essay will thus be of a more generally interactive and summative flavor. Chapters 8-11 fit under the heading of "Mediating Proposals and Fresh Approaches." This section includes essays by Mark Seifrid¹⁹, Francis Watson²⁰, Preston Sprinkle²¹ and Ardel Caneday.²²

Seifrid's essay is full of wonderful insights, and I see his position as very close to what is being argued here, when he says that, "in the expression 'faith of Christ' Paul speaks of Christ as the source and author of faith" (p. 146, italics added). He also says: "For the Apostle, to believe in Jesus Christ is not first to act, but rather to be acted upon by God in his work in Jesus Christ. It is to know that our faith is the work of another" (p. 146). However, in his essay Seifrid mainly applies this understanding to the kerygmatic dynamic of preaching and the verbal summons to faith (pp. 131, 132, 134, 135, 136, 140, 142, 144, 145). He comes very close to what I have tried to articulate when he speaks of Christ "communicating himself" by means of faith (p. 132), and of how faith is "created and sustained by the concrete promises of salvation given to them" (p. 140). He is also entirely correct in noting the importance of the resurrection in the saving work of Christ (p. 141), for it is the resurrected Christ (not the historical Jesus of the past) who is now the source and author of Christian faith. I would only wish to see

¹⁹ Mark A. Seifrid, "The Faith of Christ," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 129-146.

²⁰ Francis Watson, "By Faith (of Christ): An Exegetical Dilemma and its Scriptural Solution," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 147-164.

²¹ Preston M. Sprinkle, "πίστις Χριστοῦ as an Eschatological Event," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 165-184.

²² Ardel B. Caneday, "The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ as a Theme in Paul's Theology of Galatians," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 185-208.

these insights teased out further by putting such notions in the concrete setting of the ritual performance of Christian liturgy.²³

Francis Watson's chapter (pp. 147-63) is largely an attempt to drive the subjective genitive reading off the battlefield by establishing that Habakkuk 2:4b is the scriptural source of Paul's expression ἐκ πίστεως, and that Paul does not interpret this passage as a Messianic prophecy of the resurrection of the Righteous One, but rather as a statement that "the one who is righteous by faith will live" (p. 162). Thus Habakkuk provides the basis for Paul's understanding of justification by faith in Christ, not a basis for understanding Christ as the resurrected one whose faithfulness to God is the source of salvation. Watson's view still does not account for how Paul gets the idea of Christ as the source of our faith from Habakkuk 2:4 ("from faith to faith"). It is clear enough that the verse speaks of faith, but from whence does Paul get the notion of the "faith" of the church arising from the "faith" of another ("from faith to faith")? We have suggested that the wording of Habakkuk in the original text could have provided Paul with this insight ("the just shall live by his faith").

Preston Sprinkle's chapter puts forward the idea of *pistis Christou* as a kind of shorthand for what he calls an "eschatological event" (pp. 165-84). He summarizes a body of overlooked secondary literature in English, German and Japanese (!) which has proposed readings of *pistis Christou* which do not fit neatly into the objective/subjective polarity (pp. 167-74), and then suggests that the most plausible of these options involve seeing *pistis Christou* either as the Christ-event which is the "content of the gospel," or "the preached gospel" itself as the message about the Christ-event (p. 175). He briefly mentions the possibility that Paul may have used the expression to refer to the church as "the sphere of salvation created by the gospel" (not too far from my proposal), but thinks this option is unlikely (p. 175). He then offers a reading of two passages in Galatians (3:2-5; 3:22-26) which

²³ It is not clear to me, for example, that Seifrid fully grasps the fact that the "visual and demonstrative" (p. 141) elements of Romans 3:21, 25-26 do not *only* refer to the death and resurrection of Christ as events of the past, nor are these visual elements adequately conveyed through the verbal proclamation of the gospel only; but rather they are put on display weekly through the performance of the Eucharistic liturgy: "to demonstrate at the present time his righteousness" (Romans 3:26).

employ "faith" terminology, to showcase some combination of the first two "mediating" proposals (pp. 176-80). He briefly suggests that some of the early Church Fathers can be understood along similar lines (pp. 180-82), before finally hinting at the end of his essay that he may not be convinced of the view he has been defending after all, and urging that further study be dedicated to these issues (pp. 183-84).

My comments here will have to be brief: 1) It would seem clear that Galatians 3:2-5 is not speaking of "faith" merely as the proclaimed gospel message, or even as the content of that message, since 3:1 brings up the visual portrayal of the gospel, and verse 5 speaks of the constant supply of the Spirit and ongoing miracles among them (i.e., among the worshipping congregations). Such language evokes more of a regular performance or liturgy of the faith, than a message based upon the abstract faith of an "event" of the past. 2) While on its own, "faith" in Galatians 3:22-26 could easily be understood either of the content of the gospel, or of the liturgical performance of the gospel, the fact that the law of Moses prescribed a ritual performance which served as a tutorial until the coming of Christ, certainly pushes us in the direction of the coming of "faith" as a new liturgical performance. The subsequent context of chapter 4 only confirms this suspicion as it continues the argument, with its references to religious "service" (v. 8), calendrical questions (v. 10), and the contrast between the two covenants (v. 24). For these reasons I am not persuaded that "faith" or *pistis Christou* in Galatians refers essentially to the Christ-event as the content of the gospel Paul preached.

Ardel Caneday's essay (pp. 185-205), "The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ as a Theme in Paul's Theology in Galatians," has a straightforward reading of *pistis Christou*, which is determined by his understanding of the term "faith" in Galatians as in certain contexts a "metonymy for Christ's faithfulness, answering Israel's unfaithfulness, in his substitutionary role of redeeming us from Torah's curse" (p. 203). While admirable in its elegance and simplicity, this suggestion is hampered both by the lexically unlikely gloss of "faithfulness" for *pistis* in these debated verses, as well as his tunnel vision which focuses on the redemptive work of Christ as a past event (pp. 197, 200, 201, 202, 203), rather than a ritual performance in the concrete setting of ongoing Christian worship.

One strength of this essay is that Caneday pays more attention to Galatians 2:20 (p. 197) than do any of the other essays in this collection. In fact, surprisingly, none of the other chapters give this verse more than a passing reference: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (AKJV). Not only does this verse help us to see how "faith" can simultaneously be the faith of Christ and the believer ("Christ lives in me"), but it also shows that Paul thinks of the "faith of the Son of God" not only as something which avails at the point of conversion to introduce the lost sinner to the realm of faith, but also as an ongoing experience in the life of the believer ("the life which I now live"). While Christ's sacrifice on the cross is indeed an "event" of the past, his life in the believer(s) is an ongoing reality which finds ritual performance in the weekly worship of the mystical body in replacement of the rituals of the Mosaic Law (cf. Galatians 3:1, 5).

The final two sections of the book contain discussions of *pistis Christou* in the wider New Testament witness (chapters 12-15), and a couple of final essays dealing with the Church Fathers and Karl Barth (chapters 16-17). Included in these pages are discussions of the Synoptics and Acts (pp. 209-22), the Gospel of John (pp. 223-37), James 2:1 (pp. 239-57) and the Book of Revelation (pp. 259-74). Mark Elliott's chapter on the Church Fathers (pp. 277-89) inadvertently reminds us that closer attention to liturgical setting on the part of scholars may shed more light on the Patristic material — as it is evident that Ignatius at least (pp. 281-82) was thinking in terms of the performance of ritual worship when speaking of the "faith of Christ." And I very much doubt that Ignatius was alone in this regard among the early Fathers. But we must draw this discussion to a close.

Conclusion

We suggested at the outset of this essay that Thomas F. Torrance may come through and save the day, with his virtually unparalleled theological vision and biblical clarity. And indeed, in light of the preceding discussion, we would now like to bring this essay to a close with some quotes which serve as evidence that

Torrance would wholeheartedly agree with our suggestions about the “faith of Christ” and the public performance of the gospel in the liturgy of Christian worship:

In the New Testament gospel Christ’s faith, his obedience, his knowledge are the foundation of my faith, obedience and knowledge, so that my faith, obedience and knowledge are objectively controlled by his. Similarly, in the preaching of the early church, in the *kērygma*, *it is Jesus Christ and his obedience which shapes and controls the presentation and preaching of the church.*²⁴

Christ becomes high priest through maintaining his Sonship faithfully in our existence of sin and weakness. By living out the life of the Son of God within our humanity through his faithfulness, through his suffering obedience *and intercession*, he becomes our high priest.²⁵

The resurrection and ascension, however, do not mean that Christ’s priestly sacrifice and oblation of himself are over and done with, but rather that in their once and for all completion they are taken up eternally into the life of God, and remain prevalent, efficacious, valid, abidingly real Christ is spoken of also as himself the *leitourgos*, the leader of the heavenly worship and chief executive as it were, in the heavenly kingdom.²⁶

We cannot consider this properly without taking into account the vicarious life of Jesus in obedience and prayer, and the fact that the

²⁴ Thomas Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 28 italics added. In other words, it is the perfect obedience of Jesus and His acceptance before God, which makes the gospel “good news,” and the basis of our reconciliation to the Father.

²⁵ Thomas Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 79 italics added. Christ’s intercession in heaven is the presentation of the fruits and merits of his perfect life and sacrifice to the Father, which is the only basis upon which sinners can now be reconciled to God in his holiness.

²⁶ Torrance, *Atonement*, 273. Christ as our “worship leader” now grants sinners on earth access to the Father, as the accomplished perfection of his incarnate obedience draws us with the confidence of His body to the throne of God in heaven, through the mystery of congregational union with our spiritual head in the liturgy.

whole existence of the incarnate Son was both the fulfilled intervention of God among man and the fulfilled response of man toward God, in filial obedience, faith, trust, love, worship, prayer and praise.²⁷

If he were only our representative before God, he would represent us in *our* prayer and worship and would be, so to speak, their instrument. But as substitute as well as representative, he acts in our place and offers worship and prayer which we could not offer, yet offers them in such a vicarious way that while made in our stead and on our behalf they are made to issue out of our human nature to the Father as our own worship and prayer to God. We worship the Father not in our own name, nor in the significance of our own prayer and worship, but solely in Christ's name who has so identified himself with us as to make his prayer and worship ours, so really ours that we appear before God with Christ as our one true prayer and our only worship.²⁸

²⁷ Torrance, *Atonement*, 274. Christ's worship of the Father is simply the presentation of the perfect and only sacrifice of his earthly life, and thus the fidelity of the historical Messiah to the Father while on earth *is integrally connected* to the heavenly liturgy as the very substance of what is now offered up on our behalf as intercession, in compensation for the sins of the earthly body who approach the throne of grace.

²⁸ Torrance, *Atonement*, 275 italics original. The liturgy of the still sinful body on earth is only acceptable to the Father because it is now (in the act of congregational worship) united to the flesh and blood sacrifice of the Mediator on our behalf, with whom as bride to husband, we are already "one flesh" and one body.