

Tom Noble

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

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*