

**Tom Noble**

**Discussion guide: Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*,  
(Paternoster, 1983; T. & T. Clark, 1992)**

### **Chapter One: The Mediation of Revelation**

Analytical thought – must rather understand without abstracting from the matrix of relationships – understanding is necessarily circular – internal relations – latent structure – intrinsic intelligibility – coherent pattern of order. The oneness of Jesus Christ with God the Father: his oneness with Israel.

Conceptual tools – the penetration of the Word of God into the depths of Israel's soul and being was a harrowing experience – the clay in the hands of the potter.

(1) The covenant partnership between God and Israel involved a running conflict between divine revelation and what St Paul called the 'carnal mind'.

(2) The election of Israel by God took the form of a community of reciprocity

(3) God's revelation came to Israel in such a way that it intersected and integrated its spiritual and physical reality

(4) God's revelation of himself through the medium of Israel has provided mankind with permanent structures of thought and speech about him

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## **Chapter Two: The Mediation of Reconciliation**

Revelation and reconciliation belong together. A basic principle of knowledge: all genuine knowledge involves a cognitive union of the mind with its object. Knowing God requires cognitive union with him in which our whole being is affected by his love and holiness: it is the pure in heart who see God. *Askesis*

- (1) The covenant between God and Israel was not a covenant between God and a holy people but precisely the reverse – a covenant of grace with sinful, rebellious, estranged Israel.
- (2) Intensification of the conflict. He makes their very sin the means by which he binds them to himself. Brought to its culmination in Jesus
- (3) We may find this difficult: but Israel was elected to reject the Messiah vicariously (Acts 2:23). John Donne on the cross:

It bore all other sinnes, but is it fit  
That it should bear the sinne of scorning it?

The continuing role of Israel: the scapegoat on the *Yom Kippur*

The Holocaust

Profound lesson: the Incarnation was the coming of God to save us in the heart of our *fallen* and *depraved* humanity – St Paul – the Greek Fathers. Otherwise atoning and sanctifying reconciliation can be understood only in terms of external relations between Jesus Christ and sinners – forensic, judicial terms. The awesome truth that through his Incarnation the Son of God appropriated our fallen humanity under the judgement of God.

Jesus used our very sin as the means to bind us irrevocably to himself in the love of God. Cf. the holocaust. The need to bind Christians and Jews together. The God-forsakenness of the cry from the cross, converted into a prayer of commitment and trust. The holocaust museum in Jerusalem: holocaust and covenant – the cross of Christ. Christians divided at the Holy Sepulchre.

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### **Chapter Three: The Person of the Mediator**

‘Onto-relations’ – illustrated from particle physics – dynamic fields of force: the inter-relations between the particles are part of what the particles actually are. Cf. the ‘onto-relations in Christian theology, in Christology and the Doctrine of the Trinity – concept of ‘person’ – the relations between the persons belong to what the persons really are – person-constituting relations - Father, Son and Holy Spirit ‘co-inhere’. Cf. James Clerk Maxwell and Einstein – relational thinking. We have considered Jesus Christ within the dynamic field of God's relations with Israel. Now we must consider Jesus Christ in his internal relations insofar as these are disclosed to us his relation with God the Father and within the constitution of his incarnate person.

#### The Inner Relation of Christ to the Father

Ernst Mach: atoms are only ‘mental artifices’, ‘scientific fictions’ (observationalist)

Max Planck: atoms are real (realist). Similar choice in Christology:

- a phenomenalist (=observationalist) approach (Jesus cannot be known as he really is, but only as he appeared to the primitive Christian community)
- a realist approach: allow Jesus to disclose himself to us in his own intrinsic Logos and in terms of his own internal relations.

When the Fathers tried to do the latter, they found themselves coming up against the *dualist* assumptions of their Hellenistic culture – the dualism of the timeless world of ideas and spirit and the empirical world of events in space and time. This *dualism* inevitable cut Christ in two, so that one either began ‘from above’ with his divinity (thus failing to recognize his true humanity), or ‘from below’ with his historical humanity (thus failing to recognize his divinity).

#### The Oneness in being between the Son and the Father

The Fathers insisted on a unitary approach: the wholeness or integrity of the one person who was both God and man. They started with the basic clue of the Father-Son relationship. Mt. 11:27//Lk. 10:22 - a mutual relation of knowing and loving within this exclusive relationship. This relationship falls *within the very being of God*.

Two points implied:

1. Knowledge of God the Father and knowledge of God the incarnate Son arise in us together, not one without the other – the one undivided *self*-revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

2. The Incarnation must be regarded as falling within the being of God himself. Reconciliation, as the movement of God's love, draws us into the embrace of the eternal communion of love in God.

### The Incarnate Constitution of the Mediator

Jesus Christ as Mediator embraces both sides in the mediating relationship – not just God *in* man, but God *as* man.

We must think of him as the Mediator in virtue of what he *is*: he does not mediate a revelation or reconciliation which is other than what he is. He is not merely the *bearer* of the Word, the *agent* or *instrument* of the reconciliation and revelation: he *is* the Word...the Truth... 'our Peace'... he *is* the propitiation, the reconciliation, the revelation. If we let go the inner constitutive identity between Jesus and God, or between his Person and his work or word, then the Gospel begins to disintegrate.

Suppose we let go this identity? Then his word of forgiveness has no validity ... and he is only a symbol of God, not God's own *self*-revelation... and God does not love us to the uttermost for he did not come himself. We are left with a dark inscrutable Deity behind the back of Jesus Christ.

### 'Is God really like Jesus?'

If we take an Arian line, then Jesus is only a symbol for God, and he can only have a moral relation with God. Jesus can only then be our example, his sacrifice only a moral demonstration or a judicial transaction external to us, and the Church can only be a society for moral improvement. Salvation then does not take place in the ontological depths of human being, there is no profound cleansing of the roots of human conscience through the blood of Christ, no radical new birth of human being through him – but only external relations as with a doctor, a moralist or a social worker.

### The Unity of Christ's Person and Work

But if he is very God and very man:

1. The atoning reconciliation takes place within the Person of the Mediator. It is not merely an external transaction, but he has become incarnate within our fallen, guilt-ridden humanity, he has *really* taken our sin upon himself to heal and sanctify our human nature from within.
2. Men and women are savingly reconciled to God by being taken up to share in the inner relations of God's life and love. *Theopoiesis* or *theosis*.
3. The union and communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is projected into estranged humanity so that the hypostatic union of God and Humanity in Christ becomes the reconciling union, the bridge through which estrangement is ended.

4. The Church cannot be thought of as externally related to Christ, but rather all are incorporated into Christ as living members of his body. The 'objective' union we have with him through his birth in our flesh is 'subjectively' actualized in us through his indwelling Spirit, we in Christ and he in us.

The Personalizing and Humanizing Activity of Christ

- Jesus Christ the Mediator is *personalizing Person*
  
- Jesus Christ the Mediator is *humanizing Man*

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#### **Chapter Four: The Mediation of Christ in our Human Response**

God-manward ministry in last chapter: now the man-Godward – High Priest, Advocate  
Two parties to a covenant – but another factor: *a covenanted way of response* – God knew that Israel would not be able to fulfil the covenant provisions – hence the liturgies of expiation. ‘The servant of the Lord’ – an embodiment of the covenant – conflation of Moses and Aaron, guilt-bearer and sacrifice for sin.

The all-important middle factor: The vicarious humanity of Jesus

#### Revelation

A particular human being who actualized in himself the personal Word of God to man and the personal response of man to God’s Word. A way of response out of the depths of human existence in which each human being was free to share through communion with Jesus.

#### Reconciliation

With the Incarnation, the Sonship of the Son of God has been incorporated into the inter-personal and family structures of our human existence – being-constituting relations – which we polluted and twisted. He made his own the estranged and disobedient condition of our human being, and has converted it back in love and obedience to the Father. On the cross he penetrated to the utmost extremity our self-alienating flight from God, and turned everything round so that out of the fearful depths of our darkness and dereliction we may cry with him, ‘Our Father.’

The whole life and activity of Jesus was the vicarious human response which God has provided for us.

Representation and substitution. If only representation, Jesus would represent (express?) *our* response. If only a substitute detached from us, no ontological bearing upon us. Liberal reject substitution with scorn, Fundamentalists do not see its relationship to the *vicarious humanity* of Christ.

What the vicarious humanity means in the mediation of our human response to God in:

(1) Faith

Yes, we must have faith, but believing is not an autonomous, independent act. Hosea. Jesus steps in and provides that faith (i.e. faithfulness) in which we may share. Stress of Western individualism on freedom. Teaching his daughter to walk: his hand, not hers. Peter's faith and Jesus' intercession. Faith as an empty vessel. The 'author and finisher of faith.'

(2) Conversion

We must repent and believe. No one else can do it for us – except Jesus. He was baptised 'into repentance' – completed in the cross. We are unable to escape through our own free will for our free will is our self will. We are unable to repent, but Jesus turned everything round through his vicarious repentance. 'When were you born again?'

(3) Worship

The pattern of the OT liturgy – reflecting the events of Sinai. Jesus embodies in a vicarious form the response of human beings to God. Jesus in his self-oblation *is* our worship, our prayer. We do not pray in our own name and significance, but in his. In worship and prayer, he acts in our place so that what he does is nevertheless effected as our very own, issuing *freely* and spontaneously out of ourselves. 'Abba, Father!'

(4) The Sacraments

Sacraments of the finished work of Christ. We do not baptize ourselves, but are baptized. In the Eucharist, we are given communion in his very body and blood – the sacrament of our union with him in his great act of self-consecration. We participate in his self-consecration and self-offering to the Father. We come to the holy table not to protest our own faith or conversion, but put out empty hands to receive bread and wine which we eat and drink in communion with his body and blood.

(4) Evangelism

Unconditional grace and reconciling exchange. An evangelical way to preach the gospel and an unevangelical way. He will never let you go, even if you refuse him and damn yourself in hell. The freedom of Mary and of Jesus. Galatians 2:20: 'I, yet not I, but Christ' – the message of the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ.

## **Chapter Five: Atonement and the Holy Trinity**

Christian and Jewish Conceptions of God

Christian and Jewish Approaches to God Need Each Other

Necessity of the Atonement for Knowledge of the Trinity

The Trinitarian Ground of the Atonement

The Communion of the Holy Spirit

The One God and the Triune God

Necessity of the Trinity for Understanding the Atonement